THE NATURE OF PARENT PARTICIPATION AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL: AN INVESTIGATION

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Dedication

In memory of my grandmother, Elvira E. Lakhram, who taught me to pursue increased academic achievements, embrace challenges, and use opportunities to acquire new knowledge; in essence, to remain a learner, forever. Her dedication, insight, and passion for persistent learning left a legacy to follow.

ABSTRACT

Given the lack of research in Canada in the area of high school parent participation, the goal of this study was to gain insight into their perceptions of the following: participation, advantages, changes, and barriers. Data was gathered from an urban high school in Alberta, Canada, using interviews from three randomly selected participants from each grade level (10, 11, 12), for a total of nine respondents and used a qualitative, narrative, and descriptive study design. Findings revealed that volunteering, attending activities, academic support, school council, and surveys constituted types of participation; provision of information, emotional support, and academic guidance were advantages; change was evident; barriers were classified as child-based challenges, school-based challenges, and parent-based limitations. Research concurred with previous literature, that parent participation decreased as their children aged. Based on the findings in this study, recommendations were made for high school principals wishing to enhance parent participation at their schools.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The Investigation of the Nature of Parent Participation at the High School Level

After nine years of formalized schooling, the majority of Alberta students enter the final phase of their education known as *high school*, typically they range from ages 14 to 19. Depending on the school district, the term may blur into higher or lower ages to accommodate the demographics of various regions. High school is perceived as a developmental stage during which young adults begin to acquire program specific skills, increase their independence, develop relationships, discover passions, explore career development, refine their thinking skills, and discover new experiences and opportunities. Throughout high school, students make ongoing choices that affect future career choices and paths. These decisions may or may not include parental guidance based on the perceptions of some high school students that parental involvement is unnecessary (Oxley, 2013).

Parent perceptions of involvement at the high school level varies considerably depending on family culture and beliefs (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Some parents are heavily involved in their child's high school education. This involvement of parents has been referred to in a variety of ways; parent involvement (Oxley, 2013), parent engagement (Ferlazzo, 2011), and parental participation (Wolfendale, 1983). These researchers suggest involvement includes, but is not limited to: course selections, extra-curricular activities, friendship circles, career opportunities, type of program completion, and daily discussions that concern positive and negative influences. In contrast to heavily involved parents, are parents that incur the feeling that their children are of the age to make

decisions for themselves and therefore, have limited involvement and provide support and guidance only when they deem it necessary.

Each year, Alberta Education surveys parents and students in grades four, seven, and 10. All teachers in Alberta schools are also asked to complete surveys. The survey, called the *Accountability Pillar* (Alberta Education, 2010), examines a variety of areas including student achievement and stakeholder satisfaction with schools. The data gathered is used by school administrators and school jurisdiction officials to identify areas for future improvement and assess current performance. Although there are many categories in the survey, one area in particular, parental involvement, has gained an incredible amount of attention in the urban high school being discussed (Elk Island Public Schools, 2015). From 2013 to 2016, the results of the *Accountability Pillar* reflected a large gap between teacher perception and parental perception of parent involvement at the high school level in this particular jurisdiction. The *2015-2016 Accountability Pillar* results indicated that teachers felt parents were highly involved in their children's high school education; in contrast, parents felt that they were only somewhat involved. There must be reasons for the discrepancy in the opinions between teachers and parents. This urban school had intentionally tried to improve communication and used a variety of formats that included face-to-face meetings, school council information sessions, email, Synervoice (the school's phone call system), and various forms of social media (Olmstead, 2013). One reason for the increased communication was to seek improvement in the *Accountability* Pillar results, which, in essence, would reflect that parents felt more involved in their children's education. Although a variety of communication formats

were used, parents continued to indicate, as per the *Accountability Pillar* results, that they continued to feel a lack of involvement in their high school children's education.

According to Alberta Education's *Teaching Quality Standard*, it is expected that teachers are able to involve parents and develop strategies to create partnerships (Alberta Education, 1997). The particular school being studied made a conscious decision to focus on increasing communication with parents to provide opportunities for them to feel more informed about school operations and activities. It was with hope that having increased access to information and knowledge about school activities, parents would be able to generate conversations with their children about coursework and life choices to support student learning. The staff at this school prioritized parental involvement and included it in their school education plan. It is important to gain insight about why a place that flourished with sports, drama, music, career and technology studies (CTS), and community events was still perceived by parents as having low parental involvement.

At the high school level, school councils in Alberta are viewed as platforms for parental involvement. A school council is a group of parents and community members that voluntarily attend meetings to provide advice on topics relating to the school's programming, education plan, policies, budget, and to share opinions about school activities and events (Alberta School Councils, 2017). Typically, the parents that attend these meetings are already connected and involved with the school. It is important to recognize that the parents on a council may have similar perspectives and represent a small fraction of a population.

With the increase in technology and social media available, it is concerning to see that the results of the *2015-2016 Accountability Pillar* reflected a dissatisfied parent

population in the area of parental involvement in the urban high school being discussed. There are two high schools in the urban area of the district. Upon investigation, it was determined that the other high school in the area also exhibited low involvement results. The purpose of this study was to gain insight from parents and guardians about their expectations of involvement at the high school level, the barriers they feel exist, and come to know what their experiences are in regards to involvement, in order to derive conclusions to improve parental involvement at the high school level.

Further, as the 2015-16 *Accountability Pillar* indicated that there was a low level of parent involvement at the high school level, it is important to find out from parents themselves if this is actually the case. Could there be other reasons or factors why the *Accountability Pillar* is yielding low parent participation? Could it be that the *Accountability Pillar* does not accurately reflect what parents understand their involvement to be? Could the language used in the *Accountability Pillar* be difficult for parents to understand? Could it be that response rates to the surveys were low, and do not reflect the beliefs of the larger parent population? In response to the findings of the *Accountability Pillar*, this study sought to gain an understanding into the nature of parent perceptions of involvement.

From 2015 to 2017, in my role as a teacher in the school and the formally appointed staff representative to school council, I attended school council meetings to gain insight into the thoughts of the parent community. In conversations, parents expressed the need for more volunteer opportunities. Together, with administration, I became the volunteer coordinator for our school. From my attendance at school council meetings, listening to the parents who spoke at these meetings, and from my role as

volunteer coordinator, I became curious about parent participation and sought to further my understanding of the barriers that parents felt they faced regarding participation at the high school level. Unfortunately, the questions in the *Accountability Pillar* used a limited, multiple choice format, which did not lend themselves to answers that could satisfy my curiosity. It was my hope and belief that the interviews in this study would provide opportunities for parents to elaborate on their experiences.

My curiosity about the discrepancy between teacher and parent perceptions of parental involvement that arose from the *Accountability Pillar* results, my interpretation of the conversations at school council meetings, and my role of volunteer coordinator led me to establish for this study the following primary research question: What is the nature of parent participation at the high school level? I also established six secondary questions. They are:

- What do parents perceive participation to mean?
- What are the advantages to parent participation?
- How has parent participation changed over the years?
- What are factors that contribute to changes in parent participation?
- What barriers impact parent participation?
- What school structures benefit parent participation?

Key Terms

The following terms were used throughout this paper: academic achievement, human capital, Accountability Pillar, parental involvement, parental engagement, and parental participation. They are defined as:

Academic Achievement

A key term used in this study was *academic achievement.* In the literature, academic achievement was defined in a variety of ways, depending on the researcher's perspective. For the purpose of this study, academic achievement was defined in relation to adolescents. Hattie and Anderman (2013) concluded that academic achievement occurred when "students, families, and teachers rely on classroom grades to monitor student performance" and was used to "determine which students are most prepared and able to compete in the global economy" (p. 10).

Human Capital

The term *human capital* was similar to the investments from manufacturing plants and equipment; communities would invest in the development of people through schooling, which would benefit not only the individual, but also the economy (Ungerleider, 2004).

Accountability Pillar

This thesis made reference to the *Accountability Pillar*. This was a yearly survey produced by Alberta Education that was provided to parents and students in grades four, seven, and 10, to gather data about the school in a variety of areas. The survey was also intended to be completed yearly by all teachers. The data emanating from this provincial survey were meant to be used to make informed decisions and comparisons, with the intention of improving areas of concern.

Involvement, Engagement, or Participation?[1]

The phrases *parental involvement* and *parental engagement* have numerous definitions and appeared to be used interchangeably in the literature. After conducting this search it was noted that the two phrases were not always used synonymously. With further investigation, it appeared that when the phenomenon of parental participation was studied prior to the year 2004, researchers used the phrase parental involvement. Following that year, the phrase parental engagement was used more frequently. Throughout the literature review section of this paper, the researchers chosen terminology was honored, and remained unchanged, when describing their contributions. The reason to retain the various terminology was to provide accurate descriptions and denotations of coined terms and phrases associated with specific researchers. However, throughout the remainder of the paper, the primary phrase used was parental participation. Parental participation denoted both parental involvement and parental engagement. This choice was appropriate as the review of literature revealed that over time, researchers used the phrases interchangeably, which at times, made differentiation between the two terms difficult to interpret. The phrase *parental involvement* meant actions that were demonstrable (Jeynes, 2013) and the phrase *parental engagement* meant the ability to engage families and connect with the school in order to understand what parents were experiencing, thinking, and concerned about (Ferlazzo, 2011).

[1] The terminology used by each author was honored as the author used it. For purposes of this study, parental involvement and parental engagement will be synonymous with parental participation. Parental participation will be the preferred term from this point forward.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Understanding how past trends impact the current philosophies in education is imperative in order to gain insight into parent participation in schools today. The notion of parent participation in schools has not always existed; instead, it has evolved historically, alongside political and economic changes (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2014). Since the establishment of formalized schooling, families and schools have learned to work towards a common goal: student success (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2014). In the past, schools were responsible for academia, while families focused on morals, faiths, and cultures (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Education was perceived as sequential, whereby early education began in homes and then continued in schools. In essence, little insight was provided from families, as the responsibility for formal education was delegated to schools. The norm became the expectation that schools would continue the at-home learning process in more formalized settings.

Historical Perspective

The 1960s

Historically, Canadians have continually changed their ideas about their expectations of what schools should provide for students (Ungerleider, 2004). Ungerleider provided insight that described how schools were reflections of economic and societal influences. In the late 1950s and early 60s, parents started believing that completing high school was like an investment that would essentially develop *human capital*, thereby increasing financial gain for both the individual and the economy as a whole (Ungerleider, 2004). Schools were expected to reform students to reflect and accommodate societal norms and demands. Parents sought, for their children, an

education with values that were aligned with ones being taught in the home (Ungerleider, 2004).

In the past, the physical presence from parents did not occur in the schools, but rather was conveyed through the ideologies and community beliefs upheld at that time. According to Rogoff (2003), parental involvement in early education was considered interference. The Alberta Teachers' Association (2014) published the *Report of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools*. This report indicated that schools in Alberta historically reflected an absence of parental involvement and as time progressed, parents increased their involvement. During the 1960s, parents had no opportunities to challenge the policies that existed. Ideologies at the time reflected that schools had authority over all aspects of children while they were at school; many students that had special needs were institutionalized, and not educated, as they were seen as incompetent (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2014).

The 1970s

According to the *Report of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools*, more active parent advocacy for students with special needs began around the 1970s (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2014). From that period onwards, parental advocacy continued to increase. Based on the aforementioned literature, it is safe to conclude that the value placed on parental participation is certainly dependent on the political factors and ideologies of given periods. In Edmonton, Alberta, during the 1970s, there was evidence of School-Based Management (SBM) systems. According to Malen, Ogawa, and Kranz (1990), SBM's are systems that identified schools as primary units that focused on improvement, but utilized a shared framework of decision-making

processes, like school-site councils. In 1976, The Edmonton School Board was at the forefront of having advisory-type school councils.

The 1980s

By 1980, the Edmonton Public School District adopted SBMs (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998) throughout all schools. Through the SBM process advisory councils were established to increase participation, gather data, and distribute power (Brown, 1990). A variety of terms were used to describe these advisory-type councils: "school council, site council, school community council, improvement council, decision-making council, parent advisory council, participatory decision making, school-based decision making, and site-based decision making" (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998, p. 326).

At this time other legislation and societal factors came into being that may have contributed towards the growth of parental advocacy. The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* became legislated in 1985, which lead to an increase in knowledge by Canadian citizens about their individual rights and parental advocacy which led to new demands being placed on schools (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2014). In 1988, a major shift occurred with the passage of a new *School Act*. It outlined and identified parental rights in education (UNESCO, 1995).

The 1990s and Later

In 1993, Alberta Education released Policy 1.6.1, which used descriptors that included statements like: "in consultation with students, parents/guardians and school staff" (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2014, p. 13). This illustrated that as the decade progressed, parental advocacy was expected to have increased and paved the way for heightened parental participation in schools. In 1994, parents that had the desire to seek

input into the school system and the operation of individual schools, were required to voice their concerns through the Alberta Home and School Councils' Association, known as AHSCA (Taylor, 2001). The next year, on April 24th, the government established Bill 37, the *School Amendment Act 1995*, "which introduced a legislative framework for the existence and operation of school councils. It established a clear mandate for the role of school councils and allowed parents greater opportunity to become involved in their children's schools" (Harrison & Kachur, 1999, p. 130). In 2014, AHSCA was changed to the Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA), the provincial association that represented school councils. School councils served to provide as an avenue for parents to become involved in their children's education; Brien and Stelmach (2009) proposed that "school councils have a role in the improvement of student learning and in the accountability of schools to parents and the public" (p. 7). All public, francophone, and charter schools in Alberta were then required to have a school council. School councils were required to adhere to the guidelines and policies outlined by ASCA. Educational responsibilities became shared amongst schools and families with a renewed focus on the success of students (Hill & Taylor, 2004).

Differentiating Between Parental Involvement and Parental Engagement

Parental involvement. Baker, Wise, Kelley, and Skiba (2016) provided a clear distinction between parental involvement and parental engagement. Parental involvement is when parents are physically present in school buildings; parental engagement is the ability to "view multiple constructions of how parents are involved" (Baker et al., 2016, p. 1). Some researchers like Olmstead (2013) postulated that "involvement in schooling (e.g., attending meetings, family activities, volunteering) was seen as reactive, whereas

engagement in children's learning was seen as proactive" (p. 28). Unfortunately, these terms are often used interchangeably, but do not provide the same connotation. Baker et al. (2016) supported the notion that the acknowledgement in the difference of terms has been recognized by few authors. With further research, Jeynes (2013) described parental involvement as actions that are demonstrable, like reading to children and participating in parent programs. Another definition, provided by Jowett and Baginsky (1988), described parental involvement as a variety of interconnected activities that are reflective attributes of both home and school. Parental involvement, according to Epstein (1985) was defined as " the teacher's requests and instructions to assist at home with learning activities related to the children's school work" (p. 19). A summary of these definitions is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Various Meanings Associated with Parental Involvement

Researcher	Meaning of Parental Involvement
Baker et al. (2016)	Parents are physically at school
Jeynes (2013)	Actions that are demonstrable
Jowett and Baginsky (1988)	A variety of interconnected activities that are reflective attributes of both home and school
Epstein (1985)	Teacher's requests and instructions to assist at home with learning activities related to the children's school work

Parental engagement. On the other hand, parental engagement, according to Ferlazzo (2011) was perceived as the identification of how to engage families and connect with the school in order to gain an understanding of what parents were experiencing, thinking, and concerned about. In addition to Ferlazzo (2011), Redding, Langdon, Meyer, and Sheley (2004) stated "the school may affect home environments in positive ways with its intentional, consistent interaction with parents" for its definition of parental engagement (p. 1). In addition to the terms parental involvement and parental engagement, Wolfendale (1983) used the term 'parental participation' alongside the two terms that, according to Khan (1996), are all still used interchangeably. Many parents, when provided with surveys, are asked about their engagement level with the school, yet provided responses that alluded to their participation in the school. Many studies used the terms interchangeably, which often persuaded the reader to as well. A summary of parental engagement according to these researchers is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

Various Meanings Associated with Parental Engagement

Researcher	Meaning of Parental Engagement
Ferlazzo (2011)	Connecting with the school in order to gain an understanding of what parents are experiencing, thinking
Redding, Langdon, Meyer, and Sheley (2004)	The school may affect home environments in positive ways with its intentional, consistent interaction with parents
Wolfendale (1983)	Used the term 'parental participation' to allude to both parental involvement and parental participation

A Comparison Between Elementary, Junior, and Senior High Parent Participation

Findings from various research studies and dissertations have supported the notion that elementary levels of schooling have much higher parental involvement in comparison with the high school level. Dauber and Epstein (1993) and Epstein et al. (2018) concurred that as students moved from elementary to high school, parental involvement decreased. Constantino (2007) concluded that "as students move from elementary to secondary school, all domains of family engagement suffer" (p. 58). A study by Catsambis (2001) reiterated that high parental involvement exists for elementary and middle grades, but "current knowledge regarding the influence of family involvement in secondary education is now developing a consistent body of research" (p. 167). It is evident that parental involvement is lowest in high school, but further investigation is required to understand the barriers and factors that contribute to the decrease in involvement as children age.

Over time, despite an increase in societal complexity, evidence has shown a correlation between parental involvement and student achievement (Oxley, 2013). According to Epstein et al. (2008) the benefits of parental involvement in school included: increased achievement in English and Math, increased reading and writing abilities, increased attendance and decreased negative behavior patterns. Overall, academic achievement is directly correlated with increased parental involvement. Eccles and Harold (1996) inferred that the reason for the decrease in parental involvement at the high school level can be attributed to increased student independence and more difficult subject matter. Epstein (1985) concluded that parents may have also encountered difficulties due to the grade level of their children, their own preconceived attitudes towards school, and limited time to spend with their children. Hall et al. (2005) further identified that parents may have low levels of education themselves and unclear understandings of school processes. As students mature and increase their independence in school, there appears to be an increasing number of barriers that impact the lack of involvement at the high school level. Vaden-Kiernan and Chandler (1996) posited that schools tend to communicate less about involvement opportunities as grade levels increase. Overall, the aforementioned statements, when examined as a whole, reflect that parental involvement and engagement at the high school level is a complex topic that requires an in-depth understanding in order to gain further insight into making improvements in this area of study.

