

Improving the School, Family, and Community Partnership  
Through Increased Awareness and Collaboration

by  
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Approval Page

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## Abstract

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This applied dissertation was designed to increase the awareness of a parent resource center located in an urban community. The parent resource center had been in existence for 10 years. Due to urban renewal, the original clientele was relocated to other areas of the city. When the adjacent housing area was reconstructed, a different group of residents inhabited the new development. Based on preliminary data, the new inhabitants were not aware of services provided through the center and within the community. Therefore, a community relations program was developed to promote the programs, services, and activities available to increase the quality of life among the targeted population.

There were 111 participants in this study: 35 community residents, 16 stakeholders, and 60 school officials. Participants were asked to complete a familiarity and awareness survey while participating in an information session. Some of the participants participated in a tour of the parent resource center facilities after the initial survey and completed another survey, measuring their gain in awareness of parent resource center programs, services, and activities.

An analysis of the data revealed the importance of using the parent resource center as a supplementary source of information and direct services development in the low-income primarily minority community. The study also revealed the usage of the center increased the chances of success to participants. The study showed how the center could be accessed to enhance current school and neighborhood initiatives.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### *Description of the Community*

The city where this study took place is considered by many to be one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the south, a city steeped in culture and heritage and home to a diverse array of citizens who represent a wide variety of economic levels. Many also view this bay region as a place where the rich and famous wisely invest in business and property ventures, tending to boost the local economy. The city has the third largest population in the state, reported as 327,220 in April 2004, and it is the largest city in the county. The municipality's population represents one third of the total population of the entire county. Its success is partially attributable to Mother Nature for the proximity to the main waterways, lush landscapes, vibrant beaches, thriving marine opportunities, and booming agricultural industries. Otherwise, the foresight of sound leaders has made the area internationally known.

However, in the midst of an air of prosperity and upward mobility lay an area long forgotten or perhaps ignored by politicians and citizens at large. Nestled in the heart of the city is a community that contains 10 historically ethnic neighborhoods. Geographically, this designated area is in a prime location near downtown, the bay, the river, numerous beaches, a military base, and the city's seaport. Because of its long-standing history of poverty and crime, few outsiders previously ventured into this section of the urban core. This is a community that has faced many challenges but has many assets (University of South Florida, 2004).

The community where this study took place encompasses 3.7 square miles of land (the city totals 108.7 square miles overall) with 41.0% of that area being used for residential purposes versus 28.4% citywide. Other noticeable differences in land use are

that 1.7% is devoted to industrial use, whereas 4.6% is used for industry citywide. This denotes a lack of industry and jobs in the immediate area. The U.S. Census Bureau (2006) statistics of 2000 indicated the population of the community as being 16,444 individuals whereas the population of the entire city was 303,447.

Neighborhood growth history trends indicated that, since 1970, the population steadily declined from 24,332 in 1970 to 16,444 in 2000. Population trends for the years 1970-2000 revealed a steady decline totaling 32.4% compared to an overall increase of 8.4% for the remainder of the city. Seventy-three percent of the community's residents were Black, which was the highest concentration in comparison to anywhere else in the city, which overall had 26.1% Black inhabitants. School-aged adolescents totaled 26.4%, whereas the citywide average was 20.8%. The median household income was \$14,538 to \$26,250 compared to the citywide average of \$34,415. Thus, 26.9% of families struggled below the poverty line, while an average of 14.0% did citywide. Families receiving public assistance totaled 527 compared to 5,440 citywide. High school graduates totaled 60.2%, whereas 77.1% graduated citywide. Despairingly, 6.1% graduated from college, while 25.4% graduated overall.

The present mayor was elected in 2003, leaving behind an exemplary career as a supervisor of elections. With a proven track record of blazing trails, she has set out to shake things up and lead by example through accountability. In that effort, the way business is conducted has taken on newfound respectability. In addition to redefining the city's vision, mission, values, and goals, five strategic focus areas were developed as a component of the strategic planning process to guide the transformation of the city further. Those five strategic focus areas are investing in the city's neighborhoods, economic development in the most challenged areas, creating a downtown residential

community, efficient city government focused on customer service, and acculturating the city as a center of the arts. One of those most challenged areas was the community where this study took place. It was specifically mentioned as an area of high concern.

#### *Researcher's Work Setting*

The school district was the 9th largest in the United States, encompassing rural, urban, and suburban areas. The pupil membership survey of September 2004 indicated that there were 81,376 students enrolled in elementary schools; 175,056 students enrolled in secondary schools; 187,694 students enrolled in special centers, such as the charter exceptional school and preschool; and 9,645 enrolled in adult programs for a total of 197,739 students countywide. The district had 31,184 employees, which were divided as 13,959 instructional personnel, 799 administrators, 8,843 noninstructional personnel, and 7,579 temporary and substitute personnel.

The parent resource center is located on a campus in an urban neighborhood. The building is situated in the midst of two former housing projects and conveniently seated between two major essential social service agencies. Building 1 opened in its present location in 1993 and was operated by the county. Offerings included medical, health, and social services. Building 2, the parent resource center, opened in 1996 and was named in honor of a deceased outstanding educator and county commissioner. Building 3 opened in 1998 and provided services through state-funded programs in the areas of health and human services.

In a 1994 publication outlining the overall plan for the campus, campus components were listed. Among the planned components was the parent resource center, an 8,000-square-foot building. The community desired a center dedicated to fulfilling nontraditional educational aspirations. Stakeholders included grass-root coalitions;



educators, social service personnel; and most importantly, residents. Communities need strong families. That need provided the opportunity for service organizations, churches, and other community businesses to take advantage of sponsoring a neighborhood family resource center. These organizations often focused on projects that strengthened the family unit (Carfora & O'Rourke, 1997).

Historically, the parent resource center grew out of the need to educate the underprivileged and reform the misguided continuously. Previously, classes were being held at the adjacent social service center. As the need grew, so did the realization that a facility devoted primarily to education would be necessary. The stated mission of the parent resource center was to coordinate and provide educational activities to ensure that a positive impact was made on at-risk families and thereby at-risk children. The parent resource center concept was conceived to integrate educational, medical, and social and human services that were beneficial to meeting the needs of children and their families on school grounds or in locations that were easily accessible. Parent resource centers serve as a central point of delivery for services that have been determined locally as needed in support of a child's success in school and in the community.

Projected services to be offered for access at the parent resource center in 1994 included preschool registration, adult basic education classes, tutor training, family literacy training, parenting skills, computer training, vocational training, counseling, and a toy and book lending library. The primary goal of the parent resource center's staff would be to coordinate activities that would facilitate community and school partnerships by serving as the point of contact for designated school sites. The staff would also be responsible for making referrals as necessary to appropriate resources. The deliberate coordination of the efforts of numerous partners would be used to enhance the

coordination of service delivery to at-risk families.

Categorically, the parent resource center is a community school. These types of schools fulfill a niche in society that can only be positively addressed by a collaborative effort on behalf of social service agencies, schools, the community, and concerned citizens. Many community schools were established under the full-service schools ideology. A full-service school may actually be labeled by many different names and consist of a variety of configurations. Typically, each site is unique because the community where the school is located dictates the placement of applicable programs. The full-service school may be called a school community center, community service center, community school center, family resource center, human resource center, or other names (Ringer & Decker, as cited in MacKenzie & Rogers, 1997).

#### *Researcher's Role*

For over 3 years, the researcher was employed by the school district as an administrative resource teacher, the site manager for the parent resource center. The responsibilities of that position consisted of a fusion of administrator, guidance counselor, instructor, and social services worker. For over 15 years, she served in numerous positions within education as a school guidance counselor, career counselor, adjunct instructor, testing officer, and business education teacher.

The many roles and educational experiences allowed for a vast compilation of knowledge, skills, and abilities. As a job requirement, the researcher was heavily involved with community-based organizations. Each of these organizations attracted membership from the community at large, university partners, community college program representatives, city employees, school district employees, retired professionals, and private business owners. Participation in activities that were generated to enhance

and educate the community was a natural occurrence within the job description (see Appendix A).

### *Statement of the Problem*

The purpose of this study was to increase the awareness and familiarity of programs and services available at the parent resource center. The site previously served as a support mechanism to area schools as well as to the families of area children attending school in suburban locations. The literature attests to the importance of a parent resource center to the community it serves. However, if residents, stakeholders, and school officials within the community are not aware of the programs and services offered by the parent resource center, how can they take advantage of those offerings?

Among the five goals listed in the 1994 publication outlining the overall plan for the campus as measures necessary in establishing a system of support for the families in the target area was the elimination of barriers to effective home-school communication and bridging the gap between parents, school officials, and students. Building community cohesion and coordinating natural support systems are crucial activities. Communities that are characterized by a high degree of social dysfunction need programs designed to remove barriers in meeting their needs and promoting the development and stability of the community.

In 2001, urban regeneration caused two formerly massive housing projects to be leveled to the ground. The residents were relocated to other areas of the city. Thus, a way of life was also systematically demolished for the sake of progress. This was a massive diffusion of a poverty-based lifestyle. Due to the renovations and loss of the primary focus group, multiple programs, personnel, and services were eliminated. In the process, the parent resource center suffered. Changes in personnel, programs, processes, and

procedures caused the site to experience a decrease in popularity. These changes, many due to urban renewal and the end of court-mandated busing, signaled the beginning of an evolutionary process.

The parent resource center goals were the following: (a) accommodate multiple agencies and organizations at one location thereby increasing community access to services; (b) provide opportunities for agencies and organizations to coordinate services on behalf of clients; (c) identify and develop services that empower families and individuals to achieve self-sufficiency; and (d) strengthen, build, and enhance relationships with schools, agencies, and the community to improve services and outcomes.

Service standards and benchmarks previously used to evaluate levels of organizational effectiveness and compliance with funding specifications, including full-service school provisions, are the degree to which the following objectives were accomplished: help parents to navigate the educational system, promote the empowerment of at-risk families, facilitate parent groups to keep parents involved in school matters, act as a liaison between home and school, confer regularly with parents and appropriate community and school personnel, enlist the cooperation of the parents in examining family situations, increase parent involvement and resident success via the parent resource center, increase parental involvement in the educational process of their children, help parents to seek or further their own educational aspirations, and coordinate community resources to help families understand and accept services from other community agencies. However, many years have passed since adherence to these standards was revisited.

Prior to July 2002, the site hosted a staff of highly trained educators and student

services personnel. There was a permanent full-time staff of four assigned to the parent resource center as well as multiple itinerant professionals. Full-time positions included a coordinator, human relations specialist, family advocate, and secretary. The three professional personnel received assignments to other locations.

When the researcher was hired in November 2002, the position filled had been reclassified from an administrative to an instructional position. The responsibilities of the secretary and site manager now encompass many of the required managerial tasks. Services previously offered in support of the home-to-school connection were discontinued. Some of the documented programs and services that fell to the wayside were a prekindergarten class, an infant daycare program, a male mentoring program, and a family literacy library, to name a few.

On a daily basis, residents, potential clients, visitors, and employees of other organizations located on the campus were inquisitive as to our existence and questioned our purpose. "What is this building?" or "What do you do here?" were questions frequently asked. Typically, staff explained and answered all questions posed to the satisfaction of the individual. Also, visual aides in the form of the newsletter, which included up-to-date information on each of the programs housed within the facility, and flyers detailing each program were provided. However, this was apparently a drop-in-the-bucket approach to addressing a widespread problem as it related to public knowledge of programs and services available via the parent resource center.

Due to the physical location of the building, foot traffic was usually high. The city bus stop was located on the campus. A great deal of time was spent directing people to the appropriate places and services. On occasion, individuals came back for additional information or clarification. If this occurred and situations permitted, the person was

accompanied to search for an answer to the dilemma.

Cicetti-Turro (2004) conducted a service-learning project in the community where the parent resource center is housed. The university collaborative for children, families, and communities sponsored the service-learning project. Each planned activity within the project was required to meet an identified community need. The need identified by the sponsor as the focus of the service-learning project was mapping school assets within the targeted community.

In-depth interviews were performed with five staff members from the neighborhood high school. Those staff members were identified as student support services personnel. The role of student support services personnel included being responsible for enhancing student success by providing programs, services, and opportunities for growth that were supplemental to classroom instruction. The employment titles of those personnel were parent liaison specialist, guidance counselor, curriculum development specialist, assistant principal, and human relations specialist.

Questions posed examined processes and procedures for providing resources and referrals to students and their families through partnerships with community agencies and support systems. Question 1 asked, "What are some of the resources and services you offer students at [your school]?" Question 2 asked "What are some of the resources and services you offer the students from the local neighborhood that do not attend [your school]?" Question 3 asked "Let's say, for example, a student is having difficulty and you're unable to help him within the school. What resources in the community might you refer the student to?" Question 4 asked, "What are some of the resources and services you offer parents and families of students at [your school]?" Question 5 stated, "What are some of the resources and services you offer parents and families from the local

neighborhood whose children do not attend [your school]?”

Question 6 asked, “Let’s say, for example, a parent or a family is having difficulty and you’re unable to help within the school, what resources in the community might you refer the parent or family to?” Question 7 asked, “What are some of the resources and services you offer to the community, outside of the regular school day?” Question 8 asked, “Tell me about the partnerships you have here at [your school].” Question 9 asked, “What about partnerships like support groups, booster clubs, or mentoring programs?” Question 10 specifically mentioned the parent resource center in terms of the respondent’s usage of the available programs and services when it asked “How have you used resources like the [parent resource center], [the neighborhood health center], [the local technical school], [the community development corporation], or [the neighborhood social services assistance office]?” Question eleven asked, “Tell me about the role and function of the parent liaison.” Question twelve asked, “Who else at [your school] do you think we should talk to about the resources, services, and partnerships you offer here?” (Cicetti-Turro, 2004).

Of the five staff members interviewed, three had referred students to the parent resource center for specific programs such as the school-choice program and the out-of-school suspension program. One of the staff members interviewed was not familiar with the parent resource center as indicated by that individual’s response to the question posed. One interviewee indicated familiarity with a singular offering at the parent resource center but was otherwise unfamiliar with additional programs and services. Therefore, 80% (4 out of 5) of the high school respondents indicated at least minimal familiarity with and usage of the parent resource center.

Based on the findings of the interviews of the five high school staff members, the

parent resource center was found to be unknown as to its value as an educational support or underutilized by those who were aware of its existence. Although the parent resource center was located a mere mile or so from the high school, it was found that the personnel interviewed were only aware of specific programs and did not possess an adequate working knowledge of the comprehensive umbrella of services offered through the parent resource center. The staff members were not fully aware of or were poorly informed of available services.

Following the completion of the service-learning project, the doctoral student conducting the interviews requested permission to perform observations at the parent resource center. In an attempt to help the student become more familiar with the climate of the community and available assets, permission was granted by the school district. During the observations, the student was able to shadow parent resource center personnel, while learning about programs and services available.

The researcher, after properly introducing herself as the moderator for the revived 16th annual back-to-school information sessions, posed several questions to the group, which was a standing-room only crowd of over 100 individuals. She asked, "How many of you are aware that [the school] is a part of the school district, is conveniently located next door, offers adult basic education and graduate equivalency diploma courses, and is a parent resource center?" Less than 10 hands were raised throughout the entire process of introduction, questioning, and informing.

Another question asked of residents was, "Do you know of anyone who is in need of a graduate equivalency diploma?" Finally, the importance of completing high school and the opportunities to provide a better life for self and family were highlighted. At the dismissal of the information sessions, the center's newsletter was handed out to



participants. Many approached the researcher to discuss their interest in accessing the services mentioned. The qualifying stipulation for participants was that they reside in the community. The participants were, by and large, uninformed of the parent resource center's existence or its purpose.

A medical doctor, who has provided care for residents through the adjacent health clinic for the past 3 years, was recently referred to the parent resource center. Due to scheduling conflicts for use of the auditorium, the secretary for the manager of the clinic called to coordinate accommodations for an educational program. The program he sponsored allows students enrolled in middle and high school to experience an introduction to careers in the health sciences.

The doctor commented in reference to the parent resource center that "you are really a best kept secret and an answer to a prayer" and stated that "the atmosphere was more conducive to training the students due to the lack of external stimulation that the students would have been exposed to at the center as clients sought services in that facility." He also was surprised as to the cleanliness and spacious nature of the facilities. He was totally unaware as to the parent resource center's purpose and availability although he was aware of its existence.

