

# Parent Involvement in the Menomonie Middle School Educational Talent Search Program

By

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## ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to determine the attitudes and behaviors of parents whose children were involved in the Educational Talent Search Program at the Menomonie Middle School, in Menomonie, Wisconsin

This study surveyed the needs, attitudes and behaviors of parents in regard to their involvement with their adolescent's education and the Educational Talent Search Program. parents whose adolescents were students at the Menomonie Middle School, in Menomonie, Wisconsin. Surveys were then analyzed using T-tests, ANOVA, and the Student-Newman-Keuls Multiple Range and the Duncan Test.

Mothers were more supportive of the Educational Talent Search Program, exposure to career education, and desired more parent/child events at school than

fathers. Non-Caucasian parents scored more positively than Caucasian parents about the program being helpful, more parent/child events, and the school valuing their suggestions. The English language was also more difficult for them. Single parents indicated that having a busy lifestyle prevented them from attending school events more than two parent families. Parents with a high school education indicated that the English language was more difficult to understand.

This study concluded with recommendations on how to improve and enhance parental involvement in the Educational Talent Search Program.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

There is one irrefutable truth in education: parent involvement in the schools promotes student success and achievement. This involvement is the very heart of most school reform efforts and is advocated directly by local, state and national policy makers. Indeed, one of the national educational goals stated explicitly “By the year 2000, all schools will promote the social, emotional and academic growth of children”(Goals 2000, 1994).

Parent involvement in a child’s formal education has been proven over and over again to significantly affect a child’s achievement level (Berger, 1995). Over thirty years of research has proven beyond dispute, the positive connection between parent involvement and student success. Effectively engaging parents and families in the education of their children has the potential to be far more transformational than any other type of educational reform (National PTA, 1998). Well-implemented school and community practices yield positive results for the students, the school, and the parents (Berger, 1995; Epstein, 1986). Many studies have been done to show that parental involvement enhances student achievement all the way through college (Berger, 1995; Epstein, 1986).

Parent involvement can be a challenge at any age but it is especially true for the middle school years. Parents are generally committed to involvement in the primary years. Elementary aged students enjoy having their parents volunteer, attend school-



sponsored events, and assisting with homework. Parents are committed to getting their children off to a good start. Parents of middle school aged children tend to back off from involvement in school because of the changing independence of the child. Middle school age students want to put distance between themselves and parents. They are establishing their independence. Having parents involved in their education is not as appealing as it was in elementary school. This is also a period when various indicators of academic motivation, behavior and self-confidence decline which adds to the challenge (Pena, 2000).

Additional factors such as language can be a barrier to parent involvement. They may not be able to clearly understand the intent of the program. They may also feel intimidated by the language barrier and may not attend an event despite the assistance of an interpreter (Gestwicki, 1996).

Parents who are low income may feel intimidated by a teacher's education level and lifestyle (Gestwicki, 1996). The educational jargon can be intimidating along with professional dress. Each can be a barrier between home and school. Parents may feel that they are being judged on these things in their own lives.

Dual income and single parent families make up a large percentage of parents with middle school age children. Lack of time and energy can be major barriers for these two family types (Pena, 2000).

The Educational Talent Search Program is a federally funded grant that supports students academically and assists them with post-secondary education. Students that qualify for this program are minority and low-income first-generation college students. The grant serves students in the 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades. The local Talent Search Grant is

housed at the University of Wisconsin - Stout. The local program reaches out to the Menomonie Middle School. The program educates and academically supports the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades.

One of the specific goals set by the U.S. Department of Education for the 2002 through 2007 Educational Talent Search Grant cycle, is the involvement of program participant parents (Educational Talent Search Grant, 2002). This objective presents a challenge for the Educational Talent Search Program personnel, as these particular parents can be the most difficult to get involved for the reasons stated above. This presents a challenge for the Educational Talent Search Program to study and identify specific barriers that might keep parents from becoming involved in the Educational Talent Search Grant at the Menomonie Middle School. Once the barriers are identified, the program can continue to provide services that will be accommodating to parental involvement.

#### Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to identify the issues that keep parents from involvement in the Middle School Educational Talent Search Program in Menomonie, Wisconsin. The study will include a variety of parents who had children at the Menomonie Middle School during the 2002-2003 school year.

#### Research Questions

The overall objective of this research is to pinpoint the issues that keep Menomonie Middle School parents from being involved in the Educational Talent Search Program. Specifically the study will look at the following questions:

1. How does the education level, family structure, ethnicity and gender of parents affect their attitudes toward education and the Educational Talent Search Program?
2. How important is the time of day, a meal and childcare in attending an education event?
3. What topics are parents interested in being more informed about?
4. Do parents feel the school values their opinions?
5. Do parents perceive the school as welcoming?
6. How helpful is the Educational Talent Search Program perceived by parents in its present form?

### Definition of Terms

The following terms will be defined to help the reader understand the study.

