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# Parent-Teacher Partnerships in Special Education

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PARENT-TEACHER PARTNERSHIPS  
IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

By

Cassandra Braley

An Honors Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for Honors

in

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## **Introduction**

There is an old African proverb that says, “It takes a village to raise a child (Buzzell, 1996, p.1).” In today’s society, this saying is applicable to the idea of parent-teacher partnerships in education. The underlying assumption of such partnerships is that everyone who has a stake in a child’s life, including the parents, teachers, and community, should work together to give that child the best education possible. In reality, however, key stakeholders in a child’s life may have many different ideas and beliefs, and, as a result, a disconnect in communication and relationships among them can arise. In such situations, fluid partnerships between these stakeholders can be challenged and resulting tensions can emerge which, in turn, can affect a child’s educational experience (Staples & Dilberto, 2010).

### **Education From Family Unit to Public School**

In the United States, children were first educated by their parents, especially by their mothers. At the dawn of the Republic the role of the mother was to raise patriotic children. This concept is often referred to as “Republican Motherhood” (Kerber, 1976). The idea of “Republican Motherhood” rested upon the belief that: (1) The stability of the nation rested on the persistence of virtue among its citizens; and, (2) the creation of virtuous citizens was dependent on the presence of wives and mothers who were well informed (Kerber, 1976). Although a mother could not perform a political function in public during that time period, her political role at home was important to the overall success of the Republic (Vandenberg-Daves, 2002). She was expected to be “dedicated to the service of civic virtue; she educated her sons for it; she condemned and corrected her husband's lapses from it” (Kerber, 1976, p. 202). At this time, the family unit was responsible for educating children. This all started to change with the advent of compulsory education laws in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Schutz, 2006).

During the early 1800's, public schools were being established and laws were first being made about children and school. Throughout this time students were not required to attend school, and parents had the authority over whether or not they wanted the children to go to school. In the words of Horace Mann, a leader in education, "Between the pre-Revolutionary period and the mid-1800s, the power to decide whether, when, and how to educate one's children lay entirely in the hands of parents" (Compulsory Education Laws: The Dialogue Reopens, 2000, web). However, in 1852, Massachusetts was the first state to pass compulsory education laws, requiring children to be enrolled in public or private school or to be homeschooled. Other states followed until in 1918 Mississippi became the last state to require children to attend school in the "public sphere." By the end of the compulsory education movement (1852-1918), all states required children (between the ages of 5 and 18, depending on the state's laws) to receive a public education outside of the home (Compulsory Education: Overview, 2012).

This movement effectively transformed the responsibility of educating children from the family unit to the public school. The push for compulsory education was driven by policy makers who believed: 1) compulsory attendance would level the disparity between the rich and the poor and 2) public schools could be used to "Americanize" the increasing number of immigrants entering the country (Compulsory Education Laws: The Dialogue Reopens, 2000). However, by the mid nineteenth century, evidence of tensions between the family unit and public schools began to emerge. For example, some asserted that public school teachers began to start to mistrust parents having the authority over handling their child's education and began to push to increase their power (Coulson, 1999). In *Massachusetts Teacher* (1851), it was written that: "In too many instances the parents are unfit guardians of their own children ... the children must be gathered up and forced into school" (Coulson, 1999, p. 79-80). According to the California State

Superintendent of Public Instruction “The child should be taught to consider his instructor, in many respects, superior to the parent in point of authority ... [T]he vulgar impression that parents have a legal right to dictate to teachers is entirely erroneous” (Coulson, 1999, p. 82-83). This increasingly prevalent practice of elevating the teacher’s position over that of the parents in regard to a child’s education is one important factor that began to split the connection between parents and teachers in the public school setting.

### **The Public School**

When public schools first started in America, they were centered in the town's common area. Children from around the area would be sent to the school that was closest to them. The classroom at that time was a one room schoolhouse with students of all ages and abilities. Usually, the teacher was a young, unmarried woman. These schoolhouses were supported and valued by the community with farmers supplying wood for heat and parents taking turns to clean. Often, teachers lived with local families, moving from one household to another. The parents of the students, the teacher, and the student would not only see each other during school hours, but also during community events (School: The Story of American Public Education, 2001).

As means of transportation developed and expanded, teachers were able to move out of the communities in which they taught. This coincided with the expansion of public schools and the advent of specialized training programs for teachers (School: The Story of American Public Education, 2001). This led to the increased professionalization of the field and teachers were beginning to be seen as a professional with a specialized knowledge base. Hierarchical relationships began to form with teachers ranking over parents, and it was almost never questioned (Lazar & Slostad, 1999).

## **Parental Involvement in Schools**

According to Lazar and Slostad (1999), when teachers began to try to connect with parents, schools generally did not reward the teachers for their efforts and “have traditionally distanced parents and teachers (p. 207).” A number of teachers believe they did not have the right to work with parents unless they were given permission by the administration or school board. In some school districts, schools further divided the relationship between the parents and teachers by excluding parents from some of the most important educational decisions, such as decisions about the curriculum and instruction, evaluation and other school controlled decisions that are based on the majority culture. (Lazar & Slostad, 1999).

In order to help reconnect teachers and parents, there have been several recent federal initiatives to help rekindle the relationship between home and the public school based on the belief that parental involvement in school bolsters student outcomes. For example, one of the 8 goals outlined in the Goals 2000: Educate America Act (P.L. 103-227) which was first signed into law in 1994, was focused on encouraging schools to promote partnerships that would increase parental involvement (Paris, 1994). The rationale for the inclusion of this goal was the assumption that such programs and policies could promote the social, emotional, and academic growth of children. Later, in 1999, the U.S. Department of Education reported to Congress that increasing the involvement of parents in the education of their children was a national goal for people in both general and special education (Leiter & Krauss, 2004; McDermott-Fasy, 2009). In addition, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) includes provisions for promoting partnerships in education. First signed into law on January 8, 2002, NCLB is a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) which was first enacted in 1965. NCLB’s primary purposes were to have schools set high standards and establish measurable

goals that could improve the student's outcome (NCLB 2001). In NCLB it also stated that there is a shared responsibility for achieving high student success between the school and parents. Specifically, the law calls for "schools and parents to build and develop a partnership to help children achieve the state's high standards [and] importance of communication between teachers and parents" (NCLB 2001, 115 STAT.1503). NCLB (2001) further states that teachers and other school staff should be educated in the value and usability of the contributions of parents, and parents and teachers should work together as equal partners in order to help students achieve high standards. Based on these federal initiatives, it is undeniable that parental involvement in public schools is encouraged and valued in today's society.