Academic Success and Parent Participation

There are two key studies that identified the link between academic success and parent participation. The first study, by Catsambis (2001), found that parental

involvement directly supported the educational success of high school students. The study concluded that parental involvement was positively correlated with academic success until students completed high school (Catsambis, 2001). Catsambis (2001) concurred with Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) that positive relationships are what foster academic outcomes, like planning for college and sustaining an academic program in high school. The correlation between academic success and parental involvement was identified in both case studies, but Catsambis (2001) did identify other findings as well. Catsambis (2001) also compared high school to middle school findings, and discovered that parental involvement practices, like supervision at home, were no longer a contributing factor at the high school level. A similar finding occurred when comparing Grade 10 and 12 students. Catsambis (2001) argued that "the effectiveness of different parental involvement practices may be changing as children mature and move to a new school environment" (p. 168). Catsambis (2001) also supported Eccles and Harold (1996), and stated that the knowledge of academia was certainly an area of parental concern, and therefore, did impact the level of involvement from the home. In essence, the type of parental involvement changes from a behavioral nature, to one of academic guidance.

Catsambis (2001) identified a few negative correlations throughout the study. For instance, increased parental involvement occurred when parent-school contacts were required to handle academic or behavioral problems. The increased contact with the school was to rectify problematic behavior or increase monitoring between the home and school. This pattern of data, termed negative associations, usually occurred when students lagged behind in school. The majority of the data in this study, did however, reflect

positive correlations between student academic success and parental involvement at the high school level.

Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) completed a study that further supported some findings of Catsambis (2001). The study investigated a multidimensional construct of parental involvement, with a particular focus on the effects of increased student engagement in schools. The study provided a more specific look at three elements of parental involvement: school-based, home-based, and academic socialization. School-based involvement included the attendance at school events and volunteering at a school; home-based involvement included the provision of resources for homework and extended learning in the home; and academic socialization included the communication of parental expectations and planning for future academia (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) concluded that parental involvement improved the academic success of grade 10 students. This was attributed to discussions in the home that encouraged open communication about future plans, which increased their children's motivation and engagement in school. One interesting conclusion derived from this study involved the physical presence of volunteering in school. One might hypothesize that volunteering would contribute to increased parental involvement which in turn, would improve student achievement. This study confirmed the opposite finding. Having parents spend time in schools, like volunteering, did not necessarily have any impact on student achievement at the high school level (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) concluded that many encounters with the school were nonacademic and contact was negative in nature.

The findings by Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) indicated that the physical presence of parents being at a child's school did not contribute to academic success but rather, impacted the emotional support and the sense of caring that the child experienced. Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) also concluded that "there is a difference between parents' overall involvement with the child and involvement in the child's education" (p. 238). In essence, parent involvement greatly impacts a child's affective experiences. Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) postulated that parental involvement could enhance the academic success of students due to the behavioral and emotional supports provided; however, it was imperative to understand that "not all parental involvement strategies impact the different types of adolescent outcomes in the same manner" (p. 622).

Three years earlier than Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014), and 10 years after Catsambis (2001), Williams (2011) identified similar findings regarding the connection between academic progress and parent involvement. Williams (2011) alluded to a number of studies that attested to the significant positive correlation between parental involvement and increased academic success at the high school level. Williams (2011) referred to the work of Constantino (2006), Epstein (2008), Griffin and Galassi (2010), Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, and Davies (2007), Machen, Wilson, and Notar (2005) and Rappino (2008) in that they provided extensive research that validated the importance of parental involvement and the improvement in academic achievement. In contrast to the aforementioned data regarding the effects of parent volunteering by Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014), Lewis (2009) did find data to support that there was a "greater significance in the association between the variables of parent volunteering and students achievement" (p. 1). The difference in the data could be attributed to the grade levels being examined.

The study by Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) focused on youth that attended high school, whereas Lewis (2009) studied youth in grade eight specifically. Overall, the data did reflect that there were differences when examining parental involvement in a high school versus a middle school.

Although evidence supported that increased parental participation directly impacted student achievement and behavior, there was still low parental participation at the high school level. According to Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, and Sandler (2007), there was very little information available to identify the strategies that motivated parents to increase the partnership between home and school. Fortunately, there are many studies that did provide insight into the barriers that high school parents faced, when attempting to become involved in their children's lives.

Barriers of Parent Participation

Khan (1996) examined possible barriers that parents encountered. One barrier was attributed to the lack of interest in general, which affected other areas of participation. There was also a difference of opinion regarding the purpose of involvement, a lack of skills to make significant contributions or purposeful barriers established by the school system itself. Some parents were aware that their own situations create obstacles themselves. Leitch and Tangri (1988) reported that health concerns, level of expectations, and work obligations were challenges that may have existed. Liontos (1991) further concluded that "the lack of time, energy, and money; inadequate housing and schools; lack of community support; difficult family relations; innumerable social problems; and barriers related to race, class, culture, and language" also affected parents' abilities to become involved (p. 5). Khan (1996) also continued to investigate plausible barriers and

included the premises by Davies (1987) that the education system itself was a barrier because of its bureaucratic nature. Some examples of this bureaucracy included the autonomy of teacher-based decisions and the array of a loosely coupled system, where the various levels of decision-making were construed. Lutz and Merz (1992) found that parents also expressed feelings that school boards behaved in elitist fashions, where trustees acted in opposition to the people they were supposed to represent, leaving them voiceless during voting processes (as cited in Khan, 1996).

Other studies also identified plausible barriers that parents encountered when trying to become involved at the high school level. Duchnowski, Kutash, and Romney (2006) believed that some parents did not know how to help, felt staff were condescending towards them, and teachers did not provide any clarifications or communicate how they could participate. This left feelings of helplessness and despair amongst parents. Paylor (2011) suggested that ethnicity in itself was a barrier. He concluded that African Americans have the least amount of parental involvement in comparison to other racial groups, in the United States. LaBahn (1995) suggested that schools do not have an understanding or an awareness to support non-traditional families, like single parents. This attitude conveyed feelings that reflected an ‘us vs them’ attitude, which was perceived as unwelcoming and uninviting for parents.

Ways to overcome barriers. Khan (1996) described ways that parents could become involved; these suggestions included the following: as recipients, educators, non-institutional volunteers, and decision makers. Khan (1996) categorized parent involvement based on a model established by Bloom (1992): involvement with their own child’s education, participation in school life, and advocacy. According to Bloom (1992)

involvement included examples like checking and monitoring homework, attending school requested meetings, and supplementing school curriculum; participation included volunteering with field trips, conducting fundraising activities, providing a fan out system to other parents for information, helping in the classroom, and providing tutoring at the school; advocacy included participating on school council, serving as a monitor of changes in policies to assist other parents and becoming involved at different levels to assist with school structure changes (as cited in Khan, 1996). Khan (1996) provided seven suggestions to overcome barriers to parental involvement: empowering parents by imparting extra knowledge to discuss relevant topics; portraying administrative support for parents to be involved like including parent perspectives when making decisions and providing access to resources; creating home-school interdependency, where parents are asked to identify how they would like to become driving forces; continued awareness and practices that reflect current research of parental involvement; establishing a clear structure or model to base frameworks; reaching out to newcomers with a focus on building new relationships, including those with cultural minorities; and increasing citizenship participation that ranges from individual consultations to support of parent associations (Davies, as cited in Khan, 1996).

Ouimette, Feldman, and Tung (2006) provided an evidence-based list of suggestions for increasing the success of engaging parents at the high school level. They concluded that having a "school vision that focuses on the value of a parent-teacher-student team" was essential in order to convey the message that leadership truly believed in parent support (p. 111). The Boston Arts Academy (BAA) established a framework used to encourage and sustain a collaborative process. Another indicator of success could

be attributed to hiring staff that encompass the values aligned with BAA. They directed attention to minority hiring as well, to foster the idea of acceptance and the focus to welcome diverse minorities. The last attribute that BAA based its success on is its attention to size. As a private affiliation, they thrived on a small population of 381 students, and focused on building and strengthening relationships between staff, students, parents, and administration. They diminished communication barriers and ensured that "not speaking English or working long hours, will not hinder parent involvement in BAA" (Ouimette et al., 2006, p. 112).

Constantino (2007) found that exhibiting administrative support was crucial, and stated that "any leader who does not believe in the power of family engagement will have little success leading staff members and communities towards the goal" (p. 58). It is imperative that "since secondary schools have large attendance zones that no longer inspire the feeling of a neighborhood school" and "most secondary schools are much larger than elementary schools and can be more intimidating," administrators of high schools need to increase their focus to create highly welcoming environments (Constantino, 2007, p. 58). This can be accomplished through incorporation of signage in multiple languages that direct parents to important areas of the school; utilizing pictures of staff to alleviate language barriers; designating accessible parking that conveys the feeling of welcoming families; and increasing accurate website information (Constantino, 2007). These suggestions certainly alluded to the importance of creating a welcoming school climate. Rodriguez, Ringler, O'Neal, and Bunn (2009) indicated that the creation of a positive school climate that encourages parents to participate and engage will foster an environment and atmosphere towards increased learning.

Constantino (2007) suggested that alongside a welcoming environment, improved communication will also remove barriers to parent involvement at the high school level. His suggestion involved using two-way communication that provided set rules for responding to parent communities. Some ideas included: having set expected times for responding to concerns, clarity in accessing teacher phone numbers and emails, translated documents for language barriers, and the increased frequency of news postings. Constantino (2007) further explored the concern of poor parental attendance and explained that moving meetings away from the school and into community buildings may alleviate transportation concerns and decrease the intimidation of large buildings. The last suggestion to remove barriers related to the difficult curriculum encountered at the high school level. Constantino (2007) guided administrators to increase the supports for learning at home. He provided the following solutions: expect teachers to include access to related topics that parents could access to assist their children; have teachers provide weekly topic newsletters with suggestions on how to become involved; and for administrators to send newsletters about curricula that are written in easy and plain language for parents. Johnstone-Schrag (2011) reported these exact same findings, and reiterated that poor communication needed improvement in order to solidify the partnership between home and school. It can be inferred that communication between home and school did influence parental beliefs about a school.

School based communication with high school families has changed significantly in recent decades. The impact of technology on parental involvement is a newer area of study, due to changes in communication between homes and schools. Olmstead (2013) conducted a study that examined the relationship between technology and parent

perceptions of involvement. It was interesting to note that due to technology, “proactive involvement does not require parents to be physically at their children’s school” (Olmstead, 2013, p. 28). Forms of technology used to communicate with parents included: websites, phone-calling systems, parent portals, and online formats (Olmstead, 2013). It is imperative for schools to utilize technology in order to communicate with parents, since working parents continue to experience barriers in their involvement (Constantino, 2003).

Data indicated that parents found technology to be useful in improving and sustaining communication (Olmstead, 2013). Parents found that the use of email, phone messaging, and school and classroom websites were most beneficial in remaining involved in their children’s education (Olmstead, 2013). The use of social networks like Facebook and Twitter were examined. The majority of parents preferred Facebook, while teachers preferred Twitter to communicate with parents (Olmstead, 2013). This certainly illuminated the difference in perspectives between teachers and parents regarding the use of preferred technology. Textbooks were provided online to improve access to resources and with the intention of increasing parental involvement. Unfortunately, few parents accessed these tools and online resources; however, it was also noted that teachers did not provide reminders that these tools were accessible (Olmstead, 2013). Email was used primarily to respond and communicate about academic concerns; teachers responded to emails within a 24 hour time frame (Olmstead, 2013). The use of technology supported a conducive environment for parent involvement, which was previously addressed by Constantino (2007). Olmstead (2013) reiterated the importance of having regularly updated websites, if the intention is to sustain parental involvement. According to

Olmstead (2103), “embracing the potential of these emerging technologies and how they can keep parents connected to their children’s school is important” (Olmstead, 2013, p. 37).

E-nvolvement

Currently, there are very few studies available at the high school level that involve technology and parental participation. It was even more challenging to find information pertinent to Alberta. In 2016 there were studies that investigated electronic parental participation. With further investigation, parental involvement and technology, was being coined with the term “parental e-nvolvement”. Sad, Konca, Özer, and Acar (2016) have defined e-nvolvement as “parental efforts to plan, engage in, support, monitor and /or address the learning experiences of their children either at home or at school predominantly using technological devices and media” (p. 163). E-nvolvement allowed parents to work with their children online, provided additional academic supports, and increased access to information (Sad et al., 2016). Technology has increased collaboration, helped with supporting academic achievement, and fostered communication with schools, by making it easier and more accessible for parents (Sad et al., 2016). The array of technology included: computers, tablet PCs, smartphones, internet, printers, digital cameras, and voice recorders (Sad et al., 2016). Technology use provides a supplementary platform for families and could assist with decreasing language barriers when used in a meaningful way. Looking back, previous literature from Somekh, Mavers, and Lewin (2003) supported the notion that technology could provide opportunities for better learning; improving connections between home and school;

decreasing time and space limitations; increasing communication; and strengthening opportunities for parental engagement involving academics.

Unfortunately, none of the studies involving parental participation and technology addressed the high school level. Olmstead (2013) studied parents of children in grades four and five; Sad et al. (2016) studied parents of children in grades one through seven. Although the studies examined are reflective of only elementary and middle school e-nvolvement, they did conclude that access to technology has served as a framework to increase parental participation. Overall, it can be inferred that parental access to technology improved communication, which in turn, increased parental participation.

Communication with parents needed to be consistent and informative because it directly impacted school morale (Brown & Vaughn, 2015). Increased communication lead to improved relationships, and improved relationships increased trust (Brown & Vaughn, 2015). More recently, tools such as online grade books, emails, texts, applications, online log books, video chats, online surveys, and Google docs have made communication with parents more accessible and easier to accomplish. With technology continually changing and expanding it is "imperative that teachers and administrators stay current with the tools that families are using to communicate" (Olmstead, 2013, p. 37). The school that was examined in this study used tools like online grade books, emails, texts, online log books, video chats and applications. The online survey results from the *Accountability Pillar*, however, continued to indicate that parental participation was still low. So, why, with increased accessibility to information and technology, do high school parents continue to report low participation from/with schools?

Other Factors to Consider

Other researchers like Pomerantz, Moorman, and Litwack (2007) have concluded that parental involvement may have more pronounced benefits for some, rather than all children. They posit that the effects of parental involvement may not necessarily benefit academic areas, but more likely the mental health or psychological functioning of children (Pomerantz et al., 2007). This idea was previously mentioned and was also supported by Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014). Pomerantz, Moorman, and Litwack (2007) were inclined to understand other factors that may be contributing factors for the success of children. They posited that there were multiple forms of parental control and that it varied from full control to an autonomy-supported involvement, which could greatly impact the level of parental involvement (Pomerantz et al., 2007). Another factor they felt could impact the achievement of children was the level of intrinsic motivation. This was difficult to measure and greatly varied from child to child. Pomerantz et al. (2007) also questioned the positive and negative affects of parents working with their children on academic endeavors, which could be dependent on the motivation and support level of the environment. Pomerantz et al. (2007) provoked questions about the impact that emotional functioning has on academic achievement, and not just parental involvement in its own framework.

Authors like Robinson and Harris (2014) further inquired about parental involvement being the savior to underachievers. Their research is not questioning if parents should be involved, but rather, whether or not, “greater parental involvement will solve many of the problems currently facing our schools” (Robinson & Harris, 2014, p. 4). Robinson and Harris (2014) identified two prevalent issues that faced education in the

United States: levels of proficiency and achievement gaps due to social class and race. In the United Sates there was increasing evidence that surrounded social class inequalities. Robinson and Harris (2014) noted that numerous federal policies were constantly being implemented to address issues with parental involvement but failed to take in consideration all the other factors that are linked to social inequalities. Robinson and Harris (2014) found that "one major reason for this lack of consensus among scholars is that parents' involvement has been measured differently across studies" (p. 19). They concluded that small samples were used; the variances in studies between elementary school children and other studies focused on adolescents; and the lack of documentation that provided data based on race and ethnicity (Robinson & Harris, 2014). In essence, many of the studies simply provided "snapshots of parental engagement from various angles" (Robinson & Harris, 2014, p. 220).

The extensive research completed by Robinson and Harris (2014) deduced a significant number of findings. First, they identified that, "parents with higher social class backgrounds are more involved in their schooling both at home and at school than those with lower social class backgrounds" (p. 221). Second, "evidence does not suggest a clear positive connection between parental involvement and academic outcomes" (p. 224). They further supported this statement and indicated that "there are forms of involvement that are associated with declines in achievement" (p. 226). In regards to greater parental involvement reducing racial achievement gaps, Robinson and Harris (2014) concluded that "suggesting parental involvement as a key strategy for reducing achievement inequality appears to be based more on ideology than empirical evidence" and that the distribution of socioeconomic resources should be the focus (p. 228).

There were many factors that were interconnected when investigating parental involvement. The major pressing concerns as ascertained by Robinson and Harris (2014) were: determining which involvement activities are typically relative to each ethnic group and to gain an increased understanding of why certain activities are valued more than others. By finding out the answers to these questions, parental involvement programs will improve in its focus and most likely work towards a common vision. Gaining an understanding of the factors that influence parental involvement will improve participation and in essence increase student success in a variety of areas. It is important to keep in mind that "parental involvement and achievement do not exist in a vacuum" and "we should not expect uniformity in any achievement benefits that parental involvement confers" (Robinson & Harris, 2014, p.227).