Disadvantaged – A person that has had few advantages to enhance social development and learning potential.

Educational Talent Search – A multi faceted program that helps students from ages 12 to 27 achieve academically and prepare them for post-secondary education.

First Generation – Neither birth parent have graduated from college.

Low Income – A family income of \$24,000 or lower. Qualification for the Educational Talent Search Program

Parent Involvement – Any number of ways in which parents, teachers, and Educational Talent Search staff work together either directly or indirectly for the purpose of improving the student's academic and personal achievement.

Post-Secondary Education – Education that follows high school such as technical college or a four-year degree program.

Student Support Services – This program helps disadvantaged students adjust to college, attain good academic standing, and improve the likelihood of graduation with a four-year degree.

TRIO – Three federal programs of Upward Bound, Student Support Services, and Educational Talent Search. At present, it consists of eight programs, which help disadvantaged students reach their post secondary goals.

### Assumptions

It is assumed that those who participated in the survey are a good representation of the parents at the middle school in Menomonie Wisconsin. It is also assumed that the questions in the survey will be answered honestly by the survey participants.

### Limitations

This study will only be representative of the parents at the Menomonie Middle School. This study could not be generalized to other school populations.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

Parent involvement in a child's education has been proven over and over again to significantly affect a child's achievement level (Berger, 1995). Parent programs that follow standards set by research yield positive results for the students, the school, and the parents (Becker & Epstein, 1982, National PTA, 1998). As much as parent involvement is important to student achievement, there are barriers that keep parents from being effectively involved (Pena, 2000).

The new Educational Talent Search Grant (2002-2007) has as one of its objectives, parent involvement. To achieve this objective, literature will be reviewed on the significance of parent involvement in education, standards for parent involvement programs, barriers to overcome to achieve effective parent involvement and the Educational Talent Search Grant. (Educational Talent Search Grant, 2002).

#### Importance of Parent Involvement

According to the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs (National PTA, 1998) the most comprehensive survey of research on the effects of parent involvement in education, is a series of publications developed by Anne Henderson and Nancy Berla (1995). In these publications they cite more than 85 studies, and document the profound and comprehensive benefits for students, families and schools when parents get involved.

### Benefits for Students

. When parents are involved, students achieve more, regardless of income level, ethnic background or the educational level of parents. The more extensively their parents are involved, the higher the student achievement will be. Along with this, students whose parents have been involved have higher graduation rates and greater enrollment rates in post-secondary education. Middle and high school students whose parents have remained involved tend to make better transitions, maintain the quality of their work and develop realistic plans for the future (National PTA, 1998).

The most accurate prediction of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which a student's parents are able to create a home environment that encourages learning, and has high but reasonable expectations for their children's achievement (National PTA, 1998).

Benefits for students aside from increased academic achievement are more positive behaviors and emotional development (Cai, Mayer, and Wang, 1997, Greenwood and Hickman, 1991).

### Benefits for Parents

The parents of students can also benefit from their involvement in education. When low-income parents are trained to work with children, they developed better attitudes, became more active, and helped support school activities (Fuller, 2003). They also begin to seek additional education for themselves (Henderson, 1988). The parents also benefited from better communication with their children after involvement (Charkin, 1989; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Having children do well in school has emotional rewards for parents the rest of their lives.

### Benefits for Schools

Schools are also a benefactor of parent's involvement. Those schools that favored the involvement of parents outperformed the schools with little involvement (Epstein, 1987; Henderson, 1988). On the basis of students' achievement and the quality of the school, those schools that have long-lasting and comprehensive programs are more effective than those without (Rioux & Berea, 1993). More specifically, schools benefit from more volunteer time. This has positively affected classroom learning as well as the school environment, and contributes to the overall school-community relationship.

### Benefits for Teachers

Many teachers feel that they do not have the extra time or energy for parent involvement at the middle school level. If they were convinced of the benefits, they may feel it's worth the initial output of energy for long-term benefits.

Teachers who are committed to parental involvement reap significant benefits in parental perceptions of their merits. "A teacher who involves parents in students learning are more likely to report a greater understanding of families, cultures, and increased appreciation for parental interest in helping their children, and a deeper respect for parent's time and abilities"(Eldridge, 2001, p. 66).

Parents on the other hand who become involved in their children's schooling also tend to develop a positive attitude toward their children's teachers (Bempechat, 1992, Greenwood and Hickman, 1991).

### Asian American Families

One of the fastest growing minority groups in the United States are Asian - Americans. In the city of Menomonie Wisconsin, people from Asian countries have

migrated in large numbers. Most of these people are Hmong refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. They tend to have lower levels of education and higher levels of unemployment (Chan, 1992).

The Asian American family is the primary social unit. The strongest family bonds are between parent and child, not the parents themselves. Obedience to the parents is expected, and disrespect is not tolerated. Asian Americans also have high expectations for their children academically, and value moving up the economic and career ladders (Watts & Tutwiler, 2003). Academic success is expected and when not achieved, it results in punishment. Asian parents views on education reflect respecting teachers, valuing their knowledge and expertise, and monitoring their children's academic progress at home.