### **Parent-Teacher Partnerships in Special Education**

In the field of special education, federal initiatives have also supported the assumption that parent-teacher partnerships are vital for improving student outcomes. For example, in 1975 the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142) was passed. This was the first federal document outlining parental rights and responsibilities. PL 94-142 gave parents the right to be educational decision makers and supervisors of their children's education (McDermott-Fasy, 2009; Overton, 2012). The name was changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990. In 1997 an amendment to the document was made to include ways to help strengthen and expand parent's roles in shared decision making about a student's eligibility, Individual Education Plan (IEP) and placement (McDermott-Fasy, 2009; Overton, 2012). This increased emphasis on the role of parents in the unfolding special education process was reiterated in a subsequent report from the U.S. Department of Education (2002) that stated that "Commissioners and expert witnesses have repeatedly stressed that parents are the key to success for students with disabilities" (U. S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 38). Finally, in



the most recent revision of IDEA (2004), it is stated that: “Almost 30 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by ... strengthening the role and responsibility of parents and require ensuring that families of such children have meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children at school and at home (IDEA, 2004, p. 118).” As a result of such policies and initiatives, the topic of parent-teacher partnerships in special education has received increasing attention in recent years (McDermott-Fasy, 2009).

### **Parent-Teacher Partnerships Today**

There is now a proposal to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) under the Obama Administration (ESEA Reauthorization, 2011). Under the “Supporting Families and Communities” section of the proposal, the acts will encourage “districts spend a minimum of \$270 million nationally on parent and family engagement” (Supporting Families and Communities, 2, 2011). The schools and districts will be required to use funds to promote family partnerships that increase student achievement, to create a welcoming environment for families, to open their communications, and have strong collaborations. Like NCLB, this reauthorization would also encourage professional development programs for teachers to help create a stronger partnership with the students’ families (Supporting Families and Communities, 2011). Based on this most recent federal initiative, the push to promote parental involvement in schools continues.

### **Situating the Current Study**

Despite an increasing emphasis on parent-teacher partnerships at the federal level, the gulf between teachers and families is widening as teachers, especially those working in urban school districts, rarely live in the school’s neighborhood and do not share the same cultural or

ethnic background as their students (Schutz, 2006). This geographical and cultural divide can affect life in the school and classroom, especially in terms of teacher perceptions. For example, in a recent study it was found that, “70 percent of teachers held negative beliefs about [students in urban schools] and their families” (Schutz, 2006, p 700). In another study, it was noted that “Sixty-four percent of the teachers [surveyed in underperforming urban high schools] agreed with the statement ‘I believe that parents or guardians are largely to blame for students’ low achievement’” (Schutz, 2006, p 700). In such schools, it was found that parents tend to focus their efforts on helping their children on home based activities (Schutz, 2006). Other studies also found a high incident of parents involvement focused on home base activities. Some attributed this to the reality that parents of low socioeconomic status were challenged with the dilemma of splitting their limited time between “either spending time on their children” and “paying a price in terms of economic security” or “privileging work in order to keep a roof over their families’ heads” and “providing less support to their children” (Schutz, 2006, p 700). In addition, many parents of low socioeconomic status were also found to have a history of negative interactions with schools, which tended to make them reluctant in terms of the level of their involvement in schools (Schutz, 2006).

In more suburban areas, the gulf between teachers and families is not so severe (Schutz, 2006). In such districts, the teachers are more likely to live in a geographically similar environment and share some cultural and/or ethnic similarities with their students. This in turn can affect teacher perceptions in a positive way (Schutz, 2006). As such, parent-teacher partnerships are found to be more beneficial for “European American [families] than among African American, Hispanic, and Asian American students; students from families of low socioeconomic status; and students from single-parent households” (Lee & Bowen, 2006, p. 195). For

example, Dee (2004) found that teachers belonging to the ethnic majority scored students who were of the ethnic minority lower than if the teacher belonged to the same ethnic minority group.

In addition to less cultural and ethnic overlap between teachers and their students and families, there are other types of diversity or differences new teachers are challenged to face. For example, in Rhode Island schools 18% of the student population receives special education services (Infoworks, Measuring RI Schools for Change, 2009). In Providence schools, there are 16% of students who receive special education services (Infoworks, Providence District, 2009). In general, the majority of parents of students receiving special education services reported a low level of satisfaction. For example, in the 2008-2009 Annual Performance Report (APR), only “33% of parents with a child receiving special education services [reported] school efforts at or above the state standard for facilitation parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities” (Part B State APR, p 50). In Providence, only 31.37% of parents reported that they were involved to help improve their child’s special education service (APR, 2008). Based on these numbers, one might conclude that a gulf also exists between special education teachers and the families and student they serve.

I am currently completing my teacher preparation program. When I graduate, I will be certified to teach elementary school students in grades 1-6 as well as elementary and middle schools students with mild to moderate disabilities. When you look at me, you see a young, single white female. This was the typical description of teachers back when compulsory education laws were passed, and it is still the most common teacher candidate entering the field of education. Based on what I know about the gulf that often exists between such teachers and the increasing diverse student body in our 21<sup>st</sup> century classrooms, I am interested in doing as much as I can to learn about the perceptions and experiences of families who do not share the

same geographical space and/or cultural and ethnic background as I do, but who are very likely to share the same school or classroom with me in my professional life. Also knowing that a low percentage of parents of students receiving special education services in Rhode Island, are satisfied with parent-teacher partnerships, I know I need to know more. As such, I have designed a research study for my Honors thesis that focuses on learning about parent-teacher partnerships in special education, specifically in urban settings. The purpose of researching parent-teacher partnerships in special education is to find out more about the parents' point of view, their experiences and feelings, how they would want to improve the partnerships. This would better equip me to understand how parents and teachers can work together to improve student outcomes. I would like to hear a number of parents tell their stories of partnerships: what worked, what didn't work. It is my hope that by listening to such stories that I will be able to become a more skillful practitioner and effective advocate for making meaningful connections with families in the future. Since I strive to become a teacher, I want to not only know what other teachers think of parent-teacher partnerships and how they would like to improve them, but I would want to know the opinions of parents.

## **Mini-Literature Review**

In many discussions on the education of students with disabilities, the role of parents has always been an important topic (McDermott-Fasy, 1999; Anderson, 2006). Research on this topic includes the demographics of the parents (Epstein, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker & Sandler, 2005; Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007); the reasons why parents become involved in their student's education (Epstein, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker & Sandler, 2005), the different ways parents can become involved (Epstein, 1995; Driessen, Smit, & Slegers, 2005; Lee, 2006; Wanat 2010); and, how the parents' involvement can help improve their student's outcomes in school (Coleman, 1966; Greenwood & Hickman 1991; Epstein, 1995; Fantuzzo, Davis, & Ginsburg, 1995; Sanders, 1998; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Trusty, 1999; Yonezawa, 2000; Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2001; Palenchar, Vondra & Wilson, 2001; Mattingly, Prislín, McKenzie, Rodriguez, & Kayzar, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Wanat, 2010). There has also been much research looking into why parent-teacher partnerships need and how the researchers believe, based on their data, the problems can be fixed (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Taylor, 1991; Hornby & Lafaele, 2001; Driessen, Smit, & Slegers, 2005; Patrikakou, 2005; Wanat 2010).