The request to compile a comprehensive documentation of resources available on the campus had been formally verbalized in countless advisory board meetings by the organization's chair. The advisory board acted as an oversight committee for the surrounding neighborhood. The value of this document to this community would be beyond measure. The foundation for this collection of resources was outlined in the advisory board's strategic improvement plan (see Appendix B). Not only would the information benefit the community directly, there would also be indirect benefits, one of

which would be the verification of resources in a format that would supersede the fragmented collection of existing information. It would serve as a representation to residents and visitors alike that community support structures existed above and beyond those that were commonly known. Contrary to popular belief, this community did have tangible systems that produced measurable outcomes for residents.

In 1999, as a transplant to the region, the researcher's first acquaintance with this area occurred after taking a southbound turn and somehow landing in the midst of an area filled with miles of dilapidated public housing projects as far as the eye could see. Not only that, disenfranchised residents loitered the streets in abundant numbers. Some were just hanging out while others were engaging in obviously socially unacceptable behavior. Looking around, a sense of shock and bewilderment set in.

How could such conditions exist just moments away from the seaport? A mere drive under the overpass would take you into another world. This would be a world in high contrast to what was just witnessed, of observable environmental pride, built on the foundation of cultural influence. This contrasting area had continued to grow by leaps and bounds due to organized and controlled efforts on behalf of their neighborhood organization.

On this brief excursion, feelings of fear arose while witnessing the sudden change of atmosphere and events. This was an unusual emotional experience for the researcher, having lived and vacationed throughout the world. Every metropolitan city has areas of urban decay or slum zones. Somehow this was different, in a negative sense. Reflecting on the actual time it took to drive south, it may have taken about 5 minutes. It was one of the strangest 5 minutes ever recalled. It was hurtful to witness human beings existing in this manner on the dawn of the new millennium.

In the summer of 2002, after applying for the site manager position at the parent resource center by facsimile, directions were secured by telephone. Being previously unaware of the existence of the facility and desiring to examine the location prior to the interview, a visit was embarked upon. Following the given information, once again a southbound turn into the crime-ridden neighborhood was required. Surprisingly, where the public housing projects once stood there was nothing! It was a virtual ghost town save the few businesses that were struggling to remain open. With the use of federal housing funds, the process of urban renewal had begun. Having accepted the position, this researcher also became a collaborator in the improvement efforts.

#### *Purpose of the Project*

In its heyday from 1996 until around 2001, the parent resource center was well known within the community. It was but one feature of the comprehensive one-stop concept known as the campus. Currently, there are numerous ongoing local research studies as well as service learning projects focusing on enhancing the quality of life within the urban core. This study added to that body of knowledge by contributing to the collaborative efforts by developing, implementing, evaluating, and thereby improving needed awareness information pertaining to the parent resource center.

Due to urban renewal, the targeted population was temporarily relocated to other areas of the city. This mass exodus cleared the way for the destruction of two major public housing projects and for the reconstruction of housing estates that were marketed to attract a different mixture of tenants. Thus, the poverty-based community was diffused, taking with it a vast majority of the participants of the social- and educational-based programs for which the campus had been constructed. The residents moved, and in response, the programs located at the parent resource center dwindled to a singular

offering. This climatic shift was observed to be a causative factor in the lack of awareness of current services.

The adult basic education class was the only program to survive this transition stage. The enrollment appeared substantial on paper, whereas in actuality only a dozen or so students attended regularly, which was adequate to sustain funding of the unit. Otherwise, the multipurpose room was booked at least a couple of times a week for small-group meetings. This was the status of the site for one complete school year. The site struggled through on a bare-bones existence.

As the area began to repopulate, the new community members often ventured in to inquire as to the function and purpose of the parent resource center. Of course, information was provided to substantiate existence. However, several years passed, and although the site as now occupied, name recognition and value to the community remained unclear. On any given day, residents wandered in and asked what has become an old familiar question, "What is this building, and what do you have in here?" Therefore, more attention needed to be focused on the promotion of the parent resource center as to its attributes and fundamental worth.

Although the center was a school district site, there were district employees as well who remained unclear as to the purpose and some to the site's existence. It was not unusual to receive verification phone calls from personnel seeking to investigate the questions of "where are you, what are you, what do you offer, and did you say you are a public school site?" Among those employees who were aware of the site's existence, it was referred to as an oasis in the desert because of the physical attributes of the facility, variety of programs and services offered, and fact that these resources were free of charge.

The purpose of this case study was to improve access to and awareness of offerings available at the parent resource center. Insights, preferences, opinions, and suggestions were cataloged to provide guidance and input with the goal to allow that feedback to assist in the establishment of an ongoing relationship of collaboration with community residents, stakeholders, and school officials. It was also important to understand the perception that the community had pertaining to the role of the parent resource center. It was the knowledge of that perception that provided the groundwork to assist in planning for future growth of the organization.

The need for the type of information that this research generated was based upon several outstanding evidentiary factors:

1. The research findings of the service-learning project by Cicetti-Turro (2004), which was conducted under the auspices of the university collaborative for children, families, and communities. This researcher served as a mentor for one of the doctoral students assigned to the project. The parent resource center was one of the sites featured on that particular survey instrument.

2. The 2002-2003 advisory board strategic plan requirements (see Appendix B). By systematically identifying community assets, professionals would be better prepared to direct and refer residents appropriately. A brochure was to be constructed, featuring bullet-form details on each available source of assistance located within each facility on the grounds. This brochure would serve as the basis for a series of ongoing workshops and staff development opportunities. However, the day-to-day tasks took priority, and the initiative was abandoned.

Although advisory board members voluntarily accepted the challenge to complete required tasks associated with assessing the available resources on the campus, somehow

the full scope of activities that were identified as necessary remained undone. The project never quite got off the ground in the manner that was intended. The idea was to provide insight through training to professionals working within the campus in reference to services rendered by neighboring agencies. Of stated concern were (a) residents receiving the runaround by being misdirected or by being told that certain programs or services were nonexistent within this locale whereas the services did exist; (b) professionals lacking the knowledge of available resources within the campus and, therefore, failing to relay that information to potential users of those resources; and (c) people who were advocating for themselves needed and deserved reliable written information pertaining to the campus, which was updated on a regularly scheduled basis.

3. The current community-driven redevelopment process, which was organized under the auspices of the community revitalization partnership, was collaborative effort spearheaded by community residents; local churches, civic, and community organizations; the city; and the local university's collaborative program for children, families, and communities with the cooperation of the school district; the county commissioners; the state of department's health and human services outreach program; and others, including the citizens of the entire city.

As a member of the community revitalization partnership's education and social services subcommittee, the challenge was to make much needed progress within identified confines (see Appendix C). One of the monumental undertakings of the subcommittee was the impending Needs Assessment for the Community (see Appendix D). This monumental task would be conducted under the supervision of the subcommittee in collaboration with neighborhood organizations and in partnership with the local state university. As a precursor to that event, this study sought to lay the

groundwork for further exploration by clarifying the contributions of the parent resource center within the myriad of resources available within the community.

### *Background and Significance*

In the days of court-ordered mandatory busing, the parent resource center served as a support mechanism for 26 public schools: 14 elementary, 5 middle, 4 high, 2 magnet, and 1 alternative. The service boundaries encompassed all 10 neighborhoods within the community and allowed the parent resource center to serve as a focal point for all surrounding school sites by coordinating activities in fostering a positive community and school partnership. Although many low-income families did strive to support their children's education, their overall levels of involvement were lower than those of families who did not live in poverty (Boethel, 2003).

Community social issues during the planning phase for the construction of the parent resource center included the busing of children to 22 outlying schools with some students traveling as far as 26 miles away from home. This created a disadvantage for the children and their families in being able to participate in school-sponsored activities. Many of the parents did not have adequate transportation, which created the misconception that these parents were not interested in their child's school performance due to their lack of involvement. In the target area, almost 3,000 school-aged children lived in single-parent households headed by females. These mothers were mostly unemployed or underemployed with limited education and documented health and mental health conditions.

Because of racial disproportion within urban schools, inner-city students were forced to attend schools far away from home. Students were bused to suburban schools throughout the county, sometimes removing a child as far away as an hour ride from

home. During this period, the parent resource center served as a centralized place for educators to meet conveniently with parents to hold conferences as well as hold off-site open houses and information fairs. This helped to eliminate the transportation barrier in areas where large numbers of students who were bused to suburban schools resided. The site's parent liaison usually coordinated the meetings and events. Specific characteristics tended to be correlated with higher rates of poverty, such as the parents' education level and single-parent status. Families from racial, ethnic, and cultural minorities tended to report lower levels of involvement than those of mainstream White families. Economic stressors may be linked to the extent and types of involvement among low-income families (Boethel, 2003).

Systematically, school choice, the magnet school option, and charter schools have replaced widespread busing and brought racially diverse populations into all schools. The challenge was to keep neighborhood schools from becoming racially identifiable, while allowing students to attend schools close to home. During this transition, many changes took place within this community. Because of all of the changes in people, places, events, and systems, name recognition for the parent resource center was low.

The vast majority of students formerly attending suburban schools have returned to schools located reasonably near home, the two enormous housing projects were demolished and reconstructed as multi-income estates, the community's designated boundaries were reconfigured to include a greater portion of the urban core, 8 of the 12 schools located in the new boundaries became magnet schools, and the school district dedicated substantial financial incentives to increase the number of highly qualified professional educators in urban schools.



### *Research Questions*

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What steps are necessary to improve existing levels of awareness, enhance familiarity, and clarify the parent resource center's role among community residents, stakeholders, and school officials?
2. Can collaborative relationships between the parent resource center and community residents, stakeholders, and school officials be established?
3. Will the creation of collaborative relationships with community residents, stakeholders, and school officials result in an increased client base for the parent resource center?

### *Summary of Chapter 1*

To accomplish the task of creating economic balance and equity within the city, the mayor has enlisted the assistance of neighborhood coalitions in each of the communities that were slated for economic improvement. In the targeted area, the community revitalization partnership became the forum used to oversee much needed advancement. This partnership was composed of concerned citizens from all walks of life. The monthly meeting was attended by over 100 individuals, representing entities such as the city, the school district, community agencies, the police department, the university, residents, and so on.

A citywide pride campaign was developed to encourage all citizens to do their part in creating a better place to live, play, and work. Every citizen has an important role in the community-building process. The status or the occupation does not matter; each person can be an asset. The contribution that this researcher made was to increase the awareness of available resources offered at the parent resource center through the

development and implementation of a community relations program. The value of a parent resource center to the community it serves is immeasurable. As a result of research activities, community residents, stakeholders, and school officials were better able to access these offerings, thereby adding to the overall quality of life within the targeted area.

## Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

### *Theoretical Issues*

Epstein's (as cited in Boethel, 2003) model of overlapping spheres of influence provides a conceptual framework for the study of school, family, and community relations. Three overlapping circles represent family, school, and community. Time, experience, philosophy, and the practices of the family, the school, and the community are some of the various forces determining the degree of overlap among the circles. In some cases, and at some points in time, the school's community and the family's community may be virtually one and the same. With minority and low-income students, however, these spheres of influence tend to be divergent.

Epstein (as cited in Boethel, 2003) identified six essential types of involvement for a comprehensive partnership program: (a) parenting, which includes helping families establish home environments that support children as students; (b) communicating, which includes designing and conducting effective two-way communication systems about school programs and student progress; (c) volunteering, which includes recruiting and organizing assistance and support structures for school functions and activities; (d) learning at home, which includes providing information, ideas, and instruction to families concerning how to help students with homework; (e) decision making, which means including families in decisions about the school; and (f) collaborating with the community, which includes identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen and support the school, family, and community partnership.

Epstein's sixth form of parent involvement--collaboration and exchange with community organizations, such as businesses, cultural organizations, agencies, and other groups that concern themselves with the welfare and education of children--was added

because of the need to make it more feasible for families to maintain access to support services. Collaborating with the community (Epstein, as cited in Boethel, 2003) and a seventh category, which is an adaptation by Mattingly, Prislín, McKenzie, Rodriguez, and Kayzar (2002), directly relate to the focus of this research study. That seventh category is parent academic education, such as English language or high school diploma equivalency courses, which schools could sponsor (Mattingly et al.). Programs could emphasize the teaching of English to speakers of other languages as a means of meeting the needs of the community while providing information and training.

Several organizations are dedicated to helping parents help themselves and assist their children. The research indicated that parental involvement in education has a significant positive impact on student achievement. The Parent Institute for Quality Education and the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project developed a parent education model known as Families in Schools. The program targeted low-income, culturally diverse urban schools for the pilot project. According to Johnson, Jiang, and Yoon (2000), 9-week class sessions were geared toward helping parents improve their skills and were taught to select groups of participants.

The class sessions taught the importance of parents taking an active role in the education of their children. Specific strategies were identified, and the classes followed a written curriculum. Program objectives were to increase the frequency of parent and teacher communication, increase the frequency of parental behaviors that support student learning, raise parental expectations for their children, increase parental involvement in school affairs, and motivate parents to set and pursue their own educational goals (Johnson et al., 2000). After the class sessions ended, monthly follow-up telephone surveys were conducted to measure the sustained involvement of parents.

As a strategy for improving achievement among Hispanic students, a qualitative study was conducted for the creation of a community-based family education center. In-depth interviews were conducted with 16 parents residing in the federally subsidized housing development where the educational center was to be established. Six parents who were actively involved in the center's creation and 10 others who sent their children to the center but did not help to create it were interviewed. Interviews were conducted in Spanish to accommodate parents and accentuate the fluidity of the interview process. All of the parents in the study expressed concern for their children's well-being and supported the center's establishment because they firmly believed that they or their children would personally benefit from the activities (Aspiazu, Bauer, & Spillet, as cited in Boethel, 2003).

A qualitative case study following nine African American and Latino families with elementary-age or younger children was conducted over a 1-year period by Chin and Newman (as cited in Boethel, 2003). The study explored the effects of the increased pressures on low-income families from the combination of increased student testing and changing welfare laws. The researchers hypothesized that welfare reform and increased costs of living have pulled poor and low-income parents away from involvement in their children's schooling and towards more hours in the workplace. The research study found that most of the nine families were doing what they could to balance the demands of work and parental involvement although not with much success. Those who were more involved tended to pay a price in terms of economic security. Others, who worked more in order to keep a home for their families, were experiencing varying degrees of problems in their children's school lives. This scenario of balancing the demands of transitioning from welfare to work, while facing parental involvement requirements, is quite typical of

some of the families the parent resource center has served.

The perception of parental involvement was explored through the views of parents and teachers in a low-income, urban school community through ethnographic interviews. Involved and uninvolved parents and teachers at one elementary school highlighted the differences in epistemology and culture that existed between the parents and the teachers. Specifically, teachers expected parents to come when they were needed. The unmet expectations of the teachers lead to judgment of parents, thereby promoting parent alienation from the school. In addition, parent concerns, when unheard by the school or not responded to by teachers, created a silenced voice for parents. Ultimately, differences in epistemologies and cultures that exist between parents and teachers must be bridged in order for the goal both parties consider important, working for positive outcomes for children, will be reached (Lawson, 2003).

Less competent parenting is often associated with economic stress and hardships. There were several reasons offered as to why some children are resilient when exposed to the numerous risk factors associated with poverty. In general, three types of protective factors were noted: adequate financial resources; maternal educational attainment; and positive, encouraging parent interactions. All three protective factors were thought to stimulate cognitive development. The relationship between low income and the quality of learning opportunities was examined because of the effect environment has on cognitive development (A. Jackson, 2003).

An observation frequently cited in research documents was that urban schools must go beyond the norm and begin to view themselves as educators of the family, not just the child. Because research confirmed that the educational level of the mother is crucial to the success of the student, schools serving families in which mothers are not

well educated will need to reach out and provide educational opportunities to ensure the success of the mothers.

Employment in the low-wage job market by poor and near-poor single African-American mothers was found to produce dire consequences for young children's development. An examination of this fact was investigated with a sample of women who were current and former welfare recipients in the period before welfare reform (A. Jackson, 2003). Research demonstrated that early childhood is the stage during which income matters most for children's development (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, as cited in A. Jackson, 2003).

The poverty rates among American children are simply astounding. During the 1990s, 19% of all children in the United States were poor. Sixty-eight percent of families headed by unemployed single mothers were poor, whereas 24% of families headed by employed single mothers were poor. Although 26% of African-American families with children were poor, 47% of those families were head by a single mother. This study examined the relationship between economic conditions, education, and parenting skills. This knowledge is important because a large number of young African-American children are being raised by single mothers who are disproportionately represented among the very poor and the welfare dependent (A. Jackson, 2003).

