School Counselor-Parent Collaborations: Parents' Perceptions of How School Counselors Can Meet their Needs

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ABSTRACT

SCHOOL COUNSELOR-PARENT COLLABORATIONS: PARENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF HOW SCHOOL COUNSELORS CAN MEET THEIR NEEDS

by

Natalie Kane Grubbs

The purpose of this study was to gain a fuller understanding of the sort of assistance, support, or education parents feel they need from school counselors in parenting adolescents. The research question examined was: What sort of assistance, support, or education do independent school parents feel they need from school counselors in raising adolescent children? The participants for this study were parents of middle school children attending an independent school located in an urban southern city. All parents of children attending the independent school were asked to respond to an online “needs assessment” survey asking parents to select parent education topics that are of interest to them. Parents participating in this phase of the study had an opportunity to volunteer for the next phase of the study, an online card sort activity. Parents who volunteered for the online card sort activity were sent a link to the online card sort activity where they took a list of parent education topics and arranged them into groups as they saw fit. Analysis of the results revealed nine themes, or categories of topics that are of interest to parents of middle school children: Parenting Skills, Adolescent Self-Management, Self-Awareness and Esteem, Academic Opportunities and Career Choices, Peer Relationships and Skills, Emotional Wellness, Physical Health and Wellness, Parent-Teacher/Staff Communication, and Technology Safety and Use. An informal concept map was created to visually represent the categories of parent education topics that emerged from the study. The results of this study can assist professional school
counselors in designing parent education and consultation curriculum and interventions, and help ensure that school counselors better meet parents’ needs.
SCHOOL COUNSELOR-PARENT COLLABORATIONS: PARENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF HOW SCHOOL COUNSELORS CAN MEET THEIR NEEDS
by
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A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Counselor Education and Practice in the Department of Counseling and Psychological Services in the College of Education Georgia State University

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2013
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to first thank God, from whom my help comes. Many people have asked me how I have been able to balance the demands of family, work, and doctoral studies and I have known all along that the answer is You. Thank you Lord, for being my source, my strength, and my shield.

I would like to thank Dr. Catharina Chang, my dissertation committee chair and my dissertation committee: Dr. Andrea Dixon, Dr. Gregory Brack, and Dr. Kelly Lyn for all of your patience, guidance, and support. Dr. Chang, thank you for being my mentor throughout my doctoral journey and for being a classic model of how to establish, maintain, and protect one’s balance. I have been blessed to be able to learn from you. Dr. Brack, thank you for all of your guidance in preparing my methods and results section, and for being a consistent source of encouragement. Dr. Dixon and Dr. Lyn, thank you for your support and constructive feedback and for modeling professional excellence and stellar mentorship. I would also like to thank Lindy Parker and Kimere Corthell for your assistance as research team members for this study, and for bringing joy, laughter, and enthusiasm to it.

There is no way I would have been able to accomplish this task without the support of my friends, my family, and my colleagues at Whitefield Academy and The Galloway School. Thank you all for keeping me grounded and for reminding me of my purpose for pursuing a doctorate degree.

I want to thank the parents who participated in this study and shared with me your needs, wishes, and hearts’ desires in raising your sons and daughters. It is my honor and my pleasure to come alongside you and offer my assistance and to support you as you accomplish the most important work there is: Loving, nurturing, and teaching children.

To Lauryn, Sean, and Lena, my greatest accomplishments and greatest blessings, I dedicate this research to you. I became a better person the moment I became a parent, and I vow to always work towards being the parent that God wants for you. To Mom and Dad, I thank you for being excellent parents and for modeling how to love and guide my own children. To Troy, thank you for your love and support. Thank you for being my partner and my friend, and thank you for all you have done to allow me to pursue my dream.
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CHAPTER ONE
SCHOOL COUNSELOR-PARENT COLLABORATIONS

The Importance of Parental Involvement

The importance of parental involvement in a child’s education has been documented for over 40 years (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Parental involvement, whether parents are participating at home (helping with homework, etc.) or at school (attending parent workshops, conferences, etc.), has been shown to have a positive impact on children’s academic and personal/social wellbeing (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Parental involvement positively impacts children’s academic skills. These improved academic skills in turn led to an improvement in academic performance (Hill & Craft, 2003).

Parental involvement increases social capital, increasing parents’ skills and information and making parents better equipped to assist their children in school-related activities (Hill & Taylor, 2004). As parents increase their interaction with the school, faculty, and other parents this helps to build consensus about appropriate behavior for children and thus, increases social control. An expectation for appropriate child behavior can then be effectively communicated to children at school and at home, thereby potentially decreasing problem behaviors (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Through both social capital and social control, children receive messages about the importance of schooling, which increases children’s competence, motivation, and engagement in school (Hill & Taylor, 2004). These benefits are lasting benefits. A longitudinal study of parental involvement and child wellbeing found that parental involvement at school at the elementary level, as reported by teachers and parents, had lasting benefits for children. Parent reports of home involvement were also shown to have lasting benefits for children. These long-
term benefits included lower rates of high school dropout, increased on-time high school completion, and increased level of education (highest grade completed) (Barnard, 2003).

Most of the existing literature on parental involvement focuses on parental involvement at the elementary level. However, adolescence is a time of many changes, including change in school context, family relationships, and development. With these changes, academic performance often declines, while long-term implications of academic performance increases (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Hill and Tyson (2009) performed a meta-analysis on 50 studies about parental involvement in middle school and found a positive association between parental involvement and achievement. This finding is consistent with the positive association found between achievement and parental involvement with younger children. At the middle school level, however, there was one type of parental involvement (i.e., involvement that reflected academic socialization), which stood out as having the strongest positive association with achievement (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

Academic socialization includes parents communicating their expectations for academic achievement and value of education with their children, discussing learning strategies with children, making plans and preparations for the future, and linking material discussed in school with students’ interests and goals (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Hill and Tyson (2009) pointed out that academic socialization is consistent with the development of adolescents. This type of involvement is also, in ways, easier for parents to navigate due to adolescents’ increasing sense of independence, larger school sizes at the middle level, and increasing number of teachers for middle school students. Having conversations with their children about academics and making connections between
learning and children’s interests and goals is something that can be done at home, without parents having to navigate the changes middle school brings (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the value of parental involvement and its importance to the development of children at all educational levels. The author will examine a widely referenced and empirically supported model for parental involvement, the Epstein Model of Parental Involvement. Finally, the author will explore ways school counselors can serve as impetuses for parental involvement in their school buildings.

The Epstein Model of Parental Involvement

Literature about parental involvement not only focuses on the importance and value of parental involvement, but also presents several theoretical models of parental involvement and practical guides for educators on developing or facilitating parental involvement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Of the models presented in the literature, the Epstein model for parental involvement is the most widely referenced framework for parental involvement in schools (Bower & Griffin, 2011). This paper will also use the Epstein model as a framework for the discussion of parental involvement in schools as it relates to school counselors. Joyce Epstein (1995) stated that the way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about their children’s families. If schools view children as simply students, they are likely to see families as separate from the school. Epstein posits that it is important for schools to promote school/family/community partnerships focused on a shared responsibility to work together to create better programs and opportunities for students (Epstein, 1995).

The Epstein model defines six types of parental involvement. The first type of involvement is Parenting, whereby school officials provide parents with information on
how to establish home environments that are conducive to child development and learning. The second type is *Communicating*, where effective forms of communication between the school and the home are designed and implemented to keep families informed about school programs and children’s programs. The third type of involvement is *Volunteering*, where parents are recruited to help and to support the school. The fourth type of involvement is *Learning at Home*, where parents are provided with information and ideas about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning. The fifth type of involvement is *Decision Making*, where parents are included in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives. The sixth type of involvement is *Collaborating with Community*, where resources and services from the community are identified and integrated to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development (Epstein, 1995).

Epstein’s model is based on the theory of spheres of influence, with three main spheres of influence being identified as the family, the school, and the community (Epstein, 1995). These three spheres of influence can be either considered to be separate or overlapping. A school that values parental involvement thinks of the spheres of influence as overlapping, with students at the center of the spheres and with caring as a key concept. Epstein described school-like families where families are involved in education, value education, and work to create home environments that build upon and support what happens at school. She also described family-like schools where schools are aware of what is going on in children’s lives and families and create school environments that value and welcome parental involvement and support. It is important, in building collaborative relationships between schools, families, and communities that
educators use models such as the Epstein model to make intentional efforts to establish
and maintain a family-like climate at school and promote school-like family
environments for the children we serve.

**Professional School Counselors and School-Family-Community Partnership**

The American School Counseling Association (ASCA) National Model (2012), a
framework for comprehensive and data-driven school counseling programs and the
Transforming School Counseling Initiative (TSCI) from The Education Trust (2002)
promote active involvement in leadership, advocacy, educational reform, systemic
change, and collaboration between school counselors and community members as well as
school personnel (Wood & Rayle, 2006). When it comes to the overall wellbeing of
children, school counselors play an important role in facilitating the academic, career,
and personal/social development of the children at their schools (ASCA, 2012). School
counselors work on promoting systemic change in children’s lives through collaborating
with and involving parents, teachers, community members and students in the
development of comprehensive school counseling programs that promote children’s
growth and development (ASCA, 2012). Effective school counselors are aware of the
stakeholders of their school counseling programs and make efforts to connect with and
coordinate with these various stakeholders throughout the school year. It can be
imagined that interaction, coordination, and collaboration between school counselors and
the teachers at their schools would be a natural occurrence due to the accessibility of
teachers to the school counselors at their schools. However, reaching out to community
members and parents in order to collaborate and establish school-family-community
partnerships may take more effort and coordination on the part of school counselors.
With parental involvement having a documented positive effect on children’s academic achievement, parent-teacher relationships, teacher morale, school climate, school attendance, and parental confidence (Barnard, 2003; Bower and Griffin, 2011; Cripps and Zyromski, 2009; Hill & Craft, 2003; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011), it is important for school counselors to take the initiative to facilitate parental involvement at their schools. School counselors are well positioned to take leadership on school-home-community partnerships because they often work with students and families over the course of several years, whereas teachers typically work with students for only one year. This continuity across years gives school counselors the opportunity to get to know families and become familiar with family situations and resources (Walker, 2010). Since school counselors focus on academic, personal/social, and career development and all three of these areas benefit from strong parental support and involvement, school counselors make natural partners or leaders in establishing school-family-community partnerships (Walker, 2010).

There are four themes (leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and systemic change) that are incorporated as a part of the framework of the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2012; The Education Trust, 1997). These themes have remained consistent as the ASCA National Model was revised into the current edition. Wood and Rayle (2006) proposed eight school counseling-specific goals for school counselors-in-training and school counselors that are drawn from the themes of the ASCA National Model and the TSCI principles. These goals are: 1) Enact leadership within the school whereby the school counselor advances the school’s educational improvement efforts and contributes to the overall mission of the school; 2) Develop advocacy skills that will assist students and
their families; 3) Successfully team and collaborate with teachers, administrators, and the community to help students and their families; 4) Engage in assessment and the use of data to determine the needs of students and design interventions that will provide the most tailored assistance to students and the school; 5) Optimize the role of the school counselor in system support; 6) Design and execute individual planning activities for students; 7) Develop and deliver a guidance curriculum based on national standards and prioritizing student/school needs; and 8) Master brief counseling skills and crisis management as a part of responsive services. These goals are best conceptualized as goal areas with individualized outcomes and interventions (Wood & Rayle, 2006). Many of these goal areas, particularly developing advocacy skills that will assist students and families, successfully teaming and collaborating with teachers, administrators and the community, and optimizing the role of the school counselor in system support, emphasize the importance of school counselors facilitating and encouraging parental involvement.

**Recommendations for School Counselors Collaborating with Communities and Families**

According to Epstein (2010), school counselors should spend 20% of their time strengthening programs of family and community involvement. Many school counselors take courses during their school counseling training programs that teach leadership and partnership program development (Epstein, 2010). Recent literature (Epstein, 2010; Griffin, 2010) on the role school counselors can play in establishing school-family-community partnerships includes many suggestions on practical ways school counselors can implement parental involvement activities in their school communities and help narrow the gap between what is believed about parental involvement and what is actually
practiced in the schools. Epstein (2010) suggested that school counselors organize parent-to-parent forums, teach or arrange workshops on topics of interest to parents, teach parents how to communicate with the school and how to interpret school communications such as progress reports or testing reports, and provide opportunities for parents to volunteer at school. Inviting parents to volunteer at their children’s school not only gives parents an opportunity to volunteer their expertise, but also shows parents that they are valuable partners in their children’s education (Walker, 2010). When parents believe that the school values their involvement, barriers to parental involvement could begin to be eliminated. Walker (2010) suggested that schools set aside a place for parent volunteers where they can interact with other volunteers and staff members and have a “home” at school where they can serve the school while being close to their children. Epstein (2010) recommended creating a talent pool of parent volunteers.

Other suggestions for school counselors wanting to build school-family-community partnerships include: (a) setting up a parent resource center for parents to access information about the school along with information on parenting; (b) establishing regular communication with parents soliciting ideas, suggestions, and parent questions; (c) producing a directory of community resources, services, programs, and summer job opportunities; and (d) using guidance interventions such as classroom guidance and group work with parents to inform families on how to help students with learning at home (Epstein, 2010; Griffin, 2010).

Cripps and Zyromski (2009) wrote about the four components of the delivery system of The ASCA National Model (2012), which can be used to facilitate and enhance parental involvement. These four components are: guidance curriculum, responsive
services, system support, and individual student planning. The guidance curriculum can be used to help coordinate resources both inside and outside of the school and teach students to deal with stress, conflict, and peer pressure, including stress that results from parental relationships. Students can practice and learn communication skills to use with their parents, improving parent-child communication (Cripps & Zyromski, 2009). These interventions are consistent with the Parenting type of involvement of the Epstein model.