Tradition is very important to the Hmong culture. The differences between American and Asian culture can be a source of conflict between Hmong students and their parents. School personnel working with Hmong students need to value the cultural differences (Watts & Tutwiler, 2003).

There are some Indian American families, but they typically do not have the same background and lifestyle that most of the Asian American Menomonie citizens have. These students are here either because of parents that teach at the University of Wisconsin-Stout or have been adopted into an American family.

### Low Income Families

Teachers that come from middle-income families need to inculturate themselves with a low-income lifestyle. It is important for them to try to understand how low income parents and students experience life. Teachers need to understand low-income



parents' perspective on their children and academic achievement. Lack of resources does not mean that the parents lack dreams and expectations for their children. These parents are experts on their own children. It is important for educators to have appropriate expectations for low-income families (Fuller, 1994). It is then critical for teachers to deal with any biases toward low-income families that might be unfounded.

There are several issues to consider when communicating with low-income parents. Low-income parents may not have computers and/or phones. The best method for communication may be to send information in letterform. If there is a combination of a language barrier, and a low-income family, interpreters may be needed. Low-income parents may be unwilling or uncomfortable in communication with teachers. In any case, it is important that educators keep parents informed.

When creating a partnership with low-income parents, educators need to consider issues that are part of their lifestyle. Partnerships must also be built on respect. Teachers must show parents the same respect as they do colleagues. The stresses of life may be so overwhelming at times, that it is difficult for parents to put a lot of energy into their child's educational success. Low-income parents are often single or dual-income working parents. These parents have little extra time or energy to spend on parent involvement in the school. One on one communication or to create an education night that considers low-income limitations such as time and money would be profitable (Fuller, 2003).

### Family Structure

The two-parent family tends to be more involved in their child's education than single parent families. This may be partly due to the difference in socio-economic status,

but it is also strongly due to the fact that there is an extra parent involved. Fathers in both the two-parent and single parent families find it easier to attend general meetings that are most likely to occur during non-work hours. This may also be adapted to mothers working full-time.

In the two-parent families, mothers generally assume primary responsibility for the children. The pattern of participation of both mothers and fathers in single parent homes is similar to the participation of the mother in two-parent homes. In single parent families, the sole parent must fill the role regardless of whether the parent is a mother or father (U.S. Department of Education, 1997).

### Middle Schools

Middle schools are based on a student-centered concept. It is a team approach, and parent involvement is a logical extension of the team concept. In the past, parent involvement has dropped significantly as the children get older. By the middle grades, those parents who appeared in great numbers in first grade have dwindled to a few. These developmentally sensitive years demand the team effort of middle school teachers and administrators. It is widely believed that having parents involved is extraordinarily difficult, largely because middle school children are pulling away from parents and do not want them to have influence over their educational and social lives (Johnson & Fogelman, 2003).

Another issue at this level can be the complexity of the curriculum. Even among well-educated parents, helping children with homework in math and science can be a problem. Skill deficiencies, associated with computer technology, can render parents helpless to assist their children in this area. Parents can then develop a sense of

powerlessness and pull away from direct school involvement (Johnston & Fogelman, 2003).

The interests of parents need to be considered when planning events. Parents will participate in events that meet their needs (Pena, 2000).

Schools may encourage parents to be involved, but sometimes actions even though unintentional send unwelcome messages to parents. Those schools that share performance expectations with parents communicate to parents that they want them to help with these academic skills at home.

Parents' schedules should also be considered when planning special events. Scheduling special events when most parents are unable to attend sends a strong message, that the parental input and involvement is not particularly important (Johnston & Fogelman, 2003).

#### Successful Planning and Implementation of Parenting Activities

Successful planning of educational opportunities depends on the relevance and meaningfulness of topics presented at a parent education night. An on-going survey of needs and wants from parents is recommended. Parents that cannot attend an education night should receive information in another form. This may be a video or a fact sheet on-line about the missed information. Information on a parent education night should give parents plenty of time to plan to attend the event. All specific details to attend should be included in a letter sent to the parents (Johnston & Fogelman, 2003).

Workshops can be offered in a variety of locations. Having some of the parent education nights at the school is fine, but in addition hold parent education

meetings in a community building, which may be more comfortable. The timing of parent education meetings is imperative for a strong attendance. It is important to offer them at convenient times, and also to offer seminars at various times and dates to accommodate more schedules. The literature and language used in promoting the event should be simple, and free from educational jargon. The literature should be at a level that parents understand. If an interpreter is needed, one should be secured (Johnson & Fogelman, 2003).