### **Demographics of Parents Who are More Involved**

Survey research into the demographics of parents who tend to be more involved in their child's education provides information about how to get different populations of parents involved. For example, one survey stated that wealthy communities, on average, have more positive family involvement while schools in poorer communities contact families more with problems and difficulties their children are having (Epstein, 1995). Single parents, parents who work outside of the home, parents who live far from the school and fathers have been found to be

less involved at the school (Epstein, 1995). Research has also discovered that families who are more educated are more likely to volunteer in schools than families who are less educated (Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007). Parents who are Hispanic and African American are less likely to volunteer than people who are European American (Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007).

Some parents have to weigh the options of spending time becoming involved with spending time doing other activities, such as work and family responsibilities. In sum, studies reviewed found that wealthy, well educated European American parents were more likely to be involved in their child's schooling whereas single fathers, Hispanic, or African American parents were less likely due to a variety of circumstances.

### **Why Parents Become Involved**

One prominent researcher on the topic of why parents become involved in their children's education is Dr. Joyce Epstein who is the Director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships and the National Network of Partnership Schools. In 1995, Epstein described three different spheres that influence a student's education: the school, the family, and the community. She wrote, "If educators view children simply as students, they are likely to see the family as separate from the school. If educators view students as children, they are likely to see both the family and the community as partners with the school in children's education and development" (School/Family/Community Partnerships: Caring for the Children We Share, p. 701). In addition, she encouraged the parents and the teachers to recognize their shared interests in and responsibilities for the students, and work collaboratively to create better opportunities for the students (Epstein, 1995). Based on her work and the work of others, it is clear that there are many different reasons why parents get involved in their child's education.

The work of Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, & Sandler (2005) also explored this topic. In their article entitled “*Parents’ Motivation for Involvement in Their Children’s Education*,” they suggested that parents become involved in their child’s education for four different reasons. One of these reasons is that the parent feels that they should be involved, which is also known as parental role construction. Another reason a parent becomes involved in their child’s education is the parent’s belief that if they help they will make a difference. An additional reason for parental involvement is because they perceive positive invitations from the school asking them to become involved. The final reason that was found of why parents become involved is because their child wants or needs them to be involved.

### **Types of Parent Involvement**

Epstein (1995) concluded that there are six different ways parents become involved in their child’s education. The six types of parent involvement are: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, being a decision maker, and collaborating with community. These types of involvements are all different from one another and are based upon many different factors of why the parents become involved. These six types of involvement have different outcomes for the student, the parents and the teacher.

Epstein (1995) defined the first type of parental involvement as “parenting” which is developing a home environment to help support children as students. Parenting entails helping prepare your children for school and helping to guide and raise them. In order to assist parents in this area, schools have created “guides” that include suggestions for conditions of the home that help support children (i.e. the presence of books, newspapers, and other forms of print), helping to further the parent’s education, and workshops and videos on parenting and how to bring up a child. The purpose of such “guides” is to promote a more positive attitude towards the school

and to promote a home environment that promotes school readiness (Driessen, Smit, & Slegers 2005).

The second form of parent involvement defined by Epstein was called “communicating” which is using effective forms of communication from home to school and vice-versa about school programs and student progress. Types of communicating include: a parent’s attendance at conferences with the teachers at least once a year (and attending follow-up meetings, if needed); attention to folders that go home with student work where they can write comments or read teacher comments; and a parent’s attendance at conferences on how to improve student grades. It also includes other forms of communication such as phone calls to the school and the ensuring that teachers provide them with clear information about schools, school courses and programs, school policies, and activities. Communicating helps the parents understand the school’s programs and policies, raises their awareness and helps monitor their child’s progress, and opens the line of communication between them and the teacher. Teachers benefit from this method through understanding the parents’ views on policies, programs and progress.

Epstein’s (1995) third type of parent involvement was called “volunteering” which includes volunteering within the classroom, participating in surveys, and helping with phone trees. Parents benefit from this form of involvement through understanding the teacher’s job and helping to carry over activities from school to home. Parents also gain self-confidence to work with children or to possibly take steps to improve their own education. Teachers become aware of the parents’ skills and also gain the ability to give individual attention to students by using a volunteer.

The fourth type of parental involvement defined by Epstein (1995) was called “learning at home” which entails parents learning about helping their children at home with school work



and other curriculum related activities and decision making. Learning at home encompasses activities such as helping the child at home by discussing educational topics, helping with homework, and helping to manage the student's time (Lee, 2006). It also includes the parents learning skills that are required to help students and with homework policies. For example, in a related research study, all of the parents of students with special needs who did not volunteer in the classroom were involved in helping the student "learn at home" (Wanat, 2010). The type of work done at home includes providing extra instruction and testing their children on assignments. According to Epstein (1995), the benefits of this type of parental involvement is that the parent gains an understanding of what is being taught and helps them develop conversations with their children about their school work and classroom experiences. Teachers benefit from learning at home by learning a respect for the students' family time and being able to better design homework around the students' and families' needs.

The fifth type of parent involvement in Epstein's (1995) stages was "decision making." This is when parents are involved in school decision making or become a parent representative. Some common types of this type of involvement are memberships in PTO/PTA and other parent organizations. The parents are seen as equal decision makers in the students' education. The parents are able to feel ownership within the school and in school decisions.

The last type of parent involvement defined by Epstein (1995) was "collaborating with the community" which is defined as using the community to help strengthen school programs, family practices, and student development. The benefit of this type of involvement is that the parents are able to know about and utilize what the community has to offer inside and outside of the classroom. In addition, they are able to interact with other families in the community and also be able to see the school's role in the wider community. Examples of such activities include

using outside sources (such as information provided by community companies and organizations) that link learning skills and talents, encouraging service to the community by students, families or the school (such as recycling or helping out senior citizens), and the participation of alumni students to help out the younger students.

### **Student Outcomes From Increased Parent Involvement**

In 1966, it was argued that variables associated with students' homes were a significant factor for student success (Coleman, 1966). A later research found that "Approximately one-half to two-thirds of student achievement variance studied was accounted for by home variables, especially socioeconomic status, rather than school variables" (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991, p.279). Since then, researchers have been finding out just how parent involvement has been helping students (Mattingly, Prislin, McKenzie, Rodriguez, & Kayzar, 2002). Research found that students whose parents were involved achieved higher scholastic and behavioral self-concepts than students whose parents did not get involved. (Fantuzzo, Davis, & Ginsburg, 1995). It has also been discovered that parent interactions have also helped to improve student attendance, to improve enrollment in challenging high school courses, and to promote successful transitions for the students from special education to general education (Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2001). Research has also found that parent involvement has helped lead to lower dropout rates (Trusty, 1999; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Yonezawa, 2000).

Parental involvement can also help improve and develop a student's social functioning (Jordan et al, 2001). For example, studies have shown that students can improve skills such as their behavior and social ability as well as create a more positive student-teacher/adult and student-peer relationships. These positive relationships can lead to strong role models for the

student to follow. Parent involvement helps to motivate students and can help them develop intrinsic motivation and self-help skills (Sanders, 1998; Palenchar, Vondra & Wilson, 2001).