Chapter Three: Methodology

This study examined the context of a specific school. The primary research question was: What is the nature of parent participation at the high school level? The study gathered parents' perceptions of their participation in the education of their high school children to identify promising practices that may enhance parental participation. Accordingly, this research explored parental perceptions of the types of participation they were experiencing at the high school level; identified potential barriers parents were encountering at this particular school; investigated how participation may have changed in comparison to earlier years; and gathered feedback and suggestions for school structures that may increase parental participation. This research used a qualitative, narrative, and descriptive study design.

The study was framed using a qualitative descriptive method to generate detailed interviews (Willis, Sullivan-Bolyai, Knafl, & Cohen, 2016). Willis et al. (2016) described this method as identifying thematic summaries and interpreting "common themes, moving beyond what individual participants reported, clustering together common ideas from multiple individuals to re-present the data" (p. 1193). Although this study was comprised of interviews, deriving common themes still involved more than surface level interpretations (Braun & Clark, 2006).

A qualitative descriptive method allowed additional sources of data to be used, which in this case, would be documents or photos that parent participants chose to share (Creswell, 2014). Although I did not explicitly request that documents or photos to be shared, participants were allowed to use their technology to provide examples or reference information to describe certain circumstances. When additional sources were

used by participants, they were included in the data. This study had semi-structured questions that all respondents were asked, which required planning and a framework from which to work. This supported the grounds for a qualitative descriptive study, according to Sullivan-Bolyai, Bova, and Harper (2005). According to Willis et al. (2016), a qualitative description process is able to "conduct either individual interviews to explore experiences, or focus groups when seeking consensus to assist in the development of an educational program or intervention, or to explore beliefs, attitudes, and values" (p. 1194). In this study, individual interviews were conducted to explore the idea concerning the phenomenon of parental participation in a school. This research design also provided flexibility when collecting and documenting data. According to Willis et al. (2016), "if interviews are the primary data, analysis begins with the first interview. A detailed summary of the first interview is developed, and this development continues for each subsequent interview. Observational data are included in the summaries for data analysis" (p. 1195). For this study, interviews were the primary data; each interview required summaries and categorizations in a subsequent manner; and observational data, when there was any, was also included in the final summary.

Each interview was audio recorded, transcribed, and verified for accuracy. Every question was examined independently. Next, similar values, ideas, perceptions, and opinions from each question were identified. This was done for every subsequent question. The data from each question were grouped into common themes, to provide evidence of similar trends. The next step involved checking for accuracy. I sought to ensure that both the descriptive validity and interpretive validity aligned together (Willis et al., 2016). The descriptive validity was the transcript itself; the interpretive validity in

this case was my interpretation of the findings. Having the transcript to make reference to, and having the researchers' findings, allowed each question to be analyzed three times. It was essential to revisit both sets of data in order to increase the accuracy and reliability of my interpretation of the interview responses.

Context

The school that was sampled was situated in an urban setting, in Alberta, Canada. The school was predominantly populated by children who were Caucasian, with very few visible minorities. The average household income in this municipality is $165,451 (Strathcona County, 2017). There are 1113 students, 66 teachers, and 34 support staff (Elk Island Public Schools, 2015). The school offered a plethora of programming and opportunities: special education, fine arts, Advanced Placement (AP), Communication and Technology Studies (CTS), athletics, leadership, the Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP), and core classes for varying academic needs. In this context, I served as a special education and science teacher. I taught 56 students altogether. The size of the school provided a relatively large sampling population. Although this was a single-school study, the ideas and information gathered could be used to identify the factors that make this study both applicable and non-applicable to other urban schools, namely the ability for this study to be transferable (Brooks & Normore, 2015).

Participant Recruitment

In order to begin this study, I first sought and received ethics permission from the University of Lethbridge Human Subject Research Committee. Next, permission was sought from the District Superintendent and the principal of the urban school being examined. Following these permissions, participants received an invitation to participate,

as well as a letter of consent that addressed my purpose for this research, the protocol involved, and an assurance of confidentiality (Appendix A). The research participants in this study were parents or guardians of the students enrolled in the identified school. Three parents or guardians were randomly selected from each of the three grade levels (10, 11, and 12) for a total of nine participants. I used a computer to generate three random numbers associated with the parents or guardians of the students, based on the total of the grade population. I made phone calls to the parents selected, by first introducing myself, reading a scripted statement (Appendix B), and asked if they would be willing to participate in this study. When they chose to refrain, I thanked them for their time and contacted the next randomly selected parent.

I continued to phone parents until three participants from each grade level agreed to be interviewed. If a parent then chose to decline, the next random computer generated parent was contacted. The selection process continued until nine participants were identified and fit the appropriate designated grade criterion. As well, if a parent revoked permission, during or following the interview, another random computer generated selected person would have been contacted. It is important to note that parents did not revoke their permission at any time throughout this study. Intentionally selecting three different grade levels, as opposed to an entire school random sampling, provided the opportunity to make or decipher grade level trends that arose based on experience and time spent in high school.

Most interviews were conducted on-site (at the school of the study) for four reasons: ease of transportation for families; accessibility for bookings; the provision of spaces with limited noise and distractions; and to alleviate safety concerns. It is essential

to identify that this study was directly related to the study of educational practices and that the purpose of having the interviews occur at the school was to investigate the phenomena of parental involvement (Brooks & Normore, 2015), therefore it was determined that the school would be an ideal location for the interviews to take place. Although interviews that occurred at the school supported a familiar context, as referenced by Burgess (1988), anonymity remained a primary concern. Therefore, participants were given the choice of either the urban school itself or a location of their choice. The interviews took place based on the availability of the individual participants. Since the questions were open-ended, there was no minimum or maximum time specified. For the participants who chose the school setting for their interviews, meeting times were provided to the office manager to ensure there were no conflicts with both room scheduling and potential disruptions. Overall, six parents chose the school setting as their preferred choice; three parents selected their own homes for the interviews to be conducted due to mobility issues or anonymity preferences.

Data Collection

In order to gain insight into parents' perceptions of their participation at the high school level, it was imperative to follow all protocols and procedures as outlined by the University of Lethbridge and the school district. This study utilized a semi-structured interview process to collect data. In this type of interview, the interviewer "…provided a basic framework for examining the phenomena and the accompanying attitudes but, given the diverse nature of the different events, freedom to move beyond the basic set of questions was essential" (Partington, 2001, p. 33). This provided the opportunity to further examine new leads. Due to the complexity of the interview process, a clear

understanding of how to conduct effective interviews was necessary to collect accurate data. The data collected can certainly be influenced by the interviewer; therefore, it was necessary to gain an increased understanding of the proper techniques to use between the interviewer and the interviewee.

To ensure that the interviews were conducted in an effective manner I followed the advice offered by Partington (2001). Partington (2001) suggested the establishment of a detailed framework of questions, prior to the interviews being conducted. For this study, a total of seven questions were asked. They were as follows:

1. Describe what parent participation means to you.
2. What advantages are there to parent participation in high school?
3. Describe some specific types of parent participation that have been helpful to you in high school.
4. Describe some ways that your participation in your child's schooling has changed as you have progressed through your child's education.
5. Depending on grade level, each question will be as follows:
    a. (Grade 10) Describe how your parent participation has changed since your child was in grade nine.
    b. (Grade 11) Describe how your parent participation has changed since your child has been in high school.
    c. (Grade 12) Describe how your parent participation has changed over the duration of your child's time spent in high school.
6. Describe any barriers you have experienced that limited your participation at the high school level.

7. Are there any additional comments you would like to share in regards to parent participation? (If Yes) Please elaborate on them.

These questions provided data to answer the primary research question: What is the nature of parent participation at the high school level?

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

The interview process comprised the main technique used for data collection in this study. This process used "experiences by interpreting and summarizing the organized empirical data", which fulfilled the criteria for qualitative analysis (Malterud, 2012, p. 795). In addition, one parent provided a support document which in turn was included in the analysis. The interpretation of qualitative analysis proposed by Malterud (2012) was referred to as *systematic text condensation* (STC). STC used Giorgi's (2009) four-step procedure as part of its framework (as cited in Malterud, 2012). Giorgi included the following four steps to analyze qualitative data:

1. One reads the entire description in order to get a general sense of the whole statement.
2. Once the sense of the whole has been grasped, the researcher goes back to the beginning and reads through the text once more with the specific aim of discriminating *meaning units* from within a psychological perspective, with a focus on the phenomenon being researched
3. Once the meaning units have been delineated, the researcher goes through all of the meaning units and expresses the psychological insight contained in them more directly. This is especially true of the meaning units most revelatory of the phenomenon under consideration.

4. Finally, the researcher synthesizes all of the transformed meaning units into a consistent statement regarding the subject's experience.

The STC is a descriptive approach that embeds the four steps of Giorgi (2009), in addition to, (a) presenting what participants have indicated (b) identifying parts of subjects' descriptions and (c) including a small number of subjects in the study (as cited in Malterud, 2012). The main purpose is to analyze data by shifting between both the processes of decontextualizing and recontextualizing (Malterud, 2012). I used the four-step process of analysis, as outlined by Malterud (2012), in the following manner.

The first step was *total impressions- from chaos to themes*; the overall data was read with a concentration on participants' voice (Malterud, 2012). After reading the entire transcript, "[I] asked [myself] which preliminary themes can be identified in the material" (Malterud, 2012, p. 797).

The second step was *identifying and sorting meaning into units– from themes to codes*; I "systematically review[ed] the transcript line by line to identify meaning units. A meaning unit is a text fragment containing some information about the research question" (Malterud, 2012, p. 797). The STC framework differed from Giorgi's procedure by using only parts of the whole text to constitute meaning units (Malterud, 2012). In other words, the STC method allowed this study to use parts of the interview responses for analysis. Following the identification of meaning units, was the coding process. Coding was comprised of "identifying, classifying, and sorting meaning units potentially related to the previously negotiated themes" (Malterud, 2012, p. 797). This was reflective of a decontextualizing process, where pieces of evidence from each case was taken out of its original context and compared to other cases, grouped, and marked with a code

(Malterud, 2012). This process involved elaboration of the original themes identified. Malterud (2012) emphasized that the coding procedure should remain flexible, and making ongoing changes was a normal and acceptable part of the process. As decisions were made I maintained a *decision trail* that provided the opportunity to revisit previously made decisions, in case a choice did not continue to have sustained relevance (Malterud, 2012). I recognized throughout the process that a meaning unit may be coded and used under multiple code labels. The coding process occurred through my manual work of highlighting, cutting, and pasting of the sheets of data obtained from the transcripts. I also maintained that regardless of the decontextualizing occurring, the original version of the transcript remained accessible and unchanged. The process of coding to see results was a much better process than identifying codes first and sorting afterwards (Malterud, 2012). Overall, I accepted that "code groups and code labels are merely the means, not the goal" (Malterud, 2012, p. 798).

The third step, *condensation– from code to meaning*, involved the "systematic abstraction of meaning units within each of the three to six code groups" (Malterud, 2012, p. 799). Different from Giorgi's (2009) method, the STC method took each code group and analyzed it "for further abstraction by condensation of content" (Malterud, 2012, p. 799). Next, the meaning units were sorted into subgroups that provided answers to the questions in the study. Two or three subgroups were constructed and became the focus for in-depth analysis. The subgroups, after thorough review, were reduced, into a condensate (Malterud, 2012). According to Malterud (2012), a condensate is described as an "artificial quotation maintaining as far as possible, the original terminology applied by the participants" (p. 799). He suggested that writing the condensate in the first-person

served as a reminder that all subjects needed to be reflected and included on the issues being addressed (Malterud, 2012). Sometimes, information may fit better in other subgroups, and moving ideas around can be beneficial. The last process involved revisiting the leftover subgroups that were in the same group, and identifying common themes of the code group (Malterud, 2012).

The last step, called *synthesizing– from condensation to descriptions and concepts*, data was rebuilt to form a valid reflection of the study as a whole (Malterud, 2012). Malterud (2012) suggested examining the subgroups and starting with both the condensates and quotations, using analytical text and organizing them into subgroups that embed the quotations. Providing examples throughout the analytical text supported the findings and provided support as well. The result of this procedure provided analytical text that was "reconceptualised, returning to the full transcript, where we validate whether our synthesis and the illustrative quotation still reflect the original context appropriately" (Malterud, 2012, p. 800). Next, each code group received a category heading; these headings differed from the results of the findings. Malterud (2012) reiterated that "we should not expect to identify exact associations to each participant, since cross-case results are the outcome of multivocal synthesis" (p. 800). It was imperative that everything was able to be connected back to the original data, or the validity decreases. The latter part of the analysis involved the comparison between the findings of the study, other literature, and theories. The focus of the study also addressed new findings whether the speculation about the research was affirmed or challenged. Lastly, recommendations and other areas to pursue further research was acknowledged to provide provisions for future studies.

Conducting Ethical Research

Researcher Position

I was a teacher at the urban school being studied. I taught a total of 56 students out of a school population of 1137. I was also the formally appointed staff representative to school council. There was an average of 18 parents that attended school council that I knew as acquaintances. I had no contact with these parents, other than conversations that occurred at school council meetings. Based on a strong presence of parents and guardians at the school council, I made the assumption that parents would want to be involved in their children's education. When I gathered information, I found there was minimal opportunity for parents to feel their responses would affect the academic endeavors of their children. In terms of my bias, there was a 74 out of 2274 chance of me recognizing the participants in this study.

It was my responsibility as the interviewer to help interview participants feel that their responses were free to be expressed, without any bias from me (Partington, 2001). It was essential that I "abstain from the use of personal knowledge" and "set[ting] aside [of] what we already know about a given phenomenon" (Bevan, 2014, p. 138). This concept is referred to as "bracketing" by Tufford and Newman (2012). By remaining unbiased, participants had an opportunity to provide open responses and felt comfortable asking questions in return. When necessary, I provided clarifications upon requests and remained conscious of rephrasing rather than limiting the nature of responses. I was also aware of multiple perspectives and remained attentive by not excluding opposing or non-hypothesized views from surfacing from the interviewee (Partington, 2001). In other words, I was able to keep the questions easy to understand and as clear as possible,

without providing gestures or expressions that may have impacted the views shared by the interviewee. I also needed to "provide critical awareness through the research, thereby empowering the interviewee" (Partington, 2001, p. 34). If information was shared that I felt exhibited an oppressed condition during disclosure, I revisited the situation and facilitated the proper channels for communication to address the concerns.

In order to encourage interviewees to fully share their perceptions, I established an environment that encompassed empathy and developed rapport using body language that appeared relaxed and welcoming (Partington, 2001). This encouraged parents to feel safe, and hopefully, increased their willingness to contribute with more in-depth responses. I ensured that my responses were non-judgmental, and provided time for participants to reflect, paying attention to not close discussions early. In essence, I concentrated on listening, rather than responding.

When responses were given, I provided a restatement of shared information to reflect that I was listening carefully and understood what the interviewee conveyed (Partington, 2001). When responses appeared unclear, it was critical to seek clarification in order to ensure that I understood the response and accepted the willingness to be corrected (Partington, 2001). One strategy suggested by Roulston (2011) was "to sum up or formulate the sense of prior talk in order to gain participant feedback concerning the accuracy of the interviewer's interpretations of what has been said" (p. 361). Inaccurately interpreted information would greatly affect the data. When interviewees were unable to respond to questions, I balanced persistence with the freedom to decline responding. I rephrased the question to check for understanding, and remained cognizant of his or her feelings in case it was uncomfortable for the interviewee (Partington, 2001). I also

considered prompts for interviewees to provide further detail or examples (Roulston, 2011). At times, interviewees responded with “other people’s beliefs” (Roulston, 2011, p. 354). I encouraged participants to refocus their attention to their own experiences.

Roulston (2011) reiterated that methodological writing that involved qualitative interviews would frequently deviate from the interviewer’s anticipated plans and would require attention to unforeseen challenges as they arose. In essence, “interviewing is a complex task requiring attendance to a range of skills and information all at one time” (Partington, 2001, p. 42). The quality of data obtained was certainly dependent on the effectiveness of my interviewing skills. Therefore, it was absolutely necessary for me to engage the interviewee in a manner that was empathetic, supportive, and reflective of an impartial demeanor (Partington, 2001). There were a few unanticipated events that occurred throughout this study like the participant’s cell phone ringing and announcements that occurred over the intercom system. However, gaining insight through literature further prepares new researches about potential challenges. Many findings in the research literature do not provide solid examples of steps to rectify problems. Roulston (2011) concluded that “this is partly because the range of challenges that might occur in interview contexts is as wide and varied as the sorts of qualitative studies conducted by innumerable researchers” (p. 361). As a result, I found it imperative to continuously reflect and remain astute during the interview process, in order to enhance and protect the relationship between and myself and the interviewee.

Ethical Behaviour

The ethical considerations for this study involved confidentiality and anonymity. Since participants were parents within this community, maintaining confidentiality was

important. The ability to protect participant confidentiality required an in-depth understanding of research ethics. Tolich (2004) described confidentiality as being reflective of an iceberg; the top of the iceberg known as the general confidentiality, labelled external confidentiality, and the bottom of the iceberg metaphorically labelled the internal confidentiality. External confidentiality is when the researcher takes all precautions necessary to protect the identities of participants in the study; internal confidentiality involves the caution involved when participants in a study are able to make sense of one another's identity based on a familiar context (Tolich, 2004).

As a researcher, I found it was important to avoid disclosing certain traits of people that would have made them highly identifiable in a study (Baez, 2002). I also found it to be important to consider using the dominant approach in this study. This means that as the researcher I was obligated to "collect, analyze and report the data without compromising the identities of [the] respondents" (Kaiser, 2009, p. 1634). I did not note ways in which this presented challenges to balancing the inclusion of pertinent details in a study for increased accuracy and the potential for those details to identify and allude to certain participants (Kaiser, 2009). The main objective of any study should be to "protect the privacy of all persons, to build trust and rapport with study participants, and to maintain ethical standards and the integrity of the research process" (Kaiser, 2002, p. 1634). I believed that I was able to ensure the privacy of the parents was protected throughout the process.