Responsive services such as individual and group counseling can be used when students need help or support for family issues such as divorce or changing family roles (Cripps & Zyromski, 2009). System support activities such as discussion groups and parent workshops can provide parents with information and tools needed to assist adolescents with academic goals as well as personal and social difficulties. Parents can also learn about ways to discipline while still demonstrating caring and support and learn strategies to help students solve problems. Community members can participate in mentorship programs or visit the school to volunteer their services or expertise (Cripps & Zyromski, 2009). Finally, individual student planning services can be provided, inviting parents to work alongside the school counselor and other school faculty members to create plans for individual student growth and development. Parent education workshops and parent consultation are specific school counseling activities that can also facilitate school counselors-parent collaboration. The next section will take a closer look at collaboration through parent education and consultation.

**Parent Education and Consultation**

One specific way in which school counselors have been known to contribute to school-family-community partnership is through providing parent education workshops
and parent consultation services. The decade of the 1980s first brought about a renewed emphasis on stronger school-home relationships, and providing parent education and consultation services was considered one way in which school counselors could contribute (Ritchie, 1994). Huhn and Zimpfer (1984) suggested that parent education increases school counselor visibility, reduces parent-child problems, fosters greater acceptance of the school counselor by parents, increases parents’ self-confidence, increases school counselors’ knowledge of students’ families, reduces students’ problems in and out of school, and promotes the home-school alliance or partnership.

For decades, parents have turned to school counselors for assistance when they experience child-rearing difficulties, and assistance has been rendered through individual consultation with parents experiencing difficulty or through group parenting-skills training programs (Ritchie, 1994). In a study of parent education needs as perceived by parents, Crase et al. (1981) found that parents perceived a need for assistance dealing with aggression, setting limits, developing their children’s self-confidence, improving family communication, and getting their children to assume responsibility. When the parent education program, Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP), was created in 1976, a group of school counselors were asked about their perceived parent education needs of parents. These school counselors indicated that parenting programs should include topics such as self-concept enhancement, helping students succeed in school, behavior management and discipline, decision-making, and substance abuse issues (Ritchie, 1994).
Literature on School Counselors and School-Family-Community Partnerships

While there is substantial literature on the importance or value of parental involvement and the lasting benefits of parental involvement on child wellbeing, the role professional school counselors play in promoting parental involvement, specifically, is discussed scantily in existing literature. Discussed even more sparingly are specific models used by school counselors who wish to facilitate parental involvement in their school buildings.

School Counselors’ Perception of Parental involvement versus Parental involvement Practices

The value placed by school counselors on parental involvement is discussed in the literature. However, there are mixed findings in research about the value school counselors place on parental involvement (Griffin, 2010). Some school counselors value parental involvement and make efforts to welcome parental involvement, while others rank the importance of parental involvement activities behind several other counseling activities such as individual and small group counseling (Griffin, 2010). The Epstein model (1995) is one of the only models reflected in the literature as a model used by school counselors. In one of the few articles about school counselors applying particular parental involvement models, it was found that there is a gap between the amount of school counselors who believe parental involvement is important and the amount of school counselors who actually work towards parental involvement in overt ways. Seventy-four percent (74%) of the 205 school counselors surveyed for one study on parental involvement, all members of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), agreed that school-family-community partnerships are useful, but over half of
the school counselors surveyed reported that they did not participate in partnership activities (Griffin, 2010). The school counselors who did participate in partnership activities reported that they are involved in activities that fall into the aforementioned Community or Parenting type of involvement using the Epstein model as a reference for parental involvement models (Griffin, 2010). Although infrequent, school counselors in the study also reported participating in activities that fall into the Communication, Decision-Making, Volunteering, and Learning at Home categories. Griffin (2010) noted that in this study of school counselor participation in parental involvement activities, the school counselor participants were not provided with an operational definition of school-family-community partnership and reasoned that some school counseling activities that would fall into one of the six types of parental involvement in the Epstein model were not reported as parental involvement activities simply because the school counselors may not have recognized the activities as instrumental in building school-family-community partnerships.

The ASCA National Model (2012) expects school counselors to collaborate with, be knowledgeable about, and refer to community agencies in the best interest of students. The ASCA Ethical Guidelines (2004) also urge school counselors to partner with families and community to enhance student success. Therefore, it seems understandable that most of the school counselors asked reported participating in Epstein’s (1995) Community and Parenting type of involvement activities.

**Impact of School Counselors’ Support on Success of Parental Involvement Activities**

In order to develop strong school-family-community partnerships, it is most effective when school officials work as a team, write a detailed plan linking the six types
of involvement to specific school goals, implement the plan, and evaluate the plan (Epstein, 2010). When school counselors are supportive of school-family-community partnerships, there is a significant positive correlation between school counselor support and the quality of programs, the percentage of families who are involved, and the amount of teachers who participate by conducting involvement activities (Epstein, 2010). This correlation doubles in strength when the school counselors’ support was combined with the support of other colleagues in the school (i.e., principals, teachers, school officials) (Epstein, 2010). While more research is needed to support and demonstrate causation in the relationship between school counselor support and the success of parental involvement activities, it is certainly supported in the literature that school counselors can play a key role in building strong partnerships.

**Barriers to Parental Involvement**

Even though parental involvement has such well-documented benefits to child development and student achievement (Barnard, 2003; Bower and Griffin, 2011; Cripps and Zyromski, 2009; Hill & Craft, 2003; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011), there is an apparent gap between what is supported in the literature about parental involvement and what is in practiced at schools. A survey of 1035 secondary schools in the United States found that 83% of teachers considered that the level of parental involvement at their schools should be increased (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Some of the explanation for why there is a gap between what we know about parental involvement and what we do relates to understanding the barriers that exist and prevent parents from being more involved in their children’s education. When considering ways to involve parents in their children’s education, it is important that
school officials, including school counselors, consider potential barriers to parental involvement and make efforts to remove barriers to involvement.

Hornby and Lafaele (2011) used an adapted version of the Epstein model of parental involvement to explain the gap between literature’s support of parental involvement and the actual practice of parental involvement in the schools. As explained in their article on parental involvement, there are four areas that present unique barriers to parental involvement: individual parent and family factors (i.e. parents’ beliefs about parental involvement, life contexts, SES), parent-teacher factors (i.e. different language, goals, attitudes and agendas), child factors (i.e. age, disabilities, giftedness, and behavior), and societal factors (i.e. economical, historical, political, and demographic). These four factors were adapted from Epstein’s (1995) framework of overlapping spheres of influence focused on the areas of family, school, and community, adding an additional focus on child factors. A discussion of each area follows:

**Parent and family factors.** Hornby and Lafaele (2011) found that parents are more effectively involved when teachers actively encourage parental involvement, when parents believe their involvement can have a positive impact on their children’s academic success, and when parents perceive that they are welcomed at their children’s schools. Some parent factors that can present barriers to parental involvement include aspects of parents’ life contexts, such as level of education, family circumstances, and overall psychological resources. Class, ethnicity, and gender can pose barriers to parental involvement as well. Barriers related to ethnicity, culture, and language are important to consider in encouraging parental involvement. In general, ethnic minorities are less involved, less represented, and are less likely to have access to resources that make
parental involvement possible. Parents who possess cultural capital that matches that generally valued by schools, on the other hand, are better represented and most widely represented in literature. These parents are the White middle-class parents in most cases (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Affluent families and communities have more positive family involvement compared to schools in more economically disadvantaged communities where there are more negative contacts with families that focus on problems children are experiencing rather than positive accomplishments of students (Epstein, 1995).

**Child factors.** Some child factors that can present barriers to parental involvement include the age of children, with older children being “less keen” about school involvement. Children’s performance at school can be a barrier, with children who are struggling in school having parents who are general more inclined to be involved and active in parental involvement activities. When students are performing well academically, a barrier can exist when parents and teachers don’t agree on the existence of the child’s academic talent or gift or when parents feel their involvement is not necessary because their children are not experiencing difficulty or struggles (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

**Parent-teacher factors.** Sometimes parents and teachers and school officials have different goals and agendas for parental involvement. For example, parents may see parental involvement activities as a way for them to discuss their children’s progress, compare their children’s progress with that of other children, learn more about the school and teaching methods used, question teachers about any concerns they have, or learn ways to handle certain parenting challenges (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). On the other hand, teachers and school officials may see parental involvement as a way to increase
school accountability to their communities, increase student achievement, address cultural disadvantage or inequality, find out from parents how children are coping with school, discuss children’s progress and any difficulties they are having, and identify ways for parents to help their children at home (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). If the goals and agendas of parents and school officials differ, parental involvement is less likely to be effective and these differences themselves can present barriers to parents being involved in the school building.

**Societal and historical factors.** Greater societal and historical factors could present barriers to parental involvement. Parents are seen as having an important role to play in education, however family structures are changing with more families having two parents working outside of the home, and increased numbers of divorces and separations resulting in increases in sole parenting and blended families. Consequently, parents are experiencing higher stress levels, less money, less time, and greater difficulty being involved in the education of their children (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

**Implications for School Counseling Practice**

Having an understanding of potential barriers to parental involvement can help school officials design parental involvement programs that meet the unique needs of the families represented in their school communities. For instance, Epstein (1995) identified populations who are less involved, on average, at schools. These populations included single parents, parents who are employed outside the home, parents who live far from the school, and fathers. In order to address these disparities, the school should: (1) build positive partnerships with families in economically disadvantaged communities; (2) organize opportunities for families to volunteer at various times and in various places;
and (3) balance communications about students’ problems and difficulties with communications about positive accomplishments of students (Epstein, 1995).

Establishing the kind of family-like schools described by Epstein (1995) can help in ensuring that parents feel welcome in their children’s schools, making sure there are various opportunities to get involved that meet the needs of parents with varying work schedules and family circumstances, and considering each unique child and family in planning activities that involve families and the community.

School counselors play a valuable role in promoting systemic change for the benefit of the students at their schools. The ASCA National Model (2012) provides an excellent framework for school counselors who are interested in playing a leadership role in advocating for students and promoting systemic change, thereby addressing some of the barriers to parental involvement that are present in their school communities. Collaborating with stakeholders such as teachers, school administrators, students, and parents can help school counselors build comprehensive school counseling programs that focus on systemic change. It is important for school counselors to not only assume leadership in building partnerships with stakeholders, and school-family-community partnerships should be the focus in establishing collaborative relationships on students’ behalf.

In building school-family-community partnerships, it is important for school counselors to consider the culture of their individual school and/or school system, but also the cultures represented in the school building. For schools who serve a K-12 population or school systems with a cluster model in which schools feed into other schools, it is important for school counselors to work on building partnerships that offer
parents opportunities to serve across levels. This not only strengthens school-family-community partnerships, but it also provides continuity of parental and community involvement. It is just as important for school counselors to be aware of all potential barriers to parental involvement and make efforts to address these barriers while creating school plans for parental involvement. Seeking the parent voice in creating this plan can help school counselors be more aware of barriers to parental involvement. Therefore, parents should play a key role in the creation of plans to establish or maintain school-family-community partnerships.

Researchers have provided suggestions for school counselors wanting to improve school-family-community partnership in their schools. Cripps and Zyromski (2009) provided examples of specific interventions within the delivery system of The ASCA National Model (2012) that school counselors can begin to implement in their schools. Epstein (2010) also provided examples specific to the role of the school counselor of ways a school-family-community partnership can be established. It is important for school counselors to become familiar not only with the benefits and value of parental involvement, but also with models such as the Epstein model, tips, and strategies available to school counselors for implementation of parental involvement activities. School counselor knowledge of models and interventions can help narrow the gap between the value school counselors place on collaboration and partnership and the actual practice of school-family-community partnership.

**Implications for School Counseling Research**

Although there is a documented positive impact of school counselors’ support of parental involvement activities on the success of those activities (Epstein, 2010), there is
a dearth of empirical studies that either support or challenge the role of school counselors in implementing parental involvement activities or providing parent education. The need for school counselors to take part in parental involvement activities and advocate for the empowerment and involvement of parents for the sake of students is implicit in The ASCA National Model (2012), The TSCI (2002), and The ASCA Code of Ethics (2004). However, there needs to be more research on interventions and activities school counselors use to encourage and facilitate parental involvement. There also needs to be more literature on the activities and interventions school counselors deliver in schools and how they support parental involvement, as there is some speculated misrepresentation of school counselors’ involvement in parent collaboration due to school counselors not considering their interventions to be directly tied to parental involvement (Griffin, 2010). Likewise, more research is needed that empirically tests particular parental involvement models and explores the sources of information or data used by school counselors in designing and implementing parental involvement activities in their schools. In a review of the literature on school counselors’ participation in parental involvement activities, there is little research on school counselors’ parental involvement activities at the middle school or high school levels, and there is virtually no literature about the role of independent (private) school counselors in parental involvement activities. Future research should focus on the role of school counselors in school-family-community collaboration with adolescents. Future research should also explore the roles and activities of school counselors working at different types of school (public schools, independent schools, etc.) as well as consider any demographic variables
that impact parental involvement including socioeconomic status and other demographic variables.
References


CHAPTER TWO

USING PARENTS’ PERCEPTIONS TO INFORM SCHOOL COUNSELOR-PARENT COLLABORATION AT A SOCIOECONOMICALLY ADVANTAGED MIDDLE SCHOOL

Introduction

In this paper, the author discusses the benefit of parental involvement and school-family-community partnership at the middle school level, with a look at issues particularly experienced by adolescents from socioeconomically advantaged families.

School counselors’ participation in school-family-community collaboration will be discussed, along with an exploration of how school counselors use data to inform practice in their school buildings.

Promoting Adolescent Wellbeing through Facilitating Parental involvement

Adolescence is a critical period of development, marked by continuous physical, emotional, mental, and psychological changes (Cripps & Zyromski, 2009; Hill & Tyson, 2009). Adolescents are developmentally experiencing changes with their bodies as they approach and develop through puberty. Children this age are also developmentally more independent, and their support network extends to include peers and teachers in addition to their nuclear and extended families (Hill & Tyson, 2009). While adolescents are experiencing these social, emotional, and physical changes, they experience changes in their educational environment as well. The school day now, in many cases, involves a larger school building, a larger and sometimes more diverse school population, and more teachers (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007; Hill & Tyson, 2009). Adolescence
has been targeted in the literature as a critical developmental period (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007).