#### Standards for Parent Involvement

The National Parent Teacher Association has secured parent involvement as one of the eight National Education Goals. Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional and academic growth of children. This organization has created program standards of excellence. The standards along with corresponding quality indicators, was created to be used with national standards and reform initiatives in support of children's learning and success. It is with the goal of academic success that the National Parent Teacher Association encourages all education and parent involvement representatives to use these within their school systems (National PTA, 1998).

The purpose for the standards is threefold: to promote meaningful parent and family participation, to raise awareness regarding the components of effective programs, and to provide guidelines for schools that wish to improve programs. When these standards are used, they can be directives for moving programs. Standards should be considered in context with local school needs and circumstances (National PTA, 1998).

### Student and Parent Learning

School staff members must recognize parent roles and responsibilities. They should, ask parents what support they need and work to find ways to meet those needs. When they do this they communicate a clear message to parents “We value you and need your input in order to maintain a high quality program. Along with this, programs must be culturally sensitive to diverse family populations, appreciating traditions and differences.

Involving parents provides teachers with a valuable support system. Most parents are willing to assist students in learning. They do not always know how to assist their children. Helping parents connect to their child’s learning communicates that they value what their children achieve (National PTA, 1998).

Studies have proven that the schools where parents are involved in school decision-making have higher levels of achievement and greater community support. Effective partnerships develop when schools actively enlist parent participation and input, communicating that they are valued as full partners in the education of their children. It is important to provide understandable, accessible and well-publicized processes for influencing decisions, raising issues or concerns and resolving problems (National PTA, 1998).

### Collaborating with Community Resources

Communities offer a wide array of resources valuable to the schools and families they serve. When schools and communities work together, both are strengthened.

Businesses connect education programs with the realities of the work place. Families can

access community resources more easily. Students can provide service in the community and learn beyond their school environment (National PTA, 1998).

Schools that are attempting to create parent involvement programs must consider the standards set for program quality. These will be taken into account as the Educational Talent Search Program at the Menomonie Middle School creates an effective parent involvement program.

### Wisconsin State Standards

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction has standards and suggestions for a family-community-school team approach. The Wisconsin standards are also based on research over the past 30 years. It has shown that when families and communities are involved children do well academically, the staff has higher morale, and families and communities support and understand their school (DPI, 2002). They state that parents are the key to planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating any effective practices.

The six types of partnerships are the standards the state has set up to encourage school districts in involving parents (DPI, 2002). The first type partnership is parenting. This includes the responsibility of parents to help their children learn. Schools can help by connecting parents to resources and education that helps them to succeed in this role.

Another partnership is volunteering. Volunteering includes participation by parents at the school to improve the learning environment. The contributions of parents should be shown appreciation for and encouraged.

Community outreach or collaborating with the community recognizes that the community is an important part of overall education. Community resources whether basic or enrichment, contribute to the success of all students (DPI, 2002).

Communication is another partnership, which school and parents should form. Communication as a two-way process is the responsibility of both schools and parents. Parents should be empowered to discuss their children with educators and be supported. Additionally, schools have a responsibility to provide information such as report cards and other student assessments in a user-friendly and timely manner (DPI, 2002).

A fifth partnership is learning at home, which includes helping students and their families make connections between what is learned in school, at home, and in the community. Families and educators can work together to develop education goals and then provide opportunities to learn at home and in the community.

Governance and advocacy is a partnership that requires parents to be accepted as partners. Parents and other adults need to advocate for all children. Decision making, should include the perspectives of low-income and minority parents, as well as majority parents (DPI, 2002).

### Barriers

Even though the research shows that parental involvement is beneficial for students, there are barriers that make it challenging to coordinate. The Educational Talent Search Program at the Menomonie Middle School has obstacles or barriers to consider in planning parent involvement programs. The Educational Talent Search Grant provides specifically for minority, low-income and first-generation college students. The program also needs to consider the obstacles described in the previous paragraphs, those of language barriers, education level, single parents and the educational perspective that middle school parents have.

Assumptions made by some teachers and the lack of importance they place on parent involvement can create another set of barriers. Although teachers agree that parent involvement contributes to more effective teaching and a healthy school climate, few believe that they could realistically change parent's behaviors (Becker & Epstein, 1982, Bempechat, 1992; Epstein, 1992).

#### Over Coming Barriers - Customer Friendly Schools

Businesses are very familiar and comfortable with terms such as marketing and customer service. Schools, not being familiar with these terms, have had to adopt this role to remain competitive. A customer service approach draws parental support. The ultimate measure of customer service is quality. Good customer relations cannot replace a quality education. Specific supporting practices can help with parental and community relations. The ABC's of good customer service are attitude, behavior, and communication. Customer service oriented organizations hire people with positive attitudes who are skilled at working with people. Educational staff should be trained in working with the public, especially in difficult situations. People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care. This requires a friendly and inviting attitude from all staff within a school. Especially important is the front office, in which parents and community encounter first (Chambers, 1998).

In a survey done by Delores Pena (2000), parents were surveyed on parent involvement and offered suggestions. The number one and most simple suggestion were to make the parents feel more welcome.