Barriers that students face such as health and mental health problems can be eased because of parent involvement in the classroom and with the school (Wanat, 2010). Through meetings like the PTA, parents and professionals (including teachers, doctors, etc.) can gather to talk about methods to address barriers students face (Wanat, 2010). Through the connections the parents make with the school and school related organizations, they can gain access to services that they may have not been able to access such as physical health services and social services which in turn benefits the child and improves student outcome (Jordan et al. 2001).

### **What's Missing From Parent-Teacher Relationships**

According to Patrikakou (2005), "From the onset of a child's life, the family and relationships formed among family members are profound catalysts of social, emotional and cognitive development" (p. 1). The children then go to school to further their education. If the parents and teachers work as separate units, parent-teacher partnerships are more difficult to promote and maintain. From this disconnect, tensions may arise. The struggles between parents of a student and the school system are exemplified in *Learning Denied* by Denny Taylor. In the forward William L. Wansart explains that the book is about a "family's clash with public school, special education bureaucracy ... to protect [the child] from the school" (Taylor, xi). The parents tried to work with the teachers and the school and they were lied to and not helped. Because there was a disconnect between the family and the school, the student in this book became disengaged and stopped performing well in school. Although this may be an extreme example, it illustrates some of the common elements missing from parent-teacher partnerships that have gone bad: trust, open communication and collaboration.

In some cases parents and teachers do not know who should initiate and maintain the collaboration. Many parents, especially parents who have children with special needs, who become dissatisfied with the relationship they have, think that the teachers are unable to fulfill their responsibilities and do not want to have a collaborative relationship. In one research's findings there was a father that was frustrated that because there were no defined roles between teacher and parent, their miscommunications were standing in the way of helping his son (Wanat 2010).

Many times teachers are not taught how to interact and form relationships with parents. In one survey of six southern schools it was found that only 4% of the educators of future teachers taught the future teachers a complete course on parent involvement, and 15% of the future teacher educators taught a part of a course on the topic (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991).

### **Building Better Relationships**

There are a lot of scholarly works that describes how to build better relationships with parents and how the teacher should work with the parents (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). According to Greenwood and Hickman (1991), parents and teachers agree that a course should be taught about parent involvement. There are "clear gaps between the rhetoric on parent involvement found in literature and typical parent involvement practices found in schools" (Hornby & Lafaele, 2001, p. 38). Almost all of the scholarly resources and literature on how to improve parent-teacher partnerships are written from the point of view of teachers (Driessen, Smit, & Slegers, 2005). There needs to be more resources about how parents view the partnerships and what are their ideas about what will help more successfully develop the relationship. Parents are the people who should know their children best, and for a teacher to

have the opportunity to work with them and to gain their insight would be an indispensable resource.

## **Conclusions**

In general, it may be safe to assume that just about all families care about their children and want them to succeed. In the field of education, one might suggest that one way families can help their children succeed is to become involved in their education. Research reviewed in this section suggests that sometimes that is easier said than done. On the one hand, some say parents just need better information on how to become involved. On the other hand, others state that teachers and administrators would like to involve families but just do not know how to promote parental involvement (Epstein, 1995). Epstein (1995) suggested that most students want their families to know more about partnering with the school. However, families and schools often hold different points of views about the “How”. For the most part, research indicates that families and schools want to work together towards promoting better student outcomes.

What many of the scholarly resources are missing is the experiences that parents have while interacting with the parents and what relationship they believe works well between them and the teacher where the child benefits the most.

This close relationship needs to be developed once more so that children are not torn between the teacher’s teachings and the parent’s teachings. A partnership between parents and teachers creates an environment that is comfortable and safe for the child. A parent-teacher partnership in special education is especially needed (McDermott-Fasy, 2009). A student with special requirements needs a helping hand to guide them. Although the parents of a student with special needs and the teacher may meet at an IEP meeting, the parents should know what goes on in the classroom on a regular basis. If there is a problem that the teacher discovers about the

student, the teacher should be able to feel that they can speak freely to the parents to address the problem. On the other hand, the parents are the people who know their child best; they have taught their child since the day they were born, so if the parent suggests to the teacher how to teach their child, the parents should not need to jump through hoops to try to help their child to learn.

## **Methodology**

This study focuses on parent-teacher partnerships from the perspective of parents. For this research project the term “parent-teacher partnerships” references the interactions between the family (which includes natural parents, legal guardians or other persons standing in loco parentis) of the child and the child’s teacher(s) (including but not limited to the general education teacher, the special education teacher, and other special services teacher). It indicates that there should be a shared responsibility between the family and the teacher in the education, social and emotional development of the student (Jacoby, 2003).

The research questions guiding this investigation are:

- What are the parents’ experiences and feelings about their partnerships with their child's special education teachers?
- How would the parents want to improve the partnerships?

To answer these research questions, I selected the methodology known as semi-structured interviewing. This is when the interviewer attempts to gain information from the participant. Although there are questions that the interviewer prepares beforehand, the interview carries on in the same manner that a conversation would. This gives the participant the chance to explore topics that he/she feels are important (Clifford, French, & Valentine, 2010).

### **Identification and Selection of Participants**

Before I had started to look for parents, I had to figure out what my parameters were. I wanted parents who were from the Rhode Island area, since that was where I was learning to teach. I also wanted parents of students identified as having a mild/moderate disability. In addition, I was interested in parents whose children were in the elementary or middle school

grades. These grades are the grades that I am learning to teach, so I felt it would be helpful to learn what parents in these grades think regarding parent-teacher partnerships.

To find parents to interview for this project, I used two methods. One method that I used was to hang up a flier at the Sherlock Center at Rhode Island College where developmental disabilities are researched and services are coordinated (see Appendix A). This flier was hung up by a staff member in an area where parents frequently visited. The other method that I used was to post an ad on Rhode Island Parent Information Network (RIPIN). I contacted a member of the ad site through my advisor. The member posted the ad containing the basics of this research project and my contact information. Both the flier and the ad requested parents to contact me if they were interested in participating in my study.

### **IRB Process**

Before beginning the recruitment and interview phases of my study, I had to get the research project approved by Rhode Island College's Institutional Review Board (IRB). First, I completed a CITI online training in research ethics before submitting any protocols to the IRB. Afterwards, I submitted an application to the IRB. After the IRB reviewed my application, I made the necessary changes they required and resubmitted my application. Finally, it was passed. This was when I started looking for parents to interview for the research project.

### **Description of Sample**

The sample of this project consisted of three participants. All of them were mothers. Although the fathers were not present at the time of the interview, all of the participants were married. All of the participants interviewed were also Caucasian. The level of education among the participants ranged from some college to a graduate from college. The occupations of the mothers varied from part-time sales to a real estate agent to a nurse (see Table 1).