Over the past 40 years, researchers have explored the relationship between parental involvement and adolescent wellbeing and have found that when adolescents perceive that their parents are involved in their education, they have a greater sense of self-esteem, self-evaluation, and improved peer relationships in addition to greater academic success (Cripps & Zyromski, 2009; Hill & Tyson, 2009). Parenting style, defined as the attitudes and values parents use to determine how they interact with their children, has also been shown to greatly influence child development. The Autocratic/Democratic parenting style, characterized by warm and involved parenting combined with firm and consistent limits, has a positive impact on child and adolescent wellbeing and has lasting positive effects on adolescents’ self-evaluation, self-esteem, and intrinsic motivation. Conversely, parenting styles that are either excessively controlling or excessively permissive have negative impacts on child development (Cripps & Zyromski, 2009).

Professional school counselors make natural partners or leaders in establishing school-home partnerships because school counselors focus on children’s academic, personal/social, and career development, and because all three areas have been shown to benefit from parental involvement (Walker, 2010). The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model (2012) for school counseling programs provides a strong framework for school counselors addressing the school’s various stakeholders through interventions within the guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and system support delivery systems. These stakeholders include
students, faculty members, parents, and members of the greater community. The most recent edition of the ASCA National Model (2012) draws a clear line between direct student services, which ASCA (2012) defines as “in-person interactions between school counselors and students”, and indirect student services, which are services provided on behalf of students as a result of the school counselor’s interactions with others (ASCA, 2012). Examples of direct student services include individual counseling and group counseling, while examples of indirect student services include referrals to community organizations and agencies, parent consultations, and teacher consultations. The ASCA National Model outlines elements and strategies that school counselors can take to provide indirect student services. The model also recommends that school counselors spend 80 percent or more of their time in direct student services and indirect student services (ASCA, 2012). Cripps and Zyromski (2009) and Epstein (2010) have made guidelines and suggestions, based on the ASCA National Model, for school counselors who wish to focus on collaborating with parents, specifically. School counselors can provide guidance lessons to adolescents on ways to better communicate with parents and adjust to family changes and the demands of the home environment, invite parents to participate in student and curriculum planning activities, and provide workshops and in-services to parents to teach parents the importance of parental involvement and the benefit of a supportive parenting style (Cripps & Zyromski, 2009). The ASCA National Model’s (2012) recommendation that school counselors spend 80% of their time either directly or indirectly serving students, and the intervention strategies outlined by Cripps and Zyromski (2009) represent delivery components as suggested by The ASCA National Model. Epstein (2010) recommended that school counselors spend 20% of their time
focusing on supporting their school’s plan for facilitating parental involvement, a proposal that would call for school counselors spending less time providing direct services to individual students and working alone and more time informing and engaging parents in meetings, forums, and activities and working with teachers, administrators and parents.

**The affluent preteen.** Madeline Levine (2006) wrote a book entitled *The Price of Privilege*, a book that is often referenced and shared among school counselors working in independent (private) school settings. Levine (2006) wrote about parental pressure and material advantage creating a generation of disconnected and unhappy children. Levine stated that affluent teenagers are disproportionately unhappy compared to teenagers in lower socioeconomic classes. Professional counselors in community and school sites are reporting that although one might assume that affluence and privilege help safeguard the emotional health of children, affluence actually contributes to the unhappiness and fragility of privileged children (Levine, 2006). This trend begins around early adolescence and continues throughout high school (Levine, 2006). Preteen children of affluent, well-educated families are being identified as “America’s newly identified at-risk group”, and are experiencing among the highest rates of depression, substance abuse, somatic complaints, anxiety disorders, and unhappiness of any group of children in this country (Levine, 2006).

Levine’s (2006) explanation for this seemingly counterintuitive data is that affluent parents often confuse being involved and supportive with being intrusive, place high levels of pressure on their children to succeed, and are emotionally unavailable to their children. This contributes to children failing to master one of child development’s
most important tasks: the development of a sense of self. While adolescence is a period where children develop a sense of self, or independence (Hill & Tyson, 2009), Cripps and Zyromski (2009) found that adolescents actually do desire for their parents to be involved in their lives at school.

Based on the data about the unique challenges that socioeconomic advantage could present (Levine, 2006), and the benefit of adolescents’ perceived parental involvement (Cripps & Zyromski, 2009), building school-family-community is an area that school counselors can focus on in the overall effort to facilitate children’s career, personal/social, and academic development. If the school counselor perceives parents at his or her school to have a strong desire to be involved yet, as Levine (2006) posits, their involvement is misguided and having a counterproductive impact on children’s development, then the school counselor has an opportunity to teach and encourage effective parental involvement through school-family-community collaboration/partnership.

Even though data exists about material advantage and its potential drawback in adolescent development, there is nothing in the literature that empirically supports school counseling practice in independent schools, which tend to attract socioeconomically advantaged families due to high tuitions and limited financial aid availability. Further, because there is no governing body that lays out expectations for the role of the school counselor in independent schools, and because the role of the school counselor at independent schools can vary from school to school, there is much role confusion surrounding independent school counselors.
School, Family, and Community Partnership

Epstein and Voorhis (2010) discussed the importance of school, family, and community partnership and used the Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence to assert that children perform better academically when educators, parents, and community members recognize their shared responsibility in rearing young people and work together instead of in isolation. Parental involvement declines across the grades, meaning that as children grow older and advance in school, parents tend to become less involved. Despite the decline in parental involvement, students in every level (elementary, middle, and high) want their families to be involved in their education in some way (Epstein, 1995). Epstein (1995) posits that in order for parents to remain involved, schools need to work to develop and implement appropriate practices of partnership at each grade level. According to Epstein and Voorhis (2010), it is important for schools to consider partnering and collaborating with families and community as an important component of the school’s programming as opposed to an accidental intervention that affects only a certain amount of parents.

There are many documented benefits to parents being involved in their children’s education, including increased academic success, early social competence in children, increased social networks and resources, and a decrease in the achievement gap between lower income students and privileged children (Bower, 2010). Epstein and Voorhis (2010) described six types of parental involvement, the first of which is Parenting. The Parenting type of involvement is defined as helping all parents understand child and adolescent development and establish home environments that support children as learners. The second type is Communicating, where effective forms of communication
between the school and the home are designed and implemented to keep families informed about school programs and children’s programs. The third type of involvement is *Volunteering*, where parents are recruited to help and support the school. The fourth type of involvement is *Learning at Home*, where parents are provided with information and ideas about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning. The fifth type of involvement is *Decision Making*, where parents are included in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives. The sixth type of involvement is *Collaborating with Community*, where resources and services from the community are identified and integrated to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development (Epstein, 1995).

**Summary and Research Questions**

The ASCA National Model (2012), a framework for comprehensive, data-driven school counseling programs, provides an excellent opportunity for school counselors to provide services to students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community members. Because adolescence is a period of child development marked by unique challenges and developmental issues, it is important for school counselors at the middle school level to design school counseling programs that address adolescent developmental needs directly with students. Additionally, because parental involvement and adolescents’ perceived involvement of their parents has been linked to adolescent wellbeing, spending time indirectly serving students through collaboration with their parents is an effective way for school counselors to advocate for student wellbeing.

Providing parent education in the form of parent groups, workshops, and in-services involves parents in their children’s education and also benefits adolescents’
overall wellbeing. Using data collected from parents to assess parent and student needs is an effective way to ensure that the guidance program addresses the unique needs of any particular school community. However, there is not much in the literature that provides information about what parents’ perceived needs are, nor is there much in the literature about how school counselors use data directly from parents to inform what services they provide to students and their families. Further, there is no existing literature on how school counselors working in independent schools use school-family-collaboration to promote and facilitate parental involvement. This study aims to contribute to the literature on school counselor involvement in parental involvement activities and school-family-community collaboration at the middle school level, while also contributing to the literature on school counseling in independent schools.

The research question investigated was: What sort of assistance, support, or education do independent school parents feel they need from school counselors in parenting adolescent children? This study aims to get a fuller understanding of the support parents perceive to be most helpful from school counselors in raising their children. A concept mapping method will be used for this study. Concept mapping is a method that takes into consideration the fact that clients’ perceptions sometimes differ from counselor’s perceptions and incorporates the client’s point of view into data collection and interpretation (Paulson, Truscott, & Stuart, 1999). Concept mapping takes a domain and clarifies it, getting to the structure of a phenomenon as experienced by a particular population (Trochim, 1993). In concept mapping, participants generate ideas, thoughts, or experiences and group them together through a card sort activity. The card sort is analyzed and interpretation of participants’ groupings is used for program planning
and evaluation (Trochim, 1993). Through concept mapping, bias is reduced because meaning units are sorted by the participant, and not by the researcher (Paulson, Truscott, & Stuart, 1999).

Method

Concept Mapping

*Concept mapping in qualitative research.* Concept mapping is a type of structured conceptualization whereby ideas are represented in the form of a picture or map (Trochim, 1989). In order to construct the map, ideas first have to be described or generated, and the interrelationships between them articulated. Typically, six steps are involved with concept mapping: 1) Preparation, or selecting participants and developing the focus for the conceptualization; 2) the Generation of statements related to the focus of the study; 3) Structuring, or sorting the statements (referred to as a card sort); 4) the Representation of Statements in the form of a concept map using multidimensional scaling and cluster analysis; 5) the Interpretation of the maps created in step four; and 6) the Utilization of Maps for program evaluation or planning (Trochim, 1989). Jackson and Trochim (2002) describe concept mapping as a methodological blend of word-based approaches and code-based approaches. Word-based approaches use words created by the respondents as units of analysis, capture relationships between concepts, and allow structure in the data to emerge based on co-occurrences of words or relational similarities in the form of a visual representation. On the other hand, code-based methods, or thematic coding methods, reduce text data into manageable summary categories or themes but may impose researcher bias in the form of the researcher’s preconceived thematic categories (Jackson & Trochim, 2002).
Concept mapping combines features of word-based and code-based methods, providing the benefits of both methods by synergizing and integrating the two (Jackson & Trochim, 2002). Concept mapping is similar to word-based approaches in that it allows for visual representation of conceptual similarities through statistical mapping. However, concept mapping retains the context by using intact respondent statements as units of analysis instead of words. It is similar to code-based approaches because it allows human judgment to cluster these similarities thematically, but it uses statistical analysis based on respondent judgment as opposed to relying solely on researcher judgment (Jackson & Trochim, 2002).

There are many specific methodologies that share the name concept mapping. Concept maps can be drawn informally, with participants using a free-hand method to draw a picture of all the ideas related to some general theme, a method widely used in the field of education (Jackson & Trochim, 2002; Novak & Gowin, 1997). A more formal form of concept mapping, and the approach that most guided this study, includes a sequence of structured group activities linked to a series of statistical analyses that process the group input and generate maps. In other words, concept mapping combines qualitative and quantitative research strategies and actively involves research participants in generating terms and gathering data (Paulson & Edwards, 1997; Trochim, 1989). Researcher bias is reduced because the data are sorted by participants, and because the analysis of groupings is conducted using statistical analysis of the groupings determined by the participants (Paulson & Edwards, 1997).
Participants

**Overall socioeconomic and cultural demographics.** The sample for this study included parents of children attending an independent middle school in an urban Southeastern city. Parents of the 243 students enrolled in the middle school are asked to report the ethnicity of their children upon enrollment. At the time of enrollment, 156 (64.2%) of the children’s parents did not indicate the race or ethnicity of their children. 42 (17.3%) of the children were identified by their parents as European American; 18 (7.4%) of the children were identified as African American; 8 (3.3%) of the children were identified by their parents as Asian American; 7 (2.9%) children were identified by their parents as Other; 4 (1.6%) of the children were identified by their parents as Latino/Hispanic; 3 (1.2%) of the children were identified by their parents as Multiracial; 2 (0.8%) of the children were identified by their parents as Middle Eastern; 2 (0.8%) of the children were identified by their children as Pilipino; and 1 (0.4%) child was identified by their parents as Indian. The school was not able to provide specific socioeconomic information, other than that the families represented in the school population have annual incomes that range from zero to multi-millions. The school community is made up of a diverse population in terms of religion and religious affiliations, sexual orientation, age of parents, and family constellation (single parents, divorced and/or remarried parents, etc.).

**Online parent survey participants.** All 422 parents of the 243 students attending the middle school received an invitation to participate in an online survey for the first phase of this study. Out of the 422 parents who received the invitation to participate in the online survey, 66 (15.6%) parents voluntarily responded to the online
survey. The online survey did not collect further demographic data from parents outside of what was provided by the school, except for the grade level of parent respondents’ children. Out of those 66 parents, 18 (27.3%) were parents of 5\textsuperscript{th} Grade children, 18 (27.3%) were parents of 6\textsuperscript{th} Grade children, 19 (28.8%) were parents of 7\textsuperscript{th} Grade children, and 16 (24.2%) were parents of 8\textsuperscript{th} Grade children.

*Familiarity with the school counselor and the role of the school counselor.*

Of the 66 parents who responded to the online parent survey, 43 (65.2%) had never met with their child’s school counselor one-on-one, while 23 (34.8%) had met with their child’s school counselor. Out of the survey respondents, 38 (57.6%) had never attended a workshop sponsored or facilitated by their child’s school counselor, while 28 (42.4%) of the respondents had attended at least one parent workshop sponsored or facilitated by the school counselor at the school. When parents were presented with a description of the school counselor’s role on the online survey, 56 them (84.8%) were at least somewhat familiar with the role of the school counselor at their child’s school. Of the 56 parents who were at least somewhat familiar with the role of the school counselor, 11 (19.6%) of them reported that they were very familiar with the role of the professional school counselor.

*Card sort participants.* Out of the 66 parents who received an invitation to participate in the online parent survey and took the survey, 17 (25.8%) participated in a card sort activity to sort the statements generated by responses to the survey. Sixteen (94.1%) of those 17 parents were mothers and 1 (5.9%) of them was a father. Ten (58.8%) of those 17 parents did not indicate their race or ethnicity upon enrolling their children; 4 (23.5%) of them identified their children as European American; 2 (11.8%)
identified their children as African-American; and 1 (5.9%) identified her child as Latino/Hispanic. Six (35.3%) of the parents who participated in the online card sort activity were parents of 5th Grade students; 3 (17.6%) were parents of 6th Grade students; 4 (23.5%) were parents of 7th Grade students; 2 (11.8%) were parents of 8th Grade students, and 2 (11.8%) parents had students in multiple grade levels (i.e. one child in 5th Grade and another in 6th Grade; one child in 6th Grade and another in 8th Grade).