How the school presents itself is very important. Forms of communication can play a vital role in the school customer service program as well. How user-friendly are



school newsletters? User-friendly newsletters are easy to read, have illustrations, white space, and short articles of interest to the audience. They should also invite feedback and involvement in school activities. The school brochure should also be user-friendly. It must focus on special and unique features of the school, and include interesting information that will be helpful to families (Chambers, 1998).

The most important aspect of customer-oriented communication is listening. Serving customers or parents and community means knowing what they want and need. The school personnel need to ask questions and be open to feedback on services. Options might include tear-off comment forms on school newsletters, phone or paper and pencil surveys or feedback to be left on a website.

The essence of good customer service is showing that you care. This kind of approach and attitude will help parents feel welcomed and comfortable being part of the school (Chambers, 1998).

#### The Educational Talent Search Grant

The local Educational Talent Search Program is housed on the University of Wisconsin Stout campus in Menomonie, Wisconsin. The local program first started with Wisconsin schools that had large Native American populations, and expanded to the Menomonie schools in 1997 due to the rise in the Hmong population. The local program educates and counsels over seven hundred students in Wisconsin school districts.

The Educational Talent Search Program has been on the University of Wisconsin Stout campus since 1989. It is part of the larger TRIO Program at Stout, which also includes Student Support Services, a program that supports disabled, minority and first generation students at the college level. The national TRIO Program includes eight

student support programs. TRIO was born in 1964 during the war on poverty, with the Upward Bound Program, and now includes eight programs to assist low-income, first-generation students (Verdon, 2001).

### Summary

Parent involvement at the middle school level is an element necessary for students to achieve in school. Middle school is an age that challenges educators and parents on how to remain involved, despite middle school students increasing need for independence.

The benefits of parental involvement for the student, parent and school were significant. The student benefits were higher achievement and greater increase in post-secondary education. Parent benefits included a better attitude toward education and some began to seek further education for themselves. Schools and teachers who developed a better relationship with parents, outperformed schools that had little parent involvement. Effectively involving parents has been proven to benefit all involved.

The Menomonie Middle School has a number of factors that define its Educational Talent Search population, and presents challenges in designing parental involvement in programming. The Hmong population has culture and language barriers to consider when planning parent programming. Low-income families have certain common threads in their lifestyles that need to be considered. It is important for educators to understand how low-income families experience life, and to reach them considering their lifestyle. They may not be highly educated, but they do know their child, and this should be respected. The middle school student and his family characteristics also need to be taken into consideration. The mere fact that education and

technology have changed can be intimidating enough for them to feel uncomfortable with school involvement. All of these characteristics and factors need to be considered in programming for parent involvement. This section concluded with factors to consider when planning parent activities at the age level (Johnston & Fogelman, 2003).

The National Parent Teacher Association has secured parent involvement as one of the eight National Education Goals. They have also developed standards based on research for school districts to plan and promote parent programs. These standards need to be considered when planning programming for parents (National PTA, 1998).

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction guidelines also supports parent involvement programs and encourages each school district to develop and implement these programs. They have mirrored the standards set at the national level by the National Parent Teachers Association.

Barriers to parent involvement are hurdles that Educational Talent Search needs to overcome. These include language differences, needs of single parents, education and income level and the educational perspective that middle school parents have.

Creating a customer-friendly school is necessary for parents to feel comfortable with teachers and administrators. A customer-friendly school has a friendly attitude, behavior and communication. It is one that sees its students and parents as customers and rendering education as a service. This promotes a good relationship with parents.

Educational Talent Search Grant at the University of Wisconsin Stout serves the Menomonie Middle School. It provides student support services such as study skills and career development to the 6<sup>th</sup> 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades.

Chapter 3 details the methodology used in this study of the Educational Talent Search Program in the Menomonie Middle School.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

#### Introduction

In this chapter you will find a description of the subject, the selection of the sample, description of the sample, the survey, procedures of data collection, procedures for data analysis, and the limitations of the procedures used.

#### Research Purpose and Questions

The overall purpose of this research was to identify the issues that keep Menomonie Middle School parents from being involved in the Educational Talent Search Program. Specifically the study looked at the following questions:

1. How does the education level, family structure, ethnicity and gender of parents affect their attitudes toward education and the Educational Talent Search Program?
2. How important is the time of day, a meal and childcare in attending an education event?
3. What are the topics that parents are interested in being more informed about?
4. Do parents feel the school values their opinions?
5. Do parents perceive the school as welcoming?
6. How helpful is the Educational Talent Search Program perceived by parents in its present form?

All the parents of students who were in the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades at the Menomonie Middle School, and were eligible for the Educational Talent Search Program were mailed a survey to be completed voluntarily.