**Table 1**

	Mrs. Black	Mrs. Smithfield	Mrs. Cousins
Mother	Yes	Yes	Yes
Married	Yes	Yes	Yes
Race/Ethnicity	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian
Marital Status	Married	Married	Married
Highest level of Education	Some college	College	College
Occupation	P/T Sales	Nurse	Real Estate Agent
Child's Gender	Female	Female	Female
Age Of Child	11	8	5
Child's Grade Level	5	2	Pre-school
Child's Special Education Category	Autism (PDD-NOS)	Vision Problems	Speech Problems, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy

The children of the participants met all of the parameters that have been previously outlined. The ages of the children were 5, 8 and 11. They were in preschool, second and fifth grade (respectively). The students were all girls. The children's special education eligibility categories included: Autism spectrum disorder, speech and language impairments, and visual impairments.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

When parents who were interested in being interviewed contacted me, I sent them the Consent Form via email (see Appendix B) to review and scheduled an interview. Two of the interviews took place at Sherlock Center at Rhode Island College; one in person and another by a phone interview; the other interview took place at E. G. Robertson Elementary School in Warwick, RI. When the parents and I met at the Sherlock Center or at the school, I answered any questions they had relating to the study and then asked them to sign the Consent Form before we started any of the interview process. Next, I asked the parents to provide some demographic information. I filled in their answers on the Demographic Form (see Appendix C). After that we started the interview process (see Appendix D).

To start off the interview I read the following statement: *“When a student is suspected to have a disability, the student is referred to have special education services to help that child. These special education services conducted by the special education teacher and parents should have the same goal for the student that they want to work towards. How would you describe your relationships with your child’s special education teacher and how do you think your collaboration helps your child?”* Then the parents told their stories. I also had additional probes ready if needed. I wanted the interview process to be more discussion based rather than question and answer based. My opening statement was meant to promote a context in which the parents did not feel pressured or constricted. The whole interview process lasted one hour on average. The parents were not compensated with any money or gifts for their time.

## **Data Analysis**

With the permission of the participants, the interviews were recorded. To analyze the data from the interviews, I set up a table that broke down parent teacher relationships into six

categories. These six categories were based on a chart that Epstein (1995) had previously defined (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

<b>Type of Involvement</b>	<b>What was said</b>	<b>Total instances</b>
<b>Parenting</b>	•	
<b>Communicating</b>	•	
<b>Volunteering</b>	•	
<b>Learning At Home</b>	•	
<b>Decision Making</b>	•	
<b>Collaborating With Community</b>	•	

While I listened to the audio-taped interviews, I listened for instances of when the parents talked about a practice they had done (or had wanted to do) that related to one of Epstein’s six types of involvement activities. Then I wrote the example down on the table in the corresponding category. I also marked down the time so I would be able to refer back to the interview when needed. An example follows in Table 3. This process was repeated for all the participants (see Appendix E).

**Table 3: Mrs. Black's Interview Data**

<b>Type of Involvement</b>	<b>What was said</b>	<b>Total instances</b>
<b>Parenting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	0
<b>Communicating</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers not working collaboratively together within classroom. 1:09</li> <li>• Open to requests, needs to take lead. 2:08</li> <li>• Knows what to do for student, offer new information</li> <li>• Parents need to be clear</li> <li>• Does not lower expectations</li> <li>• Gives positive feedback and constructive criticism.</li> <li>• Notes back and forth, email (regularly (at least once a week)) 7:05</li> <li>• School calls parents about ongoing events 20:00</li> <li>• Meet teachers before hand</li> <li>• Grades and homework online</li> </ul>	9
<b>Volunteering</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not go into classroom. 2:21</li> <li>• Gets invited to come into the classroom, but nothing specific on volunteering. 13:03</li> </ul>	2
<b>Learning At Home</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses visuals at home, not help with current teachers, but past ones. 21:34</li> <li>• Send home homework help, and use modifications. 3:15</li> <li>• Gives stuff before hand to let her set up visuals. 3:30</li> </ul>	4
<b>Decision Making</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Member in PTO 14:08</li> <li>• Chair of Parent advisory committee. 14:08               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Have workshops- had one on circle of friends</li> <li>○ Communication with parents</li> <li>○ Functions</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Circle of Friends (added to IEP after) 24:25</li> </ul>	3
<b>Collaborating With Community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helps others in the community- Provide classes to help parents learn how to help with/do the homework (lattice multiplication) 42:57</li> <li>• Information card she created- teacher passes it out to students (allows parent to take burden of telling students about their child). 30:40</li> </ul>	2

## **Limitations**

One limitation of my research project is that all of the parents I interviewed were mothers. If I had fathers in my sample, there may have been different opinions expressed. The parents that I interviewed were also very involved in their children's education. If I interviewed parents who were not on the PTO or similar organizations there could have been different results. Additionally, all of the mothers that I interviewed were very similar demographically (i.e. if they were of a different ethnic or racial background or if one of the parents had been single). If had advertised in more varied areas I could have had a more diverse participation group.

## Conclusions

This section presents the analysis and interpretation of data collected from three parents regarding their experiences of partnerships with their children's special education teachers. Information is presented in this order: (1) parenting, (2) communicating, (3) volunteering, (4) learning at home, (5) decision making, and (6) collaborating with the community. As stated in previous sections, these were the 6 categories identified in Epstein (1995) as different ways that parents become involved in their child's education.

### Data Analysis and Interpretation

#### *Parenting*

Throughout my interview only one of the three parents mentioned activities that 'fit' into Epstein's (1995) "parenting" category. For example, when one parent (who had a preschooler) described a time when she utilized the advice of the special education teacher, "They've really helped [my daughter] ... [she] has sensory issues... so we had to, even at school, at home we had to brush her down several times a day to stimulate her. It was brush therapy. ... Before that she would have a breakdown, she would be all out crying, hyperventilating, everything if you tried to put anything in her hair. A Band-Aid would do the same thing... The same thing with shoes and clothes... She had some real sensory issues that she had to overcome and the school helped out a lot with that," that was an example of *developing a home environment to help support children as students*. In addition, when she talked about, "[My daughter] has really low muscle tone... There are toys for her to play with at home like a balance beam and a trampoline... It helps her build her muscles. I really wouldn't have really know that unless [the special education teacher told me]. I read a lot, I don't think I would have known what to direct my reading towards to learn about this" that was also an example of "parenting."

### *Communicating*

All three of the parents interviewed mentioned involvement activities that ‘fit’ into Epstein’ s (1995) “communicating” category. For example, when Mrs. Black talked about how she and the teacher writes notes back and forth and email regularly (at least once a week) along with being about to meet the teachers before the school year starts this was an example of using *effective forms of communication from home to school and vice versa about school programs and student progress*. In addition when Mrs. Smithfield talked about, “With [the general education teacher] I don’t really know what is going on in the classroom, because of [the special education teacher] I can call her and say ‘this is the results can you pass it along.’ She is really good about keeping all of the communication going... if I have any questions I can just ask,” that too was an example of communicating because she was describing her experience with her being comfortable enough with the special education to call her at any time. Mrs. Cousins’ description of, “We have a pretty good relationship; we talk back and forth. [My daughter] is learning sign language because she doesn’t talk. So if I teach her a new sign I communicate it to the school... and the same holds true with them if they teach her a new sign or if they are working on anything. ... We try to communicate as much as possible, we have emails and I stop at the school as much as often, to talk with the teachers,” also fits into this category.

