Chapter 1

The Problem

Parental involvement has been an important part of legislation related to K-12 education since 1965 with the enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, but has come to the forefront since No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002) became public law in 2002 (Lloyd-Smith, 2008). The purpose of NCLB was to equalize education among all student populations in the United States; one strategy for accomplishing this goal was to mandate that every school develop a plan to involve parents in the educational setting (U.S. Department of Education, 2004b). Even though NCLB did not include guidelines for schools to achieve this goal, it did give each school the responsibility of designing a parental involvement plan (Lloyd-Smith, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2004b).

In order for any plan to be successful, all of the stakeholders must have input (Stringer, 2007). Stakeholders who are affected by parental involvement include the school system and individual school administrators, teachers, community, parents, and students. Research that explored the perceptions of parental involvement held by administrators, teachers, community, and parents is easily accessible, but the perceptions of high school students are more difficult to locate, and yet they are a stakeholder in the process and need to be heard (Faber, 2008). Having worked in the public school setting at the high school level for over 20 years, this researcher came to question why parental involvement is a struggle for all schools, but especially so at the high school level (Lloyd Smith, 2008; Lowman & Elliott, 2010). As students progress into the higher grade levels, parental involvement declines (Lloyd-Smith, 2008). This study explored the perceptions of high school students to determine whether they agree that parental involvement has, in fact, declined, in their situation. According to a study conducted by Stanik (2007) that consisted of interviews with numerous parents and high school students, parental involvement has been an issue at all grade levels because the government has

not taken into account individual state and community availability of resources. Furthermore, those considered to be at the poverty level do not have as many resources available for parents and students as do those in high-income communities. The lack of resources mentioned by Stanik includes the availability of transportation to get to the school, having to work long hours and not being available to come to the school for conferences, or not being available to the student at home to assist with homework or discuss school activities at home (Stanik, 2007).

The guiding questions in this study were: How do high school students define parental involvement? How does parental involvement affect their high school success? These are important questions as high schools across the nation struggle with developing parental involvement plans that actually increase the time parents are involved in their children's education and produce higher academic achievement.

1.1 The Problem

Parent involvement is an ongoing concern among all levels of schooling with high school being no exception (Lloyd-Smith, 2008). This researcher teaches high school career courses and is concerned about how students perceive parental involvement in their education. This is an age when students are striving for independence so the study explored what being successful in school means to high school students, how the high school students describe parental involvement, and how parental involvement affects the success of high school students. The following situations are some in which parental involvement opportunities existed. Some were successful, while some were not. All of the names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

Jamie began making inappropriate comments in class and wearing inappropriate garments to school, which brought disciplinary action. The

classroom teacher made attempts to contact her mother, who was a single parent. When phone messages were not answered, the matter was referred to an administrator who was successful in speaking directly with Jamie's mother. A meeting was set up and Jamie came into class excited that her mother was coming to school and could hardly wait for me to meet her. At the appointed time, her mother did not arrive. A message was left with the front office to contact me when she arrived and I would come to the front office to meet with her. Her mother did not arrive that day or any other day an appointment was made.

Brandon had an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) in place. His mother called an assistant principal asking that his teachers call her and arrange an appointment to discuss his progress in class. I called and suggested three times when I would be available to meet with the mother. Each suggestion was met with, "I have a doctor's appointment that day. I have to pick up my daughter from her appointment that day." I asked the mother to set a day and time that would work with her schedule, and she did, but she did not show up for the appointment or call to cancel or reschedule. I was able to meet with the mother when she was called to complete a yearly evaluation of Brandon's IEP at the end of the school year.

Mandy was an academically gifted student. Her mother called to schedule an appointment to meet regarding Mandy's progress in class. I asked Mandy's mother to please bring Mandy with her for the appointment. Her mother arrived at the designated time with Mandy and we proceeded to the classroom for an informal setting as opposed to meeting in a conference room, in an attempt to make both the mother and Mandy feel more comfortable about discussing Mandy's progress. The mother and I sat at a table toward the front of the room, motioning for Mandy to have a seat. Mandy did not sit down, but proceeded to the back of the room and pretended to read a poster during the conference, but stayed within hearing range of the discussion. At the end of the conference her

mother asked, "Mandy, do you understand what has been said and your responsibilities for succeeding in the class?" Mandy, "Yes." Mother, "Do you intend to follow through with your responsibilities?" Mandy, "Yes." Mother, "Do you have any questions of your teacher?" Mandy, "No."