Prior to the commencement of conducting the interviews, Guillemin and Gillam (2004) maintained that gaining permission to proceed, termed *procedural ethics*, was important to obtain, but so was having an informed understanding that other ethical

conditions could arise during a study. Kaiser (2009) suggested that researchers remove identifiers like names or addresses on documents and instead, store the names in separate files and locations. This was adhered to for this study. Another suggestion was to replace the names of respondents with pseudonyms, which could be done in word processing programs using the "find and replace" tool (Kaiser, 2009). Although personal identifiers may be eliminated, the possibility that contextual identifiers, like life stories or data identifiable to a community, could remain (Kaiser, 2009). In this study, informed decisions were made regarding details that required changes, but were not modified to the extent that it changed their original meaning (Kaiser, 2009). I was cognizant of the aforementioned subject identifiers.

Kaiser (2009) enhanced the dominant approach, and provided additional insight into furthering confidentiality and identifying the process as an *alternative approach*. She addressed the shortcomings by "making respondents better informed of the use of data" and "instituting practical steps to facilitate dialogue with respondents about how their data can be used" (Kaiser, 2009, p. 1636). Kaiser (2009) suggested re-contacting participants if data was going to be used in a different manner; sharing the study with participants; discussing confidentiality at the onset and in follow-up discussions with participants. Since I worked with a specific school, I provided parents the chance to revisit their original preference and by so doing conveyed that confidentiality and choice were highly valued. My intention was to insure that a high level of confidentiality was upheld in this study.

Being a teacher, my first consideration was naturally to follow the directives outlined by the *Teaching Quality Standard*, engage parents and value their feedback so as

to enhance my professional development and by so doing, value them as partners in learning (Alberta Education, 1997). In addition, careful consideration was given in order to abide by the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FOIP) (Government of Alberta, 2007). This document addressed the use of parent information in regards to any use by schools. One section of the document alluded to the accessibility of parent names. As the researcher, I needed to contact parents. The FOIP document stated that as a teacher, I was allowed access to parent contact information under the condition that it was for the performance of duties. In this case, contact was initiated to develop and increase my professional capacity and followed the protocols of authorized agencies like the University of Lethbridge and the School Board.

Delimitations

This study provided insight into the perception of nine parents and guardians whose students attended a specific urban school. The form of this study reflected a non-experimental study that used a qualitative, descriptive design. I was invested in this study as a researcher with prior knowledge based on information acquired from the review of previous literature on parental participation and engagement at the high school level. Based on research of others in this field, I gained insight in the perceptions of parent participation and furthered my understanding of models and strategies school administrators could implement to increase their parental participation. Prior to the study, I was in contact with 18 parents from school council and 56 parents from teaching in the school. There was a possibility that I could have recognized 74 out of a possible 2226 interviewees. This could have impacted their willingness to share information openly. It is important to note, now that the study is complete, that none of the known parents were

interviewed. However, in the end, the conclusions drawn and the recommendations made are based on the data from nine parents from one high school in a primarily middle class urban high school.

Another perceived limitation of the study was the provision of only one researcher. As contended by Malterud (2012), having only one researcher eliminated the opportunity to consolidate themes and identify variances in perspectives. Other researchers may have identified differing themes and other constructs within this study. Partington (2001) inferred that some bias will exist because researchers can only understand an interviewee to the best of their abilities. In essence, there still remains no way that an interviewer can completely understand the subject's perspectives. In contrast, having access to other experienced researchers did provide opportunities to discuss my findings, seek insight, and foster reflective processes. Partington (2001) extended the idea that "some characteristics of the good interviewer are dependent on ascribed, rather than earned status, so that identification with the interviewer is made possible by being the same ethnic group" (p. 42). This may have value, but was also a limitation in my context given that the majority of the urban school I sampled was predominantly Caucasian, and I am not. In this case, it was evident that the ethnicity of the interviewees and interviewer was different. The possibility of differing ethnicity acting as a limitation of disclosed information between the interviewer and interviewees was not testable in this study.

This study is reflective of the perceptions of parents from only one urban school. The students in this school are predominantly Caucasian, with only three students self-identified as Indigenous. The parents of the population that attends the school is relatively affluent, where many of the families have one parent working in the household. The

school offers diverse educational opportunities and thrives in both academic and non-academic programming. This school also has a well-attended school council, with an average of fifteen parents attending the monthly meetings. Overall, the findings in this study will reflect the perceptions of the participants from the school being examined, and are based on their experiences within the community.

This thesis did not seek to make globalized conclusions for or against parental participation at the high school level. This thesis provided evidence that was reflective of circumstances based on a geographical area. It did not make a case for either positive or negative effects of parental participation in high school. Furthermore, this study did not serve to place judgment on the participants in this study regarding their participation in the school. There was a possibility that all interviews provided a limited amount of information for this study. The participants were chosen by random selection and were able to express opinions regarding parental participation that reflected strategies to increase their involvement at the high school level.

Summary

There is literature to support that parental participation in schools impacts children in positive ways. Various studies (Catsambis, 2001; Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014); Williams (2011), concurred that parental involvement is directly correlated with the academic success of students. Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) identified that parental involvement also positively impacts the motivation and engagement of students in school. Their research provided evidence of success at the high school level. Most research continues to support the notion that parental participation is highest in the early years of schooling in comparison to the latter years. There is little literature available that

specifically addresses the effects of parental participation at the high school level. Data from a provincial survey (Elk Island Public Schools, 2015) indicated that, for one urban school in particular, there was a discrepancy between parent and teachers' perception of parental participation. Parents have indicated that they do not feel satisfied with their level of participation at their high school.

This study used a qualitative descriptive method and nine interviews were conducted to address the primary research question of: What is the nature of parent participation at the high school level? To gain insight and enhance parental participation opportunities, the interview process continued to further investigate additional factors that contributed to parental participation. This research explored what parents perceive participation to mean; identified potential barriers that impacted their participation; investigated how participation may have changed in comparison to earlier years; and gathered feedback and suggestions for school structures to increase parental participation. Findings provided a more thorough understanding of how parents perceived their role of participation at the high school level so that educators are able to incorporate strategies to purposefully increase parent participation.

Chapter Four: Findings

This study consisted of interviewing nine randomly selected participants from an urban high school in Alberta, Canada. Three parents were randomly selected from each grade level (10, 11, 12) as participants. Phone calls were made to recruit willing participants. The participants were given the choice of either on-site (at the school of the study) or a location of their choice. Six participants selected the school site, while all three grade 10 participants selected their own homes as their preferred choice of location for the interview. All interviews were conducted by the researcher. In one grade 10 interview, both the husband and wife contributed to the same interview. This interview was counted as one participant since their responses were dependent on each other's perspectives.

Interviews were recorded using an audio device. The duration of the interviews varied between nine and 27 minutes. Questions asked by the researcher were identical, with the exception of question five, which was phrased according to the grade level of the child (Appendix A). Following each interview, participants were thanked and provided with a copy of their signed consent forms. At no time in the study did respondents decline their interview. Each interview was transcribed and verified for accuracy. Each transcript was given a designated number. Every question on each transcript was labelled with the corresponding number. Responses for each question were cut with the question still attached and verified to ensure that they were labelled with corresponding transcript number. This process occurred for the eight subsequent transcripts. All responses for question one were then gathered, organized by grade level, and glued onto a scroll of paper corresponding to question one. The responses were organized by grade for ease of

grade level analysis. This process was completed for the subsequent six scrolls, organized by question number. In total, there were seven scrolls of paper organized by question number, with nine pasted responses corresponding to each labelled transcript, and organized by ascending grade level.

Every question was examined independently. Similar values, ideas, perceptions and opinions from each interview was identified and written onto a colored sticky note and placed beside each response (Appendix D). The data from each question was grouped into common themes, using a different colored sticky note to provide evidence of similar trends (Appendix E). I ensured that both the descriptive validity and interpretive validity aligned. Each question was analyzed three times. Both sets of data were revisited to increase the accuracy and reliability of the interview response interpretation. Lastly, the scrolls were arranged beside each other by grade level, to identify common themes within a specific grade (Appendix F).

Question One: Describe What Parent Participation Means to You

All nine respondents mentioned that volunteering at the school in a physical manner meant parent participation. Examples of their responses included attending field trips, managing track and field days, office support, stocking books in the library, occupational presentations, lunchtime supervision, distributing graduation gowns, and helping teachers inside the classroom with general tasks. One parent stated, “Parent participation is being involved with classrooms, being involved actively at the office, sort of knowing what’s going on in all aspects of your child’s education.”

Along with volunteering, was the idea of being able to attend extra-curricular activities or school based activities. Four out of nine alluded to showing up at the school

for sports activities or to watch fine arts productions. In contrast, to taking a lead role like volunteering, these parents felt observing their children at school related activities showed that they cared and supported them. One parent said, “She invited me and I showed up. It just lifts her heart to see mom come and see her doing work.”

Three out of nine respondents specified that parent council involvement meant parent participation. Two of those three believed that parent council provided the opportunity to have a voice in school decisions. They strongly believed that it was important to be involved in a variety of decisions at the school level. One parent affirmed:

> Parent participation for me, means getting involved in the school at a parent council level where you’re able to give your opinions and advice on educational matters; not just coming in and passing out hot dogs, but actually having a voice.

This same parent identified the value of parent surveys. She felt they provided feedback for the school to make improvements. Three grade eleven parents also addressed the importance of being consulted about decisions made at the school level and having the opportunity to voice their concerns. Overall, the importance of parent council was identified by parents in grades eleven and twelve.

Another topic of importance included academics. Four responses mentioned that helping with academics in their homes is what they felt defined parent participation. These parents felt that helping their children study and complete their schoolwork was time well invested. In addition, two of these responses identified their reliance on the online parent portal, a program used to report student progress. One parent stated, “I do

get parent portal sent to me once a week to keep up on their grades or to keep track of their attendance".

A key term used in seven interviews was the word 'involved'. This word was used in the first sentence of two interviews. Another participant used the phrase, "…a constant in their education", which signifies that she too could be perceived as being involved. The last participant stated "It's important for a parent to see exactly that level their child is in and to make sure that any issues that happens you're there to help them…" Again, this parent is also indirectly defining what involvement means to her. Overall, parent participation in all of the interviews reflects that parents are somehow invested in the schooling of their children.

Question Two: What Advantages are There to Parent Participation in High School?

Although the question refers to the advantages of parent participation at the high school level, four out of nine respondents reiterated that they were less involved than previous years of their children's schooling. Two out of these four respondents felt that they needed to become more involved than previous years to find out what was happening at the school. One stated that "Because when your kids get into high school the communication is shut off, even more-so than junior high." A specific phrase found in five responses was to find out "what's going on." This was a general statement found across all three grade levels that followed with more specific examples of what they were interested in knowing. Three out of these five responses also mentioned that a benefit of being involved meant they were able to determine the morale of the building.

An advantage of parent participation addressed the importance of relationships with people. Two parents identified that knowing students in their child's friendship

circle was important to them. Four other parents mentioned that getting to know the staff at the school, especially the counsellor and administrators, served as a huge benefit to the success of their children.

Another advantage of parent participation was the ability for parents to provide academic guidance. Four out of nine interviewees mentioned that the success of their children was impacted by their involvement. Some examples of academic guidance included: monitoring marks, studying with children, course selections, goal setting, post-secondary investigation, accessing tutors, following deadlines, and implementing strategies to improve grades. One parent stated the following:

> It's more maybe talking to the counsellors, reorganizing his timetable, trying to alleviate a little bit of course load, making sure he gets what he needs for the goal that he has set up for himself, so that by the time he's graduated from grade 12, that he can move on to secondary education.

Four out of nine parents described aspects of emotional support. They described situations like taking kids home when they were sick; asking kids how their day was; sending the message that they are cared for, and ensuring their children's needs are met. The parents spoke in general about the nurturing they provided and the importance of supporting their children in school. One parent stated that "The more involved you are, I think, sends your kids a message that you care and you're there for them…" Similar to emotional support, two additional parents mentioned that an advantage of parental involvement is being an advocate for their children. One parent attributed her ability to advocate for her child to the relationships she developed with administrators. The other parent felt that she could address issues that her child was not comfortable doing and

said, "... knowing that I do have a voice and if they have a problem, that they can't go to a teacher or a counsellor, that I will step up and help them with their voice."

In addition to parents advocating for their children, two out of nine parents felt that communication was improved when parent participation increased. One parent identified that using technology to access information was essential to finding out about new policies and having conversations about them with her son. The second parent felt that her presence in the school helped her seek information about activities happening in the school.

Question Three: Describe Some Specific Types of Parent Participation That Have Been Helpful to You in High School

Academic involvement was mentioned in eight out of nine interviews. The awareness and insight into marks and grades was of primary concern. Two individuals from these eight mentioned that goal setting demonstrated active involvement in their children's education. Three parents indicated that email enabled them to clarify academic concerns and communicate with staff at the school. Other examples of academic involvement included helping their children study, adjusting courses, accessing the marks portal, financing additional tutoring, attending interviews, and assisting with post-secondary planning.

Attendance at monthly parent council meetings was mentioned by four participants. For these parents, the meetings provided information and the clarification of other changes occurring in the school that they felt was not clearly communicated to the rest of the parents. Parent council also served as a platform to voice concerns and understand the overall activities and directives from administrators.

Six parents indicated that physically being present at the school has impacted their parent participation. Being at the school was described in a variety of contexts. This included presence due to athletic involvement as a spectator, attending student presentations when invited, helping at the school, and simply being present in the building. One parent described her involvement in the following statement:

> To be present whenever I can be. To show up for everything that's going on in the school whether again it's an academic thing, it's an athletic thing. That we're there; that I have offered to help in any way with teachers and programs.

Two of the six parents mentioned that driving to and from school also reflected their parent participation to show their children that they cared. Only one of the parents directly specified that he was a parent of an athlete.

Four parents felt that having a connection with the staff was essential to the success of their children. These parents indicated that getting to know their children's teachers was important to them. Three parents built connections with staff by being present in the building, while one other parent sustained relationships through E-mail. This parent described her connection: “Once I saw that he was struggling, emailing; I had an E-mail relationship with the teachers. This year social, we are struggling with 30-1. I E-mail the teacher immediately, because I mean, it's so quick now with communication.”

Question Four: Describe Some Ways That Your Participation in Your Child’s Schooling Has Changed as You Have Progressed Through Your Child’s Education

All nine participants identified that their participation changed as their children progressed through their schooling. All nine participants indicated that their involvement decreased as their children aged. The most involvement was at the elementary level,

kindergarten through grade six, followed by junior high, grades seven through nine, with the least involvement being in high school, grades 10 through 12. Examples of involvement at the elementary level included studying with their children for spelling tasks; assisting teachers in the classrooms, like craft days and photocopying; assisting with hot lunch days; dropping and picking up children; attending field trips; participating on parent council; organizing fundraising; noon hour supervising; and being present inside the school. Examples of involvement in junior high were attending school activities like band excursions, assisting with course selections, school council involvement, attending extracurricular activities, and providing academic support. Examples at the high school level included post-secondary exploration, goal-setting, and career exploration.

One reason identified for the decrease in participation is the increased independence of their children. Four parents specified that their children no longer required the level of support needed in earlier years. One parent alluded to the increase in independence of their children and used phrases like “But, I wasn't going to hold his hand and lead him through everything.” A second reason stated for less participation is the decreased number of volunteer opportunities, like field trips. Six respondents indicated that as their children aged, the number of field trips or need for parents to accompany students on field trips decreased substantially. One parent summarized this in the following statement, “So volunteerism was much higher in elementary, and decreased almost steadily through junior high, and then non-existent in high school.” Another parent reiterated this feeling with the comment, “They're like, we’re fine. We don't need parents.” One parent stated that she wished there were more opportunities provided and

said “In the same breath, anything that comes up in regards to volunteering in the high school I try to be there.”

A third reason for the decrease in participation is the respect for their children's social status and image. Five respondents discussed the importance of respecting the space and independence of their children. One respondent articulated this in the statement, “My kid doesn't want me sitting in the classroom making math folders like I could do in grade one.” Another respondent relayed the perspective of her child's feelings: “I don't want you to come to the school. I don't want you to be here. It's not cool.”

Other confounding factors briefly mentioned for the decrease in parental participation included the following: parents being busier with their own employment, the increase in complexity of curricular content, the lack of fundraising required, and only a few parents are selected to attend field trips when opportunities arose. An interesting comment made by one respondent in particular is that over her child’s duration in high school, she realized that she was most involved in grade 12 due to the importance of post-secondary planning.

Question Five: Grade Specific Question About Participation Changing:

a) Grade 10: Describe How Your Parent Participation Has Changed Since Your Child Was in Grade Nine.

b) Grade 11: Describe How Your Parent Participation Has Changed Since Your Child Has Been in High School.

c) Grade 12: Describe How Your Parent Participation Has Changed Over the Duration of Your Child’s Time Spent in High School.

The grade 10 parents varied somewhat in their responses. Two of the respondents felt that their involvement had not changed between transitioning from grade nine into grade 10; the other respondent felt there was now less involvement in grade 10 in comparison to grade nine. Two respondents continued to support their children in academic areas, while another, upon reflection, felt that a higher level of emotional support was provided in grade 10 in comparison to grade nine.