The Harvard School of Public Health reported that poverty has a direct influence on parent involvement. Parental involvement can include a number of activities, such as parents developing and using skills to support effective learning; engaging in two-way communication with the school about student progress; volunteering in the school; assisting with homework; becoming involved in school issues and decisions; and coordinating and integrating services that will enhance the learning. Regardless of how it

is defined, parental involvement is important to children's success (Heymann & Earle, as cited in Bracey, 2001).

Although high stakes achievement tests tend to widen the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students and those who are not, parents and educators working together in close partnerships can help to narrow the gap. Effective partnerships provide opportunities for an integration of strategies to promote the academic and social development of children. A comprehensive partnership program should include such elements as parent education and family support. Successful partnerships are built on reciprocal agreements between schools, families, and communities for overlapping responsibilities in addressing student learning (Davies, 2000).

A study to compare efforts to increase family and community involvement in schools and academic achievement was conducted by Sheldon (2003). An evaluation of existing school-family-community partnership programs at local schools was performed. Student achievement scores on a statewide-standardized test was collected and statistically analyzed for correlations. The study showed a link between the efforts made by schools to improve parent and community involvement and higher academic achievement of the students.

Involving parents in young children's literacy development is a challenge met by many school districts. Several programs and strategies are being used at various levels to enhance literacy development and address literacy needs of parents. Suggestions for preschool children include playing classical music, participating in meaningful learning experiences, and reading aloud. In addition, Even Start and Mothers Understanding Methods of Schooling are effective family-based literacy programs (Aeschliman, 1998).



Strategies used with the parents of elementary-aged students included morning meetings at school for parents, home visitations, academic-themed family nights, family resource centers, and hiring parent liaisons. Strategies used for including the parents of secondary school students included school improvement programs, using parents as tutors and mentors, having church-based parent resource centers, and providing preparation for parent conferences (Aeschliman, 1998).

Empowerment was what *The Achiever*, a U.S. Department of Education (2003b) monthly newsletter, provided. Information for educators, parents, and anyone interested in the current state of education was covered in depth. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002) was but one aspect of the information that is available through this source. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 focuses on providing parents with the information they need to make informed decisions about their child's education.

Another critical concern within the field of education was adequate yearly progress. Based on achievement data from the previous school year, each state must compile a list of schools that did not make adequate progress. Working within the law's parameters, each state sets its own standards for academic achievement and goals for annual progress. Schools receiving Title I funds (lower socioeconomic, mostly inner-city schools) that do not meet the state goals are designated as needing improvement. These schools must then notify the parents of their status and offer additional opportunities for student success, such as the change of placement to a school that did meet adequate yearly progress standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2003a).

#### *Key Themes From the Literature*

Many researchers have focused the attention of their studies on the creation of

school, family, and community partnerships. Throughout this study, the reader will find extensive reference to a study conducted by George (1993). Although several years have passed since that study was performed, the procedures used and processes outlined to engage the community, remained useful. In no way was this researcher's study meant to replicate that of George. However, George's study assisted this researcher in verifying best educational practices, as a method of reference.

There were many similarities noted in common with this researcher's study and that of George. Mainly, those commonalities were location, population, focus, techniques, and concerns. George worked collaboratively with the school district, community partners, and select residents to establish a parent resource center in an urban neighborhood. Likewise, this researcher used relationship-building techniques to engage community residents, stakeholders, and school officials. Both studies espoused parent involvement, through the use of the parent resource center, as a means of empowerment. Relationship building between schools, families, and the community was seen as the key to establishing reciprocal partnerships.

Both studies took place in the bay area and focused on enhancing access to supplemental educational opportunities for a predominantly low-income, economically disadvantaged population, living in an urban community. George's research took place in a nearby suburban area with a major metropolitan city in close proximity. The community was densely populated with a total prekindergarten through 12th-grade enrollment of 97,000 students. At the time the study took place, this was the 6th largest county in the state. The district was operating under a court-ordered busing mandate for integration purposes. A sizeable portion of the district's operating budget was earmarked for transporting students to achieve a racial balance throughout the county.

George was employed as an Exceptional Student Education coordinator of a state-funded grant for identifying potentially gifted minority and economically disadvantaged students. The researcher worked with the families of children enrolled in a federally funded preschool program to assist in developing the child's strengths and to remediate weaknesses, with the goal being to help the child reach his fullest potential.

The primary goal of George's doctoral practicum was to improve the school partnership with minority and economically disadvantaged families. Objectives designed to achieve this goal included organizing a parent resource center in a public housing community, helping parents to become involved by increasing their ability to access school and community resources, and increasing leadership from teachers to involve parents in school matters.

George created the parent resource center for families whose children were transported by buses to attend suburban schools. When the parent resource center this researcher manages was planned, in 1994, the same situation existed. Urban students traveled to the suburbs to attend school. Therefore, the construction of a parent resource center was essential. Suburban school officials built a reliance on the parent resource center as a central location to conduct parent conferences and other school related activities in the community where the students resided.

Another similarity was the construction of materials to aid in the ease of access in gaining information on resources and opportunities. George constructed a resource handbook whereas this researcher constructed a brochure and a multimedia presentation, with the same purpose in mind. The intention was to provide user-friendly information for the community.

Study findings indicated that minority parents and guardians were intimidated by

educational bureaucracy and perceived communication from the school as an indicator of a problem. The participants in the study expressed a perceived lack of interest by the school in the welfare of their child and the family. Parents were found to have limited transportation, which prohibited them from participating in school activities. The schools did not offer late bus rides; therefore, families were not able to take advantage of afterschool activities. Also, school personnel did not visit the communities in which those students resided for meetings and other community functions. Principal interviews indicated little to no participation in school-based parent involvement activities by minority families (George, 1993).

There were at least 10 causes identified for the problems that were documented with the parents: intimidation with educational bureaucracy, overwhelming registration paperwork, communication from the school did not solicit parental input, court-ordered busing caused students to attend schools far away from home, the families did not possess adequate transportation, schools did not take the time to win the trust of the minority families, families felt vulnerable because of inadequate education or lack of success in school themselves, not enough personal contact from the schools was initiated to reach out to the minority community to increase involvement, and minority families lacked self-confidence to initiate communication or participation with the school (George, 1993).

The schools did not actively seek to initiate parent involvement from minority families. The families did not understand how to improve their child's chances for success in school by accessing school and community resources. Many of the parents had not experienced success in school themselves. Their previous negative end results predisposed them to poor outlooks for their children. The expectation and outcome

projected for the study were for parents to increase their contact with the school (George, 1993).

Having read a substantial impressive grouping of scholarly materials such as dissertations, theses, research studies, opinion papers, and articles, this researcher was impressed with the body of knowledge in existence on building collaborative relationships, partnerships, parent involvement, full service schools, parent resource centers, and school-linked services. However, George's study stood out because it contained a combination of several topics that were to form the concentration of the study this researcher performed.

Building relationships between schools and social service agencies became a priority for many educational reformists. Because social service agencies and schools often serve the same clientele, locating these services within or near public schools has helped to alleviate problems associated with transportation, availability, and time. Overall, the convenience associated with these collaborative ventures benefits the community, schools, and agencies themselves.

Noted researcher, Don Davies (1996) described "the tenth school". Only one tenth of schools actually participate in what he calls true collaborative efforts with parents and the community. In general, most schools do the traditional parent nights, open houses, and other events that invite the public into their schools. However, the tenth school goes beyond the norm and reaches out to community business partners, provides opportunities for families to access services that are conveniently located on school grounds, and implements supportive measures to assure that students are successful in spite of economic and social shortcomings.

The tenth school provides a variety of offerings, to fit the diverse needs of its

families and children. Some of those school-linked programs, services, activities, and offerings were: parent education, school readiness, life skills, teen pregnancy, teen parenting, dropout prevention, substance abuse prevention for alcohol and drugs, and integrated services programs that combined a wide range of services, including health, vocational, educational, and social services.

A parent center can be as simple as a few tables and chairs that are set up in a convenient location or as intricate as a dedicated room (or building) within the school or nearby. Many service providers have joined with the schools in these programs. For instance, social service agencies, health and mental health agencies, churches, welfare agencies, universities, and senior citizens groups offer services on school campuses as participants in school-linked programs (Davies, 1996).

#### *Comparative Discussion of Differing Conclusions*

The issue of providing additional support services to parents is one that is faced by many schools, especially in lower socioeconomic neighborhoods. Plevyak (2003) found that school administrators are often hesitant to make the effort to involve parents in education because it opens up a whole new issue of adult education or the lack thereof. The parents themselves may need help before they would be able to help their child. This is a theme that has also been pervasive throughout the literature on parent involvement. Although some parents may want to help or have the desire to become more involved, sometimes their own inadequacies present obstacles. These obstacles may be a lack of education and mental or health conditions. Some parents may also have been special needs students when they were in school.

Therefore, by inviting parents to become a part of the school's mission, educators are also opening themselves to an ever-expanding array of unmet needs that will be

manifested. Professional educators say that schools are becoming responsible for many of the social skills that were once taught at home. As our society struggles to find the means to address the many ills that are causing this trend, such as teenage pregnancy, dropouts, drug and alcohol abuse at younger ages, and the dissolution of traditional family structures and values, these problems will need to be addressed by linking services to schools (Plevyak, 2003).

Some of the additional supports that would be beneficial for parents could include computer instruction, communication skills development, selection and use of curriculum activities and resources, self-esteem building, stress reduction education, sex education classes, parenting skills classes, and general educational development courses for parents desiring to earn a high school diploma. Partnerships among businesses and community organizations to provide support services to parents that are an extension of what the school is able to provide can be developed. A family center could be established, either in the school or nearby, that would become the focal point of family activities and services (Plevyak, 2003).

An examination of the literature also featured the negative aspects of the open usage of school facilities. Bringing visitors in to use school facilities presents opportunities for possible discourse. Most teachers do not like to share their classrooms, especially if they find a mess in the morning or if their supplies have been disrupted (Dryfoos, 2002). Such was the case on a recent occasion at the parent resource center. In an effort to open the doors to additional community agencies and create extended availability, this researcher aggressively promoted the fact that the center was open two evenings per week. An organization with which the center already conducted other business decided to host their women's empowerment group at the center also. Upon

returning the next day, the night school teacher, who was in charge of the building during evening hours, presented a verbal laundry list of concerns. Therefore, the advice of upper level management was sought, and a letter of understanding was directed to the individual in charge of the event. Unfortunately, this was not the first time complaints were made following one of the organization's meetings.

Teacher resistance was commonly found as a barrier to collaboration (Davies, 1996). In several instances, researchers have suggested that teachers proactively maintain links to organizations supporting families and children. In today's society, teachers are called upon to become the point of contact for an ever-expanding range of responsibilities, especially in urban schools. Although the teachers cannot provide these services themselves, they can play a major role in maintaining partnerships with agencies that serve their students and whose services may help to avoid the types of problems that place students at risk of educational failure.

It is common to find educators who exhibit condescending attitudes toward parents as though the educator is the sole authority on what is best for the child. In a qualitative study of school-family relationships among predominantly White, low-income families in an urban neighborhood, the researcher found that teachers expressed doubts about the effectiveness of parent involvement (O'Connor, as cited in Boethel, 2003). The author observed that most teachers and staff did not regard the low-income parents in their school as equal partners and expressed doubts about the parents' interest. As a result, parents reported their fears of becoming involved in educational decisions. The parents exhibited caution about interfering in teachers' classrooms and their general self-perception of inferiority helped to maintain the barrier of separation between the parents and the teachers.



*Comprehensive Analysis of the Agreement of the Experts in the Literature*

Dryfoos (as cited in Warger, 2001) described full-service schools as one-stop centers that support the educational, physical, psychological, and social needs of students and their families. The literature affirmed the importance and usefulness of such centers. There are collaborative arrangements in place among a variety of service agencies that bring many of the offerings to the site. The one-stop concept is supported by a coordinated, collaborative effort among schools, agencies, and other services and supports. Offering services on school grounds alleviates a variety of problems that interfere with families obtaining services for their children (no transportation, lack of understanding of public health and social service systems, inability to take time away from work, and lack of health insurance). The services offered by full-service schools vary and are delivered through collaboration among the school, agencies, and families.

The Lucy Stone Elementary School in Dorchester, Massachusetts is one of four elementary schools in a full-service partnership with an educational intervention, known as Boston Excels. Programs are offered in English and in Spanish. The examples suggested for inclusion in their menu of offerings included preventive services, such as adult education, immunizations, family planning, recreation, afterschool care, social services to access basic living resources, economic services and job placement, quality early childhood education, mental and physical health screening, consultation, drug and alcohol prevention, school meal programs, and child care. Early intervention services included guidance and counseling, tutoring, public health care, conflict resolution, child abuse education, juvenile alternative services, latch-key services, and mental health counseling (Peebles-Wilkins, 2004).

It remains unknown how many variations and the sum total actual existing full

service community schools. Dryfoos (2002) suggests that there must be in excess of 1,000 such schools nationwide. The fact that they are catalogued differently and comprise many different staff structures adds to the difficulty in accurately quantifying. The Coalition for Community Schools (as cited in Peebles-Wilkins, 2004) found that school partnership initiatives produced student academic and nonacademic gains, enhanced the school environment, garnered community support, facilitated better usage of school sites, and fostered increased community pride.

A foundation known as the League of Schools Reaching Out helped partnership elementary schools redefine themselves as community institutions. They used a number of strategies to respond to the needs of the troubled urban environments in which they are located. In addition to the traditional offerings, such as parent conferences, open houses, fund-raisers, and literacy programs, they developed three nontraditional strategies: parent centers; family support programs; and school-community partnerships with universities, businesses, and civic groups (Institute for Responsive Education, 2006).

The Willard Model School at Lakewood, which is located in Norfolk, Virginia, is 1 of 12 elementary schools with a parent center and serves as an example of the range of school-linked services that could be provided. The parent center programs had great variety; they all tended to build on family strengths by emphasizing collaboration among educators, families, and the community; and placed value on the families' inclusion in educational process by allowing parents to help select workshop topics. The parent center coordinator and teachers also visited parents in their homes (Allen, 1996).

MacKenzie and Rodgers (1997) gave an example of an exemplary full-service school that opened in 1989 in south Florida. The Walter C. Young Human Resource Center housed a middle school of over 2,000 students, a day care with almost 200 infants,

a community library, and recreational facilities. Two individuals shared the administration of the site. One was the middle school principal, and the other was the director of the community school, which offered adult basic education and all of the aforementioned programs and services in addition to the middle school. The governing body was made up of two site administrators and a board of directors, which consisted of representatives from the school board, city, and various organizations represented on the campus. Monthly meetings were held to share information, obtain advice, and secure support.

Internet-based research resulted in a plethora of current information about the Walter C. Young Human Resource Center. The center's success is evidenced by the School Accountability Report Data from September 2004 that indicated that their middle school students earned a grade of A, based on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test rating system each year for the 2002 through 2004 school years. The school's 2004-2005 School Improvement Plan was also posted and contained clear, measurable goals. The success of the full-service school format that was implemented was evident because the school is still in operation after all of these years and is still making a positive difference for the community they serve (Broward Schools, 2006).

The community can be a school's best resource. Many times, districts face limited funds to activate new initiatives or to update facilities. By working with parents, community agencies, and school staff members, much can be accomplished. C. Jackson (1996) was the principal of a small elementary in the south inherited a facility that was constructed in 1926 and was in need of major renovations both to the buildings as well as to the practices and procedures. The need to initiate and expand programs, while demonstrating accountability for spending, placed a severe crunch on an already limited

budget and called for creativity to obtain needed funding. Although situations vary with each school and each district, the community can often be considered the best possible resource. Through collaborative efforts, a community advisory board was established, technology was upgraded, a parent involvement program was established to include a Parent Teacher Association, the lines of communication between administration and staff were opened, teachers began to devote extra hours to improving the appearance of their classrooms, a monthly newsletter was written, donations were given to support the school in terms of extra supplies, and the community devoted designated Saturdays as clean up days for the physical improvement of the school grounds.