The sample was parents who lived in Menomonie Wisconsin. Menomonie is located in West Central Wisconsin. The population of the city of Menomonie is approximately 15,000. Menomonie is a thriving community economically. It is the home to the University of Wisconsin-Stout. It also houses a substantial number of larger businesses. Menomonie offers a variety of cultural and sporting events for all ages.

The Menomonie Area District has six elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school. The total population was over 3,300 students. The middle school enrolled approximately 807 students.

### Instrumentation

The purpose of the instrument was to gather information about the Menomonie Middle School parent involvement in the Educational Talent Search Program. It identified factors that were barriers to their involvement in the program.

The instrument was a three-page survey designed to gather information on parent involvement in the Menomonie Middle School Educational Talent Search Program. It had four sections; Demographics, Factors Effecting Parent Participation, Attitudes Toward School, and Suggestions that will be helpful to the Educational Talent Search Program. See appendix A for instrument.

The first section contained seven different areas of demographic information. Included was gender identification, age, ethnicity, family structure/marital status, number of children in the household, education level, and employment status.

The second section included factors effecting parent participation in the Educational Talent Search Program. The first statement asked the participant of their awareness of the program in a yes or no format. The next question asked for preference in communication using the telephone, mail or e-mail. Statements three, four and five addressed the specifics of what parents needed to attend a parent education event in terms of time, food, child-care and topics of interest.

Section three was a twelve item attitude scale which provided the participant an opportunity to rank on a one to five Likert scale how they felt about various statements that effect parent involvement. The statements were designed to identify attitudes and perceptions that parents held toward factors such as, the friendliness of the school, how their suggestions as a parent were received, their own experience as a child in school, and how involved they wanted to be as a parent.

Section four asked for any suggestions that the parent had for the Educational Talent Search Program. This information was used for making changes in programming in the local Talent Search.

#### Data Collection

The survey was mailed to approximately 807 Menomonie Middle School parents. They were encouraged to complete it and return it in the pre-paid envelope to the researcher at the Menomonie Middle School address.

#### Limitations

There were several limitations to the methodology of the survey. The results of the study only pertained to the Menomonie Middle School and the UW-Stout Educational Talent Search Program. Potential respondents who did not participate in the survey may

have a different perspective on parental involvement. This could then affect the results of the survey. Among parents who had limited English may not have filled out the survey, which would exclude a key population in the results. Often times it is the parents with a post-secondary education or higher that fill out the surveys, which slants the research in one direction.

Many parents who filled out the survey were college graduates. This will slant the perspective of the research.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results and Discussion

#### Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the survey and a discussion of them. The demographic findings of the participants were presented. The data collected in was analyzed in relation to the research questions. The findings were discussed concerning the results in relation to the review of literature.

#### Demographic Characteristics

The demographic information from Section I of the survey was presented in six areas. Demographic information included: gender, age, number of children, family structure, employment status, and level of education.

#### Gender

Respondents were asked to indicate their gender. Respondents indicated that 37 (22.3%) were male, and 129 (77.7%) were females. See Table 1.

Table 1: Gender

Gender	Frequency	Valid Percent
Female	129	77.7
Male	37	22.3
Total	166	100.0

### Age

In the survey, the respondents were asked their age. Seventeen of the respondents (10.2%) were 30 to 34 years of age, twenty-four of the respondents (14.5%) were 35 to 39 years of age, and sixty-six of the respondents (39.8%) were 40 to 45 years of age. Fifty of the respondents (30.1%) were 45 to 49 years of age. Nine of the respondents (5.4%) were 50 to 56 years of age. See Table 2.

Table 2: Age Range

Age Level	Frequency	Valid Percent
30-34 Years Old	17	10.2
35-39 Years Old	24	14.5
40-44 Years Old	66	39.8
45-49 Years Old	50	30.1
50-56 Years Old	9	5.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### Ethnic Background

Respondents were asked to indicate their ethnic background. The majority of respondents, one hundred and forty (84.8%) were Caucasian. The Asian group totaled thirteen (7.9%), Native American, seven (4.2%), Multi-racial, three (1.8%), Hispanic, one (.6%), and African American, one (.6%). See Table 3.

Table 3: Ethnic Background

<b>Ethnic Background</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>
<b>Caucasian</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>84.8</b>
<b>Asian</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>7.9</b>
<b>Native American</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4.2</b>
<b>Multi-racial</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1.8</b>
<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.6</b>
<b>African American</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.6</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Family Structure

Respondents were asked to indicate their family structure. The majority of the respondents, (n=126, 75.9%), were in a first marriage. Twenty respondents, (12%) were single, separated, or divorced. Twenty respondents, (12%) were remarried and or part of a blended family. See Table 4.

Table 4: Family Structure

<b>Family Structure</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>
<b>First Marriage</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>75.9</b>
<b>Single/Separated/Divorced</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>12.0</b>
<b>Remarried/Blended</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>12.0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### Level of Education

Table 5 reflects respondent level of education. Fifty-five respondents held a college degree (34.0%). Thirty-eight (23.4%) of the respondents had some technical training and some college credits. Thirty-three (20.4%) of the respondents held a masters degree. Another thirty-three respondents (20.4%) had a high school degree. The smallest group was at three (1.9%) respondents having some high school. See Table 5.