The grade 11 parents also varied in their responses. Two parents felt that they were more involved in their children's lives in grade 11 more so than grade 10 and one parent felt she was more involved in junior high overall. Among these two responses, the first parent indicated that the increase is attributed to the increased involvement in the following areas: academic support, communication with teachers, course planning, and post-secondary investigations. The second parent felt that she wished she would have been more informed about opportunities to become involved with the school in her child's grade 10 year. The other grade 10 parent felt that she was less involved overall in high school than in her child's junior high years. She attributed this to fewer available opportunities in high school. She stated, “I guess the opportunities are just not as frequent as in the past years. High school is, it's I guess, fewer opportunities.” In essence, two grade 11 parents felt that their involvement was affected by the opportunities provided by the school.

Similar to the grade 10 and 11 parents, the grade 12 parents also differed in their perceptions of involvement over their children's years spent in high school. However, two parents felt they were considerably more involved in the grade 12 year in comparison the grade 10 and 11 years, while another felt there was no opportunity. One of these

respondents felt there was increased involvement in the following areas: academic support, communication with teachers, and post-secondary investigations. This parent felt that at times, she "... should have been a little bit more involved because we have a lot more at stake right now." The second respondent felt that there were more opportunities to be involved in grade 12 because of graduation. She felt that grade 12 brought opportunities to get involved with the graduation ceremony and used the parent council as a means to seek information and identify opportunities. The last parent felt there was no difference in her involvement throughout her child's years in high school. She did concur that there were fewer opportunities to be involved at the high school level in comparison to junior high. She stated, "Unless I have chosen to do something outside of the school hours as a parent to support, there really has been no opportunity I'd say." Similar to the first parent, she participated in the graduation ceremony, but felt that her involvement was attributed to graduation and wished more opportunities were provided. The following statements supports this finding: "Showing up at grad. I think that's the only other opportunity that I've had to participate in his experience in education really this year. I wish there was more. I believe there should be more."

Overall, out of nine responses, four respondents felt that their involvement increased (two grade 11 parents and two grade 12 parents); two felt their involvement decreased (one grade 10 parent and one grade 11 parent); and three felt their involvement had not changed (two grade 10 parents and one grade 12 parent). Four parents identified that there were fewer volunteer opportunities at the high school level. Providing academic support was mentioned by four respondents as an important aspect of parental involvement.

Question Six: Describe Any Barriers You Have Experienced That Limited Your Participation at the High School Level

There were a plethora of barriers recognized by the respondents that they perceived as limitations for participating at the high school level. The main factors were grouped into the following categories: volunteer opportunities, social concerns, levels of independence, children themselves, communication struggles, and time. These categories contained three or more respondents. There were other responses provided that did not fit these categories and are categorized as other barriers.

Six respondents indicated that the lack of volunteer opportunities impacted their ability to participate. Two respondents in each grade felt that they were no longer asked to attend field trips, volunteer opportunities were not communicated, or being made available by the school. Six respondents felt that the social concerns of their children prevented them from being present in the school. Many indicated that their children could potentially feel embarrassed in front of their peers if they were around. Parents felt they had to respect their children's social environment and that it was important to try and refrain from interfering in their social lives at the school. One parent stated the following:

> Also, my kids don't want me there like I do. I mean when I was in elementary I went, they loved having me and wanted me to be the leader in their group and everything and even in junior high that was fine, but then high school now, they're used to me embarrassing them, but they probably prefer I don't. So, that has limited me. I don't want to mortify these children.

Two parents that addressed social concerns as barriers also alluded to the level of independence they must embrace with their children’s aging process. Their concern was

finding a balance between respecting the level of maturity and their children's independence, with sustaining involvement in their children's education. One parent summarized this in the following statement: "I find again for the teen years because they are developing their self-confidence, their independence, trying the separation, trying to find their way, I'm not in the school environment." This is different from the social concerns, where the focus is on the maturity and independence of their children, as opposed to the effects from a peer or environmental context.

Four parents identified their own children as barriers to their involvement at the high school level. One parent felt the lack of her child's responsibilities caused her to be unaware of events in the school or academic requirements. The examples she gave were as small as her child's lack of presenting field trip forms for signatures and academic test preparation for upcoming exams. Another parent felt that her child intentionally lacked responsibility out of spite. She stated, "Sometimes your own child, because they don't want you at the school, or they don't want you to know what's going on. So sometimes they can be a barrier." This parent also stated that communication was a barrier, along with three other parents. She felt that the school did not communicate effectively about events happening at the school. Another parent felt the school did not share or relay information about the amazing things children were doing in their classes. Two parents felt that the website itself did not provide clarity or information and was frequently outdated, which frustrated them further. One parent stated the following: "I've got one hour at the end of the day to try and figure this all out. And, if the website wasn't helping me, I had to then start going looking, for myself, on different Alberta websites." This same parent also alluded to time constraints, but communication was the actual barrier to

her involvement. There were three parents that specified their barrier was time in general. None of the grade 10 parents mentioned time constraints as a barrier. Two parents indicated that they were working more and into full-time positions. One of these parents felt that their lives were overall just busier, and at times, felt less motivated due to tiredness from work.

Lastly, there were four other barriers mentioned by different individuals: the increase in the difficulty of academia; the disconnection with administration; the lack of relationships or connections with staff; and the overall solemnness of the atmosphere in the school. These barriers were briefly mentioned by the respondents and followed with stories to exemplify their concerns and specific circumstances.

Question Seven: Are There Any Additional Comments You Would Like to Share in Regards to Parent Participation? (If Yes) Please Elaborate on Them.

All nine respondents concluded that supporting their children in high school was important and necessary for their children's success. The respondents provided insight into the supports required to be an actively involved parent. The role of the school, for many of the respondents, is the defining factor for successful parental involvement. Two respondents indicated that having extra supports for parents was necessary to understand how to help their own children or to complete tasks necessary for their children's academic success. They wanted more information nights or seminars to clarify concerns with technology, social concerns, and mental health. Two parents felt that parent participation at the school council was the platform utilized by some, but not enough, to find out about school business and events occurring. Two parents relayed that providing feedback to the school and having a voice or contributing opinions was critical to the

future of decisions made for their children. The impact of strong relationships with staff and more specifically teachers, directly impacted their level of involvement. These two parents believed that some staff mannerisms and attitudes greatly impacted how parents interacted with their children. Three parents stated that school communication was necessary in order for parents to better understand the lives of their children at school. These parents felt that poor communication built frustration with the school, which directly impacted their children's success when less guidance from parents occurred. One parent identified that technology was the preferred method of communication, however quite frequently, the information was either outdated or missing completely. She stated the following, “In the other side, if you tell the parents to go onto the website because the information is there and it's not updated, that's not helping the parents either.”

Moving away from the role of the school, three parents postulated that involvement at the high school level is dependent on previously engaged parents in their children's earlier years of schooling. One parent felt strongly about the correlation between their elementary years and high school years of parental involvement. This parent stated the following, “I'm sure those of us that make time for our kids’ education at the elementary level will continue to make the time knowing that it's needed or our voices are heard.” Another parent said, “Even though they're at school, I feel like I'm still taking care of them.” For these parents, their involvement started in the early elementary years, was sustained in junior high, and continued through high school. One grade 12 parent reflected during the interview and said the following:

> And I really honestly believe that high school is so important. they truly do need more support in high school. So, instead of backing off, which I think has been

> the trend, we need to come back to being more present. I honestly believe mentally, emotionally, physically, academically, socially, the kids need our support as parents. Not just the schools.

All grade 10 respondents and two grade 12 respondents described their involvement in the context of supporting their children from a home environment, as opposed to the physical presence in a school. These respondents described the guidance and support they were providing, and some respondents focused their support on their children's mental health. One grade 10 parent said, “If your kid was not doing well at school, maybe it has nothing to do with school.” Another grade 10 parent stated, “But then again, watching the signs. I haven't had issues like other friends have with their children as far as studying, or in different cases bullying, or just the social structure.”

Two grade 11 respondents addressed a concern with the term engagement. The first respondent described how her desire for more parent education about things like drugs, may not be viewed as participation, but she feels she is engaged with not only her own child, but with the school as well. The other parents attended a results review where administrators were asked to comment on a poor score from the parents on the Accountability Pillar survey with a question regarding parental engagement. The administrators described their newsletters and websites, which supported her belief that, “They were mistaking parent communication with parent participation and engagement.” She continued to elaborate on the meaning of engagement with the following statement, “They think because they've sent out a newsletter that we've engaged parents. And providing it, and communicating with us is great, but to me that doesn't mean I'm engaged in my child's education.” She further clarified her concern with the language in

the survey and said, “Like to me, I think that means, that vocabulary needs to be figured out.”

Grade 10 Findings

For grade 10 parents, parent participation meant volunteering in the school, showing interest in what their children are learning or activities they are involved in, ensuring they are studying, and watching their children’s grades. The advantages of participating in high school for parents, was being able to provide emotional support and guidance with general tasks. They stated that driving their children to and from activities, helping with academics, and contact with teachers is the most beneficial factors of parent participation.

How participation has changed for the respondents was being less involved than in previous years of their children’s education, which they attributed to their need for increased independence levels. Two out of three grade 10 parents recognized their involvement had not changed since grade nine. Academic support still continued to happen, but one parent indicated that she felt more emotional support was needed as well. Barriers to involvement included respect for the social concerns of their children and letting them become more independent.

Grade 11 Findings

For grade 11 respondents, parent participation meant volunteering in the school and having a voice that was heard by administration. Two respondents felt being involved with school council also meant parent participation. All respondents felt that the advantages of participating in high school was knowing what was happening in the school and finding out information that affected their children. In their opinion,

participation that was beneficial for them was remaining involved with parent council, providing academic guidance, and support for their children. Two parents indicated that getting to know the staff played an important role in the success of their children as well.

The grade 11 parents felt that changes to their parent participation was directly impacted by the lack of opportunities to volunteer in the school. All felt that the school council provided an opportunity to become involved. Two felt that they had decreased their appearance at the school out of respect for their children's independence. All three respondents acknowledged that participation had changed from grade 10 to 11. They felt that they were more involved in grade 11 in comparison to grade 10. Two parents stated that they continued to be involved with parent council, because there were fewer volunteer opportunities. Two respondents mentioned that the barriers to involvement included the social aspect, meaning their respect for the social concerns of their children and letting them be more independent. These same two respondents also identified that the lack of communication from the school definitely made supporting their children difficult to do. Two parents mentioned that the lack of opportunities made available also created a barrier to become more involved. Additional comments indicated that obtaining feedback from the parent community should be supported and valued by the school.

Grade 12 Findings

For grade 12 respondents parent participation meant volunteering in the school, attending field trips, and helping with activities going on in the school, like sporting events. The respondents felt the advantages to participating at the high school level was knowing what was happening in the school, providing emotional support for their children, and building relationships with staff in the building. Recognizing their

involvement with their children also enabled to parents to identify that they had an increased ability to provide academic guidance and support for their children. The respondents relayed that beneficial participation continued to be academic support, volunteering in the school, and communicating with staff.

The parents of grade 12 students identified that their participation had changed over the course of their children's years in high school. They felt there were fewer field trips and opportunities at the high school level. Two respondents felt they had decreased their appearance at the school out of respect for their children's need for independence. All three respondents indicated that their participation had decreased over the years. Two parents felt they were more involved in grade 12 in comparison to both grades 10 and 11. One parent felt there was no change in her involvement throughout her child's high school years. Two parents felt that it was attributed to the decrease in opportunities at the school level. One parent felt that grade 12 was a critical year due to post-secondary concerns. Barriers to involvement for this group of respondents was the lack of opportunities provided by the school, the website itself, and two mentioned their actual children, as they felt their children did not provide communication about their lives at school. Two parents also articulated that the lack of communication from the school directly impacted their involvement, and felt that they were unable to address their children's needs effectively. Tables 3, 4, and 5 summarize these major findings, which are categorized by grade level.

Table 3

Major Findings From Grade 10 Parent Participants

Question	Major Findings
Perceptions of participation	Volunteering in the school, showing interest in activities, studying, watching grades
Advantages of participation	Emotional support, guidance with tasks, academic guidance, morale of school, knowing what is happening
Types of participation	Driving to activities, academic support, relationship with staff physical presence
How participation has changed	Less involved in grade 10 (1 parent), no change since grade nine (2 parents)
Reasons for change	Increased independence, more emotional support, increased content difficulty
Barriers of participation	Respect for social concerns, increased independence, level of academics

Table 4

Major Findings From Grade 11 Parent Participants

Questions	Major Findings
Perceptions of participation	Volunteering in the school, having a voice, parent council
Advantages of participation	Morale of school, knowing what is happening
Types of participation	Emotional support, academic support, relationships with staff, parent council
How participation has changed	More in grade 11 than grade 10 (2 parents), more in junior high than senior high (1 parent)
Reasons for change	Increased independence, lack of opportunities, parent council
Barriers of participation	Respect for social concerns, increased independence, lack of communication, fewer opportunities, disconnect with administration, no feedback requested

Table 5

Major Findings From Grade 12 Parent Participants

Questions	Major Findings
Perceptions of participation	Volunteering in the school, attending field trips, helping with events, completing surveys
Advantages of participation	Emotional support, relationships with staff, morale of school, knowing what is happening
Types of participation	Academic support, volunteering in the school, communication with staff, physical presence
How participation has changed	More in grade 12 than grade 11 (2 parents), indifferent (1 parent)
Reasons for change	Fewer field trips, lack of opportunities, more critical years
Barriers of participation	Increased independence, lack of communication, fewer opportunities, website itself, own children, time

Data from the tables illustrated the following common trends among all three grades: parent perceptions included volunteering in the school; the advantages of participation specified the morale of the school and knowing what was happening; types of participation stated both academic support and interactions with staff; and the barriers of participation consisted of the increased independence of their children.

Chapter Five: Discussion

This study focused on parent perceptions of their participation in an urban public high school located in Alberta, Canada. It addressed the primary research question: What is the nature of parent participation at the high school level? To gain insight and enhance parent participation opportunities, interviews were conducted with nine parents of high school students in order to gather their perceptions about parent participation. Specifically, the research sought to garner insight into what parents perceive participation to mean; advantages to parent participation; how participation may have changed over time; factors contributing to changes in participation; potential barriers that impact parent participation; and insight into school structures for increased parent participation.

Data was gathered through interviews with three randomly selected participants from each grade level (10, 11, 12), for a total of nine respondents. Interviews were recorded using an audio device. Interview data were collected and analyzed using Malterud's (2012) qualitative thematic coding method. Each question was examined using both grade level comparisons and cross grade analysis by grouping results into common themes.

Four general themes emerged from this analysis of findings presented in the previous chapter: (1) types of parent participation (2) advantages of parent participation (3) changes in parent participation (4) barriers to parent participation. Interview questions one, three, and seven (Appendix A) addressed types of parent participation; questions two and seven addressed advantages of parent participation; questions four, five, and seven addressed changes in parent participation; and questions five, six, and seven addressed barriers to parent participation. Question five provided insight into both the changes in

parent participation and the barriers encountered by parents. Question seven provided evidence for all four themes since it offered an opportunity for respondents to reflect on the overall topic of parent participation. This chapter will explore these four general themes relative to parent participation at the high school level: the types, advantages, changes, and barriers. It will also identify contrasted results to previous research and recommendations for high school principals to consider. Lastly, the chapter will provide implications for future research and conclude the findings of this study.

Types of Parent Participation

Participants were asked about their perception of what types of activities constitute parent participation. In all nine interviews, participants provided their interpretation for the meaning of involvement, followed by examples to either clarify or further describe their context. The data yielded five major ideas: volunteering at the school, attending various activities, academic support, school council, and survey completion. Although respondents did not specify a ranked order for the five findings, all nine respondents characterized parent participation as volunteering at the school in a physical sense. The idea that parents are involved when they are physically present at the school is defined by Baker et al. (2016) as parent involvement. The examples provided of volunteering in the schools differed among respondents, however, all respondents indicated it was a criterion of parent participation.

Volunteering at the School

Parent participation for all nine respondents meant volunteering physically at the school and immersing themselves in the school environment. This encompassed the following activities: assisting with the distribution of graduation gowns, attending field

trips, helping in the library, participating in occupational presentations, completing various office tasks, providing assistance for teachers in the classroom, managing track and field days, and assisting with lunchtime supervision duties. These parents valued the ability to be involved in their children's education by being present inside the school. Data in this study concurred with the findings of Stelmach and Preston (2008) that parents "wanted to be part of activities and opportunities that gave to the school added educational value" (p. 71). This idea is also supported by Khan (1996), whose study concluded that parents as non-instructional volunteers are able to support the education of their children. Bloom (1992) provided further distinction between types of volunteering opportunities and concluded that parents, as *accessory* volunteers, to help with field trips and provide support around the school; whereas, parents as *educational* volunteers assist teachers with classroom tasks and other academic supports (as cited in Khan, 1996).

Parents did not indicate whether or not they perceived that volunteering would directly impact their children's academic achievement. Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) identified that having parents spend time in schools, like volunteering, did not necessarily have any impact in student achievement at the high school level. The parents in this investigation did not specify that they volunteered to improve their children's academic achievement; instead, they perceived their ability to volunteer reflected their parent participation in a broader sense of support. The data from parents in this investigation affirmed the findings of Bloom (1992) that parent participation as both accessory and educational volunteers provided the opportunity for parents to be physically at the school which, in their perspective, exhibited meaningful parent participation (as cited in Khan, 1996).

Attending Activities

While parent volunteering may not be correlated with academic achievement, Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) ascertained that certain types of parent involvement increases student engagement. The parents in this study supported Wang and Sheikh-Khalil's (2014) contention that attending extra-curricular and academic activities was believed to be an indication of support for their child's level of engagement; parents perceived this commitment to characterize participation. Demonstrating to their children that they care about various non-academic aspects of their education was seen to reflect parent participation. They described actions comprised of the following:

- driving their children to and from various events,
- spectating in athletic events,
- observing fine arts productions, and
- attending school presentations.