Lazares and Armstrong (1996) featured an extensive description of inexpensive methods that may be useful as schools struggle with public relations. Although the information given was geared to the traditional school setting, there were suggestions that are practical for any organization: (a) bombard the news media, (b) make positive phone calls, (c) offer homework assistance, (d) post assignments on cable television, (e) use parent intervention, (f) lure parents into the building, (g) hold enrichment assemblies, (h) set up a hall of fame, (i) keep track of copycats, and (j) continue to learn and talk about it. It does not have to cost a lot to enhance an image. In fact, many of the activities can be performed cost free.

In marketing a school, there are steps that are necessary to meet the challenges of the new millennium. Spring (2003) outlined seven steps for success. The advice given in step 1 was, consumers and their perception of the school need to be understood. Community members, parents, students, faculty, staff, and benefactors may be the consumers. Simple surveys are useful in identifying consumer attitudes and perceptions. Perceptions tell how consumers feel about the school while attitudes describe how

consumers think about the school. It is also important to focus communication strategies on what can be done for the consumer, not on the features the site has. Although this suggestion may be appropriate in certain instances, this researcher would endorse a blend of both consumer benefits and site features.

Spring (2003) found the second step was to speak in a shared voice. During staff meetings or at an in-service program, leaders should query the staff as to what they believe is special or unique about the site. They may have some varied aspects of views on what consumers need to hear. It is important to be mindful to take into consideration the opinions that may not fit into the typical stream of ideas.

The third step was to write strategic objectives that are strategically focused on achieving planned outcomes (Spring, 2003). The fourth step was to gather consensus from stakeholders as to the direction the school should be headed and remember to value differing opinions. The fifth step was to develop a language that conveys how the school embraces the philosophical message of the district or governing body. The sixth step was to use visual presentations to enhance the effort to market the best the school has to offer if possible.

Step 7 discussed marketing activities. Benefit-oriented language that is communicated through marketing activities is most effective. The school should be reflected in the tone of the materials. Marketing activities should consist of five basic types: communication materials, press releases, staff development, advertising, and outreach activities. Each organization's marketing plan is typically based on its budget and internal resources. Therefore, language is the most important component for building a strong image for the school (Spring, 2003).

*Summary of Chapter 2*

The value of a parent family resource education center to the community it serves cannot be easily measured. Whether it is located in the classroom, within the school, or in the neighborhood, the primary purposes of the center should be to promote parent involvement in the education of their children, enhance opportunities for self-improvement, further self-sufficiency, provide materials and information on resources that are deemed of value to residents, publicize parent educational and literacy venues, serve as a catalyst for positive change, and place at one's disposal a vehicle for exploration of an unlimited ever-updated cadre of offerings.

Providing adequate resources for parents that help to support the family unit was one of the original goals of the parent resource center. In past times, the parent resource center played a major role in the school, family, and community partnership. To recapture this former status was a desired outcome. The intent for conducting this study was to facilitate the re-establishment of a multifaceted partnership with strong emphasis on building cohesive relationships with residents, stakeholders, and school officials. This study was used to stimulate access and facility usage through increased awareness. The outcomes of this effort provided infinite possibilities.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### *Terminal Objectives*

The terminal objectives explored intended outcomes for the study. Expressing these projected results helped to define the parameters and confines of the research. The purpose of this applied research study was to develop, implement, and evaluate a community relations program, which was designed to eliminate known barriers, access where unfamiliarity and the lack of awareness have been identified as barriers, and clarify the parent resource center's role in the community. Collaborative relationship building thereby assisted to strengthen the school, community, and home network of support as outlined in the original goals for the parent resource center.

In preparation for the study, an extensive literature review was performed. The literature review included the topics of family education centers, educational reform, marketing, parent involvement, community relations, collaborative partnerships, resiliency factors, impoverished populations, parent academic needs, school-family relationships, and full-service schools.

### *Research Questions*

Three research questions guided this study. The following section contains a discussion of the research questions and terminal objectives.

*Research Question 1.* Research Question 1 explores familiarity and awareness concerns. Research Question 1 asks, what steps are necessary to improve existing levels of awareness, enhance familiarity, and clarify the parent resource center's role among community residents, stakeholders, and school officials? During the 16th annual back-to-school information sessions, only 10% of the 100 attending residents expressed some level of knowledge pertaining to the purpose and existence of the parent resource center.

The terminal objective for Research Question 1 was to increase familiarity and awareness pertaining to the availability and accessibility of programs and services offered at the parent resource center. Terminal Objective 1 states, at least 75% (75) of the 100 community residents, stakeholders, and school officials will show an increase in their knowledge of how to access programs and services at a rate of 50% or higher. The level of increase in knowledge was evidenced by presurvey versus postsurvey results.

*Research Question 2.* Research Question 2 asks, can collaborative relationships between the parent resource center and community residents, stakeholders, and school officials be established? In the days of court-ordered mandatory busing, the parent resource center served as a support mechanism for 26 public schools: 14 elementary, 5 middle, 4 high, 2 magnet, and 1 alternative. The center served as a focal point for all surrounding school sites by coordinating activities in fostering a positive community and school partnership.

The terminal objective for Research Question 2 is to establish the parent resource center as a support mechanism for the 12 schools located within the community. Terminal Objective 1 states, 90% of schools within the community will become aware of and understand the importance of programs and services available at the parent resource center. This was accomplished by building name recognition and dependency on parent resource center programs and services through the development of a public relations program.

*Research Question 3.* Research Question 3 asks, will the creation of collaborative relationships with community residents, stakeholders, and school officials result in an increased client base for the parent resource center? Based on the research findings from the service-learning project where interviews were conducted with school officials



employed at the high school, it was noted that the employees interviewed were only aware of specific programs and did not possess an adequate working knowledge of the comprehensive umbrella of services offered through the parent resource center. Therefore, referrals for services were made sporadically at best. Eighty percent (four out of five) of the respondents from the high school indicated at least minimal usage of the parent resource center by referring students and their families for services offered.

The terminal objective for Research Question 3 was to increase usage of the parent resource center by 50% or higher. Comparison data consisted of statistical information collected on the parent resource center's daily accountability logs for the previous 3 years during the same timeframe.

### *Methodology*

This applied research study addressed awareness and familiarity concerns for residents, stakeholders, and school officials in the community where the parent resource center was located. The intervention was intended to educate the community about programs and services available at the parent resource center. The study included both quantitative and qualitative data. Participants were asked to provide information via the questionnaire as to their awareness, familiarity, and usage of programs and services located at the site.

The families did not understand how to improve their child's chances for success in school by accessing school and community resources. Many of the parents had not experienced success in school themselves. Their previous negative end results predisposed them to poor outlooks for their children. The expectation and outcome projected for the study were for parents to increase their contact with the school (George, 1993).

The basic common sequence of events planned for the accomplishment of the stated terminal objectives consisted of (a) the collection of data through use of the presurvey, (b) the development and viewing of a visual presentation that was based on existing programs and services, (c) the group discussion, (d) the administration of the posttest, and (e) the scheduling of future outreach opportunities.

As a strategy for improving achievement among Hispanic students, a qualitative study was conducted for the creation of a community-based family education center. In-depth interviews were conducted with 16 parents residing in the federally subsidized housing development where the educational center was to be established. Six parents who were actively involved in the center's creation and 10 others who sent their children to the center but did not help to create it were interviewed (Aspiazu et al., as cited in Boethel, 2003).

In collaboration with the district-level supervisor overseeing the parent resource center and the school district's public information officer, a community relations program was developed to address the familiarity and awareness concerns previously detailed. Benefit-oriented language that communicated through marketing activities was most effective. The organization was reflected in the tone of the materials. Marketing activities consisted of five basic types: communication materials, staff development, marketing, and outreach activities. The marketing plan was based on budget and internal resources. Therefore, language was the most important component for building a strong image for the school (Spring, 2003).

The goal was to plan a program that was not only effective but also efficient. Funds for this venture consisted of the use of existing supplies, public access media, and other low-cost measures. Lazares and Armstrong (1996) featured an extensive description

of 10 inexpensive methods that may be useful as schools struggle with public relations. Among those suggestions, the following were utilized in this study: bombard the news media, lure parents into your building, hold enrichment assemblies, and continue to learn and talk about it.

Group 1 consisted of residents and stakeholders. A representative sample of at least 50 residents and stakeholders was utilized. For the purpose of this study, residents consisted of persons physically living within the community. Stakeholders consisted of nonresidents with a vested interest in the overall well-being or success of the community. Examples of stakeholders were citizens who did not reside within the community or employees of public and private social service, health, education, and welfare organizations offering assistance to residents of the community.

Prior to establishing contact with the potential Group 1 participants, communication was established with managers and chairpersons of the various neighborhood organizations frequented by residents and stakeholders. This dialogue consisted of an explanation of the purpose of the community relations program to identify suitable dates, times, and places for the solicitation of participants and introduction of the research study. Communication was established with Group 1 participants via existing resident and stakeholder meetings, taking advantage of prescheduled events.

Group 2 consisted of the school officials representing the 12 schools within the community. A representative sample of at least 50 school officials was utilized for inclusion in this study. The professional titles of these school officials included but were not limited to district-level administrators, principals, assistant principals, guidance counselors, psychologists, intervention specialists, resource teachers, classroom teachers, and school social workers. After compiling a database of schools, personnel, and specific

professional titles, an introductory letter was sent to solicit cooperation. The initial contact was followed by either a telephone call, a site visit to each location, or an e-mailed correspondence. Based on the response to preliminary contact information, sessions were scheduled and conducted as outlined below.

For the purpose of this study, public schools in the proposed parent resource center partnership network of support were identified as 5 elementary schools, 5 middle schools, 1 kindergarten through eighth-grade school; and 1 high school. Of the 12 schools located within the targeted boundaries, 8 were classified as magnet schools and 9 had Title I status. Five of the 12 schools carried dual designations: magnet and Title I. All 5 elementary schools had Title I status whereas only 2 had magnet programs. All 5 middle schools had magnet programs whereas 2 schools had Title I status. The singular combination kindergarten through eighth-grade school had Title I status, and the singular area high school carried both magnet and Title I status.

Two informational sessions were conducted with each group of participants. The Orientation Session encompassed an introduction, the administration of the presurvey instrument (see Appendix E), and the visual presentation. The Visitation Session featured a guided tour, a group discussion (see Appendix F), and the administration of the postsurvey instrument (see Appendix E). Each session was interactive and allowed participants to ask questions as the need arose. Throughout the research study, participants were invited to access services, according to needs they identified.

During the Orientation Session, participants were informed of the purpose of the study. Participants were guided through the administration of the presurvey instrument to ascertain existing levels of awareness of programs and services available at the parent resource center. Spring (2003) outlined seven steps for success in marketing a school.

The advice given in step 1 was, consumers and their perception of the school need to be understood. Consumers can be community members, parents, students, faculty, staff, and benefactors. Simple surveys are useful in identifying consumer attitudes and perceptions.

Following the administration of the presurvey, the visual presentation was viewed. Spring (2003), recommended the use of visual presentations to enhance the effort to market the best the school has to offer. At the conclusion of the Orientation Session, participants were asked to sign up for the Visitation Session. Tours were offered on two dates to address differences in the availability of participants. Prior to the facilities tour, the researcher compiled and analyzed information gathered on the presurvey instrument.

The Visitation Session featured a participant tour of the parent resource center facilities during student attendance hours. Participants were provided literature, materials, and promotional goods as they visited each program housed at the parent resource center. At the conclusion of the tour, an informal focus group discussion to clarify each program's role and purpose further was conducted in the parent resource center's multipurpose room. The researcher guided the discussion and composed a written summary of participant observations and insights during the informal focus group discussion. To market the school successfully, Spring (2003) recommended that consensus from stakeholders as to the direction the school should be headed needs to be gathered).

Following the group discussion, the administration of the postsurvey instrument took place. The postsurvey measured awareness and familiarity gained concerning accessing programs and services available at the parent resource center. Finally, participants were asked to provide opinionated information to assist the researcher in scheduling future outreach activities with the organization.

By examining the data that were systematically gathered, the parent resource center's community relations program was evaluated for effectiveness in meeting the objectives outlined in this study. Following completion of this study, future presentations were scheduled in an effort to continue outreach activities by providing ongoing information; requesting feedback on barriers to usage; and continuously orientating community residents, stakeholders, and school officials.

#### *Time Line and Activities*

The planned time line and activities assisted the researcher with remaining organized and productive throughout the implementation process. Listed activities and tasks were not intended to be totally exhaustive. However, they served as the guidelines for the major undertakings within the study.

*Time line and activities for Week 1.* During Week 1, a request for authorization to conduct research was submitted to the school district. The researcher met with key administrative personnel to discuss parameters of the study and strategies for introducing the community relations program (i.e., researcher's supervisor, the school district's public information officer, organizational managers, and chairpersons). A letter of introduction was written; lists of school officials and community organizations were composed; and school officials, managers, and chairpersons were contacted to schedule appointments. The researcher prepared materials (visual presentation, introductory script, handouts, surveys, etc.) and updated parent resource center accountability logs for immediate use.

*Time line and activities for Week 2.* During Week 2, the researcher continued to contact school officials, managers, and chairpersons to schedule appointments. The Orientation Session was conducted. The researcher compiled results of the presurvey and constructed plans for Visitation Session 2.

*Time line and activities for Week 3.* During Week 3, the researcher contacted local media personnel to inquire about publishing articles about events held at the parent resource center. School officials, managers, and chairpersons were contacted to schedule appointments. Orientation Session and Visitation Session were conducted as scheduled.

*Time line and activities for Week 4.* During Week 4, the Orientation Session and Visitation Session were conducted as scheduled.

*Time line and activities for Week 5.* During Week 5, the researcher analyzed data, compiled results, evaluated outcomes, and composed reports. The Orientation Session and Visitation Session were continued as scheduled. Archived parent resource center accountability logs were used to construct usage summary for the past 3 years.

*Time line and activities for Week 6.* During Week 6, the Orientation Session and Visitation Session were continued as scheduled. Postsurvey data were gathered, participant interviews were conducted, and researcher observations were done. Data, were compiled, outcomes evaluated, and reports composed.

*Time line and activities for Week 7.* During Week 6, the Orientation-Session and Visitation Session were continued as scheduled. Postsurvey data were gathered, participant interviews were conducted, and researcher observations were done. Data were compiled, outcomes evaluated, and reports composed.

*Time line and activities for Week 8.* During Week 8, past parent resource center accountability log usage summary data were compared to data gathered during the research study's time parameters to determine if an increase in usage had occurred as a result of implementation activities. The Orientation Session and Visitation Session were continued as scheduled. The Results and Discussion chapters of the dissertation were written. The final copy of the dissertation was submitted to the committee for approval.

### *Procedures*

The procedures employed to meet outlined objectives varied in nature according to their relationship to each research question. The time line for the activities revolved around convenience and availability of participants. This project involved the promotion of the awareness, accessibility, and importance of programs, services, resources, and mechanisms of support that were available through the parent resource center. The planned research activities served as the catalyst for building ongoing collaborative relationships with community residents, stakeholders, and school officials.

The number and variety of personnel assigned to each school fluctuated due to the variable funding formulas based on school status or special categorization. As previously mentioned, out of the 12 schools in the community, 8 were classified as magnet schools, and 9 had Title I status. Five of the 12 schools had dual designations: magnet and Title I. Title I schools had parent involvement program stipulations as a federal funding requirement. Those schools had to dedicate at least 1% of their federal funding dollars to parent involvement. These types of schools are often able to hire additional units of personnel, such as parent liaisons and other specialists, at the discretion of the administrators. At schools where additional specialty personnel were present, they were included in the outlined strategies.

### *Participant Roles*

The researcher had the responsibility for developing, implementing, and evaluating the activities of this study. Known roles included researcher, observer, surveyor, facilitator, analyst, composer, and writer. The researcher, however, relied on the cooperation of participants. Residents, stakeholders, and school officials, who typically referred children and their families to resources outside of the school site for



educational, social, enrichment, sufficiency, or medical purposes, were used. The open-to-the-public status of the parent resource center allowed for additional sources of survey participants such as school district personnel and community agency employees who frequently reserved use of the multipurpose room for meetings, workshops, and trainings.

### *Instruments*

The Awareness, Usage, and Familiarity Questionnaire (see Appendix E) was utilized for the pre- and postsurvey instrument. The Awareness, Usage, and Familiarity Discussion Questions (see Appendix F) were used for the guided focus group discussion component of the Visitation Session. Instruments used to survey participants and record their viewpoints were self-made. Thus, the reliability and validity of these instruments were not previously measured. In examining the research, these instruments were constructed according to the intricacies mentioned as considerations when formulating a plan for a successful parent center.