Materials

The first two steps to concept mapping are to decide on the focus of the study, and to generate statements to be used for the concept map (Trochim, 1989). The concept, which can be referred to as the “concourse”, refers to “the flow of communicability surrounding the topic” (Van Exel and De Graaf, 2005, p. 4). This flows from ordinary conversation about the topic. Once the focus of the study is decided upon, statements that are relevant to the topic of interest are typically generated by a process that involves participants in brainstorming a set of statements related to the topic (Jackson & Trochim, 2002). There are other ways to generate statements than brainstorming, which could involve abstracting statements from existing text documents such as interview transcripts, annual reports, newspapers, magazines, essays, and books (Trochim, 1989; Van Excel & De Graaf, 2005). For this study, a list of statements was generated from a combination of methods that included having participants brainstorm a list of statements related to the topic as well as extracting statements from existing documents (i.e. parent needs assessments). Students, parents, and school staff have widely different perceptions of why a school counselor is needed, and school counselors are increasingly using needs assessment surveys in order to identify the needs of parents, teachers, students, and
administrators (Paulson & Edwards, 1997). School counselors have characteristically used needs assessments in the form of questionnaires that ask parents to rate a predetermined set of tasks in order to determine the needs of the school community (Paulson & Edwards, 1997). Concept mapping is an effective tool in an attempt to collect information that is not limited by the scope of predetermined questions while still encouraging participants to provide more detailed answers than they would with open-ended questions where written responses are requested (Paulson & Edwards, 1997).

For this study, an online survey was created using Survey Monkey, an online survey tool. The survey included closed-ended questions. The first close-ended question asked the grade(s) of their children. The second and third close-ended questions asked parents whether or not they have met with their child’s school counselor and whether or not they have attended a workshop sponsored or facilitated by their child’s school counselor. These questions were asked to determine the level of familiarity the parent participants had with the role of the school counselor at their children’s school. The next question on the survey provided a description of the school counselor’s role derived from the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) and then asked participants to indicate their level of familiarity with the role of the school counselor before reading the description. Paulson, Truscott, and Stuart (1999) discuss the intent of analysis being to distill an inclusive set of statements that capture the essence of the participants’ experience. In order to provide a context for the statements that would be distilled from the sample of parents, the parents were asked about their personal experience with their children’s school counselor.
The fifth question on the survey was the open-ended question: “In your opinion, what are the most valuable parent services of middle learning and/or the school counseling program.” The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions parents have of what school counseling services would be most helpful. This question was asked to encourage participants to think through their perceptions of what school counseling services are helpful to parents, and it was intentionally placed after the question providing a description of the role of the professional school counselor in order to attempt to get responses that are informed by a basic understanding of what a school counselor does (Jackson & Trochim, 2002).

The next two questions were designed to generate the list of statements to be used for the card sort activity. One was a scaled item on the importance (or salience) of certain common parental issues where parents will choose their top five issues of concern or interest out of 28 presented issues (i.e. getting children to do chores, teaching children self-esteem, helping children navigate difficult peer relationships, etc.). The 28 statements were extracted from three existing needs assessments. One was a needs assessment survey published by Schmidt (2010), and the other two were unpublished needs assessments acquired by the primary researcher (a practicing school counselor) from other school counselor colleagues working in local middle schools. Extracting statements from existing documents is consistent with what is frequently done in studies that use the concept mapping technique (Trochim, 1989; Van Exel & De Graaf, 2005). However, the goal in concept mapping is to generate a list of statements that ideally represents the entire conceptual domain for the topic of interest (Trochim, 1989). Therefore, the next question on the survey was an open-ended question with a probe
designed to elicit participants’ perspectives on the school counselor’s role without constraining their responses to the 28 preconceived issues used for the scaled item (Paulson, Truscott, & Stuart, 1999). In essence, the scaled item allowed participants to begin to familiarize themselves with and select from already identified issues of parent concern while the open-ended question that followed allowed participants to brainstorm issues of concern, an approach more typically used than using pre-existing statements (Trochim, 1989). The probe for the open-ended question was directly related to the topic of interest and asked: “Is there a parent education topic or parental concern that you are interested in but that wasn’t included in the list in the previous question? If so, please list the topic in the comment box below.”

The final question on the online survey was included in order to identify participants for the card sort activity and asked: “Would you be interested in volunteering to participate in a study conducted by [the school’s] middle learning counselor on ways school counselors can support parents in child rearing? If so, please leave your name in the comment box.”

**Procedure and Analysis: Steps of Concept Mapping**

**Step one: Preparation.** In this step, the sample is identified as well as the topic of focus. Before the concept mapping process is begun, participants must be chosen and the specific focus for the conceptualization must be chosen (Paulson & Edwards, 1997; Trochim, 1989; Van Exel & De Graaf, 205). Based on his own research, Trochim recommends 20 to 30 people in order to provide a valid sorting of the data (Paulson & Edwards, 1997). Nielsen (2004) states that in ideal number for a card sort activity is 15 participants. With these figures as a guide, the goal for this study was to obtain a sample
of between 15-20 participants. Out of the 66 parents who responded to the online survey, 34 (52%) indicated an interest in also participating in the card sort activity to further investigate parents’ perceptions of how school counselors can be helpful to parents in raising adolescent children. After being contacted by the primary researcher with the instructions to participate in the card sort activity, 17 (26%) parents actually completed the activity. The drop in the number of participants who were willing to complete the card sort may have been due to the passing of several months between parents indicating an interest in participating in the card sort via the online parent survey and actually receiving the instructions to participate in the card sort. Nevertheless, 17 participants fit into the recommended number of participants for the concept mapping method (Nielsen, 2004; Paulson & Edwards, 1997).

The research question for this study was: What sort of assistance, support, or education do independent school parents feel they need from school counselors in raising adolescent children? The aim in selecting a topic of focus is to arrive at a set of statements that is representative of the wide range of existing opinions about the topic (Van Exel & De Graaf, 2005), Therefore the topic of focus for this study was related to the research question and is independent school parents’ perceived need for school counselor support in rearing adolescent children. Trochim (1989) explained that it is important to try to anticipate the types of statements that will result from participant brainstorming in deciding on the focus of the study. So, it was decided that the perceived need for support would be best solicited in the form of parents wanting information from the school counselor about “how to….” (i.e. how to communicate effectively with my child’s teacher). This was also decided in order to create consistency in the statements
since some were extracted from pre-existing documents and others resulted from participant brainstorming. Trochim (1989) stated that statements should, in general, be consistent with what was called for in deciding on the focus of the study and should be detailed enough so that every member of the group can understand the essential meaning of the statement. This recommendation guided the decision of the researchers to create the consistency of a common sentence stem for the statements.

**Step two: Generation of statements.** Step two is the generation of statements related to the topic to be sorted by participants (Trochim, 1989). During this step, the researcher identifies which statements to put on cards to be sorted by participants (Van Exel & DeGraaf, 2005). In order to do this, the statements must be unitized, creating a unit of analysis consisting of a sentence or phrase that contains only one concept (Jackson & Trochim, 2002). Twenty-eight statements were extracted from pre-existing needs assessment surveys and used as primers on the online parent survey to generate a participant-led brainstorming of additional statements probed by the open-ended survey questions.

The “list-like” format of the participants’ open-ended responses lends itself to the creation of units of analysis (Jackson & Trochim, 2002, p. 313). Paulson, Truscott, and Stuart (1999) described a process for distilling an inclusive statement from open-ended survey responses. The same process was followed in order to distill statements from the open-ended responses from the parent survey instrument. Taking statements from parents’ survey responses allows the language of parents to be retained for the card sort activity. Per the process outlined by Paulson, Truscott, and Stuart (1999), the primary researcher emailed the other two members of the research team, both doctoral students,
parent responses to the two open-ended survey questions exported into a file. Between the two open-ended questions, there were 80 responses total; 60 responses to the first question: “In your opinion, what are the most valuable parent services of middle learning and/or of the school counseling program”; and 20 to the second question: “Is there a parent education topic or parental concern that you are interested in learning more about that wasn’t included in the list in the previous question? If so, please list the topic(s) in the comment box below.” All three team members, working independently, took the responses to the open-ended questions line-by-line and, using grammatical rules, demarcated separate sentences. Inter-rater reliability checks were performed throughout the process of demarcating the sentences through discussion and consensus-reaching, similar to the process suggested by Jackson and Trochim (2002), whose method for making unitizing decisions was also used in this process to ensure that each sentence was broken into single-concept phrases that would complete the sentence stems “how to….” or “how to help my child….” In order to assist the team in understanding parent responses, the primary researcher, a practicing school counselor, included an explanation of some of the terminology used in the school setting along with contextual information about the open-ended questions that prompted the parent responses. The team reached a consensus through discussion to eliminate contextual or irrelevant statement and eliminate redundant statements reference.

Next, the newly generated list of statements was compared with the existing parent education statements taken from already-published needs assessments to ensure that no statements were repeated. If there was overlap between a statement that already existed and a statement distilled from parents’ open-ended responses, the existing
statement was eliminated and the newly generated statement was retained in order to retain parents’ original language. This resulted in a final list of 73 statements (60 new statements and 13 pre-existing statements), each representing a single concept through the aforementioned unitizing decisions of the researchers and by ensuring that each statement contained one idea about parental concerns (Jackson & Trochim, 2002). Trochim (1989) recommended a list of 100 or less statements, although there is no limit to the number of statements that can be created. Another recommendation for the number of total statements is 50 statements (Card Sorting, 2012). The number of statements used in similar studies using the concept mapping method with open-ended responses ranges from 95 to 156 (Jackson & Trochim, 2002; Paulson, Edwards & Stuart, 1999; Trochim, 1989). The final list of 73 statements for this study fell into the recommended range of statements, so once the research team decided upon the final list of statements the list was sent to the Institutional Review Board for approval to use the statements for step three, the card sort activity.

**Step three: Structuring of statements.** Once the set of statements to be used for the study has been generated, the next step is for participants to structure the statements by sorting them into groups that are either pre-defined by the researcher (a closed card sort) or created and named by participants in a way that makes sense to them (an open card sort) (Trochim, 1989; Trochim, 1993; Card Sorting, 2012). This is the step where participants complete the actual card sort activity to sort the final list of statements, and this process can be done in person with a researcher and either one participant or a group of participants or remotely using a software program.
**In-Person Card Sort Activities.** Card sort activities are typically done in person, where each participant receives a set of cards with each brainstormed and/or extracted statement printed on a separate 3 x 5 inch index card (Trochim, 1989). Participants take the cards and sort them into separate piles. The restrictions are that participants must place each card into a pile, one card cannot be placed into more than one pile, all statements cannot be placed into the same single pile, and a pile cannot be created for each individual card. Except for those restrictions, participants sort the cards in a way that makes sense to them (Trochim, 1989). After participants have sorted the statements into piles, the results must be combined across participants by putting each person’s sorting results into a square table or matrix that has as many rows and columns as statements (Trochim, 1989). The researcher would then assign values to the matrix indicating that the participant either placed statements for each row and column together in a pile (a score of “1”) or that the participant did not place the statements together (a score of “0”) (Trochim, 1989). Next, individual matrices would be combined to obtain a group similarity matrix, which also has as many rows and columns as there are statements (Trochim, 1989). The group similarity matrix resulting from the sorting task and combining the results of the sort for each participant is considered the relational structure of the conceptual domain, or the topic, because it provides information about how the participants grouped the statements (Paulson & Edwards, 1997; Trochim, 1989). This similarity matrix would be used in order to analyze the groupings in the next step.

**Remote, Computer-Based Card Sort Activities.** An alternative to conducting the card sort in person with each participant is to perform the card sort remotely through the use of computer software. The benefit with remote, computer based card sort activities is
that it allows for many participants in many locations, however the drawback is that you do not get information on why participants sort the cards the way they do because you cannot see the participants or hear them thinking out loud (Card Sorting, 2012). In spite of this drawback, remote card sorting was chosen for this study to accommodate and encourage more parent participation, to allow for data collection throughout school holidays and vacations (i.e. winter break, thanksgiving break, etc.), and to accommodate parents who work and would have difficulty scheduling time to attend an in-person sorting session. There are several software programs that exist to help with remote card-sorting studies, and using software programs usually has the advantage of the researcher being able to use the software for the analysis of the data (Card Sorting, 2012). The Simple Card Sort (2013) program was chosen for this study because of affordability and accessibility of the software program and because it offered the feature of data analysis through the software. When using a software program to conduct a card sort activity, the researcher would use the list of brainstormed statements and, instead of printing them onto physical index cards, enter each statement into the software program according to the software instructions. Participants are emailed a link to the study and provided with instructions for the sort (Card Sorting, 2012). The Simple Card Sort program (2013) allowed for the statements to be entered into the software and provided a comment box for the researcher to include a welcome message to participants that included instructions for completing the activity. The program then provided a link to email to participants for them to click on in order to complete the activity. Using Simple Card Sort (2013), participants do not have to download software. The software offers a simple drag and drop interface for participants to sort the statements into piles online and gives
participants the option to leave comments about the card sort throughout the activity. Once each participant is finished, the program saves the results of their exercise and allows the researcher to view and analyze the results online using several different analysis tables. Raw data can also be downloaded as a spreadsheet to allow for manual analysis (Simple Card Sort, 2013). *Simple Card Sort* (2013) gives the option of having participants complete an open card sort or a closed card sort, and because the researchers were interested in learning how participants would sort or characterize the brainstormed statements, an open card sort was chosen. Participants were allowed to sort the statements, by dragging and dropping, into piles as they saw fit, using the typical restriction of each card needing to be sorted into at least one and only one pile (Trochim, 1989). Participants were able to rename and reorganize the groups and statements throughout the activity. Once participants had sorted all of the statements, they clicked “I’m Done” to submit and end the card sort activity. The *Simple Card Sort* (2013) program then created various analysis tables, combining each individual participant’s groupings into a group similarity matrix (Simple Card Sort, 2013).