Observing children at school-related events demonstrated that parents cared and supported them. Although these examples provided a similar understanding of volunteering, they differ in terms of *who* parents perceived they were assisting. In the context of volunteering at a school, the focus was not solely for the benefit of their own child, rather for the greater benefit for others. In the context of attending non-academic activities, which also occur at the school, the focus was to benefit their own child. Parents in this investigation concurred with Wang and Sheikh-Khalil's (2014) findings that the physical presence of parents in a school provided emotional support and a sense of caring for their children.

Academic Support

Providing academic support was another form of involvement identified by parents in all three grade levels. Academic learning was grouped in two categories: home support and home-school support. For the purpose of this investigation, home support involves parents requiring no assistance or dependence on staff at the school; home-school support means staff at the school are involved in a direct manner.

Home support. Parents in this investigation provided the following examples of home support: financing tutoring, verbal reminders of study expectations, homework assistance, goal setting and post-secondary discussions, and the use of online portals to clarify academic progress. Parents in this study concurred with the findings of researchers like Brien and Stelmach (2009) that their roles deviated from direct contact with teachers and the curriculum to one of indirect support of their children's schooling. In a study by Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014), two elements of parent involvement were examined: home-based and academic socialization. In home-based involvement, parents provided resources for homework and extended learning in the home; in academic socialization, parents had discussions with their children about future plans and expectations (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) deduced that some degree of academic success of grade 10 students can be attributed to discussions in the home about future plans and academic expectations. Although parents in this investigation did not affirm that their participation directly improved academic success, parents felt home support was an asset to their children's academic success. All parents identified elements of home-based involvement to be parent participation.

Several parents mentioned the use of online portals at home to access their children's marks. Sad et al. (2016) explored this form of e-nvolvement, where parents used technological devices to monitor their children's learning. E-nvovlement enabled prompt and accessible academic reporting to parents (Sad et al., 2016). Similar to Sad et al's (2016) results, parents in this investigation also indicated that the online parent portal provided instant access to academic information, which enabled them to provide academic support to their children in the home. Sad et al. (2016) concluded that instant access to technology for parents, like the online parent portals, served as a means to support parent participation.

Home-school support. The second category, home-school support, involved parents needing further access to school supports in order to assist their children with academics in the home. Some examples in this category were: attending interviews and meetings with staff at the school; initiating contact with counsellors to discuss course selections; fostering relationships with staff by being present in the building; and the use of email to clarify concerns and communicate with staff. Some parents addressed the desire to advocate for their children, and used email as the platform to do so when communicating with staff at the school. This theme corresponded with those in Olmstead's (2013) study that examined the relationship between technology and parent perceptions of involvement. Findings from her study indicated that parents found technology useful in improving and sustaining communication between home and school (Olmstead, 2013). The parents in this investigation concurred that the ability to communicate using technology fostered academic success for their children. In essence, "the portal allows parents to directly communicate with teachers via email through a

direct link if they have questions about their student's progress" (Olmstead, 2013, p. 31). Communication with staff to support learning in the home was perceived as effective parent participation for the respondents in this investigation.

School Council

School councils provide a framework for parents to become involved in their children's education. Schools in Alberta are required to adhere to the guidelines and policies outlined by the Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA) and, accordingly, parents have the opportunity to attend meetings offered by the school to gain an understanding of the school's perspectives and believed that involvement with parent council reflected their participation. The parents in this investigation substituted the legal term 'school council' with 'parent council'[2]. Attendance at monthly school council meetings was mentioned by four participants who felt that these monthly meetings provided the following:

- opportunities to participate in school-based decisions,
- provision of information,
- clarification of challenges,
- a platform to vocalize concerns to administration, and
- opportunities to seek clarifications of school and board level directives.

The examples provided by the parents in this investigation supports the conclusion of Leithwood and Menzies (1998) that School-Based Management (SBM) systems provided "opportunities for parent input into decisions" (p. 337). Parents in this investigation invested their time to attend these after school meetings and perceived attending school

[2] For the purpose of this paper, school council and parent council are used synonymously.

council as a beneficial factor in their children's education. Parents felt that their attendance at school council meetings reflected their participation in their children's schooling.

Completing Surveys

For some parents, school councils provided opportunities for parents to vocalize their opinions with school administration. Another resource used by parents to share their opinions was the completion of school-based surveys. Four parents felt that completing school surveys reflected their participation by providing feedback for the school to make improvements; affirming that parents were being consulted about decisions affecting their children's education; and voicing their opinions on a number of academic and non-academic issues.

Khan (1996) investigated barriers to parent participation and included the premises by Davies (1987) that the education system itself is bureaucratic, with an autonomy of teacher-based decisions in schools. Parents in this investigation indicated their awareness of the bureaucratic nature of schools, and they welcomed surveys as one way to provide feedback. They supported suggestions made by Khan (1996) to include parent perspectives when making decisions. The findings in Baker et al. (2016) further highlighted the importance for schools to "value their [parent] input and participation outside the school building" (p. 180). Parents in this investigation perceived the completion of surveys as a valued process of seeking their participation. Research completed by Stelmach and Preston (2008) recommended that principals gain an understanding of the capabilities and preferences of parents when creating opportunities for involvement. Robinson and Harris (2014) further supported Stelmach and Preston

(2008) and concluded that schools would benefit from an increased understanding of activities that are valued by parents. They believed that this would help schools and parents work towards a common vision. In this investigation, parents' participation in a few surveys provided the school with some feedback and parents attested that the opportunity to participate in their children's education felt like involvement.

Advantages to Parent Participation

Participants were asked about their perception of advantages that resulted from parent participation. Some responses were repeated across all grade levels, while other responses were relative to specific grades. In this investigation, the data yielded three major categories of perceived advantages: provision of information, emotional support, and academic guidance. A study by Epstein et al. (2008) postulated advantages of parent participation to include: increased literacy and numeracy; improved attendance; and decreased negative behaviors in school. The respondents in this study did not identify improved attendance or a decrease in negative behavior as advantages of parent participation. They did, however, concur with Epstein et al. (2018) that the intent to provide academic guidance was to improve their children's grades. In this investigation, the major advantage consistent across all three grades was the provision of information; the other three major themes varied among grade levels.

Providing Information

Five parents in this study stated that an advantage of parent participation was their enhanced understanding of "what's going on." Parents indicated that they wanted to understand the overall morale inside the building and find out about things going on inside the school. Some felt that having a presence in the school gave them insight into

the overall atmosphere of the building. They wanted to see if the school exhibited a positive or negative morale. A study by Constantino (2007) concluded that schools should focus their attention on creating highly welcoming environments that convey positive feelings. A later study by Rodriguez et al. (2009) also proposed that the presence of positive school climates encouraged parents to engage in their children's learning. The parents in this investigation supported the findings of both Constantino (2007) and Rodriguez et al. (2009), they felt that the climate of a school was important and impacted their participation.

Along with the morale of the building, parents were interested in knowing about the events that occurred at the school such as guest speakers, sporting events, extracurricular activities and what was happening in classrooms. According to Brown and Vaughn (2015), communication with parents needs to be consistent and informative because it directly impacts the perception of school morale. The parents in this investigation indicated that they used school council meetings, social media, and the school website to seek information about school-based activities. They felt that knowing details of events and opportunities fostered conversations with their children. Once again, the parents in this investigation supported Constantino's (2007) findings that improved communication and an increased frequency of posted information increased parent participation at the high school level. The data indicated that several parents used school council meetings as a means to receive communication; those that attended were privy to information that would not otherwise be shared. In contrast to Constantino's (2007) study where few parents attended meetings, the parents in this investigation indicated that there was a high level of attendance at various meetings. Parents in this investigation acquired

information and were able to ask their children to further expand on the ideas brought forward from school council meetings, social media, or the school website. Similarly, Olmstead (2013) reiterated the importance of having regularly updated websites to sustain parent participation. In essence, the parents in this study perceived that both technology and school council meetings served as platforms to increase communication, which they felt was an advantage to parent participation.

Emotional Support

Four parents in this investigation alluded to the emotional support they provided as constituting one advantage of their participation. The examples highlighted direct interactions with their children. One respondent stated she felt positive about her ability to take her child home when she was ill at school. Another respondent relayed that she ensured her children's needs were met by nurturing them when needed. A third respondent felt that it was important for her child to know that she cared about her well-being and was able to provide any supports required. The examples provided by the respondents concur with findings by Pomerantz et al. (2007) that parent participation benefits the mental health or psychological functioning of children. Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) similarly found that the physical presence of parents impacted the child's sense of emotional support. Conversely, however, Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) noted that the provision of emotional support was dependent on being physically present at the school. For the parents in this investigation, the data reflected that the proximity to the school was not dependent on the emotional support for their children.

Parents continued to provide emotional support through ongoing conversations with their children about day-to-day interactions. Throughout the interviews, parents

discussed the importance of relationships as an indication of emotional support. Two main categories of relationships occurred in the data: (1) knowledge about circles of friendship; and (2) parent connections to staff. Parents conveyed that conversations with their children often involved the topics of interactions with their peers, and included both positive and negative encounters. Some parents indicated that they offered advice, reassurance, or contacted outside agencies to support their children. Parents also indicated that strengthening their relationships with staff at school was an asset. They conveyed that having a positive rapport with staff made it easier to make contact and the more frequently they did, the stronger their relationships became. Parents indicated that this was an advantage of parent participation because they believed that their relationships with staff directly supported the well-being of their children. According to both Catsambis (2001) and Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014), their data supported the notion that positive relationships does directly foster academic outcomes. Parents in this study concurred and stated that the relationships with staff supported the well-being of their children, which, in turn, positively affected their grades in school. A study by Brown and Vaugh (2015) concluded that increased communication fostered stronger relationships and stronger relationships fostered trust between parents and staff. One parent in this investigation supported this connection and stated that she attributed her ability to emotionally support her child to the relationships she developed with administration.

In this investigation strong relationships with staff were highly valued. Some parents linked the strength in relationships with staff to success in their abilities to advocate for their children. Having rapport with staff made parents feel comfortable contacting them about their children's needs in school. In order for parents to advocate for

their children, they first needed a relationship with staff in the school. Parents in this investigation identified that the provision of emotional support for their own child, combined with strong relationships with staff in the school, fostered their ability to advocate for their children's needs. Bloom (1992) similarly postulated that advocacy for parents was one way that parents could get involved (as cited in Khan, 1996). The parents in this study felt strongly that supporting their children emotionally was dependent on their ability to directly interact with their children, build relationships, and act as an advocate.

Academic Guidance

Four parents in this study stated that one advantage of their participation was the ability to provide academic guidance for their high school children. Parents deemed their guidance as a necessity for their children's academic success. Researchers such as Oxley (2013) and Catsambis (2001) concluded that there is, in fact, a correlation between parent involvement and student achievement. Conversely, Robinson and Harris (2014) opposed the opinions of parents in this investigation and proposed that there was a lack of evidence to support a positive correlation between parent guidance and increased student success. Pomerantz et al. (2007) concurred with Robinson and Harris (2014) when concluding that parent involvement may not foster academic success, but rather their child’s mental health. Pomerantz et al. (2007) concluded that parent involvement may have more pronounced benefits for some, rather than all children.

The parents in this investigation certainly contradicted the notions of both Pomerantz et al. (2007) and Robinson and Harris (2014), and perceived that their involvement in their children’s education included a variety of supports and strategies

that may directly improve their children's grades. Parents in this study concurred with researchers such as Constantino (2006), Epstein (2008), Griffin and Galassi (2010), Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, and Davies (2007), Machen, Wilson, and Notar (2005) and Rappino (2008), who all provided evidence to validate the positive correlation between parent involvement and increased student achievement. Epstein et al. (2018) provided further detail that parent involvement can greatly "influence skills, test scores, and other achievements over time" (p. 17). The parents in this investigation did not provide examples of improvement in specific subject areas, but rather the examples and strategies they perceived necessary for their children's academic success. Parents in this study supported the research of Brien and Stelmach (2009), that the activities and opportunities to support their children's learning were more important than the end result of academic achievement.

Overall, through the examples and strategies provided by the parents in this investigation, two categories of academic guidance were identified: (1) general support, and (2) future planning. Some examples of general support included: strategies to improve grades, monitoring marks and online portals, assistance with studying for various academia, and assistance with course selections. In regards to course selections, one parent indicated the need to contact the school to change a course after a deadline passed because her son was floundering and his marks were extremely low. Catsambis (2001) would classify this scenario as a negative correlation and would suggest that increased parent involvement occurred when parent-school contacts were required to handle academic problems. Overall, Catsambis (2001) would further support the notion

that this situation reflected parent involvement as a means to directly support the academic success of high school students.

The second category, future planning, included examples about the preparation for post-secondary endeavors. One area of overlap from the previous category of current high school support involved assistance from parents with course selections with a primary focus on post-secondary requirements. Parents provided other examples of support such as assistance with goal setting and post-secondary discussions. Catsambis (2001) and Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) postulated that positive relationships fostered conversations about planning for college and the ability to sustain an academic program in high school. The parents in this investigation believed that positive relationships with their children allowed them to engage in post-secondary discussions. These conversations about post-secondary discussions were not solely parents of grade 12 students, but grades 10 and 11 as well. The study by Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) concluded that grade 10 parents who engaged in discussions with their children about their future academic plans saw improvements in their children's academic success. Parents in this investigation certainly valued conversations with their children about setting goals and post-secondary explorations to sustain academic achievement. They viewed these conversations to be an important aspect of their participation.

Changes to Participation

Participants were asked about changes in their parent participation throughout their children's school years and, more specifically, in their children's high school years. The data yielded two major ideas: general changes and high school changes. All

participants in this investigation recognized that their participation varied throughout their children's elementary, junior high, and senior high years in school.

General Changes

All nine participants reported that their participation changed throughout their children's educational journey and, more specifically, that it had decreased as their children aged. Participants specified that their children's time in elementary school reflected their highest level of involvement. When their children completed junior high school, their involvement decreased. As their children entered high school, their involvement was substantially lower than at both the elementary and junior high school levels. This trend is supported by Dauber and Epstein's (1993) finding that as students progressed through school, parent involvement continued to decrease. Table 6 provides details of various volunteer roles for parents in this study, grouped by grade level.

Table 6

Parent Volunteer Roles Organized by Grade Level

Elementary Involvement	Junior High Involvement	High School Involvement
academic support	academic support	academic support
attendance at school council	attendance at school council	attendance at school council
assistance with office duties like photocopying and filing	assistance with course selections	assistance with course selections
assistance for teachers in classrooms	supervisory roles on band trips	discussion about goals and post-secondary
noon hour supervision	supports for extracurricular activities	
deliverance of hot lunches		
supervisory roles on field trips		
coordination of fundraising events		
driving children to and from school		
help with general tasks in the school		

There were fewer examples provided by parents for their involvement at the high school level in comparison to both the elementary and junior high levels. Catsambis (2001) postulated that the reasons for different levels of parent involvement could be attributed to the decrease in necessity of some activities as their children matured and changed schools.

The data in the present study revealed two consistent trends of involvement throughout their children's schooling: academic support and attendance at school council. Participants in this study concurred with the findings by Catsambis (2001) that parent involvement was positively correlated with academic success from elementary school through to high school. Parents in this investigation affirmed that they supported their

children's academic endeavours throughout all levels of their schooling, and that they valued their contributions at school council meetings throughout all levels of their children's schooling. They further described their participation as a shared framework of decision-making known as School Based Management (SBM) (Malen, Ogawa, & Krantz, as cited in Leithwood & Menzies, 1998). Since school councils are mandated for all public, francophone, and charter schools, opportunities to be involved in decision-making is provided for the majority of elementary, junior, and senior high school parents. Harrison and Kachur (1999) supported this notion and reiterated that parents are being provided increased opportunities to engage with their children's schools. Hill and Taylor (2004) concluded that when educational responsibilities were shared between schools and families, student success became the primary focus.

High School Changes

Changes in parent participation throughout just the high school years varied among grades; the only consistent aspect across all three grades was providing academic support. Two grade 11 parents and two grade 12 parents indicated they were more involved in those grades compared to other grades. The reason for increased involvement in grades 11 and 12 was attributed to post-secondary planning. This purpose aligned with Eccles and Harold's (1996) findings that, as children aged, the type of parent involvement changed from behavioral support to academic guidance. Two grade 10 parents felt there was no change in the level of their parent participation in comparison to the junior high years. The third parent felt that she was less involved in grade 10 compared to grade nine, except for the provision of emotional support. She felt this was due to the transition into a new school. Her perception opposed the notion made by Catsambis (2001) that high

school parent participation decreased due to increased maturity and the transition to a new school. In this context, parent participation in grade 10 increased only due to the transition from a junior high to a senior high school.

Barriers to Parent Participation

Participants were asked their perception of barriers they encountered that limited their participation throughout their children's high school experience, an important area of insight necessary to improve parent involvement. Robinson and Harris (2014) reiterated the importance of gaining this understanding: to improve programs for parent involvement and work towards a common vision for student success. Constantino's (2007) findings supported those of Robinson and Harris (2014) that leaders must acknowledge family engagement to promote a common vision for both staff and the community. The data in this investigation yielded three barriers: child-based challenges, school-based challenges, and parent-based limitations.

Child-Based Challenges

Child-based challenges were compromised of responses primarily based upon the child's own beliefs and actions. The data in this category reflected two types of child-based challenges: social concerns and children's behavior. Six parents in this investigation indicated that their children believed that their social reputation was highly important to them. These children communicated with their parents that their presence could embarrass them and, thus, affect integral social relationships with peers. Parents indicated that in order to sustain a positive relationship with their children, they felt pressured to refrain from being around their children while they were with their peers. A

study by Deslandes and Cloutier (2002) deduced that there is increased autonomy desired by students, causing parents to perceive this as a barrier to their involvement.