### *Volunteering*

Two of the parents interviewed also mentioned some form of “volunteering” or involvement activity that ‘fit’ into the subcategories of *volunteering within the classroom, participating in surveys, and helping with phone trees*. For example, when Mrs. Black said, “There are lots of notes; they have lots of parent things that you can be invited to. ... Anytime there is a parent thing my husband and I always go. I never get anything about volunteering...

[like] to go on a field trip,” that was an example of how she could use this method of partnership. In addition, when Mrs. Smithfield said that she is always open to helping out in the classroom if the general education teacher wanted her to stop by that shows how she is available if the teacher ever wanted to engage in this type of partnership.

### *Learning At Home*

Involvement in Epstein’s (1995) “learning at home” category was mentioned by all three of the parents interviewed. For example, when Mrs. Black said, “Everything, even in math, everything that has a definition of a word or that can make her understand and remember it; we put visuals to it.... [The teacher] gives me information... the week before so [my child] can review the reading for the week and gave me time to set up the visuals,” this is an example of her *helping her child at home with school work and other curriculum related activities and decision making*. Mrs. Black’s “[school] has classes if [the parents] want to learn [how to teach their children the material that they are learning]” which is another way the school and parents participate in this form of partnership. Another example of learning at home is when Mrs. Smithfield said, “The thing is with twins at home ... it is helpful because if they are reading by themselves or doing something I can hear [the twin with special needs ask her sister] ‘what’s this?’” and when she talked about how she worked with both of her daughters over the summer with reading. Mrs. Cousins’ description of “I just went to a library and just grabbed every [book]... I started with very basic signs... I taught everybody in the house just those basic, basic signs... I just grabbed every [book]... I had to teach myself [how to] sign and then I had to teach everybody in the household... I’ll [also] go online and think of a work I want to teach her” also fits into this category.



### *Decision Making*

Throughout my interviews, only one of the three parents mentioned activities that ‘fit’ into Epstein’s (1995) “decision making” category. For example, when Mrs. Black said that she is a member of the school’s PTO and is the chair of the Parent Advisory Committee that was an example of *involvement in school decision making or become a parent representative*. Mrs. Black said her responsibilities as a member of the Parent Advisory Committee “[has] to set the agendas and set the workshops. We do usually do a couple of workshops a year. We do it both [for teachers and parents]... because usually if the parents want to know, usually the TAs and even the teachers want to know some of the stuff too. And just basically doing all of the communication with the parents and handling complaints or issues with the parents. Then we have a couple of other functions throughout the year and then we have to present it to the school committee at the end of the year.”

### *Collaborating with Community*

Two of the parents interviewed also mentioned some form of “collaborating with community” or *using the community to help strengthen school programs, family practices, and student development*. For example, when Mrs. Black said, “I sent a thing... with [my child’s] picture that says this is [my child] and it just talked about who she is. What she likes ‘I like this, sometimes I do this, but it is just because I am excited.’ ... I said I just want everyone in the class with her to just read it so they know who she is about. Instead of them doing, ‘Well children with disabilities are different.’ I liked it more specific to her. ... I think that letting the children know this is what she has; this is what it is about, it doesn’t mean that you can’t say hi to her or play with her. ... To me, the social component and just her being happy is just as important [as academics],” she was telling how she is involved in this form of partnership. This helps Mrs.

Black’s child to gain social skills and support from other students. Another example is Mrs. Smithfield sending her daughter to Sherlock Center at Rhode Island College for help with her vision problems which fits into the subcategory of strengthening student development.

**Summary**

Epstein (1995)	Mrs. Black	Mrs. Smithfield	Mrs. Cousins
Parenting			
Communicating			
Volunteering			
Learning At Home			
Decision Making			
Collaborating With The Community			

In sum, the categories that most often defined parent involvement activities for my participants were “learning at home” and “communicating”. The categories that least often defined parent involvement activities for my parents were “parenting” and “decision making”. My impression of these results are the types of partnerships that are quick and easy to use (such as communicating) and were mainly parent directed (such as learning at home) are the partnerships that parents used the most. Being in an age where communication and information is so easy to access over the internet, the parents seemed to gravitate towards partnerships that lend themselves to this ease of access. For parents that have busy lives and are not able to set aside a lot of time to advocate to parent-teacher partnerships require a great deal of time and a commitment (such as volunteering and collaborating with the community), the partnerships that they can control and that are quick takes priority.

## **Implications**

### *For Parents*

From their partnerships from working with the special education teachers the parents have all had different outcomes and experiences. One similar theme that the parents kept mentioning was that they liked teachers who openly communicated with them. This was Mrs. Black's main talking point that she kept on going back to during the interview. Mrs. Smithfield also said that she really likes the close connection that she and her daughter have with the special education teacher. Mrs. Cousins likes how she is able to take the situation at home and try to help her daughter as much as possible.

### *For Students*

The most important outcome is how the parent-teacher relationship affects the students. One main theme that developed throughout my interviews was how the parent teacher partnership affected the student's academics. Mrs. Black had excitedly mentioned that when the special education teacher pushed her child to do the best that she could, she jumped one whole grade point. Mrs. Smithfield had mentioned how her daughter is reading more often and how it is no longer a struggle to have her read.

Another main theme that was mentioned about how the students benefitted were social and emotional outcomes. Mrs. Black's daughter has had more social interactions and has more friends. She also has positive role models from her Circle of Friends that help her and guide her. Mrs. Cousins also talked about how her daughter greatly benefitted from peer modeling and has gained a lot of motivation in the classroom. The main thing that Mrs. Smithfield's child gained was more self confidence as a student.

### *For Teachers*

The special education teachers also have various outcomes from their partnerships with the parents. These outcomes greatly depended on the relationships each teacher had with the parents. The special education teacher that worked with Mrs. Black gains professional development and more knowledge about Autism. She also obtained knowledge about how to use visuals in the classroom that will help the students learn. The special education teacher that works with Mrs. Smithfield has learned how to make a unique connection between her and the students, which helps the teacher to fully understand the students' needs, and how she can positively influence how the students see themselves. Mrs. Cousins' special education teacher gains knowledge about how open communication with parents allows her to fully understand what is happening at home.

### **Conclusions**

When first preparing this project I had established a set of research questions that would guide my thinking throughout my investigation. The research questions that I had set forth were as follows:

- What are the parents' experiences and feelings about their partnerships with their child's special education teachers?
- How would the parents want to improve the partnerships?

From looking at the interview data and my research questions I realize that I cannot make sweeping generalizations about most parents. However, I have learned something about parent teacher partnerships and those lessons learned follow.

All of the parents expressed that they needed open lines of communication between all parties that have a hand in their child's education. For example, Mrs. Cousins feels that the open

communication between her and the special education teacher helps them to connect what her child is learning at school to what she is learning at home. Mrs. Black wishes for more collaboration and communication between the two teachers (the general education and the special education teachers) in her daughter's classroom. Mrs. Smithfield believes that the lack of communication between all of the people involved in her child's IEP process causes it to be dragged out. In her opinion, if there was better communication and collaboration between everyone in the IEP procedure then the process would be quicker and her child would get the services that she needs sooner.