**Step four: Analysis/mapping of statements.** After the group similarity matrix is created, the statistical procedure of representing the statements involves several steps (Paulson & Edwards, 1997). Commonly, two-dimensional multidimensional scaling (MDS) techniques are applied to the similarity matrix and the statistical technique MDS is performed on the card sort data to suggest the organizational principles implicit in the participants’ sorting (Jackson & Trochim, 2002; Trochim, 1993). The MDS technique can be performed using computer software programs (i.e. SPSS and Excel). The MDS analysis is typically combined with a hierarchical cluster analysis of the MDS
coordinates, resulting in a map that visually represents the group’s set of ideas about the topic. In this map, each idea is represented by a dot or point, with ideas that are more similar (as determined by the MDS and cluster analyses) located more proximally on the map (Jackson & Trochim, 2002; Trochim, 1993). Analysis of commonalities from different card sorting sessions can be formal, as in the process just explained, or as informal as using the researcher’s notes and recordings of the participants’ names and card numbers to find commonalities. Qualitative information based on comments participants make during in-person card sorts can also be used in data analysis (Card Sorting, 2012).

Some card sort software programs feature data analysis, as in the case of the Simple Card Sort (2013) software used for this study, which produces a group similarity matrix, conducts a cluster analysis on the matrix, and produces a tree view (dendrogram) of the results from the cluster analysis (Simple Card Sort, 2013). This analysis can be thought of as a statistical, computer-based variant to the multivariate method of using MDS and cluster analysis of point maps used in other studies (Jackson & Trochim, 2002; Paulson & Edwards, 1997; Paulson, Truscott, & Stuart, 1999; Trochim, 1989). Data analysis for this study maintained a statistical analysis of participant judgments, thereby reducing the researcher bias that methods bases on researcher-driven analysis are criticized for (Jackson & Trochim, 2002). However, the use of a computer-based software program eliminated the creation of 1) a point map based on MDS coordinates and 2) a cluster map visually representing how statements were grouped by a cluster analysis of the point map (Trochim, 1989). Instead, the program presented a tree view (dendrogram) based on a cluster analysis of the similarity matrix that visually represented
similarities and dissimilarities between statements (Simple Card Sort, 2013). This is divergent from the analysis approach represented in existing literature (see Jackson & Trochim, 2002; Paulson & Edwards, 1997; Paulson, Truscott, & Stuart, 1999; Trochim, 1989). Jackson and Trochim (2002) assert that the role played by theory in informing concept mapping analysis depends on decisions made by the researcher at each stage of the analysis, and the use of a method that places more emphasis on the statements, or the ideas of the participants than on the statistical placement or hierarchal arrangement of the statements is consistent with the researcher’s client-centered theoretical approach. If maps are not created from the multivariate multidimensional scaling (MDS) approach outlined by Trochim (1989), a less formal approach similar to less formal methods described by Jackson and Trochim (2002) can be taken to create a visual representation of the relationships between concepts once statements have been grouped and once clusters have been analyzed by using maps similar to spider maps or mind maps, as described by Wheeldon and Faubert (2009). In another instance of data analysis being informed and guided by theory (Jackson & Trochim, 2002), this less formal approach to creating a visual representation of data was taken for this study.

The Simple Card Sort (2013) program produces several data analysis tables useful for interpretation, including the aforementioned group similarity matrix and dendrogram, as well as a group summary.

**Group Summary.** Simple Card Sort (2013) provides a listing of all categories or groups used by participants. Groups can be sorted by number of participants who named the groups, allowing outliers to be determined and merged with similar, more popular groups. The software also provides a statement summary with the number of groups each
statement was placed into. The percentage of time any statement is placed in any group is provided, as well as a report on the amount of agreement there was between participant results for each category. The online card sort activity the participants created was an open card sort, meaning that they were free to pile cards into as many groups as they felt they needed, that they were free to place cards together in ways that seemed to fit to them, and that they were free to name the groups whatever made sense to them. All together, the participants created a total of 141 groups in order to organize or sort the 73 statements.

Because participants could arrange cards into groups then name the groups whatever they chose, many of the original 141 groups created by the participants were repetitive, and some groups shared the same name with the name being spelled differently or using different punctuation marks. The Simple Card Sort (2013) software counted each created group as a distinct group, therefore two groups with the same name but spelled differently would still be counted as two distinct groups. Many of the groups had distinct names, but were very similar to the names of other groups. The group summary provided by Simple Card Sort (2013) is considered raw data in the software program, and is not as interpretable as the similarity matrix or cluster analysis. However, the software offers a way to standardize groups that are misspelled or similarly named by using a feature entitled “Group Merging”, whereby the researcher can select group names that should be combined, enter a group name to combine them into, and click “merge” (Simple Card Sort, 2013).

“Group Merging” is a helpful feature in the software program in order to allow the researcher to eliminate redundant or repetitive groups and aid in the development of a
final cluster solution. Deciding on a number of clusters to select requires researcher judgment because there is no mathematical criterion that can be used in order to select clusters. This is because the “best” number of clusters depends on the context and level of specificity desired (Jackson & Trochim, 2002). Trochim (1989) suggested a cluster solution of anywhere from 3 to 20 final clusters of statements. In order to achieve this, eliminating repetitive or redundant groups is desirable, and using the merge feature in the Simple Card Sort (2013) software, the groups were merged, and the merging was defined by collapsing similar groups, misspelled groups, and repetitive groups (ex: goal setting, goal-setting) into larger groups. It was important to the researchers that the language of the participants was retained in the group naming as much as possible as this is a participant-oriented approach that allows for the clustering of qualitative data into themes as they are reported by participants rather than defined by the researchers (Paulson & Edwards, 1997). Therefore, in most cases, an original group name chosen by parent participants was used as the final name for a merged group. If a new name was created for any of the groups, researchers tried to retain as much of the original language as possible. For example, a group named “parent advocacy” was collapsed into a larger group called “parent support and advocacy”, and the groups “learning skills” and “support for differences” were merged into a larger group named “learning skills and differences.” Through this first stage of group merging, the list of 141 groups was streamlined down to 34 groups. Next, the group summary table was used to identify groups used by only one participant, and groups containing only one statement were merged into larger groups. These steps were justified by looking at the statements included in the groups, using the cluster analysis to determine other statements closely
associated with them, and seeing which groups the associated statements were in. In the end, the merging process resulted in a final list of 20 groups, which is within Trochim’s (1989) recommended range of 3 of 20 groups. The merging of the groups meant that the statements that were placed by participants in each eliminated group would now be included as statements that have been placed into the group that resulted from the merging, and the “Group Merging” feature of the Simple Card Sort (2013) factors this into its cluster analysis of the group similarity matrix, and consequently into the creation of the final cluster solution. This is a good illustration of how concept mapping is a blending of human judgment and the mathematical algorithm of cluster analysis (Jackson & Trochim, 2002).

**Similarity matrix and cluster analysis.** Analysis reports available through the Simple Card Sort (2013) software include a similarity matrix based on the percentage that any one statement is grouped with another statement. A cluster analysis is then performed on the similarity matrix, using an algorithm to look for a set of statements (two or more) with the highest similarity score. When clusters are formed, the statements in the set are replaced with the cluster (Simple Card Sort, 2013). This cluster analysis reveals those statements that are most frequently placed together by participants in the study, assigning a score of 0-100%, with 100% meaning that all participants grouped the particular statements together in their groupings. This is similar to the statistical process described by Trochim (1989), whereby a score is assigned placing a value on inter-statement similarity using the MDS method and used to create a point map visually representing statements’ similarity. In Trochim’s (1989) method, the point map is analyzed in order to create clusters of similar statements and then to create a cluster map.
visually representing the relationship between statements and between clusters of statements. With the *Simple Card Sort* (2013) software, the cluster analysis results in a visual display in the form of a tree view (dendrogram). The tree view (dendrogram) shows statement clustering from strong to weak, left to right (Simple Card Sort, 2013).

*The cluster solution.* Using the group summary, a group-by-card analysis, and the cluster analysis, the *Simple Card Sort* (2013) software creates a cluster solution, by which the software takes the statement-group pairings most frequently created by participants and reports a list of groups along with a list of the statements that were sorted by the participants into each group. In Trochim’s (1989) method, it is the task of the researcher to use the MDS and cluster analysis results to decide how many clusters the statements should be grouped into for the final solution. The researcher must use discretion in examining different cluster solutions to decide on which makes sense for the concept at hand. Each time the researcher moves from one cluster level to the next lowest (i.e. from 13 to 12 clusters), the researcher must examine which statements were grouped together at that step and attempt to decide whether or not the grouping makes sense for the overall purpose of the study (Trochim, 1989). The *Simple Card Sort* software automates this process by using an algorithm to look at the most frequent group-statement pairings, eliminate groups that overlap with one another due to the same cards being repeated in multiple groups by comparing all of the group-statement pairing, and using the cluster analysis to factor in how similarly participants ranked certain statements (Simple Card Sort, 2013). This can be done visually, or manually, using Trochim’s (1989) more traditional method by using the statement (point) map and cluster map as guides and choosing a clustering solution that partitions the items into groupings that do not overlap.
in multidimensional space (Paulson & Edwards, 1997; Paulson, Truscott, & Stuart, 1999). In this case, the *Simple Card Sort* (2013) software produced a cluster solution based on the similarity matrix, cluster analysis, and group-statement pairings of 15 groups. While this solution provides a good foundation for deciding on the final cluster solution, the task still remains for the researcher to use discretion in examining the cluster solution to determine whether or not it makes sense, considering the conceptual domain of the study (Trochim, 1989). Some of the groups included in the software program’s cluster solution included only one statement, and it was decided that it did not make sense to create a cluster solution that includes clusters with stand-alone statements. Therefore, researcher discretion was used to create a final cluster solution of 9 clusters, fitting into the recommendation for a solution of 3 to 20 clusters (Trochim, 1989). This is another illustration of how concept mapping involves using a blend of statistical tools and human judgment working together to guide decisions about the goodness of fit for the final cluster solution (Jackson & Trochim, 2002). The final cluster solution provides a structure for the statements that can now be used for the final two steps, interpretation and use of themes to guide planning and evaluating (Trochim, 1989). The interpretation and use of themes to guide program planning and evaluation will be discussed.

**Reliability and Validity**

Trustworthiness for this study was established by using a team of researchers to unitize brainstormed statements to be used for the study and by establishing inter-rater reliability by sharing individual research team members making decisions about the statement unitizing and about the final cluster solution, sharing individual decisions with other team members, and reaching consensus through discussion (Jackson & Trochim,
Limitations imposed on data collection by predetermined questions or instruments is reduced because the data that is clustered through the concept-mapping process is a participant-oriented process that organizes data into themes as participants report them, rather than defined by the researchers (Paulson & Edwards, 1997).

Because the process of concept mapping is participant-oriented, different investigations involving different samples may lead to differing sets of statements and a different conceptualization of relationships between statements (Van Excel & De Graaf, 2005). This is not regarded as a problem because the structure chosen for each study is only a logical construct used by the investigator, and the aim is always to arrive at a set of statements representative of the wide range of existing opinions about whatever the topic is (Van Exel & De Graaf, 2005). Further, whatever the structure and regardless of what the researcher considers to be a balanced set of statements, eventually it is the participants who give meaning to the statements by sorting them (Brown, 1993).

**Results**

Trochim’s (1989) fifth and sixth steps to concept mapping are interpretation of results and the use of the results for program planning and evaluation. Results can be interpreted in several ways in concept mapping, the most basic interpretation being the emergence of a theory-based representation of categories. Similar to content analysis interpretation, the concepts can be coded into themes or categories based on the clusters (Jackson & Trochim, 2002).

The research question was: What sort of assistance, support, or education do independent school parents feel they need from school counselors in raising adolescent children? The online parent education survey asked parents open-ended questions that
researchers were able to use in order to distill statements for the card sort activity. Additionally, parent responses to these open-ended questions enabled researchers to collect descriptive information about parents’ familiarity with the role of the school counselor and exposure of parents to the school counselor (reported in the participants section), as well as information about the services that parent respondents perceive to be the most valuable services offered by the school counseling program.

**School Counseling Services Valued by Parents**

When asked which parent services were the most valuable services provided by the school counselor, parents provided a variety of responses. A parent of a child in the 6th grade commented “Parent education [increasing] awareness of the social issues at school for my child.” A 7th grade parent replied “Communication of issues related to my child in their social and community environment, education for students and parents on key issues surrounding adolescent behavior and growth, communication on what is going on in the school with regard to programs offered to students on a regular basis- what are you talking about?.” A parent of an 8th grade student commented, “Helping parents support their children’s social and academic development and have realistic expectations. Also providing a sounding board for discussion of issues.” Parents’ responses to this question provided a basic understanding of themes parents are interested in school counselors including as a part of the services offered to parents. However, more specific information about parent interest was derived from parent responses to the questions asking about specific parent education topics.

**Parent interest in parent education topics presented to them.** The online survey presented parents with 28 parent education topics, and asked them to select the
five topics that interested them the most as parents. The complete list of the 28 parent education topics are listed in Table 1. The ten topics that were selected most frequently by the parents who completed the survey are presented in Table 2.