Mandy's academic progress improved but Jamie's and Brandon's did not. The question that keeps recurring is why did Mandy's mother attend the scheduled conference but not Jamie's or Brandon's? Could it be that Jamie and Brandon had given the perception that they did not want their parents to meet with their teachers or come to school (Faber, 2008)? If given the opportunity, how would these students describe their experience and what would they say about their feelings about parental involvement and its effects on their success in school?

1.2 Problem Background

Parental involvement was mandated by NCLB (U.S. Department of Education, 2004b) because research has repeatedly shown that parental involvement in a child's education raises academic achievement (Epstein, 2005, 2007; Rogers, 2006; Walker, Shenker, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2010). Much of the research conducted on parental involvement and its influence on student academic achievement has focused on elementary education (Catsambis, 2002; Lloyd-Smith, 2008). Parental involvement is high at the elementary level of education and has positive results on student achievement, but lessens as the student progresses to higher levels of education (Catsambis, 2002; Lloyd-Smith, 2008). One reason suggested for this decline is that students are giving parents the impression that they do not want them to be as involved because they are searching for autonomy at this age (Lloyd-Smith, 2008). This study explored this question as it uncovered students' definitions of parental involvement.

While research studying the effects of NCLB and parental involvement has shown that student achievement increases when parents take an active interest

in their children's educational activities, other research has revealed factors that prevent parental involvement from occurring (Epstein, 2007; Rogers, 2006; Walker et al., 2010; Xitao & Michael, 2001). Socioeconomic and ethnicity factors impacting parental involvement in school have been the subject of previous studies by Epstein (2007), Rebell and Wolf (2008), and Rogers (2006). Some studies have shown that socioeconomic and ethnicity factors affect student achievement negatively while others have shown these factors to have positive or little to no effect on student achievement (Lowman & Elliott, 2010). Bembenutty (2011) and Patall, Cooper, and Robinson (2008) studied parental involvement with homework for elementary, middle, and high school students with the same results; some students had higher achievement when parents were involved while other students showed no increase or a decrease when parents took an active role in their homework (Tan & Goldberg, 2008). The current study explored high school students' perceptions of the importance of parental involvement as it related to their high school success.

NCLB (2002) promotes student success as being the responsibility of both parents and schools. The Act holds schools accountable for designing and implementing a plan for parental involvement. NCLB did not state how the schools should involve parents, just that parents are to be involved (U.S. Department of Education, 2004b). If administrators understand students' feelings about parental involvement and how students define the type of involvement that will support their school success, then parental involvement plans can be more effectively designed to benefit the students, parents, school, and community.

Studies conducted by Epstein (2007) and Rogers (2006) showed a positive correlation between parental involvement and student academic achievement. Rogers, as well as Rebell and Wolf (2008), studied the correlation between socioeconomic background and parental involvement in the school and

determined that parents from lower economic communities were less involved in the school and students' academic achievement was lower. Walker et al. (2010) studied the process of parental involvement, or how parents were involved in school, rather than the relationship between parental involvement and student achievement, and noted an increase in student achievement if the students perceived their parents to be involved in their education, regardless of the parents' actual amount of involvement. This information leads to the belief that from the students' perspectives, it did not really matter whether their parents were actually involved in their schooling as long as the student perceived that the parent was involved in some way. Did the students perceive parental involvement because the parents asked questions about their school day and activities? Did the parents make calls to the school to check on the student's progress? What indication did the students have that their parents were involved? The current study asked students to define parental involvement.