### *Limitations*

Working within the confines of the researcher's sphere of influence, every attempt was made to assure the success of this research study. However, restrictions and constraints may have included the willingness of participants and their lack of availability for completion both scheduled sessions. Because this study did not allow for the distribution of tangible incentives for participation, this may have also acted as a hindrance affecting the quality of the information gleaned. When requesting statistical data from organizations serving the community, bureaucratic red tape was expected. Overcoming this and other obstacles posed challenges that the researcher tried to obliterate.

*Delimitations*

The study provided a short-term intervention based on the problem of the lack of awareness and familiarity with the facilities and available programs and services at the parent resource center. This study was not meant to explore or directly market services, programs, and facilities on the entire campus, only those offered through the parent resource center. Although there was considerable evidence that an overall assessment was needed, the researcher limited this study to those areas for which she had some influence and anticipated a higher degree of cooperation.

*Summary of Chapter 3*

In the past 5 years, the community experienced a total rejuvenation. The population diversified, and the community changed. Where housing projects once stood, marvelous domiciles were erected. It had been many years since the mission, vision, and goals of the parent resource center were revisited to assure compliance with published statements. In support of those foundational guiding principles, the planned results of this study consisted of the formation of a community relations program to facilitate greater outreach opportunities; the establishment of collaborative relationships with community residents, stakeholders, and school officials; and an increase in usage through heightened awareness of and access to available programs and services. As the site entered a decade of existence, these efforts paved the way for a clearer vision for its future.

## Chapter 4: Results

The research confirmed that students do better in school when families, schools, and communities work together (Chavkin, 2000). In 2006, the parent resource center celebrated 10 years of providing service to the community. Although the center was bursting at the seams with activity, the source of this activity was the multipurpose room, which was used by various school district departments and social service agencies for their meetings, trainings, and workshops.

The parent resource center was originally established as a source of supplemental educational services for children and their families. However, in the years since urban renewal took place, the linkage to community residents, stakeholders, and the 12 public schools within the community became nonexistent. Outreach was needed to establish collaborative relationships with residents, stakeholders, and school officials in the neighborhood where the center was located. At times, schools need to use aggressive outreach strategies with low-income or minority communities to establish family-school-community partnerships (Blain, 2005). Therefore, the researcher undertook this task as the primary focus of her applied dissertation research study.

Across the nation, partnership programs between schools and families and communities are expanding (Chavkin, 2000). The researcher hypothesized that the systematic creation of a community relations program, highlighting the vast array of programs and services offered through the parent resource center, would foster the establishment of interdependent relationships that focused on strengthening school, family, and community partnerships. This process included the preparation of materials, contacting key personnel, securing authorization to make presentations, and providing outreach to neighboring organizations, schools, and institutions. The end result was

increased awareness and accessibility to the parent resource center for residents, stakeholders, and school officials. A byproduct of the end result would eventually be increased usage of the site.

#### *Results Related to Terminal Objectives*

The results of the terminal objectives explore outcomes of this research study. The purpose of this applied dissertation was to develop, implement, and evaluate a community relations program that was designed to eliminate known barriers to access, which were identified as the lack of awareness and familiarity.

*Terminal objective for Research Question 1.* The terminal objective for Research Question 1 was to increase familiarity and awareness pertaining to the availability and accessibility of programs and services offered at the parent resource center. Terminal Objective 1 states, at least 75% (75) of the 100 community residents, stakeholders, and school officials will show an increase in their knowledge of how to access programs and services, at a rate of 50% or higher.

The terminal objective identified for Research Question 1 was not met during this applied dissertation's implementation. The activities planned for accomplishing this terminal objective consisted of two parts. Those two parts consisted of two informational sessions, an Orientation Session and a Visitation Session. The Orientation Session was conducted at 17 locations throughout the community, with a total of 111 community residents, stakeholders, and school officials participating in the presentations (see Table 1). The Awareness, Familiarity, and Usage Questionnaire (see Appendix E) was administered as the pre intervention assessment instrument.

Table 1

*Research Study Participants for the Orientation Session*

School or organization	No.
High school	7
K-8 school	1
Middle School A	3
Middle School B	3
Middle School C	3
Middle School D	1
Middle School E	2
Elementary School A	1
Elementary School B	3
Elementary School C	3
Elementary School D	2
Elementary School E	2
Parent resource center staff	13
Advisory board	14
Resident council meeting	21
Parent training session	17
Parent involvement group	15

*Note.*  $N = 111$ . K = kindergarten.

Part two of the terminal objective identified for Research Question 1 consisted of a Visitation Session, which was conducted at the parent resource center facilities. A total of 26 participants were in attendance for the presentation (see Table 2). The Awareness, Familiarity, and Usage Questionnaire (see Appendix E) and the Awareness, Familiarity,

and Usage Discussion Questions (see Appendix F) were administered as post intervention assessment instruments.

Table 2

*Research Study Participants for the Visitation Session*

School or organization	No.
High school	0
K-8 school	1
Middle School A	0
Middle School B	0
Middle School C	0
Middle School D	0
Middle School E	0
Elementary School A	0
Elementary School B	1
Elementary School C	2
Elementary School D	0
Elementary School E	1
Parent resource center staff	12
Advisory board	1
Resident council meeting	3
Parent training session	0
Parent involvement group	4

*Note.*  $N = 26$ . K = kindergarten

The objective was for 75% of the 111 (83) participants to increase their knowledge of the parent resource center by at least 50% or better, by attending both

informational sessions. The total number of participants completing both sessions was far less than predicted. Although 111 participants attended the Orientation Session, only 26 participants attended the Visitation Session (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Research Study Participants by Session and Category*

School or organization	Orientation Session			Visitation session		
	SO	R	S	SO	R	S
High school	7	0	0	0	0	0
K-8 school	1	0	0	1	0	0
Middle School A	3	0	0	0	0	0
Middle School B	3	0	0	0	0	0
Middle School C	3	0	0	0	0	0
Middle School D	1	0	0	0	0	0
Middle School E	2	0	0	0	0	0
Elementary School A	1	0	0	0	0	0
Elementary School B	3	0	0	1	0	0
Elementary School C	3	0	0	2	0	0
Elementary School D	2	0	0	0	0	0
Elementary School E	2	0	0	1	0	0
Parent resource center staff	13	0	0	12	0	0
Advisory board	0	14	0	0	0	2
Resident council meeting	0	21	0	0	3	0
Parent training session	1	0	16	0	0	0
Parent involvement group	15	0	0	4	0	0

*Note.* SO = school official; R = resident; S = stakeholder; K = kindergarten. For the Orientation Session,  $N = 111$ ; for the Visitation Session,  $N = 26$ .

These figures represent a deficit of 76%. Eighty-five participants chose not to participate in the Visitation Session. While participants interestingly pursued the information provided during the Orientation Sessions, most did not attend the tour of the parent resource center facilities.

*Terminal objective for Research Question 2.* The terminal objective for Research Question 2 was to establish the parent resource center as a support mechanism for the 12 schools located within the community. Terminal Objective 2 stated, 90% of schools within the community would become aware of and understand the importance of programs and services available at the parent resource center.

The terminal objective for Research Question 2 was met during the applied dissertation's implementation phase. The objective was to have at least 10 (90%) of the neighborhood schools become aware of and understand the importance of programs and services available at the parent resource center. Twelve public schools were located within the community where the parent resource center was housed. Targeted schools included 1 high school, 1 kindergarten through 8th-grade school, 5 middle schools, and 5 elementary schools.

All 12 (100%) of the neighborhood schools participated in this research study and have expanded their knowledge of the parent resource center's programs and services (see Table 4). Some studies suggested that addressing the complex interactions among family, community, and school is necessary in seeking to close the achievement gap (Boethel, 2003). To ensure that all students receive the support necessary for academic and personal success, home, school, and community, connections need to become more formal and purposeful (Sanders & Epstein, 1998).



Table 4

*Schools Gaining Awareness of Parent Resource Center*

School	Yes	No
High school	X	
K–8 school	X	
Middle School A	X	
Middle School B	X	
Middle School C	X	
Middle School D	X	
Middle School E	X	
Elementary School A	X	
Elementary School B	X	
Elementary School C	X	
Elementary School D	X	
Elementary School E	X	

*Note.*  $N = 12$ . K = kindergarten. Schools were located in the neighborhood where the parent resource center was housed.

Epstein (as cited in Boethel, 2003) identified six essential types of involvement for a comprehensive partnership program: (a) parenting, which includes helping families establish home environments that support children as students; (b) communicating, which includes designing and conducting effective two-way communication systems about school programs and student progress; (c) volunteering, which includes recruiting and organizing assistance and support structures for school functions and activities; (d)

learning at home, which includes providing information, ideas, and instruction to families concerning how to help students with homework; (e) decision making, which means including families in decisions about the school; and (f) collaborating with the community, which includes identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen and support the school, family, and community partnership.

*Terminal objective for Research Question 3.* The terminal objective for Research Question 3 was to increase usage of the parent resource center by 50% or higher. Comparison data consisted of statistical information collected on the parent resource center's daily accountability logs for the previous 3 years during the same timeframe.

Due to extenuating circumstances, the terminal objective for Research Question 3 was not met during the timeframe allotted for the implementation of this research study. The increase of facility usage by 50% pertained to usage by community residents, stakeholders, and school officials. In many instances, minority families did not understand how they could improve their child's chances for educational success by accessing school and community resources (George, 1993).

For the purpose of this research study, data from the same timeframe during the years of 2004, 2005, and 2006 were examined. The targeted timeframe consisted of this dissertation's implementation phase, which was February 15-April 15, 2006. The data used for comparison were gleaned from the parent resource center Service Delivery Record (see Appendix G), which was the accountability log.

During the 2004-targeted timeframe, 103 inquiries were made for referrals to programs compared to 84 inquiries in 2003. During the 2005-targeted timeframe, 668 inquiry-based referrals were made, which was an increase of 565 when compared to 2004. During The 2006-targeted timeframe, 630 referrals resulted from inquiries, a

comparative decrease of 38 (see Table 5).

Table 5

*Parent Resource Center Service  
Delivery Record Inquiry-Based  
Referrals*

Year	Number	% change
2003	84	--
2004	103	+22
2005	668	+548
2006	630	-6

During the course of the implementation of this dissertation, the accountability log was updated to reflect inclusion of additional categorical selections. These updates contributed to the ease of usefulness of the log. The accountability log was constructed as a landscape layout spreadsheet and allowed for tracking of the number of requests for service that resulted from walk-in and telephone inquiries. Through experience, these types of inquiries tend to come from community residents, stakeholders, and school officials. Categories were allotted for the various programs within the building. There were 8 programs housed in the parent resource center. For the purpose of this study, they were identified as programs A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and H. There was also a category for “other,” which was for tracking requests that did not fall into the realm of availability. In those cases, information was given verbally with the aid of brochures and handouts, giving people the tools they needed to secure the services they desired. Tally marks were used to maintain a count of the number of inquiries daily for each program.

Although business continued to increase substantially, one factor presented a direct effect on the decrease in accounted for inquiry-based referrals. In February, the building's entire telephone communication system was upgraded and automated. Previously, all calls were answered manually and then referred to the appropriate source of assistance. The upgrade had remained on the long list of site improvements for many years. Funds in excess of \$8,000 were finally allocated to install a system comparable to those in other school district sites.

Positive school and community relations require educators, parents, and the community to work together cohesively. One aspect of relationship building is the foundation of mutual trust and respect for the values, perspectives, and experiences of others. A repetitious finding in much of the literature was that it is common for minority parents and families to feel alienated from the school because some may lack knowledge about school protocol and may feel inadequate or unwelcome due to differences of income, education, or ethnicity when compared to school personnel (Dunlap & Alva, 1999). The need for strengthening the parent school partnership among minorities and economically disadvantaged families is a concern reported by many professionals (George, 1993).

#### *Summary of Chapter 4*

This applied research study addressed awareness and familiarity concerns for residents, stakeholders, and school officials in the community where the parent resource center was located. The purpose for creating such partnerships is to help all youngsters succeed in school and then later in life (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, as cited in Blain, 2005). The study included both quantitative and qualitative data. Participants were asked to provide information via the questionnaire as to their

awareness, familiarity, and usage of programs and services located at the site.

The intent of the intervention was to educate the community about programs and services available at the parent resource center. Countless academic and social benefits avail themselves to children where their parents are involved in their education (Blain, 2005). Collaborating with parents and communities promotes social and emotional growth for children while capitalizing on their resources and strengths. Promoting the well-being of the student and the family through collaborative activities develops social and human capital that strengthens families and communities. This tends to be especially true for low-income parents whose only access to education may be through their child's school (Dunlap & Alva, 1999).

Although only one of three terminal objectives was fully met, the data indicated some growth in all three objective areas. The other two objectives revealed some development, just not as projected. It is the belief of this researcher that the intent of the intervention was realized during the implementation of this research study.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### *Summary of the Problem*

The parent resource center was founded in 1996 with the mission of integrating educational, social, and human services that were beneficial to meeting the needs of the community's children and families in an easily accessible location. One of the four goals, which were adopted in support of that mission, was to improve services and outcomes by strengthening, building, and enhancing relationships with schools, agencies, and the community.

The researcher was employed as the manager of the parent resource center for the past 3 1/2 years. During that time, the site experienced a total rejuvenation. According to historical data, such as minutes from staff meetings, personnel rosters, accountability reports, and informal verbal interviews with some of the founders of the site during the first 6 years, the center operated as an educational hub, not only for the community but also for the entire school district in accommodating functions and events scheduled for local students who were transported by buses en masse to suburban schools.

To establish a baseline of information, the researcher conducted a search of historical data, such as newsletters, employee attendance records, and staff meeting rosters, for the parent resource center. The following information was found and reported, as a summarization. Prior to 2002, space occupancy of this 8,000-square-foot building was about 85%. However, due to urban renewal, the client base of the center had changed immensely. The two large housing projects were demolished, and tenants were relocated to other areas of the city. It was during that timeframe that programs and services were reduced, as were personnel. The residents took with them their diverse needs. Therefore, in the fall of 2002, the site housed only one permanent full-time program, an adult basic

education class. Two itinerant programs staffed by a singular person each occupied office space on an infrequent basis. Otherwise, the multipurpose room was scheduled for use by school district departments or community service agencies sparsely. Spring 2003 occupant usage of space at the site hovered around 20%.

The following school year, in the fall of 2003, additional programs and personnel were added due to the closure of an early childhood education center and available office and classroom space. With the construction of brand new housing areas also came the return of increased usage. Occupant usage of space surpassed previous records to around 90%. During the 2004-2005 school year, occupancy remained stable. Although there were two programs that left, two new programs immediately occupied the space.

During the 2005-2006 school year, the center added two additional new programs, bringing usage occupancy to almost 100% on most days. The variable percentage of usage was because the multipurpose room was not scheduled for use every single day. Although space occupancy data and building usage data indicate steady growth and increased usage, it was determined through observation, inquiry, and examination that community residents represented a minute portion of the current client base.

In community schools, it is important that community members feel a sense of ownership. The parents, students, and all the people in the neighborhood should feel welcome and willing to engage (Dryfoos, 1998). Parents need to understand and gain exposure to the opportunities presented that will offer assistance for whatever needs they are experiencing. Baseline data indicated that residents, stakeholders, and school officials in the surrounding community were not aware of the site's existence or familiar with the array of available program and service offerings. The mission statement indicated that the parent resource center was founded for the benefit of community residents. Instead, the

client base consisted predominantly of professional educators and service providers.

### *The Intervention*

This project was conducted under the mentorship of the researcher's supervisor. Prior to implementation, several meetings were held with the researcher's supervisor to review the parameters of the study. Advice was rendered as to processes and procedures for conducting the study as well as ideas for recruiting participants. Having expertise in the field of social work, as well as having served as one of the founders of the parent resource center, he proved to be a valuable source of information and guidance.

During the first couple of weeks of implementation, several key tasks took precedence. The researcher used spreadsheet software to construct a Research Study Contact Sheet in order to maintain organization. This sheet listed the school sites, principals, assistant principals, guidance counselors, and social workers for each school. A category entitled "other" was also added as many of the Title I schools had additional social service personnel such as parent liaisons. Also listed were school district supervisory personnel as well as organizational chairpersons who would need to be contacted (see Appendix H).