Four parents in this investigation identified their own children to be barriers to their involvement. Parents felt that their children prevented them access to various aspects of the school and provided the following examples of these behaviors: forgetting permission forms, lack of test discussions, lack of communication about their classes and events at the school, purposeful disconnect with their lives, and hidden academic endeavours. Researchers like Pomerantz et al. (2007) supported the ideas of the parents in this investigation and proposed that the autonomy of students greatly impacted the opportunities for parents to become involved. Pomerantz et al. (2007) concluded that the intrinsic motivation of students is difficult to measure, which the parents in this investigation also referenced.

School-Based Challenges

School-based challenges are barriers parents perceived as being embedded in the environment of the school or protocols of the school itself. Parents in this investigation supported the notion of Davies (1987), that the education system itself was a barrier due to its bureaucratic nature (as cited in Khan, 1996). Data in this category reflected four distinct sub themes: lack of volunteer opportunities, uninviting atmosphere of the school, lack of positive relationships, and absence of communication.

Lack of volunteer opportunities. Six parents in this investigation relayed that their disconnection with the school was due to the lack of volunteer opportunities. They felt that, in comparison to their children's previous levels of schooling, the high school years offered less opportunities to attend field trips or be selected as a volunteer. Vaden-

Kiernan and Chandler (1996) concurred with parents in this investigation and posited that elementary schools communicate more about field trips and provided more opportunities to be involved than high schools. Bloom (1992) further supported the parents and affirmed that volunteering with field trips was an integral aspect of parent participation (as cited in Khan, 1996).

The uninviting atmosphere of the school. The atmosphere of the school for these parents was perceived as a barrier to their participation. One parent alluded to the solemnness of the school in general. Other parents felt that the atmosphere of the school lacked energy and positive vibes. Liontos (1991) postulated that when parents perceived a negative morale at the school, their level of involvement decreased. Constantino (2007) similarly affirmed the beliefs of parents in this investigation and conveyed differences among administrators in creating a highly welcoming environment. Even the implementation of strategies such as designated parking stalls to increase parent accessibility to the school can alter the atmosphere. Rodriguez et al. (2009) continued to support the perception of parents in this investigation and concluded that positive school climates that value parent participation will foster an environment and atmosphere that improved learning.

Lack of positive relationships. The atmosphere of the school also directly impacted the relationships between staff and parents. Parents in this investigation relayed that the mannerisms, attitudes, and interactions with staff greatly impacted their perceptions of the school, which also influenced how parents interacted with their children. Parents experienced a general lack of positive interactions, which caused them to perceive staff relations as a barrier to their participation. At times, parents felt teachers

were making decisions without their insight, thus perpetuating a negativity towards teachers. Davies (1987) addressed concerns over the autonomy of teacher-based decisions, which highlighted the barriers that parents face (as cited in Khan, 1996). Researchers like Brien and Stelmach (2009) confirmed that, "… the challenges to parent involvement are located in teacher resistance and control" (p. 6).

As previously noted, there are fewer opportunities in high school for parents to build relationships with staff, which directly impacted the level of participation for parents in this investigation. Pushor and Murphy (2004) and Pushor (2007) concluded that relationship building is essential in order to support positive interactions between parents and teachers. Duchnowski, Kutash, and Romney (2006) identified that the role of teachers was imperative to parent participation, and noted that teachers often failed to provide clarifications or communicate ways that parents could be involved. The parents in this study relayed that the atmosphere of the school, relationships between staff and parents, and the lack of communication from teachers were all barriers to their participation.

Absence of communication. A lack of communication from teachers was another example of a larger area of concern for parents. They felt that there was poor communication in multiple areas of the school. Parents stated that they were frustrated with communication from both administration and teachers, which created feelings of disconnect from events at the school. This caused parents to question whether volunteer opportunities failed to exist or if the opportunities were simply not communicated. Further, they felt the school did not share or relay information about events and academic successes. Constantino (2007) concurred with the parents in this investigation and

concluded that improved communication would remove barriers to parent involvement. The dissertation by Johnstone-Schrag (2011) also supported Constatino's (2007) findings and reiterated that communication needed improvement in order to foster positive partnerships between homes and schools.

Another contention in the area of communication involved technology. Parents in this investigation were frustrated with school-related websites and social media that were either outdated or missing pertinent information related to their children's school experiences. Olmstead (2013) confirmed that websites and online formats were effective tools to communicate with parents and identified the importance of websites being regularly updated, which certainly supported the perceptions of the parents in this study. Sad et al. (2016) further supported this finding and concluded that technology has fostered communication for schools by making it easier and more accessible for parents to acquire information. Constantino (2007) encouraged administrators to increase the frequency of their postings online to improve clarity for parents. The parents in this study were willing to use technology as the platform to access information, but felt that it was outdated or incomplete, which resulted in a barrier to their participation.

Lastly, parents exhibited frustration with the school's lack of feedback. They felt the school did not adequately involve them in decisions, welcome their opinions, or seek feedback. A few parents felt that although the school was educating their children, their partnership was not recognized. In other words, they perceived that communication with the school was not valued. Bloom (1992) recognized the important role of parents and encouraged administrators to involve parents as part of decision-making processes and assistance with school structure changes (as cited in Khan, 1996). Khan's (1996) findings

concurred with those of this study, that administrators consider parent perspectives when making decisions and asked parents to identify ways they would have liked to participate. Overall, both researchers concluded that school administrators must value the insight provided by parents and have the desire and willingness to include their voices in decision-making processes. If this condition was met, parents would, in turn, improve their relationships with staff. Brown and Vaughn (2015) ascertained that increased communication with parents did in fact improve relationships, and improved relationships directly increased trust between parents and staff.

Parent-Based Limitations

Parent based limitations are factors that parents identified about themselves that affected their levels of participation. Parents in this investigation openly discussed situations, provided examples of their own contexts, and related that their own circumstances affected their levels of participation in their children's high school years. The data in this category reflected three groupings: concerns for independence, time constraints, and the level of academia.

Respecting independence. Four parents in this study indicated that it was their responsibility to allow their children to mature and make their own choices, and refrain from interfering with their decisions. In essence, parents felt they needed to respect their children’s desire for independence. Researchers like Eccles and Harold (1996) concurred with parents in this study and concluded that increased student independence did, in fact, impact levels of parent participation. Catsambis (2001) also postulated that as children matured, parent participation changed, based on the changing needs of adolescents.

Parents in this study recognized their own perceptions of their children's need for independence as a barrier to their participation.

Time constraints. Another limitation reflected in the data was the parents' decreased ability to participate in their children's lives in high school due to employment schedules. Three parents mentioned that their work demands created limitations to participate to the extent that they desired. Some examples of these employment restrictions included work hours, work commitments, exhaustion after working, and increased responsibilities outside of the work day. Epstein (1985) speculated that parent participation could be influenced by decreased time available to spend with their children. Leitch and Tangri (1988) also speculated that obligations would negatively impact parent participation. Parents affirmed these findings; time constraints did, in fact, impact their ability to participate. The study by Ouimette et al. (2006) described a school that recognized that the working hours of parents would impact their involvement, and therefore, considered the circumstances of parents when they made decisions about meeting times and events at the school. Constantino (2007) described circumstances similar to the parents in this study, where working parents experienced barriers to participation, and encouraged administrators to utilize technology to increase communication with parents.

Level of academia. The final parent-based limitation the data yielded focused on academics. Parents in this investigation conveyed that they were unable to be as involved with their children's academia due to the increased complexity of curricular content. Some parents felt that extra supports from the school would have helped to alleviate these challenges and suggested the school hold information nights or seminars related to

technology, social concerns, and mental health. Both Catsambis (2001) and Eccles and Harold's (1996) research supports those of the parents in this study, that parents' knowledge levels directly impacted the support provided by parents in the home. Constantino (2007) further explored the idea of increased difficulties with academia for high school parents and offered two strategies: teachers posting explanations of various topics and how to assist their children in curricula content; and school leaders sending newsletters related to curriculum in parent-friendly language. Parents in this investigation understood their limitations of curricula and hoped the school would assist them with strategies to facilitate the support for their children's academics.

Contrasted Results

A variety of research cited in this paper identify plausible barriers encountered by parents. Some of these differed from the data in this study. For instance, Liontos (1991) postulated that cultural backgrounds and language challenges would create barriers for parent participation. None of the participants in this study mentioned culture or language concerns as barriers to their participation. Likewise, Paylor (2011) suggested that ethnicity would create barriers; once again, none of the parents alluded to ethnicity as a barrier to participation. Robinson and Harris (2014) supported some of Paylor's (2011) findings and concluded that both race and social class were barriers for parents. The parents in this study did not perceive social class to be a constraint on their levels of participation. It can be concluded that the data in this study affirmed the findings of some researchers and disputed the findings of others. Accordingly, areas of future research may serve to increase awareness of barriers not reported in this study.

Recommendations

As a result of findings from this study, eight recommendations may be considered by high school principals wishing to enhance parent participation at their school. These suggestions are relevant to the current Leadership Quality Standard (Alberta Education, 2018), a legislated document that prescribes the expectations of educational leaders in the province of Alberta (Appendix G). The following list identifies the relevant competencies and supporting indicators that attend to parent participation based on this study's findings:

Competency One: ***Fostering Effective Relationships***

This competency includes the expectation that, "a leader builds positive working relationships with members of the school community and local community" (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 4). Since participants in this study perceived productive relationships with both staff and administration to be a school-based challenge and barrier to parent participation, it is important that opportunities to strengthen partnerships between parents and staff are numerous and widely communicated. Parents perceived that their ability to gain an understanding of the morale in the building contributed to their provision of information, which they listed as an advantage to parent participation. It is imperative that staff and administration work towards sustaining a "welcoming, caring, respectful and safe" atmosphere in the school (Alberta School Councils, 2017, p. 4). In order to strengthen partnerships between parents and staff, high school principals may consider strategies such as:

- meet-the-teacher evenings,
- invitations to school assemblies and pep rallies,

- inclusion with sporting events in and around the school working alongside staff,
- invitations to showcase student successes,
- use of the career and technology classes to foster student business entrepreneur skills for the public (like haircuts, catering, construction projects, plant sales, bake sales, automotive shows),
- take your parent to work days,
- activities for parent leaders in the school like the maintenance of displays,
- volunteer appreciation teas,
- drop-in conversation time designated to support languages offered in the school,
- appearance as guest speakers in classrooms, and
- involvement of teachers through phone calls, introduction letters, emails and newsletters.

Competency Two: *Modelling Commitment to Professional Learning*

This competency includes the expectation that, "a leader engages in career-long professional learning and ongoing critical reflection to identify opportunities for improving leadership, teaching, and learning" (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 4). It would be advantageous for administrators to receive feedback from parents, reflect on their concerns, and provide additional communication so that parents feel their opinions are valued. Since the participants in this study perceived communication to be a barrier to parent participation, it is important that opportunities to gather insight through surveys, polls, and conversations are scheduled and utilized. This might provide administrators

with the opportunity to research additional strategies for dealing with concerns and facilitate improved learning and teaching.

Competency Three: *Embodying Visionary Leadership*

This competency includes the expectation that, "a leader collaborates with the school community to create and implement a shared vision for student success, engagement, learning, and well-being" (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 5). Since the participants in this study identified the school council to be a valuable structural element within the school that allowed for parent participation, it is important for leaders to encourage community members to attend these meetings and respond by "promoting innovation, enabling positive change, and fostering commitment to continuous improvement" (Alberta School Councils, 2017, p. 5). Principals may consider communicating their shared visions with the community in the following ways:

- inviting board members to attend school council meetings,
- sharing, discussing, and posting the school's three year plans,
- inviting Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA) to discuss the roles and responsibilities of school councils and decision making processes,
- visibility of the school's mission and goals,
- inviting speakers that reflect the school's diverse population,
- educational opportunities for the community to hear First Nations, Métis, and Inuit teachings that support the curricula students are engaged with, and
- inviting parents to attend results reviews of shared data.

Competency Four: ***Leading a Learning Community***

This competency includes the expectation that, "a leader nurtures and sustains a culture that supports evidence-informed teaching and learning" (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 5). The participants in this study identified volunteering as a highly important aspect of participation. Incidentally, parents perceived volunteering to be both a school-based challenge and a barrier to participation. Parents also felt the school did not adequately provide supplemental information about events such as mental health seminars. This belief makes it important for leaders to "collaborate with community service agencies to provide wrap-around supports for all students who may require them, including those the mental health needs" and "establish opportunities and expectations for the positive involvement of parents/guardians in supporting student learning" (Alberta School Councils, 2017, p. 5). To encourage parents as partners, high school principals may consider using parents' talents and expertise by involving them as both accessory and educational volunteers (Bloom, as cited in Khan, 1996).This may include the following range of activities for parents to volunteer:

- guest speakers,
- graduation assistants,
- tutors,
- assistance in career and technology classes,
- small group interactions,
- supervisors of field trips,
- supports for students,
- extracurricular events,

- teacher assistance,
- organization for social events and drama productions,
- special education supports,
- office assistants,
- worksite placements,
- open house, and
- meet-the-teacher opportunities.

Competency Five: ***Supporting the Application of Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit***

This competency includes the expectation that, "a leader supports the school community in acquiring and applying foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit for the benefit of all students" (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 6). The parent participants in this study did not provide specific information or allude to the First Nation, Métis and Inuit community in their responses. This could be attributed to the limitation in this study, namely, the low number of self-identified Indigenous people in the school being examined. However, the participants in this study indicated that school based events, improved relationships, and communication were valued types of parent participation. It is important for leaders wishing to enhance this competency, to embrace opportunities that foster valued types of parent participation. Principals may consider offering cultural activities and inviting speakers knowledgeable in this area to share their ideas at information nights or use the school council as a platform to create these opportunities. This will provide a means for parent participants to gain a better

understanding of our First Nation, Métis, and Inuit people, whereby developing relationships and including parents in topics relevant to their children's academic success.

Competency Six: *Providing Instructional Leadership*

This competency includes the expectation that, "a leader ensures [that] every student[s] has access to quality teaching and optimum learning experiences" (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 6). Since the participants in this study identified concerns with their own levels of academia in home-school support as a limitation and barrier to participation, it would be beneficial for leaders to provide academic supports for parents to assist with student learning. This may include the following:

- hosting drop-in learning nights,
- posting extended supports online,
- access to videos of teachers reviewing concepts,
- 'cheat sheets' for parents,
- creating a parent google classroom,
- learning blogs, and
- class 'news'.

It is recommended that principals encourage teachers to access various platforms to communicate effectively with parents and supports for academia are encouraged and reflected using a variety of methods.

Competency Seven: *Developing Leadership Capacity*

This competency includes the expectation that, "a leader provides opportunities for members of the school community to develop leadership capacity and support others in fulfilling their educational roles" (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 7). The participants in

this study identified concerns with the decision-making processes and perceived school-based challenges in the area of communication and as a barrier to participation. As previously mentioned, parents in this study regarded the school council as a valuable structural element; leaders should embed collaborative, decision-making processes by, "promoting the engagement of parents in school council(s) and facilitating the constructive involvement of school council(s) in school life" (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 7). Principals may consider the following strategies to promote attendance at school councils:

- offering food created by students,
- inviting students to attend the meetings,
- inviting guest speakers to inform parents about various topics like mental health, Lesbian Gay Straight Alliance Supports, street drugs and alcohol, social media, and other relevant topics to teenagers,
- numeracy and literacy consultants,
- post-secondary and career planning experts,
- post-secondary fairs,
- leaders from the trades industry,
- school resource officers,
- board members, and
- survey parents for their topics of interest.

High school principals may want to utilize the school council platform as an opportunity to develop strong relationships with leaders in the parent population.

Competency Eight: ***Managing School Operations and Resources***

This competency includes the expectation that, "a leader effectively directs operations and manages resources" (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 7). The participants in this study indicated that the information relayed for communication purposes needed to be updated; the content of the websites are relevant; and communication distributed via technology platforms are easy to use. High school principals may consider designating specific individuals to ensure websites and social media are prioritized as effective resources in communicating with parents. It would also be advantageous for principals to gather feedback from parents about their technology needs and provide any necessary supports for the use of dynamic online portals.

Competency Nine: ***Understanding and Responding to the Larger Societal Context***

This competency includes the expectation that indicates that, "a leader understands and appropriately responds to the political, social, economic, legal and cultural contexts impacting schools and the school authority" (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 7). The participants in this study indicated their struggle with the content of information from the school. School leaders may consider opportunities to increase engagement by "facilitating school community members' understanding of local, provincial, national, and international issues and trends related to education" (Alberta School Councils, 2017, p. 7). In order to alleviate these challenges, high school principals may consider using a variety of platforms to improve parents' understanding of educational trends, such as:

- hosting information evenings,
- inviting individuals directly involved in decision-making processes,

- posting relevant links online,
- collaborating with other schools to host information nights,
- distributing news bulletins,
- using messaging systems to notify where to access additional information, and
- using a variety of technology strategies to communicate information to parents.

Implications for Future Research

This body of research has some limitations that require consideration prior to drawing conclusions from the data and making broad assumptions. Changes to this research will provide the opportunity to increase the depth of the study and yield more findings in the area of parent participation at the high school level. One limitation in this study was the sample size. Although some themes were identified from this urban high school, perhaps collecting data from all the high schools in the area would provide insight into both the similarities and differences within a geographic setting. This research could also be further expanded using a province wide survey to identify both the similarities and differences of urban and rural settings of parent participation at the high school level.

Another limitation is the measure used to collect data. Rather than surveying only parents of students in grades 10 to 12, future investigations might use a longitudinal approach and follow parents of students in grade seven, as they entered junior high, until their completion of high school, in grade 12, to gather information about plausible trends. Another consideration would be to survey not only the respondents, but also their children to gather data from both perspectives. This would provide insight into

discussions around topics such as peer circles, relationships, academic supports, independence levels, and social concerns. This data could be used to modify best practices that would be relevant to both parents and children regarding parent participation.