Administrators and teachers realize the potential impact of parental involvement on the academic success of students (Epstein, 2005; Gardner, Burton, & Klimes, 2006; Lloyd-Smith, 2008; Lowman & Elliott, 2010). The interpretations that administrators and teachers have of parental involvement may be vastly different from the interpretations held by students. Administrators and teachers define parental involvement as parents volunteering in the school and attending school activities and conferences (Lloyd-Smith, 2008). Epstein (2007), on the other hand, gave six different types of parental involvement in a child's education, including parenting types, communication, volunteering, home involvement, decision making, and community collaboration. Parental involvement is a term that could have many different meanings depending on the entity, or stakeholder, and context (Hickman, 1991). There is a gap in the literature regarding students' perceptions of parental involvement, and it was the goal of this researcher to attempt to close this gap.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The overall purpose of the study was to investigate how students feel about parental involvement. Specifically, the study asked students to define parental involvement and school success, and describe how parental involvement affected their high school success. Several studies have researched the positive and negative effects of parental involvement on student success, but few have examined students' interpretations of parental involvement (Epstein, 2007; Rebell & Wolf, 2008; Rogers, 2006). Faber (2008) examined high school students' perspectives of parental involvement as related to parents' and students' participation in extracurricular activities. The current study was similar to Faber's except it examined parental involvement as it related to in-school and out-of-school activities and factors, and whether the students encouraged or discouraged their parents' involvement in their education. This study used basic qualitative methodology to examine the students' descriptions and interpretations of the term parental involvement (Merriam, 2009).

Current studies have focused on elementary and middle school students (Bembenutty, 2011). In a literature search through numerous databases and over 1,600 articles, less than five studies emerged that focused directly on high school students' perceptions of parental involvement (Faber, 2008; Hayes, 2011; Trusty & Lampe, 1997; Whitfield, 2006). This is an area of little research, but a necessary consideration when administrators and teachers are attempting to increase the involvement of parents at the high school level of education.

1.4 Research Questions

This researcher explored the main question: What are high school students' perceptions of the importance of parental involvement on high school success? The following questions were answered during the study.

1. How do high school students describe parental involvement?

2. How do high school students define success in school?

3. How do high school students describe the effects of parental involvement on their high school success?

1.5 Theoretical Framework

The researcher based this study on Bandura's self-efficacy theory, which indicates that the confidence students have in their abilities affects the choices and outcomes of their endeavors (Usher & Pajares, 2008). Self-efficacy, as described by Bandura, is influenced by peers, teachers, and parents (Usher & Pajares, 2008). The current study focused on parents' influence on students' ability to feel successful in school. The study also compared the responses of students with findings by Trusty and Lampe (1997), and the theories of Hickman (1991) and Epstein (2007).

Trusty and Lampe (1997) described parental involvement as the way in which parents responded to and interacted with their children and the effects of these interactions on the children's behavior inside and outside of school. Hickman (1991) stated that there are seven types of parental involvement at the secondary level; "(a) parent as communicator, (b) parent as supporter of activities, (c) parent as learner, (d) parent as advocate, (e) parent as decision maker, (f) parent as volunteer/professional, and (g) parent as home activities teacher" (para. 4). Epstein (2007) addressed similar types of parental involvement at the secondary level to create the Framework of Six Types of Involvement, and added collaboration with community entities as resources for family interaction and student success. NCLB (2002) described parental involvement as a means to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind (Introduction section, p. 1).

The effects of NCLB on schools and the interpretation of parental involvement in the school have been the focus of many researchers (Epstein,

2005, 2007; Loveless, Parkas, & Duffett, 2008; Rogers, 2006). Studies have indicated varying degrees of parental involvement in the schools based on economic factors; the lower the economic status, the less parental involvement occurred, having a negative impact on student achievement (Epstein 2005, 2007; Rogers, 2006). Patall et al. (2008) went outside of the school building to study the importance of parental involvement in homework and concluded that parental involvement in homework does increase student achievement. Again, the lower the economic status, the less the parent is involved in the student's homework, decreasing student achievement (Epstein, 2005; Rogers, 2006).

Solorzano (2008) researched Latino and Caucasian parents' perspectives of parental involvement and found that income and education influenced their involvement in their children's education. The researcher also stated that involvement in, or with, their children's school was a concern with both groups of parents (Solorzano, 2008). Trusty and Lampe (1997) studied high school students' perceptions of parental involvement and the students' locus of control. They focused on the students' identity development based on how they perceived their parents' involvement in their schooling (Trusty & Lampe, 1997).