Potential program participants were contacted via organizational supervisors. Systematically, this was accomplished through phone calls, e-mails, and personal visits. The recruitment materials were used as a guideline when initiating contacts (see Appendix I). As school officials were called upon, either by phone or in person, cooperation in allowing the researcher to present an informational session on location was requested. This information would be a benefit for all and would give educators as well as parents an additional source pertaining to school and community resources. During Nova Southeastern University's Institutional Review Board process, principals of



the 12 neighborhood schools were sent a letter of participation from the school district, authorizing this research study. Therefore, many were already familiar with the project. This correspondence served as a door opener for the researcher.

The preparation of materials for use and distribution was a necessary chore. Schools typically communicate with community members through print media, whether it is a newsletter, annual report, newspaper, or other handout (Bete, 1998). Various items were constructed in preparation for the presentations. A trifold brochure featuring brief descriptors about each of the parent resource center's available programs and services was made. The brochure contained clip art reflecting visual similarities to each program's mission or purpose. This brochure was subject to the approval of the researcher's supervisor as funds were being appropriated for the professional printing of the brochure. This proved to be quite time-consuming due to unforeseeable constraints such as software issues, printer problems, and creative decisions.

Several revisions of the brochure were performed as requested by the supervisor to produce a superior product worthy of the budgeted financial investment. The capital outlay was \$275 for of 500 full-color, prefolded, professional-quality brochures. To ensure the longevity of the brochure, he requested that the program descriptors remain generic, excluding names of current personnel and all other variable information. Therefore, if subsequent orders were needed, future revisions would be minimal. This would be the first brochure ever produced for the parent resource center. After several consultations with the print shop manager, the brochure was produced. The end product positively surpassed all expectations.

A multimedia presentation featuring images of parent resource center programs, services, events, activities, and facilities was constructed. Included were the descriptions

of each program's focus along with contact information. Staff members excitedly provided information about their various programs for inclusion in the project. The presentation contained 19 slides, brightly colored and detailed with educational clip art. This too was subject to the approval of the researcher's supervisor as it was used for a dual purpose--the researcher's applied dissertation and promotion of the parent resource center's programs and services. The final product served as a comprehensive compilation of the best the center had to offer. The construction of the presentation also proved to be a task that required an extended amount of time and multiple revisions. The conceived idea became a masterpiece of creativity.

The multimedia presentation was exported into a word processing program and formatted into a transcript, which was used as a handout when needed. Keeping the community informed about the school is one way to maintain support (Enderle, 2000). The handout proved invaluable for small-group presentations and when it was not feasible to transport the projector, laptop computer, and materials. Both the projector and laptop computer had to be borrowed as available from one of the programs located within the parent resource center. Also the assumed liability for the equipment became a constant consideration.

As planned, informal interviews were conducted with several professional educators to garner their advice as to best practice concerning ways to market the parent resource center and spread the word about the many programs and services that were available. People's perceptions about organizations, products, or services are frequently based on the collective wisdom that is accumulated by listening to others. This is referred to as the grapevine or word-of-mouth approach. Favorable word-of-mouth communication can be strategically used to help market just about anything you believe

in (Carroll, 2001). Knowing how to use this grapevine communication platform as an organizational benefit is actually recognized by businesses as a serious marketing tool. The power of the grapevine is something that should be taken seriously (Carroll, 2002).

In this effort, this researcher met with the following school district executives: the public information officer, external communications manager, supervisor for middle school guidance services, bilingual services guidance counselor, supervisor of educator recruitment, and supervisor of school social work services. The researcher also met with the advertising sales executive of the regional independent newspaper, which has a high readership among community residents.

Through these meetings, the following was gained or suggested: as reporters made contact with the school district, seeking human-interest stories, they were directed to the center. This allowed for feature stories on students or others who had used the programs and services to overcome hardships and had gone on to realize life-changing success. Reporters were often interested in attention-catching features in addition to the routine stories about schools and education (Kinder, 2000).

Due to the lateness of the school year, the researcher was invited to provide staff development for guidance counselors pertaining to the parent resource center during professional study days in the fall. This allowed for a systematic mass distribution of information. It was important to make presentations at professional conferences and teacher professional days. This provided the opportunity to inform other educators, social service agencies, and families about the efforts to strengthen the parent, school, and community partnership (George, 1993).

The procedure for having publications translated into Spanish was clarified to address the needs of the newly diversified surrounding community better. This

information came in handy in serving the influx of non-English language speaking residents who frequent the center. As available, the regional independent newspaper covered activities at the center and provided a photographer. All of the informal interviews provided information of relevance and were greatly appreciated.

Over the course of this study's implementation phase, 17 Orientation Session presentations were done on location at neighborhood schools, community organizations, and residential gatherings. As planned, at the close each Orientation Session, participants were invited to further expand their knowledge of the parent resource center's programs and services by taking part in the Visitation Session. Sign-up sheets were passed around, with two planned dates for the tour. In consideration of individual needs, working parents, and overall participant availability, the researcher also offered to give one-on-one guided tours for those whose schedule would not accommodate the two preset tour dates. Having received the information provided in an interested manner, participants proceeded to sign up for inclusion in the Visitation Session.

Likewise, George (1993) also held meetings during the school year in the community to familiarize parents with the services of the school district and community and about how to access those services best. One Visitation Session presentation, featuring a tour of the parent resource center facilities was conducted. Bete (1998) outlined proven community relations strategies, techniques, and ideas from schools and districts around the country. Strategy 1 was to invite the community into the school. The Chimacum School District was sited as successfully using tours of school facilities to win public support for needed facility renovations.

### *Results of the Intervention*

Schools collaborating with other institutions and agencies, for the benefit of the

community, provide rich and varied possibilities and realities (Dunlap & Alva, 1999). A total of 111 community residents, stakeholders, and school officials participated in the 17 Orientation Session presentations (see Table 6).

Table 6

*Participant Attendance at Orientation Session*

Targeted group	No.
Residents	35
Stakeholders	16
School officials	60

*Note.*  $N = 111$ .

Preliminary questionnaire results, using the Awareness, Familiarity, and Usage Questionnaire (see Appendix E), indicated the following. Survey Question 1 asked, “Are you familiar with the parent resource center?” Most respondents (69) answered no, and 45 answered yes. Question 2 asked, “Have you ever visited the parent resource center?” Seventy-one participants had never visited the center before, whereas 45 had previously visited the site.

Question 3 asked, “if your answer to Question 2 was no, why haven’t you visited the parent resource center?” Of the 71 respondents who had never visited the parent resource center, 25 respondents were unfamiliar with the parent resource center’s location; 42 respondents were unaware of available programs and services; and 4 respondents chose “other” and offered the explanations such as they resided in other areas of the city, time constraints were a factor, and mobility issues that were related to a

disability. Most of the participants who tended to have previous knowledge of the center were aware of the center's existence because they had been directed there for training. However, the same respondents were not aware of the vast variety of programs and services available.

As hypothesized, most community residents, stakeholders, and school officials were not aware of the parent resource center's existence or location. Questionnaire Items 1, 2, and 3, in particular, gauged the degree to which participants expressed this knowledge (see Table 7).

Table 7

*Summary of Participant Survey Data for the Orientation Session*

Area	Yes	No
Familiar with parent resource center	45	69
Previously visited parent resource center	5	71
Wanted to learn more about parent resource center	109	2

*Note.* Data summarized from Awareness, Familiarity, and Usage Questionnaire for the Orientation session;  $N = 111$ .

Question 4 asked, "Would you like to continue to learn more about the programs and services available at the parent resource center?" Of the 111 respondents, 98% (109) answered yes. Item 5 required respondents to select from listed choices as to how they classified themselves. Thirty-five participants identified themselves as community residents, 16 participants identified themselves as stakeholders, and 60 participants identified themselves as school officials. The 2 who chose "other" (visitors to the community) were included in the number of stakeholders.

Question 6 asked, “If you are familiar with the parent resource center, what programs and services have you used or referred others to use?” Respondents were allowed to select multiple answers as applicable. Thirty-three responses were selected for “adult basic education/general equivalency diploma,” 16 were selected for “head start,” 26 were selected for “school choice,” 6 were selected for an “advanced placement incentive program,” 5 were selected for “homeless education literacy program,” and 9 were selected for “centre for women.” Thirty-six responses were selected for having “attended a meeting or workshop in the building”; 14 were selected for “received childcare information”; 29 were selected for “received parent educational literature, brochures, and materials”; 5 was selected for “received school supplies”; and 12 were selected for having “received information about housing.” Eighteen responses were selected for having “received information about the school district,” 20 were selected for having “received information about public schools within the community,” 2 were selected for having “received information about employment,” 10 were selected for having “received information about health concerns and issues,” 2 were selected for having “received information about public transportation,” and 10 were selected for having “received directions to other nearby community resources.”

Question 7 asked, “If you are familiar with the parent resource center, how did you find out about it?” Twenty-two indicated “word of mouth” 35 indicated that they found out about it when they “attended a meeting or workshop in the building,” and 5 indicated that they have read the “parent resource center newsletter.” Two indicated that they saw information about the center in another “community newspaper,” and 34 indicated that they learned about the center “through the schools or the school district.” Respondents who answered “other” (13) provided written answers such as they had

previously worked or had an internship on the campus or in the building; they attended Neighborhood Advisory Board meetings where the researcher provided monthly updates concerning center programs, services, and activities; and some learned of the existence through partnerships with community service agencies.

At the conclusion of the Orientation Session, participants were asked to sign up for the Visitation Session utilizing the Facility Tour Sign-Up Sheet (see Appendix J). Interest in gaining information about the center was exceedingly high, and participants eagerly pursued the information provided. The Visitation Session included a tour of the parent resource center facilities. As suggested in the literature by a researcher conducting a similar study, the second session was presented at the center (George, 1993). In preparation for the Visitation Session, a flyer was prepared as a reminder invitation. As well, George (1993) also found it difficult to schedule a tour on a single day when most participants could attend. Therefore, two dates were set aside for the Session 2 presentation.

Over 100 contacts were made to local media, school district public relations professionals, school district executive leaders, community residents, stakeholders, and school officials in reference to the open house and tour (see Table 8). Reminder invitations were sent by e-mail, delivered by hand, and verbally conveyed. Fifty-nine e-mail reminder invitations were sent, 9 phone calls were made, 17 flyers were delivered by hand, 14 flyers were placed in staff member mail boxes, 11 people received face-to-face verbal reminders, and 9 people received confirmation phone calls. Schools should seek to influence public opinion by taking such steps as improving their communication and building partnerships with reporters, parents, and the wider community (Cook, 2003).



On the morning of the Visitation Session presentation, the researcher purchased a substantial variety of refreshments--pastries, juices, fruits, breads, meats, and cheeses--to accommodate at least 50 people. Consideration of factors such as time, location, room arrangement, and refreshments will go a long way in demonstrating the importance attached to parent and community involvement (Waler, 1998). Although in excess of 100 reminder invitations were extended, the researcher realistically expected a lesser number to oblige.

Table 8

*Number of Contacts Made for the Visitation Session*

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Communication	
method	No.
Email	59
Flyers hand delivered	17
Flyers placed in staff mail boxes	14
Verbal notification	
Face to face	11
Telephone call	1

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*Note.*  $N = 102$ .

The multipurpose room was brightly decorated in seasonal décor. A laptop computer was stationed near the food area so that participants could view the continuously looped multimedia presentation of parent resource center programs and services as they mingled. A program, brochures, handouts, and survey materials were

neatly prearranged at each seat. As visitors arrived, they were asked to sign in on the Open House Tour Meeting Sign-In Sheet (see Appendix K). Afterwards, they were invited to eat and interact. A total of 26 participants took part in the Visitation Session presentation (see Table 9).

Table 9

*Participant Attendance at Visitation Session*

Targeted group	No.
Residents	3
Stakeholders	1
School officials	22

*Note.*  $N = 26$ .

To begin the session, the researcher called the group to order and rendered an introduction, the purpose for the event, and an explanation of handout materials and expectations. Broadcasting good news about schools is vital to creating positive attitudes in the community (Carroll, 2001). Next, visitors were treated to a guided tour of the facilities. Sponsoring events that invite the public in, whether for a school open house or a larger districtwide event, is a way to showcase education, teachers, and students. Education fairs are time-consuming and require hard work, but they can reap significant benefits (Kinder, 2000).

When the group returned to the multipurpose room, staff members presented additional program information and handouts. In conclusion, participants were asked to provide data by participating in the group discussion, using the Awareness, Familiarity,

and Usage Discussion Questions (see Appendix F). Question 1 asked, “Do you think the programs and services offered at the parent resource center are effective support mechanisms for the community we serve?” All respondents answered yes. In addition, some wrote comments such as “This center offers an excellent variety of resources to the community it serves. The facility is well run and user friendly. Kudos to [the researcher].” Another participant added, “Yes, when used by the community.”

Question 2 asked, “What additional programs or services would be beneficial to the community, if offered at the parent resource center?” Respondent answers varied from blank space to the following: add an Even Start program, career center, personal finance classes, computer classes, computer lab for the public, social worker, and notary services.

Question 3 asked, “What do you envision as the role of the parent resource center in the community?” Participant answers seemed to encompass many of the roles the center currently plays such as “Assist stakeholders in negotiating various services such as school system, housing, jobs, social services, etc.”; “To be a clearinghouse for services which cater to the needs of community members”; “A place to help find educational opportunities and resources”; and “I envision the parent resource center in the community as a place that should be well known with all types of resources and information available to meet the needs of the families, businesses, and organizations in this area of town.” Although these statements revealed that offerings at the center were appropriate, one response also indicated that it was important “to continue to seek input from the community to ensure services offered are valuable for [the community]”.

Finally, the Awareness, Familiarity, and Usage Questionnaire was used to gather post intervention results (see Table 10). One hundred percent of the 26 respondents

indicated familiarity with the parent resource center; only 3 out of 26 (16%) had never visited the center before. Of the 3 people who indicated that they had never visited the center before, they gave the following reasons for not visiting: 1 was unfamiliar with the parent resource center's location, 1 was unaware of available programs and services, and 1 selected the response of "other" and provided a written explanation indicating they had no time to visit the center. One hundred percent (26) of the respondents indicated a desire to learn more about the parent resource center.

Table 10

*Summary of Participant Survey Data for the Visitation Session*

Area	Yes	No
Familiar with parent resource center	26	0
Previously visited parent resource center	23	3
Wanted to learn more about parent resource center	26	0

*Note.* Data summarized from Awareness, Familiarity, and Usage Questionnaire for the Visitation session;  $N = 26$ .

*Conclusions Based on the Results*

The activities performed in support of this applied dissertation's focus can be looked upon as seeds that have been planted. Some of those seeds have sprouted, while others are still undergoing the germination process. Those seeds (and sprouts) will continue to receive nourishment through a system of ongoing contact and communication with community residents, stakeholders, and school officials. In concurrence with George (1993), this researcher also concluded that this project was a success because the participants involved were able to gain a better understanding of the programs and

services offered.

Regardless of the numerical outcomes of this research study, this was only one indicator of the success of the project. The researcher has already presented valuable information to more than 100 people. If those participants communicated with their associates, and their associates communicated with others, then the result could only be positive. As previously stated, don't underestimate the power of the grapevine as a marketing tool. The effort and the energy put forth through this exercise will blossom and bear fruit in due time. The benefits reaped will prove profitable for those who choose to take full advantage of the available programs and services.

Reflecting upon the mission and goals of the parent resource center, it is the hope of this researcher that those taking full advantage of the offerings include a higher number of community residents, stakeholders, and school officials than has been witnessed and accounted for in recent times. Forging partnerships where the school exchanges information, provides support, and houses school-linked social and health services for the community reduces overlapping services, enhances community support for the school, and increases student academic achievement (Davies, 1996).

#### *Implications Based on the Results*

It will take time to build relationships with community residents, stakeholders, and school officials. Collaboratively working to empower families develops human and social capital that strengthens families and communities (Dunlap & Alva, 1999). Empowered families take charge of their futures by accessing knowledge, analyzing data, and making informed decisions. Empowered families are able to function from a position of strength in crisis situations by determining what they want and accessing the knowledge that they need in achieving their goals and resolving their issues (Nall, 2005).