Table 5: Level of Education

<b>Level of Education</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>
<b>Some High School</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1.9</b>
<b>High School</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>20.4</b>
<b>Technical School/Some College</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>23.4</b>
<b>College Degree</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>34.0</b>
<b>Masters Degree</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>20.4</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### Employment Status

Respondents were asked to indicate their employment status. Almost two-thirds of the respondents, (n=103, 62%) worked full-time. Thirty-nine of the respondents (23.5%) worked on a part-time basis. Nineteen (11.4%) of the respondents were a stay-at-home parent. The smallest category was the unemployed parent at five (3.0%). See Table 6.

Table 6: Employment Status

<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>
<b>Full-Time</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>62.0</b>
<b>Part-Time</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>23.5</b>
<b>Stay-At-Home</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>11.4</b>
<b>Unemployed</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3.0</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Number of Children

Respondents were asked to indicate the number of children living in the home. The highest number of respondents (x=61, 37.7%) had two children. Forty respondents (24.7%) had three children, thirty-six respondents (22.2%) had one child, fifteen respondents (9.3%) had four children, four respondents (2.5%) had five children, two respondents (1.2%) had six children, three respondents (1.9%) had seven children, and one respondent (.6%) had eight children. See Table 7.

Table 7: Number of Children

<b>Number of Children</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>
<b>1 Child</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>22.2</b>
<b>2 Children</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>37.7</b>
<b>3 Children</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>24.7</b>
<b>4 Children</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>9.3</b>
<b>5 Children</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2.5</b>
<b>6 Children</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1.2</b>
<b>7 Children</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1.9</b>
<b>8 Children</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.6</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### Behaviors and Attitudes

Section II in the survey was designed to answer research questions on behaviors and attitudes. This section had five questions with four options from which to choose. 2: Are you aware of the Educational Talent Search program? 3: How important is the time of day and convenience to parents attending a parent education event? 4: What are the topic areas that parents are interested in being more informed? 5: Does the provision of child-care influence a parent attending an education event? 6: Does the provision of a meal influence a parent attending an education event?

Research respondents were asked “Are you aware of the Educational Talent Search program?” One hundred and thirty three were aware of it (81.1%), while thirty-one were not (18.9%). See Table 8.

Table 8: Awareness of Program

<b>Valid</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>81.1</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>18.9</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Respondents were asked what type of communication they prefer to have from the Educational Talent Search Program. One hundred and twenty respondents preferred written (74.1%), eighteen preferred e-mail (11.1%), fourteen preferred a combination of written and e-mail (8.6%), six preferred telephone (3.7%), two preferred a combination of

telephone and written (1.3%), and two preferred a combination of phone, written, and e-mail (1.2%). See Table 9.

Table 9: Preference of Communication with the Educational Talent Search Program

<b>Preferred Communication</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>
<b>Written</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>74.1</b>
<b>E-mail</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>11.1</b>
<b>Written/E-mail</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>8.6</b>
<b>Telephone</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3.7</b>
<b>Telephone/Written</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1.2</b>
<b>Phone/Written/E-mail</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1.2</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Parents were asked if they were more likely to attend a parent education session if it were held at 3:00 pm when students were being picked up. Most of the respondents checked no (n = 142, 85.6%). See Table 10.

Table 10: More Likely to Attend if Parent Education Session at 3:00 pm.

<b>Valid</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>13.4</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>85.6</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>100.0</b>

One of the options for the question on time of attendance at a parent education session was not likely to attend at all. Forty-three (25.9%) of parents would not be likely to attend aside from convenience of time.

Respondents were asked whether a complimentary meal would positively affect their attendance at a parent education night. Most of the respondents said no (n = 142, 86.1%). See Table 11.

Table 11: More Likely to Attend a Parent Education Night With a Complimentary Meal

Valid	Frequency	Valid Percent
Yes	23	13.9
No	142	86.1
Total	165	100.0

Table 12: More Likely to Attend a Parent Education Session at 7:30 am

Valid	Frequency	Valid Percent
Yes	10	6.1
No	154	93.9
Total	164	100.0



Parents were asked if they were likely to attend a parent education session if it were held at 7:30 am as they are dropping off their child at school. Most of the respondents said no (n = 154, 93.9%). See Table 12.

Respondents were asked if they were more likely to attend a parent education session if it were held between 5:30 pm and 7:00 pm. Over half of the respondents checked yes (n = 96, 57.8%). See Table 13.

Table 13: More Likely to Attend an Education Session  
if Held Between 5:30 pm & 7:00 pm

<b>Valid</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>58.5</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>41.5</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Parents were asked if they were more likely to attend if childcare was provided at a parent education night. The majority of respondents checked no (n = 153, 92.7%). See Table 14.