Table 1

Parent Education Topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>28 Parent Education Topics Presented to Parents on Online Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child get financial aid information for post-secondary education (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child cope with family changes (divorce, death, etc.) (ps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child better understand his or her abilities, interests, and aptitudes (ps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child resolve conflict with others (ps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child cope with pressures from school, home, and friends (ps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child become less shy and nervous about others (ps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child improve study skills and test-taking skills (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child explore future careers (c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child get information about educational options after high school (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to use logical and natural consequences (ps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child better understand people who are different (ps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child get along better with others (peers, siblings, parents) (ps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child make and keep friends (ps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child focus more on schoolwork (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child select the most appropriate courses in school (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child manage time better (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to encourage my child (ps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to develop responsibility in my child (ps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child solve problems and make good decisions (ps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child get along with teachers (ps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to be an effective single parent (ps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child be more comfortable speaking up in class (learn to self-advocate) (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child get help when needed (ps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child accept criticism (ps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child gain better self-understanding (ps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to communicate with children/tweens/teens (ps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to respond appropriately to sibling rivalry (ps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child set goals and carry them out (a)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. (a): academic topic; (c): career development topic; (ps): personal/social topic
Table 2

*Parent Education Topics Selected by Participants most Frequently*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Education Topic</th>
<th>Percentage of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child improve study skills (a)</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child solve problems and make good decisions (ps)</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child set goals and carry them out (a)</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child cope with pressures from school, home, and friends (ps)</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child better understand his or her abilities, interests, and aptitudes (ps)</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child manage time better (a)</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to develop responsibility in my child (ps)</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child resolve conflict with others (ps)</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child get help when needed (ps)</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to communicate with children/tweens/teens (ps)</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* (a): academic topic; (c): career development topic; (ps): personal/social topic

**Parent-generated parent education topics of interest.** After parents who completed the online survey selected the parent education topics that were most interesting to them from the topics provided, they were asked to indicate whether there was a parent education topic that interested them but was not included in the provided list. This was an open-ended question, and it was one of two open-ended questions on the survey. The second open-ended question asked parents to indicate what they thought to be the most valuable parent services of the middle school and/or of the school counseling program. Both of these questions were analyzed by a team of three researchers using the process for distilling statements from open-ended responses described by Paulson, Truscott, and Stuart (1999). The combined responses to the two open-ended questions yielded a total of 60 parent-generated parent education topics or
Because the purpose of this study is to find out what parent education topics parents are interested in, it was important to retain parents’ language wherever possible. Therefore, where parent-generated statements were similar or repetitive in comparison to the existing 28 parent education statements, the redundant existing statements were eliminated and the parent-generated statements were retained, resulting in a final list of 73 statements. Table 3 lists these parent-generated statements along with the original statements not repeated by parents’ responses to the open-ended survey questions.

Table 3

*Parent Education Statements Generated by Parents’ Open-Ended Survey Responses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements Distilled from the Open-Ended Survey Responses</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How to encourage my child to explore new subjects and academic interests (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child develop test-taking strategies and skills (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child work beyond his or her academic challenges (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to appropriately be involved with teachers, staff, and administrators in the school (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to communicate better with my child's teacher (ps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to cope with my child's learning disability/disabilities (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to create a home environment conducive to learning (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to develop a collaborative academic plan with my child (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child adjust to a new school (ps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child be aware of available school resources (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child cope with academic stress (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child develop better executive functioning skills (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child develop better organizational skills (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child learn to evaluate his or her own efforts in school (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child learn to better manage his or her time (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my middle school child prepare for high school (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child set appropriate goals (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to talk to my child about his or her career choices and development (c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to understand the academic tools my child uses to study (a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to teach my child to make wise friendship decisions (ps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to understand adolescent behavior and growth in general (ps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child appropriately and effectively communicate with his or her peers (ps)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How to advocate for my child (ps)
How to be aware of and access appropriate community resources (ps)
How to be more aware of the social issues my child is experiencing at school (ps)
How to become informed on current generational trends and issues (ps)
How to more effectively communicate with my child (ps)
How to help my child deal with peer pressure (ps)
How to develop realistic expectations for my child (ps)
How to encourage digital citizenship with my child (ps)
How to encourage my son or daughter to pursue an area or interest historically dominated by the opposite gender (ps)
How to help my child achieve better emotional well-being (ps)
How to help my child cope with emotional challenges (ps)
How to help my child deal with anxiety (ps)
How to help my child deal with gender specific issues (ps)
How to help my child stick with good habits (ps)
How to help my child develop effective social skills (ps)
How to help my child develop strong self-efficacy (ps)
How to help my child feel a sense of belonging (ps)
How to help my child feel comfortable approaching the school counselor, when and if needed (ps)
How to help my child form meaningful friendships (ps)
How to help my child get enough physical activity each day (ps)
How to help my child effectively handle bullying or mean behavior (ps)
How to help my child effectively handle peer pressure (ps)
How to help my child have a good diet (ps)
How to help my child identify his or her own strengths (ps)
How to help my child learn about and deal with eating disorders (ps)
How to help my child navigate puberty (ps)
How to help my child practice good personal hygiene (ps)
How to help my child understand and avoid the negative influence of media (ps)
How to know what are appropriate expectations for my child (ps)
How to promote internet safety in my household (ps)
How to protect my child from cyber bullying (ps)
How to protect my child from online predators (ps)
How to receive referrals for outside ongoing counseling services (ps)
How to reinforce developmental topics discussed at school in our home (ps)
How to talk to my child about sexuality and relationships (ps)
How to teach my child conflict resolution skills (ps)
How to teach my child to appreciate diversity (ps)
How to understand the impact of family dynamics on children (ps)

Original Statements Not Repeated in Open-Ended Responses to Survey

How to help my child be more comfortable speaking up in class (learn to self-advocate) (a)
How to help my child better understand his or her abilities, interests, and aptitudes (ps)
How to help my child get along with teachers (ps)
How to help my child get financial aid information for post-secondary education (a)
How to help my child select the most appropriate courses in school (a)
How to help my child get information about educational options after high school (a)
How to develop responsibility in my child (ps)
How to encourage my child (ps)
How to help my child accept criticism (ps)
How to help my child gain better self-understanding (ps)
How to help my child get along better with others (peers, siblings, parents) (ps)
How to respond appropriately to sibling rivalry (ps)
How to use logical and natural consequences (ps)

Note. (a): academic topic; (c): career development topic; (ps): personal/social topic

Card Sort Results

After the statements to be used for the study were collected and compiled into one large group of statements, the next step was for the participants in the study to perform the card sort activity, in which they were to arrange the statements into groups of statements, or cards, that seemed to them to "go together.” The statement groupings were analyzed using the Simple Card Sort online program to arrive at a list of groupings used by participants. Together, the participants used a total of 141 different group names. Many of the group names were either repetitive or very similar, so the groups that were either repetitive or very similar were merged together using a feature of the Simple Card Sort (2013) software called “Group Merging.” This feature allowed researchers to eliminate redundant and repetitive statements and arrive at a final list of 20 groups from which to select the final groups for the cluster solution. Having a more condensed list of groups aids in the development of that final cluster solution (Jackson & Trochim, 2002). Table 4 shows the groups that were merged in order to arrive at the final list of 20 groups.
Table 5 shows the merged group names of the various groupings created by participants. The analysis of the group names was then performed using the group merging defined by the primary researcher. For each group, the number of participants who used the group to organize statements is listed, along with the number of cards placed into each group. For this number, if two participants placed the same card into the same group, it is listed twice. The number of unique cards shows the number of only unique cards. If two participants placed the same card into the same group, it is listed only once here. The agreement figure is a measurement of the agreement between participants on whether a statement is placed into a particular group. Higher numbers mean higher between-participant agreement, with a score of 1 meaning 100% participant agreement (Simple Card Sort, 2013).

Table 4

*Group Merges to Create Final Condensed Group List*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Merged/Condensed Group Name</th>
<th>Original Group Names Created by Participant(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Academic Opportunities and Career Choices          | Post high school issues  
Planning for the future  
Career/Educational development  
Academically plan with my child  
Taking charge of financial aid  
Upper Learning/College bound  
College and beyond  
Beyond high school |
| Academic Support and Services                      | School resources and how to best use them  
Academic resources |
| Adolescent Development and Issues                  | Growing a child holistically  
Duh Mom! It’s age appropriate  
Adolescent behavior  
Development |
<p>| Adolescent Self-Management- Study,                 | Ace every subject every time |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Subtopics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organization, Goal-Setting</td>
<td>Work habits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching goal setting and self evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Study skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organizational skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self reliance/Executive functioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Goal setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic/Organizational habits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic growth- self directed learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Executive functioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping Skills</td>
<td>Life skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perfect solutions in a not so perfect world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Problem solving and problem avoidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adapting to change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating a Positive Relationship and</td>
<td>Strong family ties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Family issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Home environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family dynamics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Wellness</td>
<td>Emotional needs and when more help may be needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional well-being and communication strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Skills and Differences</td>
<td>Support group for learning/personality differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning differences/Advocating for your child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning/Personal development mindset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigating Academic Success</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High school skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Navigating academics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Influences</td>
<td>External forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive outside influences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Resources</td>
<td>Leveraging resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Available community resources for families and students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External resources and support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Support and Advocacy</td>
<td>Family support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent support skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-Teacher/Staff Communication</td>
<td>School/home issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being a good school partner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parenting Skills
- Parent/child communication
- Adolescent parenting
- Parenting 101
- Positive Discipline strategies
- Parental development/skills
- Navigating parenting more peacefully
- Discipline
- Being a good parent
- Basic parenting skills
- Parent development
- Parenting
- Parenting practices
- Parenting tips

Physical Health and Wellness
- Adolescent health and wellness
- Physical health
- Health and wellness
- Healthy knowledge promotes healthy body
- Healthy self-image and concept and physical health and fitness
- Healthy choices
- Healthy living
- Personal hygiene and diet

Puberty, Sex, Development
- Puberty
- Sex
- Development

Self Awareness and Esteem
- Student strength finder
- Teaching self-awareness
- Self-awareness
- Facilitating a self-aware child
- Facilitating your child’s inner strength
- Personal development
- Personal development and awareness
- Building positive self esteem
- Helping your child be strong and informed
- Tenacity/Confidence
- Yes you can

Sexuality and Gender Issues
- Gender issues
- Gender matters
- Go girls go boys

Social/Emotional Development
- Peer relationships and skills
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technology Safety and Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Healthy communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative emotions and self confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful friendships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-educational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping with my kid’s friend issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generational trends/issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping my child secure/safe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology/media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigating technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet and social media savvy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology and your child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology/media/generational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyber safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet and media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet and media safety</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5

*Group Summary (After Group Merge)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Names</th>
<th># Participants</th>
<th># Cards</th>
<th>Unique Cards</th>
<th>Agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parenting Skills</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent Self Management - Study, Organization, Goal Setting</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping Skills</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Skills and Differences</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Awareness and Esteem</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent Development and Issues</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Opportunities and Career Choices</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating a Positive Family Relationship and Environment</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Relationships and Skills</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Wellness</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Health &amp; Wellness</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-Teacher/Staff</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexuality and Gender Issues</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigating Academic Success</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Support &amp; Services</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Influences</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Resources</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology Safety and Use</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puberty, Sex, Development</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The *Simple Card Sort* (2013) software took the list of statements and created a group similarity matrix, based on the percentage of times statements were placed together by the participants. The group similarity matrix is shown in Figure 1. Using this similarity matrix, researchers can determine the frequency of time (in percentage) participants placed two particular statements together or believed those statements to be
similar to one another. Higher similarity percentages mean that the two cards were frequently placed together in the same categories (Simple Card Sort, 2013).
How to encourage my child to explore new subjects and academic interests

How to help my child develop test-taking strategies and skills

47 52 How to help my child work beyond his or her academic challenges

29 23 29 How to appropriately be involved with teachers, staff, and administrators in the school

29 23 29 54 How to communicate better with my child's teacher

29 41 58 17 How to cope with my child's learning disability/disabilities

17 17 23 29 11 How to create a home environment conducive to learning

35 64 41 47 47 29 29 How to develop a collaborative academic plan with my child

17 11 17 23 23 37 11 23 How to help my child adjust to a new school

29 52 41 52 47 23 5 47 23 How to help my child be aware of available school resources

29 52 47 29 23 23 11 41 23 47 How to help my child cope with academic stress

23 47 23 11 11 23 23 35 11 23 29 How to help my child develop better rew

29 64 29 11 11 17 17 35 5 35 35 76 88 47

41 58 41 23 23 23 11 64 29 35 35 29 47 47

58 23 29 17 17 17 17 29 5 11 23 35 47 58

35 35 23 11 11 23 5 47 29 23 29 17 17 17

23 70 41 58 52 29 23 58 29 70 47 35 47 35

- 5 5 - 5 11 5 - 17 - 17 5 5 5

- 5 - - 5 5 17 11 17 - - - 11 -

11 - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

17 5 11 64 70 35 29 17 35 29 11 5 - - 11

17 17 23 35 35 29 17 23 17 29 5 17 11 11

11 - - 29 23 11 23 11 41 11 17 5 - - 5

5 - 5 11 17 11 35 11 23 - - - - -

17 - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 11

17 11 23 29 29 11 58 29 17 5 23 5 17 5

17 5 5 11 11 5 17 11 17 - - - 5 5 5

41 - 17 11 11 11 17 11 35 5 11 23 5 23 5

17 5 17 - - 5 5 5 17 - 29 11 5 11

11 - 11 - - 11 5 5 5 11 - 23 11 5 11

17 17 11 - - 5 5 5 29 17 47 29 29 11

17 - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 11

17 - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 11

17 17 11 5 5 5 29 17 23 17 29 5 17 47 17

5 11 - 5 5 5 5 5 29 5 23 17 17 11

29 17 29 11 11 17 5 11 11 17 29 35 35 58

11 5 11 - - 5 5 - - - 17 - - 11

29 23 35 35 29 29 - - 23 29 52 41 11 11 41

11 - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 11

11 - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 17

5 - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 5

5 - 5 - 5 - 5 - 5 - 5 - - 11

11 - 5 5 5 - 5 5 35 - 11 5 - - 5

5 - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 5

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 5

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 5

11 - 17 5 5 5 17 5 17 29 5 5 5 - - 17

5 - 35 29 17 47 17 23 17 5 5 - - 5

11 - 17 5 11 11 17 17 5 11 - - 5 - - 5

11 5 5 5 5 5 - - - 23 - 17 11 17

17 - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 11

11 - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 5

11 5 5 5 5 5 - 23 - - 17 11 17

17 - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 11

11 - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 5

11 5 5 5 17 5 29 23 11 11 41 29 17 41

58 47 29 23 23 5 47 29 41 29 29 23 52

29 41 23 52 47 23 11 47 29 41 29 17 41

29 29 29 11 11 23 5 29 17 35 35 23 23 23

58 47 29 23 23 5 47 29 52 47 47 11 35 41

29 35 17 17 23 17 35 17 35 23 17 23 23

35 17 17 - - 11 5 5 11 11 23 35 41 29

11 5 23 11 17 17 47 5 17 5 23 17 11 5

11 11 17 - - - - 29 5 29 5 11 11

29 5 23 - - 5 - - - - - - - - - - 5

5 - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 5

5 - 5 5 17 5 29 11 23 - - 5 5

5 - 5 5 11 17 47 5 5 5 23 11 11 5

67
How to help my child develop better executive functioning skills

- 11 17 11 5 11 How to help my child develop better organizational skills
- 11 17 11 5 11 How to help my child learn to evaluate his or her own efforts in school
- 11 17 11 5 11 How to help my child appropriately and effectively communicate with his or her peers
- 11 17 11 5 11 How to advocate for my child
- 11 17 11 5 11 How to understand the academic tools my child uses to study
- 11 17 11 5 11 How to understand adolescent behavior and growth in general
- 11 17 11 5 11 How to become informed on current ge
- 11 17 11 5 11 How to teach my child to make wise friendship decisions
- 11 17 11 5 11 How to understand adolescent behavior and growth in general
- 11 17 11 5 11 How to be aware of and access appropriate community resources
- 11 17 11 5 11 How to be more aware of the social issues my child is
- 11 17 11 5 11 How to advocate for my child
- 11 17 11 5 11 How to understand the academic tools my child uses to study
- 11 17 11 5 11 How to understand adolescent behavior and growth in general
- 11 17 11 5 11 How to become informed on current ge
- 11 17 11 5 11 How to teach my child to make wise friendship decisions
- 11 17 11 5 11 How to understand adolescent behavior and growth in general
- 11 17 11 5 11 How to be aware of and access appropriate community resources
- 11 17 11 5 11 How to be more aware of the social issues my child is
How to help my child feel comfortable approaching the school counselor, when and if needed