The format used to continue contact and communication will be the community relations program, which was developed for the execution of this research study. The establishment of an effective communications network is viewed as a way to increase understanding and awareness of school initiatives and gain community support of and involvement in those efforts (“Communication Network Increases Involvement,” 2004). The community relations program will allow for sustainable systematic relationship-building techniques to be utilized to keep the community informed about the current programs, services, and activities at the parent resource center and stimulate usage of those offerings.

There are great things that occur in schools every day. One researcher charged educators with communicating these positive stories to the public (Lawrence, 2004). The foundation has been set for the future practice of having open-house days set aside for specified dates during the school year. The more this practice occurs, it is the belief of the researcher that an increased number of visitors will partake in the offering.

The small group of participants attending the Visitation Session made it possible for personal interaction with staff and questions to be fielded without the awkwardness of having to cut off the question-and-answer segment to move on to something else. The open house was considered successful because it was the first time this had been done exclusively for having visitors come by and learn more about what we do. In general, the outcome of this research study is a positive story that will be told repeatedly.

Ideally, a smaller sample size (maybe 50 participants, instead of 100) should have been targeted, thereby increasing the chances for success in all three terminal objectives. For the record, the researcher was not displeased with the outcome of the study. The project afforded the researcher the opportunity to interact with a diverse group of

individuals. Those interactions have greatly contributed to networking capabilities for future endeavors.

### *Limitations*

Throughout the implementation of this applied dissertation, the writer experienced difficulties. There is a long list of obstacles affecting the outcomes of this project. During the implementation phase of this research study, several events, both planned and unplanned, took place within the school district. Spring is the planned season of standardized testing throughout the state. In the area where this study took place, the school calendar for the months of February, March, and April included the following tests: Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test for Grades 3-adult, the Scholastic Aptitude Test for elementary students, the Math Proficiency Test for eighth graders, semester exams (end of the 3rd nine-week grading period), and the District Benchmark Writing Assessment retakes (elementary and high school).

In addition, there were holidays and other observances when schools were not in session, such as spring break and Good Friday, along with the professional trainings and conferences that took place, such as the annual parent involvement conference. Above all, a major obstacle was the lack of cooperation from school administrators and officials. Also, in March, principal reassignments took place at three neighborhood schools. As previously stated, the researcher was limited to working within her sphere of influence. Some schools required as many as five contacts before a time could be scheduled for the researcher to make a presentation. These contacts consisted of site visits to the schools, e-mails, phone calls, and repeat site visits. In brainstorming a solution to this problem, the researcher's supervisor offered access to some of the school officials whom he supervises--school social workers. This was a welcome gesture as it proved to be

productive.

Timing is everything. This researcher has concluded that spring is not the best time to initiate a study that requires the cooperation of school officials. In defense of traditional school personnel, the lack of cooperation is usually due to the lack of time and a constantly demanding schedule. In education, spring is a time of finality, and bringing operations to a close. School sites within this district operate on a traditional 9-month attendance calendar with the exception of schools and programs catering to adult populations. As the fourth 9 weeks of instruction started, teachers and students alike were looking forward to summer vacation.

Although school district officials were elated to learn of additional sources of assistance, they were inundated with routine demands and requirements. Participants were not mandated to complete both sessions although continuation was highly recommended. While presenting to several groups of guidance counselors, they were busy multitasking by organizing testing materials and making lists and such. This was not an annoyance for the researcher because that is simply human nature. Of importance was that they were actually focused enough on my presentation to offer commentary and pose poignant questions.

Participants were all too happy to receive the promotional materials that were given and know that there existed supplemental programs and services within arm's reach. Questionnaire results indicated that participants wanted to continue receiving information about the parent resource center. When asked the format in which participants would rather receive information, the answer was through brochures and tangible printed materials that could be easily dispensed.

In spite of the fact that two dates were scheduled for the open houses, the second



date produced no visitors. Therefore, that presentation was canceled. Fourteen visitors plus 12 staff members participated in the first day of the Visitation Session. In a similar study, conducted in Pinellas County, Florida, the researcher met with comparable results. George (1993) worked collaboratively with the school district, community partners, and select residents to establish a parent resource center in an urban neighborhood. The official opening of the parent resource center took place in the evening and was attended by only about 10 parents, which was 3% of the student population of 290.

There were many reasons that contributed to a lack of interest in completing the Visitation Session tour of the parent resource center facilities. Participant time and availability or the lack thereof was a factor. For those who could not attend, various reasons were given: Middle school counselors were attending a scheduled training, staff shortages would not allow for absence from the school campus, and annual evaluation conference meetings were being held. As past practice has dictated, the traditional educational community tends to seek the services of the external resources when specific assistance is needed or when the focus of high student achievement is interrupted by social issues or crisis situations.

Another limiting factor was self-imposed. This researcher enthusiastically set forth high expectations for the project. The use of a rather large population sample (100 community residents, stakeholders, and school officials) did not provide optimal results. For the purpose of a research study being conducted by an individual, the objective of having at least 100 participants complete two informational sessions was unrealistic.

Having worked in the traditional school environment for many years as a teacher, guidance counselor, and coach, the disinterest shown was not taken personally. Basically, time away from their school site is not a luxury that most public school educators can

afford. Precious minutes are typically spent cultivating the number one focus--high student achievement. The researcher remembers days spent as a high school guidance counselor. When open-house nights were scheduled, there were often more staff members present than parents and guardians. The high school where she was previously employed had an enrollment of 1,800 students. Typically, 10% or less (180) of the parents and guardians would participate in the open house.

### *Recommendations*

Four main recommendations seem appropriate and feasible:

1. The public relations program constructed for this researcher's applied dissertation should be refined and replicated for use in marketing the parent resource center and all of the supplementary programs and services offered that enhance the integration of social, educational, and medical resources that are the focal point of self-sufficiency and well-being activities within this community. That will require extracting limiting factors that served as barriers to the achievement of two of the three terminal objectives.

The implementation of this public relations program had some limitations, and as a result, there are opportunities for additional research. What worked was establishing relationships with community residents, stakeholders, and school officials through the introduction of user-friendly information; providing tangible resources in the form of brochures and handouts that served as calling cards; inviting the public to tour the parent resource center and to meet the faces behind the programs; and initiating a public relations program. What did not work was targeting a rather large initial sample group, conducting the pre- and postsurvey measurement in two distinct locations, and performing a research study, that required the cooperation of school officials in the

springtime.

2. An impact study to further validate the economic impact that the parent resource center has on the community is needed. The value of job placements, high school diplomas awarded, childcare supplied, and activities to stave off homelessness should be calculated and assigned an estimated dollar amount. Information should be cataloged to examine the extent to which lives have improved as a direct result of programs and services offered.

3. Outreach and communication within schools from a variety of community resources and programs need to occur on a regularly scheduled basis. School-linked service and referral programs can help families strengthen student achievement by working with community-based organizations (Boethel, 2003). Proactive connecting strategies would include inviting community agencies and organizations to speak at staff and parent organization meetings. This will assist educators to learn more about the community in which they work and appreciate the culture of the population that they serve better.

During my visits to schools, it was found that many of the school officials did not reside in this community and were not aware of many of the mechanisms of support that could benefit students and families who do. People who work in schools need to know a great deal about the community and the families from which the children come (Blain, 2005). Additionally, the psychological distance between parents and educators is compounded when school personnel do not see themselves or the school as a part of the surrounding community (Dunlap & Alva, 1999).

4. Research should continually develop best practices for continuing to strengthen the family-schools-community partnership. This should be an ongoing effort, not just one

that occurs formally. Researchers worldwide are working to understand school, family, and community partnerships better through the use of surveys, case studies, action research, experiments, and other research methods. This issue of international focus yielded five main conclusions: (a) Parents everywhere cared about their children and were concerned about their educational success; (b) partnerships between schools and families and the community may determine which parents become involved and how parents become involved; (c) educators need training on how to prepare for partnerships; (d) policies, support, and action are essential components of effective partnerships; and (e) international research deepens our understanding and helps to improve practices by presenting new methods for success (Epstein & Sanders, 1998).

Later in 2006, this entire community will once again be the focus of a comprehensive self-study (see Appendix D). That study will examine quality of life issues in a variety of areas such as education, social service, medical, religious, and community institutions. That study will utilize the resources of a major local university and grant funds allocated through the city government, the children's welfare constituency, and other grantees (see Appendix C). The performance of a study of this magnitude was done about 15 years ago and resulted in the building of several facilities to accommodate the needs of the community. The construction of the parent resource center was one of the facilities built as a result of the first study. It remains to be seen if the results of the impending study and the community growth aspirations that will be undertaken, especially pertaining to strengthening school, family, and community partnerships, will bring about more change.

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Appendix A

Administrative Resource Teacher Job Description

## Administrative Resource Teacher Job Description

April 25, 2005

### Mission:

Represent and promote the center as an integral component within the community to stimulate involvement, empowerment, and self-sufficiency through a vast array of educational and social service resources.

### Goals:

- Increase visibility of site through a multi-layered marketing strategy.
- Assist parents in navigating the educational system.
- Promote self-sufficiency as an outcome of education.
- Improve parent involvement in education through a series of targeted activities and events.
- Promote the empowerment of at-risk families.
- Act as a liaison between home and school.
  
- Confer regularly with appropriate community and school personnel.
- Coordinate community resources to assist families in understanding, accepting, and maintaining services.
- Facilitate parent groups to keep parents involved in school matters.
- Act as Site Manager of the center, overseeing daily operations.

### Activities:

1. Maintain adherence to established mission, vision, values, and goals of the School District as well as those of the parent resource center.
2. Contact parent educator to secure a list of schools with which contact has already been initiated, thus preventing duplication of effort.
3. Contact administrators of schools to solicit identification of contact person(s) at their site who work directly with parents (i.e. guidance counselor, parent liaison, intervention specialist).
4. Make site visit to each school within boundaries to establish and maintain relationship with a designated parent involvement contact person.
5. Provide information packets to school contacts (brochure, flyers, newsletter, directory), indicating available services.
6. Establish collaborative working relationship with the parent educator.
7. Schedule information presentations at local meetings and events (staff and parent meetings of neighboring schools, staff and agency meetings of neighboring social service agencies).
8. Invite social service programs to set up information display tables on scheduled, standard days, in the lobby for clients, residents, and adult students.
9. Invite recruiters from local technical and community colleges to set up information tables on scheduled, standard days in the lobby for clients and residents.
10. Schedule annual open house for the community, to include a tour of the facilities

- and information from programs and agencies housed at the site.
11. Host back to school program for local residents, featuring educational breakout sessions on topics such as standardized testing, graduation requirements, and other related pertinent school issues.
  12. Collaborate with educational programs at other local centers to evaluate, enhance, and expand offerings.
  13. Formalize partnerships with supporting and collaborative contacts.
  14. Solicit business partner in the community.
  15. Engage in grant writing activities to fund marquee.
  16. Engage in grant writing activities to fund books and educational materials for distribution during special educational events (such as open house and back to school program).
  17. Examine feasibility, need for, and possibility of an after school program
  18. Examine need for half-day summer kindergarten readiness program for limited number of children, residing in \_\_\_\_ area.
  19. Collaborate with existing site programs to provide additional on site services such as active parenting training and group counseling.
  20. Continue to promote activities of schools attended by students residing in \_\_\_\_.
  21. Organize a parent involvement group, in collaboration with other groups, to advocate for children and families at the school level.
  22. Design brochure for professional quality presentation.
  23. Order school personalized items (business cards, pencils, printed items), etc.
  24. Publicize information and events, of educational and social value, which may benefit the community as well as staff.
  25. Continue to pursue professional development activities to enhance level of preparation for offering increased services.
  26. Share information gleaned from professional development activities, in an effort to stimulate the desire to learn and to grow, with staff members by presenting this information at monthly staff meetings.
  27. Establish an atmosphere of teamwork and shared leadership.
  28. Continue (and increase) active membership in community organizations.

Appendix B

Neighborhood Service Center Strategic Plan

## Neighborhood Service Center Strategic Plan

### Strategic Plan for 2002-2003

Objectives #3: Identify current gaps in services on the campuses.

Listed below are gaps in services as identified by agencies on campus.

#### Neighborhood health clinic

1. Clients are scheduled for appointments on different days for services offered in the same building. Need to establish appointment card system to allow services providers' opportunity to schedule appointments on same day. Prevents clients coming back/forth unnecessarily.
2. Transportation is problem for clients. Clients wait long time for healthcare transportation. Clinic sees approximately 60 clients per day (over half need transportation).
3. Lack of funds for clients to access bus system (the service center does not maintain enough bus passes for need).
4. Lack of resources or information on clients falling through the cracks.
5. Undocumented clients have limited resources within the city-sent to other areas for services.
6. Decision on client services is often determined/provided by person at front desk; consequently clients not being provided all information or next step to seeking assistance.
7. Customer service training needed for staff at all sites.
8. Employees unaware of services offered at other buildings on the Campus.

#### Parent resource center

1. Community unaware of services available.
2. Employees unaware of services offered at other building on the campus.
3. Decision on client services is often determined/provided by person at front desk; consequently clients may not be given all information or next step to seeking assistance.
4. Childcare services needed at sight for residents and students.
5. Is not recognized as an education center.
6. Needs to initiate more community activities at site.
7. Needs to initiate more parent services.
8. Availability of phone is need for clients at all sites. Need for more phone booths.
9. Need for mentoring program for adult students.

#### Community social services center

1. Training for receptionist on services available on campus. This will enable him/her how to direct clients.
2. Social Services should be more knowledgeable of services available outside of center and share information with clients and other staff on campus.
3. Staff needs training on other services offered by providers on campus.

#### Campus advisory board

1. Campus unaware of all services offered at site.
2. Coordinate the identification of clients involved w/other agencies on campus.
3. Training for all campus staff on better understanding of services at sites and understanding of structure of agency.
4. Need for availability of legal services for clients on campus.
5. Need for clothes closet for entire campus.

#### General Requests For Assistance

1. Financial Assistance
2. Emergency Food
3. Clothing
4. Medical/Dental Care/Vision
5. Education
6. Transportation
7. Housing
8. Phone
9. Nutrition
10. Community Meeting/Space
11. Employment
12. Educational Financial Aid
13. Relocation Services
14. Childcare
15. Utilities
16. Homeless Services

Appendix C

Social Services and Education Committee

Social Services and Education Committee (SS&E)  
A Standing Committee of the  
Community Revitalization Partnership (CRP)

The SS&E committee and CRP recognize the importance of human capital and the development of human resources through education, social and health services to any community development initiative. In turn, the committee recognizes that human capital, human resources and services are impacted by community development.

The Mission of SS&E, consistent with the mission of CRP for sustainable community revitalization and self-sufficiency in\_\_\_\_, is to enhance the educational success and attainment of children/youth and to enhance the quality of life of residents across the full life-span (conception through elderly citizens). Such enhancements require the coordination of educational, social and health services within the community, and the implementation of strategies to maximize the benefits of community development while minimizing the negative impacts of community development on residents and services.

Guiding Principles for SS&E

- Involve residents and stakeholders in taking responsibility for our own community.
- Focus on education, social and health services that relate to the full life-span (conception through elderly).
- Address concerns of families in the broadest sense, recognizing that caregivers come in many forms – biological, foster, adoptive, grandparents, extended biological families, neighbors, and friends/partners.
- Use existing resources effectively and creatively.
- Coordination of services, while increasing efficiency, is designed to enhance the quality of services for residents.
- Assessing social impact of community development initiatives is critical to successfully maximizing the benefits and minimizing or eliminating negative outcomes of community development.

Structurally, the SS&E committee is organized around five service areas (with each area involving all pertinent stakeholders):

1. Educational Services (school professionals, parents, residents, agency representatives, university partners)
2. Social and Health Services (professionals, residents, university partners)
3. Family Services (professionals, residents, university partners)
4. Children/Youth Services (professionals, youth, university partners)
5. Elderly Services (professionals, elderly residents, university partners)

Each service area involves a *Working Group* of pertinent stakeholders who are tasked with proposing and carrying out/overseeing initiatives consistent with their service area and the central mission of SS&E. The SS&E committee includes a chair, a representative of each Service Area Working Group, and university partners. The university partners provide technical assistance to facilitate impact assessment, needs/assets assessment, planning, evaluation, and grants. The SS&E chair is a member of the CRP Executive Board. The committee is tasked with coordinating the efforts of the working groups,



facilitating committee and working group initiatives, bringing forth proposals to CRP for their support, raising questions/ concerns about the social impact of community development initiatives, and/or the need for consideration of enhanced human capital and the development of human resources for community development initiatives.