This researcher expanded on a study conducted by Whitfield (2006), who interviewed five students from various ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, by also interviewing five students from varied backgrounds. The researcher asked the students to describe what success in school meant to them, how they would define parental involvement, and what effect parental involvement had on their school success. Obtaining the students' perceptions as a stakeholder in the process adds to the existing body of knowledge about the perceptions held by parents, teachers, and administrators regarding parental involvement. Having the students' perceptions will enable local administrators to develop parental involvement plans that fit the needs of the students and enable parents to become more active in their children's education.

Oyserman, Brickman, and Rhodes (2007) theorized that parents perceive their involvement in their child's school will give the message that the student can achieve and that the parent's presence will keep the child focused and on track in obtaining his or her goals. The current study looked for themes to indicate agreement or disagreement with this theory. The research was based on Epstein's theory of community and parental involvement, which includes six forms of involvement in the schooling of students (Epstein, 2008). The six forms of parental involvement described by Epstein (2005) include parents' involvement at home, communication between school and home, parents volunteering in school activities, parents' involvement in helping the student with homework, parents supporting the students' decisions regarding school, and parents obtaining support from the community to assist the child in school. This study also considered Bandura's theory of how self-efficacy is formed in students to affect their success in school (Usher & Pajares, 2008). Bandura theorized that self-efficacy was the motivation to promote a student's school success and the factors that produced self-efficacy included teachers, community background, and parents (Cowan, 2006; Usher & Pajares, 2008). The key focus in this case was on the parents' influence.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Parental involvement is important to high school and school system administrators because they are interested in retaining program funding by complying with the mandates of NCLB (Lloyd-Smith, 2008). Studies have repeatedly shown parental involvement to be a factor in students' academic success (Epstein, 2005, 2007; Rogers, 2006; Walker et al., 2010). Administrators have stated that implementing a successful parental involvement plan is challenging and have speculated that parents who perceive their children do not want them involved in their schooling are hesitant to become involved and that this occurs at the high school level because students are attempting to

assert their independence (Lloyd-Smith, 2008; Tan & Goldberg, 2008). Determining how students want their parents to be involved in their education will determine the program design used by a school or school system for helping parents become involved in ways that will benefit students.

Key factors in the current study were the students' perceptions of parental involvement and its impact on their academic success. The research will add to the current knowledge of the effects of parental involvement on student school success by focusing on the high school level and adding to current knowledge about parental involvement at the elementary and middle school level (Tan & Goldberg, 2008). It also tells the story from the students' voices, not parents, teachers, or administrators. Three studies were located that occurred within the past 5 years and directly focused on high school students' perspectives of parental involvement (Hayes, 2011; Tan & Goldberg, 2008; Whitfield, 2006). These studies neither fully covered the high school students' perceptions nor can their findings be generalized to the population of the nation. It is for these reasons that the findings of the current study will add to the results of the previous studies for a continuation of how high school students describe parental involvement and its effect on their success in school.

Whitfield (2006) conducted a similar qualitative study using five students chosen by the guidance counselor at their school based on characteristics determined by the researcher. These characteristics included athlete, scholar, someone considered to be rebellious, someone considered to be popular, someone considered to be an average student, and students from the sophomore, junior, and senior classes. The current study was also qualitative and used five students with varied backgrounds, but focused only on students who were juniors or seniors due to their longer span in the high school setting. This study examined attitudes and barriers of participants concerning parental involvement. Information gathered could aid school officials in developing a parental

involvement plan, building school and family partnerships, and enhancing student academic achievement.

The results of the current study explained high school students' perceptions of the importance of parental involvement based on the five participants chosen for the study. The results add to the base of knowledge established by Whitfield (2006) by interviewing students of similar and different ethnic backgrounds as those used by Whitfield and comparing the results for similarities and differences. The results are the students' interpretations of parental involvement and school success adding to existent literature regarding the perceptions of administrators, teachers, parents, and community entities in reference to parental involvement and student success in school.

NCLB (2002) has impacted all schools across the nation by mandating they develop a plan for parental involvement (Epstein, 2005, 2007; Loveless et al., 2008; Rogers, 2006). Understanding students' perceptions of parental involvement could enable schools to be better equipped to design a parental involvement plan. Local schools can then present their plan to state policymakers with evidence supporting their plan for funding (Office of State Budget and Management, 2010). If parents are involved in ways they and their children agree are acceptable, it will motivate students to be academically successful (Faber, 2008).