- How to help my child get meaningful friendships
- How my child get enough physical activity each day
- How to help my child effectively handle bullying or mean behavior
- How to help my child have a good diet
- How to help my child identify his or her own strengths
- How to help my child learn about and deal with eating disorders
- How to help my child effectively handle peer pressure
- How to help my child practice good personal hygiene
- How to promote internet safety in my household
- How to know what are appropriate expectations for my child
- How to protect my child from cyberbullying
- How to receive referrals for outside ongoing counseling services
- How to reinforce developmental topics discussed at school in our home
How to protect my child from online predators

How to receive referrals for outside ongoing counseling services

How to reinforce developmental topics discussed at school in our home

How to talk to my child about sexuality and relationships

How to teach my child conflict resolution skills

How to understand the impact of family dynamics on children

How to help my child be more comfortable speaking up in class (learn to self-advocate)

5 11 17 41 How to help my child better understand his or her abilities, interests, and aptitudes

5 23 17 47 11 How to help my child get along with teachers

5 23 17 47 11 How to help my child get financial aid information for post-secondary education

17 11 35 58 How to help my child select the most appropriate courses in school

5 23 17 47 11 How to help my child get information about educational options after high school

5 23 17 47 11 How to help my child develop responsibility in my child

5 23 17 47 11 How to encourage my child

5 23 17 47 11 How to help my child ace

5 23 17 47 11 How to help my child

5 23 17 47 11 How to help my child

5 23 17 47 11 How to help my child
How to be more aware of the social issues my child is experiencing at school

How to become informed on current generational trends and issues

How to effectively communicate with my child

How to develop realistic expectations for my child

How to encourage digital citizenship with my child

How to help my child cope with emotional challenges

How to help my child deal with anxiety

How to help my child deal with gender-specific issues

How to help my child stick with good habits

How to help my child develop effective social skills

How to help my child develop strong self-efficacy

How to help my child feel a sense of belonging

How to help my child feel comfortable approaching the school counselor, when and if needed

How to help my child form meaningful friendships

How to help my child get enough physical activity each day

Figure 1

Group Similarity Matrix
The similarity matrix reads from left to right on each segment above, and the number shown is the percentage of times participants placed any two statements together. For example, the statement “How to encourage my child to explore new subjects and academic interests” was put together with “How to help my child develop test-taking strategies and skills” by 29% of the participants, and put together with the statement “How to help my child work beyond his or her academic challenges” by 47% of the participants.

*Simple Card Sort* (2013) performs a cluster analysis on the group similarity matrix and displays the results of the cluster analysis in a tree view (dendrogram). This dendrogram provides a visual representation of how similar participants believe statements to be (*Simple Card Sort*, 2013). The dendrogram provides a visual representation of how similar statements were clustered by participants, and can be used as a tool to determine the cluster solution based on how participants grouped similar statements (*Simple Card Sort*, 2013). The dendrogram is displayed in Figure 2.
Figure 2
Tree View (Dendrogram) of Statement Similarity
The dendrogram shows a tree view of the various ways statements were clustered together by participants. The tree is read from left to right, with clusters of statements that were placed together more frequently at the left of the dendrogram. The dendrogram provides a visual representation of the similarities displayed in the group similarity matrix, placing those statements thought by the participants to be similar to one another together into clusters. The dendrogram provides a starting point in identifying the clusters that will make up the final cluster solution by showing which statements participants place together. The next task is to determine which of the clusters shown provide the best answer to the research question being investigated (Jackson & Trochim, 2002).

The *Simple Card Sort* (2013) software uses its cluster analysis of the similarity matrix, and uses an algorithm to analyzes the statement-group pairings and reveals pairings with the highest statement-group agreement. This is accomplished by the software taking each statement and determining which group the statement was placed in the most by participants. The software then generates a cluster solution that can be used by the researcher to determine a final cluster solution that makes sense in the context of the study (Jackson & Trochim, 2002; Simple Card Sort, 2013). With guidance from the *Simple Card Sort* (2013) software personnel, researcher discretion was used to arrive a final cluster solution of 9 clusters.

In order to arrive at the final cluster solution, the researchers considered the final list of 20 groups created by the participants listed in Table 5 and used two factors in deciding which groups to use for the cluster solution, the agreement for each group and the amount of participants who used the group to sort statements into. The concept of
Agreement comes from Donna Spencer’s Card Sort Spreadsheet (Spencer, 2013) where, generally speaking, higher agreement represents more agreement between participants on which statements belong in a particular grouping (Simple Card Sort, 2013). This figure is similar to the bridging value figure used in other concept mapping studies (see Jackson & Trochim, 2002; Paulson & Edwards, 1997; Trochim, 1989). The bridging value is also used to determine how much agreement there is among participants on which statements belong in which groups. Lower bridging values mean that there was more agreement on the statements in a particular grouping, and higher bridging values mean that there was less agreement among participants on the statements belonging to a particular grouping (Jackson & Trochim, 2002). Agreement values represent the same concept as bridging values, but in the case of agreement, a lower value (0) means there was less agreement between participants and a higher value (1) means that there was more agreement between participants (Spencer, 2013). Generally, agreement values between 0.0 and 0.25 are considered to be low values, agreement values between 0.26 and 0.50 are considered to be moderate, and agreement values of 0.75 or higher is considered to be high (Spencer, 2013). A higher agreement value means that statements in a particular grouping were more frequently linked with the other statements in the cluster. A lower agreement value means that the statements in a particular grouping were linked to the other statements in the same grouping, but were also thought to be related to other statements, including statements in other clusters (Paulson & Edwards, 1997). Bridging values and agreement should be used as a backup to human judgment in determining which clusters, or groups, to use in the final cluster solution (Jackson & Trochim, 2002).
In deciding on the final 9-cluster solution for this study, the cluster solution generated by the *Simple Card Sort* (2013) software was used as a guide, and clusters were used for the solution if they met one or both of the following conditions: 1) the grouping was used by the majority of the participants, 2) the group had at least a moderate agreement value, suggesting that the grouping represented a more “discrete” theme due to high agreement between participants (Paulson & Edwards, 1997, p. 75). As Jackson and Trochim (2002) state, agreement was used as a backup to human judgment in deciding on which clusters to use for the final solution. For example, the group “Parenting Skills” was used in the final cluster solution and is a group with a low agreement value of 0.23. The group was used because the majority of the participants (13 out of 17) used it to help them organize the statements, and because it makes sense that a group entitled “Parenting Skills” would be used to house many statements that may be directly related to parenting but might also overlap with other areas of raising an adolescent child. Still, the use of parenting skills as a concept in organizing the types of issues faced by parents was considered by the researchers to be important to retain. The final cluster solution is shown in Table 6, and they are described below, starting with a summary of the clusters that fall into the Personal/Social Development domain of The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model (2012) and followed by a summary of the clusters that fall into the Academic Development domain of the ASCA National Model (2012).
Table 6

Final Cluster Solution

Cluster Names and Statements Included in Each Cluster

**Self Awareness and Esteem**
- How to encourage my child to explore new subjects and academic interests
- How to help my child work beyond his or her academic challenges
- How to help my child set appropriate goals
- How to encourage my son or daughter to pursue an area or interest historically dominated by the opposite gender
- How to help my child achieve better emotional well-being
- How to help my child deal with anxiety
- How to help my child deal with gender specific issues
- How to help my child develop strong self-efficacy
- How to help my child feel comfortable approaching the school counselor, when and if needed
- How to help my child identify his or her own strengths
- How to teach my child to appreciate diversity
- How to help my child be more comfortable speaking up in class (learn to self-advocate)
- How to help my child better understand his or her abilities, interests, and aptitudes
- How to develop responsibility in my child
- How to help my child gain better self-understanding

**Adolescent Self Management: Study, Organization, and Goal Setting**
- How to help my child develop test-taking strategies and skills
- How to help my child work beyond his or her academic challenges
- How to cope with my child's learning disability/disabilities
- How to develop a collaborative academic plan with my child
- How to help my child be aware of available school resources
- How to help my child cope with academic stress
- How to help my child develop better executive functioning skills
- How to help my child develop better organizational skills
- How to help my child learn to evaluate his or her own efforts in school
- How to help my child learn to better manage his or her time
- How to help my middle school child prepare for high school
- How to understand the academic tools my child uses to study
- How to help my child stick with good habits
- How to help my child select the most appropriate courses in school

**Parent-Teacher/Staff Communication**
- How to appropriately be involved with teachers, staff, and administrators in the
school
How to communicate better with my child's teacher
How to advocate for my child
How to be aware of and access appropriate community resources
How to receive referrals for outside ongoing counseling services
How to help my child get along with teachers

**Parenting Skills**
How to create a home environment conducive to learning
How to understand adolescent behavior and growth in general
How to be more aware of the social issues my child is experiencing at school
How to become informed on current generational trends and issues
How to more effectively communicate with my child
How to develop realistic expectations for my child
How to know what are appropriate expectations for my child
How to reinforce developmental topics discussed at school in our home
How to understand the impact of family dynamics on children
How to encourage my child
How to respond appropriately to sibling rivalry
How to use logical and natural consequences

**Academic Opportunities and Career Opportunities**
How to talk to my child about his or her career choices and development
How to help my child get financial aid information for post-secondary education
How to help my child get information about educational options after high school

**Peer Relationships and Skills**
How to teach my child to make wise friendship decisions
How to help my child appropriately and effectively communicate with his or her peers
How to help my child deal with peer pressure
How to help my child develop effective social skills
How to help my child feel a sense of belonging
How to help my child form meaningful friendships
How to help my child effectively handle bullying or mean behavior
How to help my child effectively handle peer pressure
How to teach my child conflict resolution skills
How to help my child get along better with others (peers, siblings, parents)

**Physical Health & Wellness**
How to understand adolescent behavior and growth in general
How to help my child get enough physical activity each day
How to help my child have a good diet
How to help my child learn about and deal with eating disorders
How to help my child navigate puberty
How to help my child practice good personal hygiene
How to talk to my child about sexuality and relationships

**Technology Safety and Use**
- How to encourage digital citizenship with my child
- How to help my child understand and avoid the negative influence of media
- How to promote internet safety in my household
- How to protect my child from cyber bullying
- How to protect my child from online predators

**Emotional Wellness**
- How to help my child achieve better emotional well-being
- How to help my child cope with emotional challenges

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**Clusters that fall into the Personal/Social domain of the ASCA National Model (2012).** Six of the clusters in the 9-cluster solution were thematic clusters that fit into the Personal/Social domain of The ASCA National Model (2012). These clusters are Peer Relationships and Skills, Parenting Skills, Physical Health and Wellness, Technology Safety and Use, Self Awareness and Esteem, and Emotional Wellness.

*Peer relationships and skills.* This group included topics about how parents can help their children learn the skills necessary to develop and maintain healthy relationships with their peers, siblings, and adults.

*Parenting skills.* This category included topics that specifically dealt with skills and information parents felt they needed in order to raise their children and create healthy home environments for their children. Statements in this category reflect parents’ interest in learning how to communicate with their children in a healthy way, gaining a better understanding of realistic expectations of adolescent children and learning how to discipline adolescent children effectively. An interpretation of the dendrogram shows...
that topics in this category were also linked to topics in the parent/teacher communication
group in relation to creating a home environment conducive to learning.

**Physical health and wellness.** The topics dealing with children’s physical growth, development, and health were placed into this group. The statements represented in this group dealt with children’s general health (diet and nutrition) as well as more specific topics pertaining to health (puberty, eating disorders, weight loss/gain).

**Technology safety and use.** This group was created by parents to house the topics dealing with children’s use of technology as well as how to ensure safety in using technology available to children. Statements represented in this group pertained to parents wanting to gain a better understanding of the technology their children use as well as them wanting to make sure that their children are using technology safely and appropriately.

**Self-awareness and esteem.** This group includes topics that have to do with encouraging and facilitating self-awareness and self-esteem in middle school children. This group was among the largest group, with parents placing 51 of the 73 total cards into this category. The statements in this group were related to parents helping adolescent children be more aware of their strengths and abilities, how to gain a greater awareness of and respect for others, and how to explore new subjects and interests.