Outcomes

1. Educational Success (specify indices)
2. Quality of Life (specify indices)
3. Coordinated educational, social and health services for citizens across the life-span
4. Social impact assessment that drives decision-making regarding community development

Appendix D

Needs Assessment for the Community

Needs Assessment for the Community

The purpose of this survey is to give you an opportunity to give your ideas about how you would like to see things done and created and improved in \_\_\_\_\_. Your opinions and information will remain anonymous. The information will be analyzed by representatives from the university partnership. The results will be given to the \_\_\_\_\_ Community Revitalization Partnership, each of the governing Boards of agencies mentioned in this survey and a copy to the Mayor’s office.

- 1) I am going to read a list of services provided by\_\_\_\_\_. Tell me whether or not you are aware of any of these services and whether you (or someone you know) have used the services in the past year.

Aware		Use		If Y, Effective (Y/N?)
Y	N	Y	N	
___	___	___	___	1) _____Open Air Market _____
___	___	___	___	2) Affordable Housing _____
___	___	___	___	3) _____Youth Center _____
___	___	___	___	4) _____Business Center (Incubator) _____
___	___	___	___	5) Job Placement Center _____
___	___	___	___	6) Make a Difference Program _____
___	___	___	___	7) _____Laundromat _____
___	___	___	___	8) _____Apartments _____
___	___	___	___	9) Small Business-Entrepreneurship Training _____

[Write comments about any service by number]

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- 2) I am going to read a list of services provided at\_\_\_\_\_. Tell me whether or not you are aware of any of these services and whether you (or someone you know) have used the services within the past year. [Interviewer: Refer to longer list of individual services if needed.]

Aware		Use		If Y, Effective (Y/N)
Y	N	Y	N	
___	___	___	___	1) Indigent Health Care (No Insurance) _____
___	___	___	___	2) Financial Assistance _____
___	___	___	___	3) Employment Opportunity Program _____
___	___	___	___	4) Life Skills Classes _____
___	___	___	___	5) Section 8 _____
___	___	___	___	6) WIC _____
___	___	___	___	7) _____Community Health Clinic _____
___	___	___	___	8) Sickle Cell Foundation _____
___	___	___	___	9) _____Urban League _____
___	___	___	___	10) _____Police Community Relation Office _____
___	___	___	___	11) Project Opportunity _____

[Write comments about any service by number.]

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- 3) I am going to read a list of services provided by or at \_\_\_\_\_. Tell me whether or not you are aware of any of these services and whether you (or someone you know) have used the services within the past year.

Aware		Use		If Y, Effective (Y/N)
Y	N	Y	N	
___	___	___	___	1) Adult Educational GED/ABE Classes _____
___	___	___	___	2) ___Advanced Placement Incentive Program ___
___	___	___	___	3) Homeless Education Literacy Program _____
___	___	___	___	4) Meeting Facility (by request) _____
___	___	___	___	5) Parent Conference Substation _____
___	___	___	___	6) Pharmacy Tech Program _____
___	___	___	___	7) School Choice Program _____
___	___	___	___	8) Career Training (Centre for Women) _____
___	___	___	___	9) Life Skills Training (Centre for Women) _____
___	___	___	___	10) Success Strategies (Centre for Women) _____
___	___	___	___	11) Head Start Program _____

[Write comments about any service by number.]

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- 4) I am going to read a list of services provided at \_\_\_\_\_. Tell me whether or not you are aware of any of these services and whether you (or someone you know) have used the services within the past year.

Aware		Use		If Y, Effective (Y/N)
Y	N	Y	N	
___	___	___	___	1) Cash Assistance _____
___	___	___	___	2) Food Stamps _____
___	___	___	___	3) Medicaid _____

[Write comments about any service by number.]

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Please rate each of the following services in terms of how strongly you believe they are needed in the \_\_\_\_\_ community

5 = Highest Priority

3 = Middle Level Priority

1 = Needed, but Low Priority

0 = Not needed at all

[Interviewer: Note any comments by number on back]

Priority Rating

- \_\_\_ 1) Adult Dental Care Services
- \_\_\_ 2) Adult Education Services
- \_\_\_ 3) Affordable Childcare
- \_\_\_ 4) Affordable Housing
- \_\_\_ 5) Affordable Legal Service
- \_\_\_ 6) After School/education Programs
- \_\_\_ 7) Additional School Service/Educational Programs
- \_\_\_ 8) Community Based Affordable Women's Programs
- \_\_\_ 9) Community Information/Referral Center
- \_\_\_ 10) Community Input to Decisions about East Tampa
- \_\_\_ 11) Computer Training
- \_\_\_ 12) Convalescent Homes
- \_\_\_ 13) Credit Repair Programs
- \_\_\_ 14) Mental Health Counseling (Culturally Appropriate)
- \_\_\_ 15) Disability Services (Support, Advocacy, Legal)
- \_\_\_ 16) Drug/Alcohol Rehabilitation Centers
- \_\_\_ 17) Faith Based Programs
- \_\_\_ 18) Family Activity Centers
- \_\_\_ 19) Health Care Advocacy
- \_\_\_ 20) Home Buying Workshops
- \_\_\_ 21) Homeless Program
- \_\_\_ 22) Housing Outreach
- \_\_\_ 23) Job Training
- \_\_\_ 24) Job Placement Center
- \_\_\_ 25) Juvenile Rehabilitation Center
- \_\_\_ 26) Marriage, Couples & Family Counseling Services
- \_\_\_ 27) Meeting Space
- \_\_\_ 28) Mentoring Program
- \_\_\_ 29) Neighborhood Charter Schools
- \_\_\_ 30) Parent Advocacy Groups for Schools
- \_\_\_ 31) Parks/Recreation
- \_\_\_ 32) Political Education & Ongoing Voter Registration
- \_\_\_ 33) Preschool Education Programs
- \_\_\_ 34) Business Recruitment for Economic Development of \_\_\_
- \_\_\_ 35) Satellite Medical Personnel
- \_\_\_ 36) Senior Citizen Housing
- \_\_\_ 37) Senior Citizen Programs
- \_\_\_ 38) Swimming Pools
- \_\_\_ 39) Teenage Parenting Class

- \_\_\_ 41) Transition Services for Former Inmates
- \_\_\_ 42) Visiting Nurses Services
- \_\_\_ 43) Youth Activity Centers (YMCA)
- \_\_\_ 44) Youth Programs
- \_\_\_ 45) AIDS Education (\_\_\_\_\_ AIDS Network)
- \_\_\_ 46) Child Care (Information/Referral)
- \_\_\_ 47) Truancy Prevention Center

Please rate each of the following businesses in terms of how strongly you believe they are needed in the \_\_\_\_ community

5 = Highest Priority

3 = Middle Level Priority

1 = Needed, but Low Priority

0 = Not needed at all

[Interviewer: Note any comments by number below or on back]

Priority Rating

- \_\_\_ 1) Air Condition Repair Centers
- \_\_\_ 2) Appliance Stores (New)
- \_\_\_ 3) Attorneys
- \_\_\_ 4) Auto Repair Shops
- \_\_\_ 5) Bakeries
- \_\_\_ 6) Banks
- \_\_\_ 7) Chain Drug Stores
- \_\_\_ 8) Chain Restaurants/Restaurants
- \_\_\_ 9) Clothing Stores (New)
- \_\_\_ 10) Copy Centers
- \_\_\_ 11) Credit Union
- \_\_\_ 12) Dentists
- \_\_\_ 13) Furniture Stores (new)
- \_\_\_ 14) Hardware Stores (new)
- \_\_\_ 15) Hospital
- \_\_\_ 16) Hotels
- \_\_\_ 17) Ice Cream Shops
- \_\_\_ 18) Insurance Companies
- \_\_\_ 19) Mortgage Companies
- \_\_\_ 20) \_\_\_\_\_ Bread
- \_\_\_ 21) Pizza Parlors
- \_\_\_ 22) Shoe Stores (new)
- \_\_\_ 23) Coffee
- \_\_\_ 24) Super Center

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## Background Information (Demographics)

- 1) Gender
  - Male
  - Female
  
- 2) How do you classify your race (indicate one or more)?
  - American Indian
  - Asian/Pacific Islander
  - Black or African American
  - Hispanic/Latino
  - White
  - Other
  
- 3) How old are you?
  - Less than 18
  - 18-29
  - 30-39
  - 40-49
  - 50-59
  - 60 or older
  
- 4) What is your current living situation?
  - Married
  - Living with a partner
  - Married but separated
  - Widowed
  - Single, divorced
  - Single, never married
  
- 5) Where do you live?
  - Group Home or Assisted Living Facility
  - Homeless
  - House, Condo, or trailer that I own or I am helping to buy
  - Temporary Shelter
  - Public Housing Project
  - Subsidized or Section 8 Housing
  - With a friend or family member in their place, temporarily
  
- 6) Including yourself, how many people are in your household? (circle one)  
1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9 or more
  
- 7) How many children under 18 live in your household? (circle one)  
0    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9 or more
  
- 8) How long have you lived in the \_\_\_\_\_ area?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-5 years
- 6-12 years
- 13+ years

9) What is your zip code? \_\_\_\_\_

10) How much formal education do you have?

- Less than high school
- High School graduate or GED
- Some college or technical school
- Associate degree (AA, AS, CAN, LPN) or at least 2 years of college
- College Bachelor's degree (BA, BS, RN) or advanced degree

11) What is your total household income for the past year, including work and all government assistance checks? (check one, best guess if necessary)

- Below \$5,000
- \$5,000 - \$12,499
- \$12,500 - \$19,999
- \$20,000 - \$29,999
- \$30,000 - \$39,999
- \$40,000 - \$49,999
- \$50,000 or more

12) Are you on any public assistance?

- Yes
- No

Thank you very much for your help in this important survey. We anticipate that the results of these surveys will be very informative and helpful to the community development of \_\_\_\_\_.



Appendix E

Awareness, Familiarity, and Usage Questionnaire

Parent Resource Center

Awareness, Familiarity, and Usage Questionnaire

Providing this information will help us to serve our community better.

1. Are you familiar with the parent resource center?
  - Yes
  - No
  
2. Have you ever visited the parent resource center?
  - Yes (move on to Question 4)
  - No
  
3. If your answer to Question 2 was 'No', why haven't you visited the parent resource center?
  - Unfamiliar with the parent resource center's location
  - Unaware of available programs and services
  - Other\_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Would you like to continue to learn more about the programs and services available at the parent resource center?
  - Yes
  - No
  
5. You are:
  - Resident
  - Stakeholder
  - School Official
  - Other\_\_\_\_\_
  
6. If you are familiar with the parent resource center, what programs or services have you used or referred others to use? (Select all that apply)
  - Adult Basic Education/General Education Diploma
  - Head Start
  - School Choice
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Advanced Placement Incentive Program
  - Homeless Education Literacy Program (HELP)
  - Centre for Women
  - Attended a Meeting or Workshop in the building
  - Received Childcare Information
  - Received Parent Educational Literature, Brochures, and Materials
  - Received School Supplies
  - Received Information about Housing
  - Received Information about the School District
  - Received Information about Public Schools within the Community
  - Received Information about Employment

- Received Information about Health Concerns and Issues
  - Received Information about Public Transportation
  - Received Directions to Other Nearby Community Resources
7. If you are familiar with the parent resource center, how did you find out about it?
- Word of mouth
  - Attended a Meeting or Workshop in the building
  - parent resource center Newsletter
  - Community Newsletter
  - Through the Schools or through the School District
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

By taking the time to willingly participate in this activity, you have demonstrated your consent. Thank you.

Appendix F

Awareness, Familiarity, and Usage Discussion Questions

## Parent Resource Center

### Awareness, Familiarity, and Usage Discussion Questions

Providing this information will help us to serve our community better.

The Discussion Questions will be a component of Session 2-The Visitation, and will be asked in a focus group format, with the researcher directing the interaction and recording answers in a written summary.

1. Do you think the programs and services offered at the parent resource center are effective support mechanisms for the community we serve?
2. What additional programs or services would be beneficial to the community, if offered at the parent resource center?
3. What do you envision as the role of the parent resource center, in the community?

By taking the time to willingly participate in this activity, you have demonstrated your consent. Thank you.

Appendix G  
Service Delivery Record



Appendix H  
Research Study Contact Sheet





Appendix I  
Recruitment Materials

## Recruitment Script

Dialog-In person (speaking to a group)

Hello, my name is Deborah Mangum. I am the site manager for the parent resource center. Thank you for allowing me to come before you to spread the good news about all of the wonderful programs and services that we have to offer. To better serve the community, we are implementing a community relations program. Today's presentation should only take about 15 to 20 minutes of your time and will consist of 3 parts - a survey, a visual presentation, and an invitation for you to visit our facilities.

Before I begin the visual component of my presentation, I would like to ask for your participation in a preliminary survey, to measure your current level of awareness, familiarity, and usage of programs and services located at the parent resource center. The results of the survey and other planned activities will help us improve service delivery and will also be used to meet the requirements of my dissertation.

## Recruitment Script

Dialog-In person (speaking to an individual)

Dialog-Telephone (speaking to an individual)

Hi, I'm Deborah Mangum. I am the site manager for the parent resource center. In order to better serve the community, we are implementing a community relations program, to spread the good news about all of the wonderful programs and services that we have to offer. I am visiting schools and organizations within the community to talk about the programs and services we have available. If you don't mind, I would like to ask you to participate in a short survey, to measure the your current level of awareness, familiarity, and usage of the programs and services available at the parent resource center. (If telephone-may I send that survey to you by email?). The results of the survey and other planned activities will help us improve service delivery and will also be used to meet the requirements of my dissertation.

I am also available to do on-site informative presentations, pertaining to the parent Resource Center, for groups of people. This information would be especially helpful for professionals who provide direct services to students and their families, in terms of referring them to resources within the community. My presentation should only take about 15 to 20 minutes and consists of 3 parts - a survey, a visual presentation, and an invitation to visit our facilities. When would be a good time for me to present this information to your staff? Can I schedule that with you today?

## Recruitment Script

### Email-to an individual

Hello, my name is Deborah Mangum. I am the site manager for the parent resource center. I am contacting you today because we are implementing a community relations program, to spread the good news about all of the wonderful programs and services that we have to offer to the community. This information is especially helpful for professionals, like you, who provide direct services to students and their families, in terms of referring them to resources within the community. I am available to do on-site informative presentations for your department or staff, and would like to schedule a time that is convenient for you. My presentation should only take about 15 to 20 minutes and consists of 3 parts - a survey, a visual presentation, and an invitation to visit our facilities.

I would also like to ask for your participation in a short preliminary questionnaire, to measure your current level of awareness, familiarity, and usage of programs and services located at the parent resource center. The survey is being sent to you as an attachment to this correspondence. To record your selected answers on the survey document, you must first open the attachment and then save it. After saving it, you will be able to type directly onto the document. Afterwards, you may return it to me via email, as an attachment. Or, if you prefer, you may print the survey and return it to me through the mail at the address listed below. The results of the survey and other planned activities will help us improve service delivery and will also be used to meet the requirements of my research study.

Social Services Manager

Organization

Address

City, State, Zip Code

March 7, 2006

Deborah Mangum  
parent resource center  
Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

This correspondence is a follow up to the conversation we had earlier today pertaining to my presenting information during your Resident Meeting on March 27, 2006 at 6:00 p.m. I am the site manager for the parent resource center (a School District of \_\_\_\_\_ facility). In order to better serve the community, we are implementing a community relations program, to spread the good news about all of the wonderful programs and services that we have to offer. I am visiting schools and organizations within the community to talk about the programs and services we have available.

After introductions, residents will be asked to participate in a short survey, to measure their current level of awareness, familiarity, and usage of the programs and services available at the parent resource center. The results of the survey and other planned activities will help us improve service delivery and will also be used to meet the requirements of my dissertation. Following the survey, a multimedia presentation will visually outline our purpose. The entire introduction, survey, multimedia presentation, and question and answer segment should only take about 20 minutes. Your cooperation in this effort is appreciated.

Sincerely,

Deborah Mangum

Appendix J

Facility Tour Sign-Up Sheet

## Facility Tour

## Sign Up Sheet

NamePhone/Contact Number/Email

1.	_____
2.	_____
3.	_____
4.	_____
5.	_____
6.	_____
7.	_____
8.	_____
9.	_____
10.	_____



Appendix K

Open House Tour Meeting Sign-In Sheet