Two out of the three parents that I interviewed expressed the importance of how they need the special education teachers to have the experience to take the lead. Although Mrs. Black loved that her teacher was young and open to take requests, she regretted that the teacher was apprehensive to take the lead. Mrs. Black feels that the special education teacher needs more experience with working with parents and knowing exactly what her students need. Mrs. Smithfield said that she loves that her child's special education teacher takes the lead when advocating for her daughter. She said that she would not know what to do without her special education teacher taking the lead.

Since Mrs. Cousins' child is younger, she may not have all of the experiences that the other parents have. I believe that because of this lack of exposure, she had no negative comments or suggestions for improvement about the special education teacher or program that she is working with. She has not had the same amount of exposure to different experiences compared to the other parents, who both had comments of how their partnerships can improve. Out of the three parents interviewed Mrs. Black is the most involved in different types of partnerships because, from what I see, she has had the most experience and had the most to say.

## **Future Research**

Looking at the interview data and the subsequent questions that I am left with, there are many directions where future research could focus. Future research could further analyze the point of view of the special education teachers, who are working with the parents I had interviewed. I would interview the special education teachers about their perceptions of the partnerships they have with parents and what they think can be improved on in their relationship. By doing this, I could fully view how the partnerships function from both sides and then further determine what could be improved about partnerships as a whole.

Future research can also look into how well pre-service teachers and new teachers feel about how well they are prepared to form partnerships with parents. Pre-service teachers and new teachers may have not been properly informed about the different types of parent-teacher partnerships there are and how to properly utilize them. This could also be researched further into by how well pre-service teachers and new teachers feel that they are prepared to work with parents. As a teacher, and especially as a special education teacher, one needs to know how to work with parents and meet the needs of what the parent wants and what is best for the child. Without the knowledge of knowing how to properly do these things, the teacher is left to improvise. This may lead the teacher, like Mrs. Black's teacher, to not want to take the lead in a child's education.

Another path for future research could look into easier ways for parents and teachers to form partnerships. From my data it was found that the parents utilized easier to access partnership types, such as communicating and learning at home. If partnership types such as volunteering and collaborating with the community were as easy to utilize as the above mentioned partnerships, then parents could be more apt to utilize them. If more partnership types

(not only between parents and teachers but between all of the teachers concerned with a child's education) were easier to use, then it could possibly lead to there being more collaboration and communication between all parties involved in a child's instruction. This, in turn, could help make IEP meeting run more fluently. The question remains how do we make these other partnership types more accessible and/or user friendly?

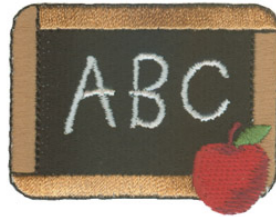
### **Final Thoughts**

From the interviews it seemed that most parents seem to lean towards communicating and learning at home as their main partnership types with teachers. It is also shown through the interviews that parents do not only rely on one specific partnership type. As a future educator, this has helped me see how I can work with parents. From my experience, I hope to further explore the relationships between all people involved in a child's education. This can better my understanding of how to advance a child's education.

My research has taught me how to become more confident as a teacher when working with parents. The parents from the interviews, like many others, just want to help their child grow as a student and want the special education teacher to work with them. These parents were trying to explain their experiences and frustrations to a willing listener, so that maybe their thoughts would be helpful in some way. Mrs. Black, Mrs. Smithfield and Mrs. Cousins were not only trying to help their child to succeed by getting their thoughts out in the open but were trying to, hopefully, advocate to help teach future parents and teachers.

# Appendix A

## Recruitment Flyer



### Parent Volunteers Needed For Research Study On Parent-Teacher Partnerships in Special Education

- Are you a parent of a child currently receiving special education services in the elementary or middle school grade levels?
- Would you be willing to share your story?

My name is Cassandra Braley and I am an undergraduate student at Rhode Island College doing an Honor's research project on Parent-Teacher Partnerships in Special Education. For my research study, I am interested in interviewing five parents of children who have been identified for special education services for mild to moderate disabilities at the elementary or middle school levels. Specifically, I am interested in interviewing parents about their experiences with their partnership with their child's special education teacher. Please feel free to email or call me about any questions you may have or if you would like to participate. I would like to interview you for about one hour. Thank you.

[Cbraley\\_4897@email.ric.edu](mailto:Cbraley_4897@email.ric.edu) or 401-439-5930

Parent-Teacher Partnership in Special Education Research Cassandra Braley <a href="mailto:Cbraley_4897@email.ric.edu">Cbraley_4897@email.ric.edu</a> 401-439-5930	Parent-Teacher Partnership in Special Education Research Cassandra Braley <a href="mailto:Cbraley_4897@email.ric.edu">Cbraley_4897@email.ric.edu</a> 401-439-5930	Parent-Teacher Partnership in Special Education Research Cassandra Braley <a href="mailto:Cbraley_4897@email.ric.edu">Cbraley_4897@email.ric.edu</a> 401-439-5930	Parent-Teacher Partnership in Special Education Research Cassandra Braley <a href="mailto:Cbraley_4897@email.ric.edu">Cbraley_4897@email.ric.edu</a> 401-439-5930	Parent-Teacher Partnership in Special Education Research Cassandra Braley <a href="mailto:Cbraley_4897@email.ric.edu">Cbraley_4897@email.ric.edu</a> 401-439-5930	Parent-Teacher Partnership in Special Education Research Cassandra Braley <a href="mailto:Cbraley_4897@email.ric.edu">Cbraley_4897@email.ric.edu</a> 401-439-5930
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## Appendix B

**Rhode Island College, Feinstein School of Education**  
**Informed Adult Consent for Participation as a Subject in the Following Study:**  
*Parent-Teacher Partnerships in Special Education*  
**Investigator: Cassandra Braley**  
**Date Created: March 31, 2011**

### **Introduction:**

- You are being asked to be in a research study of parent-teacher partnerships in special education.
- You were selected as a possible participant because you are the parent of an elementary, school-aged child who is identified as having mild to moderate disabilities.
- I ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

### **Purpose of Study:**

- The purpose of this study is so I can learn about parent-teacher relationships in special education. Through this research, I want to learn more about how parents view these partnerships and how they feel they can be made more effective.

### **Description of the Study Procedures:**

- If you agree to be in this study, I will conduct an interview with you lasting 30-45 minutes. I will ask one open-ended question and follow-up with a series of prompts. The interview will be audio-taped, and the researcher will create transcripts from the audio recordings for subsequent analysis.

### **Risks/Discomforts of Being in the Study:**

- It is your right to discontinue the interview at any time. It is also your right to only answer the questions you feel comfortable with.

### **Benefits of Being in the Study:**

- The purpose of the study is to explore parent-teacher partnerships in special education. An expected benefit of participating in this study is your contribution to research in this area.

### **Payments:**

- There is no payment for participating in this study.

### **Costs:**

- There is no cost to you to participate in this research study.

### **Confidentiality:**

- The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I may publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Research records will be kept in a secure file.