A third limitation in this study was access to participants. The phone calls made in this study occurred during the daytime, primarily during typical work hours. A bias in this situation were the respondents that were home to accept the phone calls for this study. For future studies, varying the time of day to make phone calls may provide an increased level of variances in respondents. This may increase the chance of identifying new trends and ideas.

A fourth limitation was the use of self- reported data. The data was collected and verified by the same researcher; having only one researcher eliminated the opportunity to identify variances in perspectives. Future studies may benefit from having more than one researcher to lead ongoing conversations that provide different perspectives on themes and other constructs within this study. This may assist with the identification of new themes and ideas, due to the increased insight and knowledge of other researchers.

A fifth limitation involved the lack of prior research available in Canada with reference to parent participation at the high school level. A further challenge was finding studies focussed at the high school level with contexts similar to the ones in this study. This resulted in a decreased array of literature from which to draw conclusions. Although some literature was used from other countries, one topic that continued to lack current data was the advantages of parent participation. Gaining an understanding of the factors that motivate parents is essential in order for leaders to increase participation from

parents. As time progresses, there will likely be more data available to support the topic of parent participation in high school.

Conclusion

Parent participation in high school aged children (14-19) remains a topic of interest for educational leaders. It also remains an area of study across the world. Researchers have completed recent studies at global levels to gain further insight into parent participation at the high school level. These include: Aaltonen (2016) in Finland; Lazaridou and Aspasia (2015) in Greece; Scanlon, Powell, Leahy, Jenkinson, and Byrne (2019) in Ireland; Cook and Jennings (2016) in Jamaica; and Hartas (2015) who studied Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. Although this topic is examined worldwide, there is little information available in Canada in relation to high school levels of parent participation. The purpose of this study was to gain insight from high school parents and guardians in an urban setting in Alberta, Canada, about their experiences of involvement in order to derive best practices for high school principals to consider implementing in their schools. The primary research question in this study was: what is the nature of parent participation at the high school level?

Four general themes emerged from the data: types, advantages, changes, and barriers. In the first theme, five main types of parent participation were identified: volunteering, completing surveys, academic support, school council and attending activities. Interestingly, upon closer examination, there is research to support the correlation between student activities, parent participation, and school engagement (Niia,

Almqvist, Ellinor, & Granlund, 2015). The parents in this study classified their attendance at various activities as an important component of parent participation.

In the second theme, three advantages to parent participation were identified: the provision of information, emotional support, and academic guidance. With further investigation, there are additional studies to highlight the importance of parent involvement in post-secondary planning with high school children. Recent researchers like Hill and Wang (2015), Mwangi, Cabrera, and Kurban (2018), Salas (2016), Hill et al. (2018) and Ross (2016) concurred with the parents in this study that high school parent participation greatly impacts the pathway to post-secondary pursuits.

Data in the third theme revealed two trends: general changes and high school changes. All parents in this study indicated that as their children aged, their participation decreased. Participants revealed a higher level of involvement in grades 11 and 12 and attributed the increase to post-secondary planning. Parents in this study identified concerns with their children's lack of post-secondary planning and motivation. Researchers like Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, and Holbein (2005) provided insight into the correlation between parent involvement and student motivation. Future studies investigating this topic would provide insight into what motivates students to either welcome or disregard parent participation.

Lastly, data in the fourth theme revealed three barriers: child-based challenges, school-based challenges, and parent-based challenges. Two child-based challenges were identified: social concerns and the lack of responsibility. Four school-based challenges were identified: the lack of volunteer opportunities; the uninviting atmosphere of the school; the lack of positive relationships; and the absence of communication. With an

increased infusion of technology available to schools, how did technology evolve as a barrier to parent participation? To what extent does technology benefit or hinder communication with schools? Recent researchers like Ho, Hung, and Chen (2013), Blau and Hameiri (2017), Patrikakou (2015), and Bordalba and Bochaca (2019) investigated the impact of digital media on the relationships between families, schools, and parent participation. The effects of digital media on parent participation will remain a complex area of study in an ever-changing world of technology. The last barrier, parent-based limitations, revealed three constraints: concerns for their children's independence; their own time restrictions and work schedules; and the increased challenges with levels of academia.

The perceptions of the parents in this study provided insight into the nature of parent participation of high school students and may offer suggestions for high school principals who are interested in increasing the level of parent participation in their schools. Since schools remain dynamic environments and society is influenced by prevailing perceptions, homes and schools will continue experiencing a variety of effects on its relationship. Overall, high school principals should continue evaluating the effectiveness of its strategies to sustain parent participation. With reference to the Leadership Quality Standard (Alberta Education, 2018), and based on the data in this study, the premise for the research question, *what is the nature of parent participation of high school students* can be encapsulated using one word: relationships.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

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

Appendix B

Script for Recruitment

Hello, is this ___ (name of parent or guardian selected)?

My name is Rita Lal and I am a teacher at Bev Facey High School.

How are you?

The reason for my phone call today is to request your assistance.

I am currently completing my thesis at the University of Lethbridge and hoping that you would be willing to participate in an interview for a study that I am conducting. As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for my Master in Educational Leadership.

Many parents and guardians of high school students agree that an important role in high school is to prepare youth for post-secondary institutions and/or the workplace by building independent critical thinkers. However, provincial data indicates that many parents don't feel that they continue to be involved in school when their children enter high school. I am curious to know why parents feel disengaged from this process. I am also curious to know what perspectives parents have about their participation in the education of their high school children. In my study, I will explore perspectives of what participation means to parents of high school aged students. You were randomly selected as a grade _ (10,11,12) parent to participate in this study because your insight will be used and compiled along with other parents to understand the perspectives of high school parents and their opinions about parental participation.

Your participation will include one interview that will range in length from approximately 30 to 60 minutes, here at Bev Facey Community High School or at a location of your choice. Once I transcribe your interview we will meet again for you to

validate the accuracy of what you intended. Your confidentiality and anonymity will be upheld at all times and all data will be stored securely. If at any point in the study you would like to revoke your participation, you are welcome to do so and all data will be destroyed. I will accommodate the interview based on your schedule. I am available workdays, evenings, and weekends. I would like to interview you sometime this month. Again, the interview is completely voluntary, but would be greatly appreciated. Sharing your ideas would certainly help me complete my thesis.

Would you be willing to share your ideas and set up an interview?

(Wait for response)

(If no) Thank you for your time. Have a wonderful day.

(If yes) What date and time would work best for you?

Thank you very much for your time. I will be sure to contact you two days prior to the interview as a reminder. Should you have any questions in the interim, please feel free to contact me here at the school.

Again, my name is Rita Lal and I am a teacher here at Bev Facey.

Thank you for your time. Have a wonderful day.

Appendix C

Participant (Adult) Consent Form

The Nature of Parent Participation at the High School Level: An Investigation

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled The Nature of Parent Participation at the High School Level: An Investigation that is being conducted by Rita Lal. Rita Lal is a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge and you may contact her if you have further questions in the following manner: by cell phone at 780-983-2854; work 780-467-0044 or the email address rita.lal@eips.ca.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in the Master of Education in Educational Leadership. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Pamela Adams and Dr. Carmen Mombourquette. You may contact my supervisors at (403) 332-4070 or (403) 329-2018, respectively.

The purpose of this research project is to identify the perceptions that parents have about their participation at the high school level. Parents and guardians of high school students agree that an important role in high school is to prepare youth for post-secondary institutions and/or the workplace by building independent critical thinkers. I want to investigate: Why, do parents feel disengaged from this process? What perspectives do parents have about their participation in the education of their high school children? This study will seek to explore high school parents' perspectives of what participation means to them and how they perceive their role and participation in the high school setting. The

primary research question is: What is the nature of parent participation at the high school level?

Research of this type is important because it will explore parental perceptions of the types of participation at the high school level; identify potential barriers parents are encountering at this particular school; investigate how participation may have changed in comparison to earlier years; and gather feedback and suggestions for school structures to increase parental participation. Findings will provide a more thorough understanding of how parents see their role at the high school level so that educators are able to incorporate strategies to purposefully increase parental participation.

You are being asked to participate in this study as a high school parent because your insight will be used to understand the perspectives of high school parents and their opinions about parental participation.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your commitment will include one interview that will range in length from approximately 30 to 60 minutes, at Bev Facey Community High School or a preferred location of your choice. It will also require a second meeting for you to review the transcript and validate the accuracy of what was said and intended.

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, with the time required for the interview and post-interview sessions and the time required for you to travel to your preferred location.

There are some potential risks to you by participating in this research and they include the emotional risk of discussing possible negative encounters with previous volunteering attempts or previous relationships with school personnel. Confidentiality

may also appear to be a concern for participants. To handle any feelings of resentment involving personnel in the school, the suggestion provided would be for the participants to request a meeting to discuss their concerns with the administration or teacher involved. In addition, should the participants appear distressed, providing referrals to counselling services will be suggested. Confidentiality will be upheld at all times.

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include allowing schools to gain a better understanding of how parents see their role of participating at the high school level so that educators are able to incorporate strategies to purposefully increase parental involvement. The possibility of decreasing known barriers to parents to provide these opportunities will also enhance community partnerships.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will not be used for analysis and completely destroyed.

The researcher is a teacher in the school being studied. There is a limited amount of contact with potential participants.

To insure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, I will provide verbal reminders that participation is voluntary during the request for participation and again, prior to immediately commencing the interviews. A verbal reminder of consent will occur following the post-interview session as well.

In terms of protecting your anonymity all references will be protected using pseudonyms. The context provided by participants will not be shared in a way that

provides specific reference to details of events mentioned that are in way able to be connected back to a particular person, incident, or situation.

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by ensuring that data being transcribed will not have the names of participants on any documents. Instead, there will be a letter on the document, that if cross-referenced, only then can it be verified. The consent forms of participants will be secured in a locked cabinet, away from all other documents.

Data from this study will be completely destroyed five years after the Thesis has been approved.

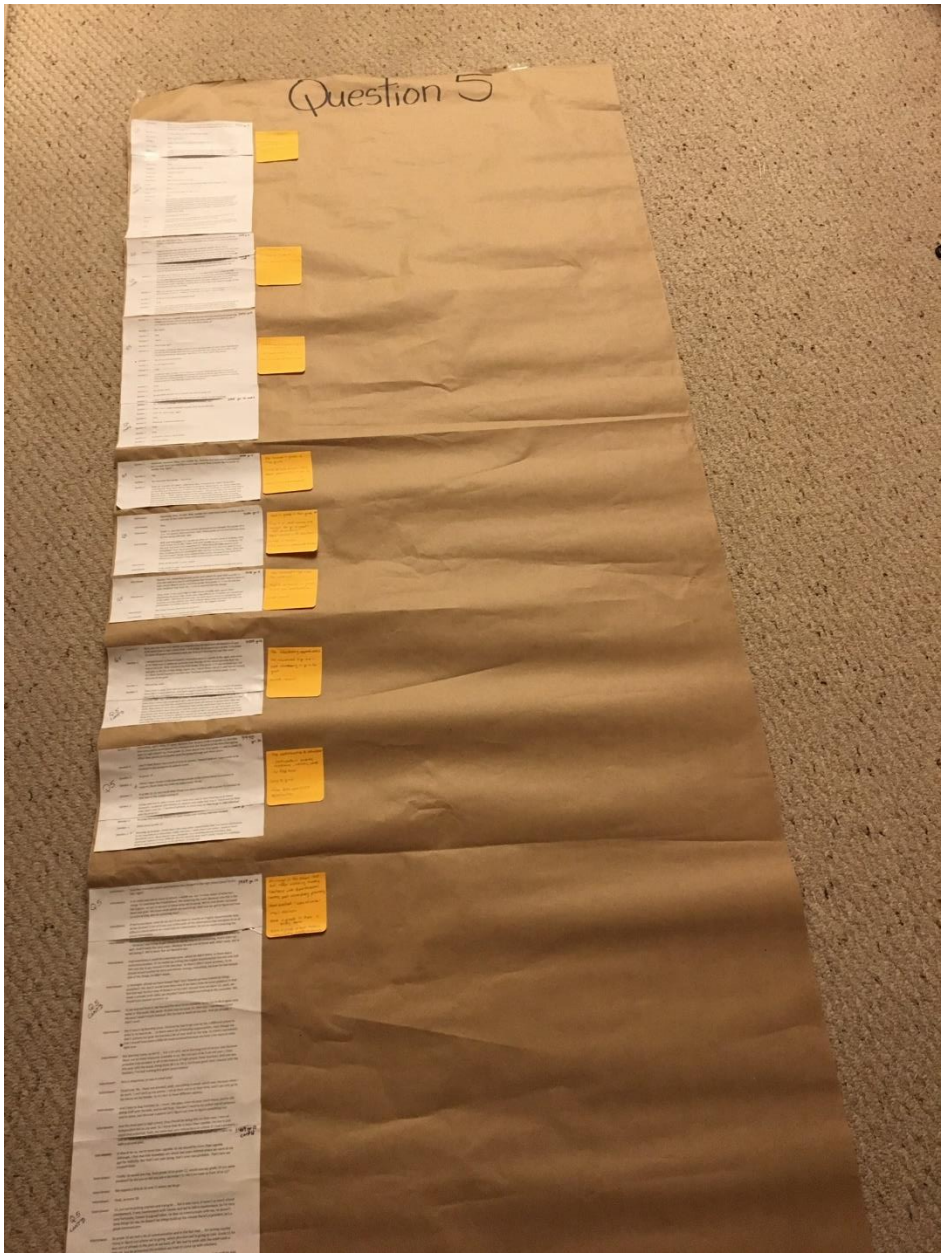
It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: directly with participants through the distribution of the thesis; in journal articles; in possible presentations at professional development sessions, and conferences; and at peer reviewed conferences.

In addition to being able to contact the researcher and the supervisors at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Chair of the Faculty of Education Human Subjects Research Committee at the University of Lethbridge (403-329-2425).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

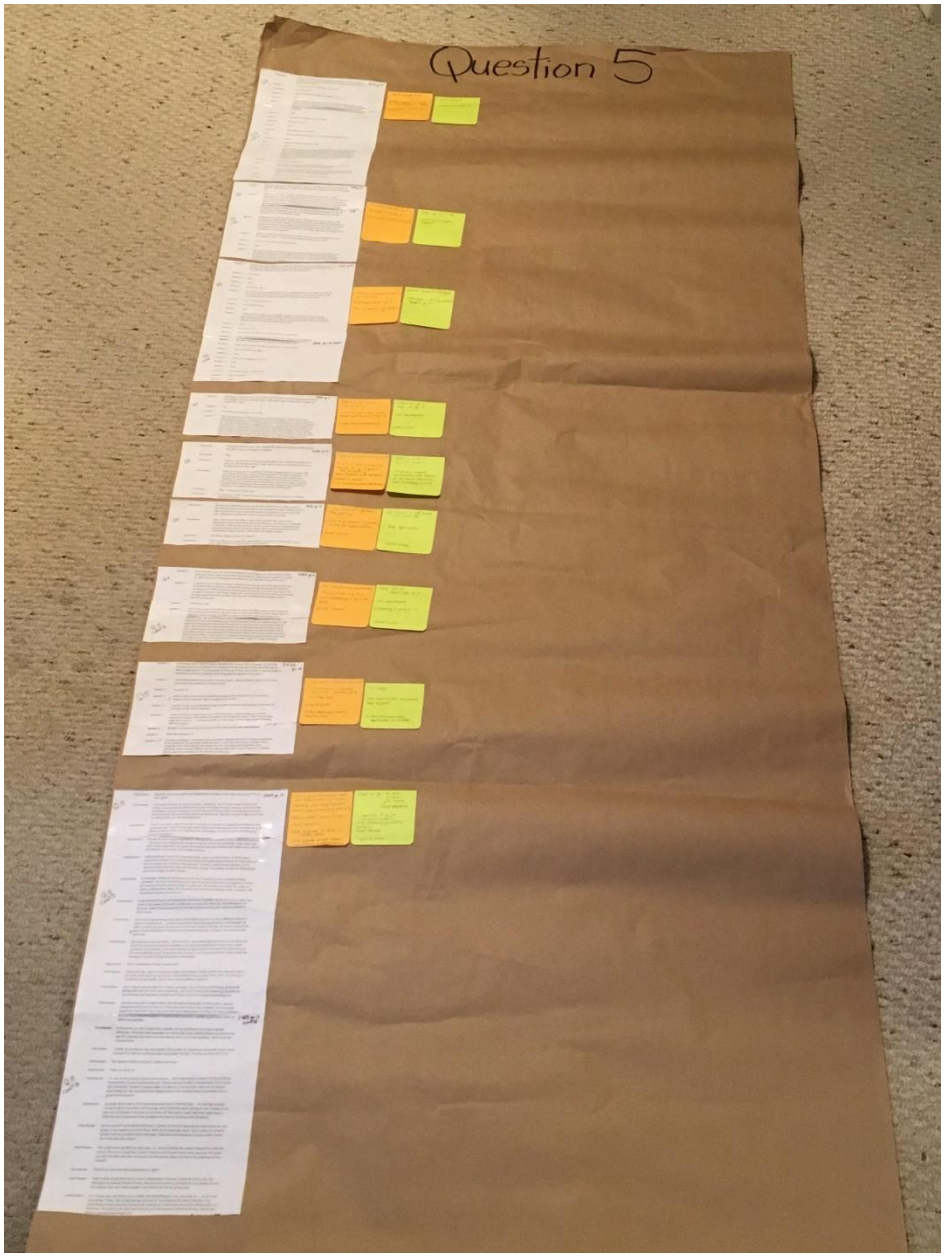
Appendix D

Sample of First Thematic Condensation



Appendix E

Sample of Second Thematic Condensation



Appendix F

Sample of Analysis by Grade Level