1.7 Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions are the values the researcher places on the study before it begins (Bryant, 2004). The assumptions in this study included being able to identify the students' definitions of parental involvement. It was assumed that the students would be able to define academic success. It was also assumed that themes would develop to aid in understanding factors the students felt

encouraged or discouraged their parents' involvement in the school and had a positive or negative effect on their success in school.

Bryant (2004) described limitations as restrictions created by the methodology chosen for the study. This study was limited by the population used for the study. Students used in the interview process were those who were willing to participate and had signed consent forms from their parents. Other limitations involved with using a qualitative methodology were the researcher's biases and how these affected data interpretation, as well as the anxiety or personal bias of those being interviewed (Patton, 2002). The students who participated in the interviews had never been in a class taught by the teacher, nor were they involved in a student organization advised by the teacher.

Other limitations included:

- The researcher was a teacher in the school used for the study.

- Participants may have answered the way they perceived the researcher wanted them to answer.

- Interpretation of results may have been biased because the researcher knew the students, the school, and the community culture.

1.8 Delimitations and Scope

Delimitations include generalization factors of the study (Bryant, 2004). This study took place in one high school located in North Carolina. The results of this study are only transferable to other high schools in the same or similar locality as the facility in which this study was conducted. Other factors that influenced the transferability of the results include ethnic, economic, and educational levels of the parents of the students who participated in this study as these may have influenced the answers given by the students during the process. The researcher did not examine test scores as the time frame did not allow for a comparison from

one year to the next to look at any changes that resulted from participation in the study. The researcher did not conduct interviews with parents as the students' answers and perceptions were the major concerns of the study.

- Student answers to interview questions were the only data used in the study.

- The study is only generalizable to other schools in the same school district with a similar socioeconomic background.

- The study did not use data from test scores to determine each student's academic success, only the students' definitions of school success.

1.9 Definitions of Terms

- No Child Left Behind: Legislation mandating schools "to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind" (NCLB, 2002, Introduction section).

- Parental involvement: Shared accountability between the school and parents for student success including increased resources and abilities to enable the parent to help the child gain academic success (U.S. Department of Education, 2004b).

- Parents: Biological mother or father, legal protector or guardian of a child (UC Davis, n.d.)

1.10 Conclusion

NCLB has mandated that every school in the nation develop a parental involvement plan without giving guidelines as to how to develop the plan (Lloyd-Smith, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2004b). Research has shown that several factors affect parents' involvement in their children's education, including socioeconomic conditions and ethnicity (Epstein, 2005, 2007; Hayes, 2011; Loveless et al., 2008; Rogers, 2006; Solorzano, 2008). Numerous studies

have focused on the perspectives of administrators, teachers, and parents regarding parental involvement (Berliner, 2006; Epstein, 2005; Patall et al., 2008; Payne, 2005; Rebell & Wolf, 2008; Rogers, 2006; Xitao & Michael, 2001). Only a handful of studies have focused on students' perceptions of parental involvement and how it affects their high school success (Faber, 2008; Hayes, 2011; Lowman & Elliott, 2010; Trusty & Lampe, 1997; Whitfield, 2006).

Chapter 2 presents a literature review of the history of NCLB and its effects on parental involvement. It discusses studies that focused on administrators' perspectives of parental involvement, as well as teachers' and parents' perspectives. It also reviews current studies that focused on students' perceptions of parental involvement and whether the students felt parental involvement influenced their achievement in school.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology chosen for this study. A basic qualitative research design allowed the researcher to construct reality by interacting with the participants throughout the interview process. Meaning was constructed from the responses of the students as to how they defined parental involvement and school success. This chapter details the research plan, how the participants were chosen, and how permission was obtained for the students to participate in the study.

Chapter 4 describes the data obtained from the interviews with the students. Themes and how the themes were drawn from the data are described. Results of the study are explained. A final summary of the research and findings is included (Bryant, 2004).

Chapter 5 contains the conclusions of the study. The researcher discusses any major themes and their indications for further research and outlines the students' responses to the guiding questions of this study. Recommendations for further research and how the findings of this study add to the current body of knowledge are outlined in this final chapter.