- All electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file. Audiotapes will also be kept in a secure file and destroyed by the researcher after completion of the project. Portions of audiotapes may be used for educational purposes, but no identifiable information will be included in those excerpts.
- Access to the records will be limited to the researcher and her dissertation committee; however, please note that the Institutional Review Board and internal Rhode Island College auditors may review the research records.

**Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal:**

- Your participation is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect your current or future relations with Rhode Island College.
- You are free to withdraw at any time, for whatever reason.
- There is no penalty or loss of benefits for not taking part or for stopping your participation.

**Contacts and Questions:**

- The researcher conducting this study is Cassandra Braley. For questions or more information concerning this research you may contact her at [cbraley\\_4897@ric.edu](mailto:cbraley_4897@ric.edu) . Her advisor is Professor Cara McDermott-Fasy. She can be reached at [CMcDermott@ric.edu](mailto:CMcDermott@ric.edu) .
- If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may also contact: the Institutional Review Board at Rhode Island College at [irb@ric.edu](mailto:irb@ric.edu)

**Copy of Consent Form:**

- You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records and future reference.

**Statement of Consent:**

- I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to participate in this study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form.

**Signatures/Dates**

Study Participant (Print Name): \_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date \_\_\_\_\_

**THANK YOU**

## Appendix C

### Demographic Data Form

1. Mother \_\_\_\_\_; Father \_\_\_\_\_
2. Race/Ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_
3. Marital Status \_\_\_\_\_
4. Highest Level of Education \_\_\_\_\_
5. Occupation \_\_\_\_\_
6. Religion \_\_\_\_\_
7. Child's gender \_\_\_\_\_
8. Age of child \_\_\_\_\_
9. Child's Grade Level \_\_\_\_\_
10. Child's special education eligibility category \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

### Interview Protocol

Opening statement/question:

When a student is suspected to have a disability, the student is referred to have special education services to help that child. These special education services conducted by the special education teacher and parents should have the same goal for the student that they want to work towards.

How would you describe your relationships with your child's special education teacher and how do you think your collaboration helps your child?

Prompts:

<i>Topic Area</i>	<i>Examples of Prompts</i>
Child	"Tell me about your child."
Parental involvement	"Tell me about how you are involved in your child's life during school." "Tell me how you collaborate with your child's special education teacher."
Teacher involvement	"Tell me how the teacher collaborates with you about teaching and interacting with your child." "Tell me how the special education teacher invites you to be a part of your child's education process."
Collaboration between parents and teachers	"Tell me how you think you can improve your partnership with the special education teacher." "Tell me how you think the special education teacher can improve their partnership with you."
Benefits for students	"What benefits/risks do you think your child gets from your partnership with the special education teacher?" "What benefits/risks do you think your child will get from continued partnerships with the special education teacher?" "What benefits/risks do you think your child will have if the changes you have suggested throughout the interview are made?"

## Appendix E

Interview Coding  
Interview 1: Mrs. Black

<b>Type of Involvement</b>	<b>What was said</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Parenting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	0
<b>Communicating</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers not working collaboratively together within classroom.</li> <li>• Open to requests, needs to take lead.</li> <li>• Knows what to do for student, offer new information</li> <li>• Parents need to be clear</li> <li>• Does not lower expectations</li> <li>• Gives positive feedback and constructive criticism.</li> <li>• Notes back and forth, email (regularly (at least once a week))</li> <li>• School calls parents about ongoing events</li> <li>• Meet teachers before hand</li> <li>• Grades and homework online</li> </ul>	9
<b>Volunteering</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not go into classroom.</li> <li>• Gets invited to come into the classroom, but nothing specific on volunteering.</li> </ul>	2
<b>Learning At Home</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses visuals at home with past teachers.</li> <li>• Send home homework help, and use modifications.</li> <li>• Gives stuff before hand to let her set up visuals.</li> <li>• Provide classes to help parents learn how to help with/do the homework (lattice multiplication)</li> </ul>	4
<b>Decision Making</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Member in PTO</li> <li>• Chair of Parent advisory committee.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Have workshops- had one on circle of friends, Communication with parents, Functions</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Circle of Friends (added to IEP after)</li> </ul>	3
<b>Collaborating With Community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information card she created- teacher passes it out to students (allows parent to take burden of telling students about their child).</li> </ul>	1

Likes: Teachers who openly communicate with each other and parents,

Outcomes for teacher: Professional development, more knowledgeable about Autism, Use of visuals

Outcomes for student: Academic (grades jumped a whole point when pushed), Social (friends, interactions), Positive role models (circle of friends) (help and guide)

Interview 2: Mrs. Smithfield

Type of Involvement	What was said	Total
<b>Parenting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	0
<b>Communicating</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open lines of communications, feels like she has a better communication with special education teacher than the general education teacher. (second grade is more business, but does not feel intimidated to ask general education teacher more questions) 16:08</li> <li>• Create talking points for student teacher relationship 13:06</li> <li>• The process needs to go quicker for IEPs 9:43</li> </ul>	3
<b>Volunteering</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not go into school feels that second grade is more business (needs to let child grow on own).</li> <li>• She is available to meet or help out in the classroom</li> </ul>	2
<b>Learning At Home</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has sister read with her to help when she stumbles 8:35</li> <li>• Works intensively with her over the summer with reading</li> </ul>	2
<b>Decision Making</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lets teachers advocate for students. 1:30</li> </ul>	1
<b>Collaborating With Community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goes to Sherlock Center for eye problem. 3:15</li> </ul>	1

Likes: Open lines of communication and the teacher really know the student.

Outcomes for teacher: have a special connection with students, model good behavior

Outcomes for student: More self confidence (less shy and reads more)

The parent really likes to use communicating with the special education teacher. She feels that she has such a great connection between the special education teacher and herself where she can call her up and ask a question at any time.

The girl that we talked about is a twin. She has a sister in a different second grade classroom. This makes it hard because of the different lines of communication. One twin started out with an IEP but graduated from it and then the other one had to have an IEP.

Interview 3: Mrs. Cousins

<b>Type of Involvement</b>	<b>What was said</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Parenting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The teacher had recommended brushing down the child to calm her down 22:53</li> <li>• Has a trampoline in the house so she can build up her muscle tone.</li> </ul>	1
<b>Communicating</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open lines of communication through learning sign language. (stops at school to talk, notes, emails) 2:31</li> </ul>	1
<b>Volunteering</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>	0
<b>Learning At Home</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Checks out lots of books to help learn more about how to teach the student. 15:40</li> <li>• Overcame some sensory issues by teaching parents about brushing her down</li> </ul>	2
<b>Decision Making</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>	0
<b>Collaborating With Community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>	0

Likes: She likes how there are open lines of communication between the school and home. She also likes to take the situation at home and try to help her daughter as much as possible. The one thing she mentioned repeatedly was that the daughter was in an intergraded classroom and the help from the peer modeling helped a lot. The mother had nothing negative to say about the teachers or anything about her daughter's learning program.

Outcomes for teacher: Open communication allows teachers to understand what is happening at home.

Outcomes for student: Learns from others in the classroom, motivation within the classroom, solve problems quickly.

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