**Emotional wellness.** This group includes topics believed by parents to pertain to ensuring that their children have emotional wellbeing and know how to cope with emotional challenges. An interpretation of the dendrogram shows that many topics in this group were linked by parents to topics that are included in the Peer Relationships and Skills group.
Clusters that fall under the Academic Development domain of the ASCA National Model (2012). Three of the clusters in the 9-cluster solution are thematic clusters that fall into the Academic Development domain of the ASCA National Model (2012). These clusters are Adolescent Self-Management: Study, Organization, and Goal-Setting, Academic Opportunities and Career Opportunities, and Parent-Teacher/Staff Communication.

Adolescent self-management: Study, organization, and goal setting. This group includes topics of interest to parents that help parents encourage, teach, and facilitate their children’s development of skills that will help them be better students. The use of the term “self-management” emphasizes that parents want to know how they can help their children be more responsible for their own academic development, a task that many middle school teachers and administrators point out to parents as tasks expected of middle school students. The term “executive functioning” is popular terminology used in schools today, especially in relation to students with learning disabilities. The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) defines executive functioning as a set of tasks that help people connect past experiences with present functioning. There are many different lists of tasks that the field of education considers to be executive functioning skills or tasks, but the NCLD includes organization and time management as two executive functioning tasks. This group included topics that mentioned executive functioning either together with or separate from various specific tasks that can be considered “executive functioning tasks”, possibly reveling the necessity of parent education to promote a better understanding of what is meant by the term “executive functioning.”
**Academic opportunities and career opportunities.** This group of topics includes topics that help parents understand how to talk to their children about life after high school, help their children get information about academic opportunities and options after high school, and help their children learn about financial aid.

**Parent-teacher/staff communication.** This group of topics includes topics that help parents gain an understanding of how to appropriately be involved with teachers and staff members at their children’s schools. Statements in this cluster were also related to how parents can appropriately and effectively advocate for their children.

**Representing Results through the Use of Informal Concept Maps**

Wheeldon and Faubert (2009) discussed the value of representing data using various types of concept maps, some more formal like Trochim’s (1989) map produced through multidimensional scaling (MDS), and others less formal like spider maps or mind maps. A spider map was generated to visually represent the results of this study, proving a way to frame the results and visually represent the perceived needs of the parents who participated in this study (Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009). The spider map is shown in Figure 3. Additionally, a horizontal hierarchy map was created to show how the results of the study can be categorized into the ASCA National Model (2012) domains of Academic Development and Personal/Social Development, and how the topics represented by the clusters are either child-centered or parent-centered. The horizontal hierarchy map is shown in Figure 4.
Figure 3
Spider Map of Parents’ Perceived Parent Education Needs
Discussion

The purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of the types of education, support, and assistance parents feel they need in raising adolescent children. It is noteworthy that the parents surveyed for the initial parent education survey were parents who were generally familiar with the role of the school counselor. Eighty six
percent (86%) of the parents indicated that they were at least somewhat familiar with the role of the school counselor. While this is encouraging for school counselors aiming to broaden parents’ awareness of the resources and support school counselors are available to offer to the school community, the low response rate (16% of the parents who received the survey) could suggest that the parents who responded to the survey were the parents who are familiar with the role of school counselor and in support of the school counselor’s role in their children’s education. Out of the ten topics that were most frequently selected by parents as topics that were of interest to them, nine of them were topics that would help parents develop better habits in their children in either the academic domain or the personal/social domain. Only one of the ten topics selected most frequently was a topic that would help parents to develop better habits themselves (*I want to learn how to communicate with children/tweens/teens*). The parents surveyed seem to be more interested in the school counselor providing services to parents that would support or supplement the direct services the counselor provides to student, as opposed to services that help parents improve their parenting skills.

To gain an understanding of the sort of assistance parents would find helpful, each parent education statement resulting from the online survey was classified by the primary researcher into one of the three domains published in the ASCA National Model (2012), which is a framework for comprehensive, data-driven school counseling programs: Academic Development, Personal/Social Development, or Career Development. Of the original 28 parent education topics found by randomly selecting already-published parent needs assessment surveys, about 30% fell into the Academic Development domain, roughly 70% fell into the Personal/Social Development domain, and less than 1% of
statements fell into the Career Development domain. Interestingly, the top ten topics selected by parents indicating areas of the most interest followed the same pattern: 30% of the statements selected fell into the Academic Development domain, 70% fell into the Personal/Social Development domain, and none of the ten most frequently selected topics fell into the Career Development domain. As for the parent-generated parent education topics, the distribution was very similar. From their open-ended responses to questions about what services they found most valuable and parent education topics of interest to them, parents generated topics that fell into the Academic Development domain 27% of the time, and topics that fell into the Personal/Social Development domain 72% of the time. There was only one parent-generated topic that fell into the Career Development domain out of the 60 topics generated from parents’ open-ended responses.

The vast majority of the parent education topics that interested parents the most, whether the parents in the study generated the topics themselves or selected from topics provided for them, were topics that fell into the Personal/Social Development domain of The ASCA National Model. Parents were least interested in topics that fall into the Career Development domain, and somewhat interested (about 30% of the time) in topics that fall into the Academic Development domain. Parents are very interested in knowing how to contribute to their children’s personal/social development, whether by learning parenting skills to contribute to that development or by helping their children develop personal/social skills. This is not surprising, as the middle school years are developmentally characterized by physical, social, and cognitive developmental changes that can be characterized as physically and emotionally “awkward” or “difficult.” These
years are also the years of children’s developmental struggle for identity and social belonging (Wood, 1997).

Although all of the topics emerging from this study as topics of interest to parents fall into either the academic or personal/social domains, the results of the study show a wide variety of topics within those domains that parents are interested in learning more about. The vast amount of topics generated by the parent participants of this study alone can be very overwhelming to see for school counselors interested in meeting the needs of the parents at their schools. The initial survey of parent interest uncovered over 70 unique topics that were of interest to parents of adolescent children. This large variety of topics is a significant extension of the topics that already existed as topics school counselors typically address in supporting parents of the adolescent students they work with. It was interesting to note that, although the participants in the study expanded greatly on the breadth of topics school counselors could be approaching in supporting parents, parents are mostly interested in learning about middle school students’ personal/social development. This may not be surprising to those in the fields that serve children and adolescents, as adolescence is a time known by many to be a time where personal/social matters take more of a front seat to academics in the school life of middle school students. It follows that the parents of middle school students would want to gain a better understanding of and be supported through their children’s social development and challenges.

Many times, school counselors may offer parent education topics based on speculation about parent needs, or based on observation about their students and subsequent deductions about the systemic factors contributing to their students’
performance or overall wellness. Other topics may be offered because of parent request, interest of the counselor or principal, or because the school wishes to address a “buzz topic” in education. This study provides more accurate information about the interests and perceived needs of a sample of independent school parents, and it seems that parents of adolescent children represented in this sample understand that academic development is important to address during the middle school years, as students this age are preparing for high school and beyond. However, parents represented in this study are mostly interested in learning not only how to help their children navigate “middle school years,” but also how to, as parents, cope with all of the physical, social, and emotional developments happening in their children’s lives. At the same time, the parents are trying to understand what to expect from their children developmentally, establish realistic expectations for their children, and gain an understanding of what “normal” is for adolescents.

The results of this study do support existing literature on the needs and interests of parents. Crase et al. (1981) found that parents, in the 1980s, were interested in learning how to discipline their children, how to encourage self-concept and responsibility in their children, how to communicate with their children, and how to help their children cope with divorce. When the Systematic Training for Effective Program was developed in the 1970s, school counselors were asked their opinions about what parents needed to learn, and they responded that parents needed to learn about disciplining their children, boosting their children’s self-concept, helping their children succeed in school, and preventing drug and alcohol abuse (Ritchie, 1994). The parents represented in this study did not indicate significant interest in drug and alcohol abuse prevention or divorce.
Instead, they expressed interest in more holistic topics such as encouraging physical fitness and wellness and facilitating healthy family relationships. Other than those differences, the participants in this study were interested in very similar themes as the parents and school counselors who were surveyed in decades past. The results of this study could suggest that parents are still interested in helping their children develop healthy self-concepts, helping them succeed in school, and learning how to communicate with their children. The themes represented in literature about parent needs have been consistent and are consistent with the parent needs expressed by participants in this study. However, the results help to broaden the themes by providing more specificity in the kinds of topics parents are interested in, which is helpful in gaining a better understanding of how to meet the unique needs of independent school parents.

**Implications**

**Implications for School Counseling Practice**

Parent consultation and parent education are empirically supported services school counselors provide to the parents of the children they serve (see Epstein, 2010; Epstein & Voorhis, 2010; Griffin, 2010; Hill & Tyson, 2009). This study offers a starting point for understanding not only general or broad topics of interest to parents represented in this study, but also specific topics or discussion points. These results may offer a starting point for school counselors interested in planning parent services based on actual input from parents. A beginning understanding of the interests of parents of the students school counselors are serving can help the school counselors design comprehensive school counseling programs that more fully address the important role parent-school counselor collaboration can play in the overall development of children.
The wide range of parent education topics of interest to the participants in the study were put into perspective through the card sort activity, through which participants organized the topics into themes or categories, resulting in 9 distinctive themes into which the parent education topics fell. These themes provide a better understanding of the nature of support, assistance, and education parents of middle school students attending independent schools are interested in. Next, the cluster analysis of the parent education topics provides a framework for thematic structuring of parent education offerings, taking topics that parents considered to be tied together or closely related and creating easy-to-understand clusters. While the participants in this study represent a limited sample of parents raising adolescent children (i.e. parents of an advantaged socioeconomic background), school counselors working with different populations can look at the themes emerging from this study to design needs assessment surveys to assess which of the themes emerging from this study are of interest to their own parent communities. School counselors who use these results as a starting point in assessing the needs and interests specific to their parent population can then go on to determine how to most effectively plan programming to meet the parent need at their schools.

Depending on the topics themselves, and depending on the depth and breadth of the topics in the cluster, each cluster could give school counselors a sense of an appropriate delivery model for educating, assisting, or supporting parents. A school counseling newsletter could be considered appropriate based on the topics of a particular cluster. Another cluster could appear to be a more appropriate fit for a series of workshops using the cluster as a theme and using 1-2 topics as different workshops in the series. A cluster with very specific topics of interest to parents of middle schoolers could
be a good fit for a list of resources published on a school counseling webpage or through
social media curating sites like Pinterest and Scoop.it. A book club for parents facilitated
by the school counselor could be another option, using closely associated topics as a
guide for choosing appropriate titles or readings.

Another potential use of this information for school counselors is to use the
clusters of topics and individual topics to guide the planning of the guidance curriculum
offered to students, and use parent interest suggested by the results of this study to
determine appropriate parent communications to help parents, in the home environment,
reinforce what students are learning through the school counselor’s guidance curriculum.
This kind of parent communication can be in the form of parent emails or letters sent
home after particular guidance topics are introduced by the school counselor at school,
parent newsletters, or resource lists. The informal concept maps provide a visual
representation of parent interest that is useful for school counselors planning parent
education workshops or series and can also be useful in planning a guidance curriculum
for students that features tie-in interventions for parents.

The results of this study can guide school counselors as they assess needs at their
schools, organize counseling interventions and programming, develop and coordinate
counseling curriculum for parents, teachers, and students, select appropriate materials and
curricular resources for use in providing school counseling services, and develop themes
for program delivery. Being able to design and implement a comprehensive school
counseling program based on information such as the information resulting from this
study will help ensure that school counselors are meeting the needs of their school
communities, and will also help effectively evaluate the effectiveness of their school
counseling programs. Another benefit of using information such as the information provided by the results of this study is that school counselors can have a foundation for collaboration with other professionals in the school building, including classroom teachers, school psychologists, and school social workers.

**Implications for Research**

This study addressed gaps in existing literature by exploring the perceived needs of parents as a source of data that can be used in the implementation of school counseling programs. This study also explores the role of the school counselor in independent schools and the needs of families from socioeconomically advantaged backgrounds, areas that are not well represented in existing school counseling literature.

This study was performed in an independent school setting, and the needs of independent school students and parents could differ slightly from the needs of parents of children in public school settings. This study can be replicated in a public school setting in order to gain a fuller understanding of the needs of parents in different school settings, and in order to compare the needs of parents of children in public school settings to those of parents of children in independent school settings. This study was also performed using a sample of parents who are raising adolescent children. The study can be replicated with parents of older or younger school populations (i.e. elementary schools or high schools) in order to obtain a comparison of the needs of parents raising adolescent children with those of parents of children who are either younger or older. Another possible direction for research is to study the perceptions of school counselors about the parent education services they provide to the parents in their school settings, and on the perceived needs of the parents they serve. Because this study used an open card sort,
there was some expected overlap in the categories with statements being placed into multiple different categories according to what made sense to the parents participating. Replicating this study, but using a closed card sort instead of an open sort might yield a more distinct categorization of the parent education topics represented in this study. In this case, the cluster solution from this study could be presented to participants and participants could be asked to organize the statements into the clusters presented.

This study leads to questions about counselor identity, particularly in independent schools, as some school counselors may not conceptualize part of their role to be providing parent education services to parents, or they may see this service as a service to be provided by community resources brought in from outside of the school. The results from Paulson and Edwards’ (1997) study on parent expectations of school counselors provide empirical support of the importance of school counselors providing support and information to parents. Epstein (2010) and Griffin (2010) also validate and emphasize the importance of school counselor-parent collaboration through providing services like parent education sessions. The ASCA National Model (2012) encourages school counselors to use a portion of their time serving students indirectly through collaboration with parents, teachers, and administration. This study furthers the support in the literature of school counselors serving students indirectly through collaboration with their families.

**Limitations**

Limitations of this study include the narrow sample of the participants. The participants for this study were parents of middle school students who were attending an independent school. The results of this study, therefore, may not be generalizable to other populations of parents. However, the sample for this study was intentionally
narrow in order to get a better understanding of the experiences of a particular population under-represented in the literature about school counselor-parent relationships. The card sort method may not be considered to provide as full an understanding of parents’ experiences as a method such as interviewing. However, the card sort method provides a unique way to reveal the relationships between the challenges that parents face in raising children. This relationship will provide school counselors a helpful way to organize interventions and cater interventions to what parents need.
References


Epstein, J., & Voorhis, F. (2010). School counselors’ role in developing partnerships