One of the options parents could check was unlikely to attend aside from childcare. Fifty respondents (n = 50, 30.3%) checked that they would not attend at all.

Parents were asked to indicate what topic areas they found of interest. “Understanding and communicating with your teenager”, was selected by 79 respondents out of 165 as a possible topic for a parent education night. The topic of “Helping your

Table 14: More Likely to Attend a Parent  
Education Night With Childcare

<b>Valid</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>7.3</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>92.7</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>100.0</b>

child develop a career path” was selected by 78 of the 165 respondents. “Coaching your child academically” was selected by 73 of the 165 respondents. “Study skills” was selected by 65 of the 165 respondents. There were 31 respondents that selected the statement that they would be unlikely to attend at all.

### Attitudes

Section III was designed to describe parents’ attitudes. The twelve attitude statements were rated using a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=undecided, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree.

Of the twelve attitude statements, respondents were most positive about three items with means of 4.22 and above. These items included item 11: “It is important for my child to do well in classes”, item 3: “ It is important to expose my child to career education”, and item 10: “ I am the greatest influence in my child’s life”. See Table 15.

Parents were undecided about four statements with means between 3.25 and 2.75. These items included item 1 “The program is helpful for my child,” item 2 “Would like to see more parent/child events at school”, item 8 “Feels adequately informed about

Educational Talent Search Program,” and item 9 “The school values my suggestions as a parent”.

Two items were reversed in scoring. Item 6 “I did not have a positive experience as a child” was reversed. The respondents felt positive toward having a good school experience as a child, leaving this item with a mean of 1.95. Item 5 was reversed “The English language is hard for me to understand”, leaving this item with a mean of 1.23.

Research question number 6 asked parents if they feel the school values their opinions? This question was answered positively. Attitude number 9 “ The school values my ideas and suggestions as a parent.” Was found to have a mean of 3.19. Sixty - six of the respondents felt positively about this item.

Research question number 7 asked parents how friendly do parents perceive the school? Parents answered positively. Item number 12 “ I feel welcome by the school environment “ had a mean of 3.77. One hundred and thirteen of the respondents felt positively about this item. See Table 15.

Table 15: Attitudes

Attitude Item	n	X	Standard Deviation	Order
11. It is important for my child to do well in classes.	162	4.63	0.62	1
3. It is important to expose my child to career education.	161	4.36	0.84	2
10. I am the greatest influence in my child's life.	162	4.22	0.83	3
12. I feel welcome by the school environment.	162	3.77	1.03	4
7. I would like to see more parent/child nights held at school.	162	3.40	0.88	5
1. The Educational Talent Search program is helpful for my child.	156	3.21	0.89	6
2. I would like to see my child go to technical school or college.	156	3.21	0.89	7
9. The school values my ideas and suggestions as a parent.	162	3.19	1.00	8
8. I am adequately informed on the Educational Talent Search Program.	158	2.91	1.14	9
4. A busy lifestyle keeps me from attending school functions.	161	2.52	1.25	10
6. I did not have a positive school experience as a child.	161	1.95	1.13	11
5. The English language is hard for me to understand.	159	1.23	0.72	12

#### Significant Differences in Parental Attitudes Based on Gender

Research question 1 intended to investigate whether or not a difference in parental attitudes and behaviors existed based on gender. Using a T-test, there were three significant differences in parental attitudes and behaviors based on gender. See Table 16.

The T-test results showed a significant difference on item #1 “The Educational Talent Search Program was helpful” at the .001 level with males scoring significantly lower ( $x=2.76$ ) than females ( $x=3.34$ ). This indicated that females were more positive than males about the Educational Talent Search Program being helpful to their child. Females scored significantly higher at the .01 level ( $x=2.960$ ) on attitude item 3 “It is important to expose my child to career education” than males. There was a significant difference at the .001 level on item 8 “I would like to see more parent/child events held at school. Again females scored higher ( $x=3.52$ ) than males ( $x=2.97$ ). Thus, mothers were more supportive of the Educational Talent Search Program, exposure to career education and wanting more parent/child events at school than fathers. See Table 16.

Table 16: Significant Differences in Parental Attitudes Based on Gender

Attitude Item	Male		Female			
	37		124			
	x	S.D.	X	S.D.	T-Test	Prob.
1. The program is helpful for my child.	2.76	0.92	3.34	0.85	-3.404	0.001
3. It is important to expose my child to career education.	2.97	0.93	3.52	0.83	-2.960	0.01
7. I would like to see more parent/child events at school.	3.92	1.12	4.49	0.69	-3.430	0.001

#### Significant Differences in Parental Attitudes Based on Ethnicity

Research question 1 intended to investigate whether or not a significant difference in parental attitudes existed based on ethnicity using a T-test. On item 1 “The program is

helpful for my child” the T-test showed a significant difference at the .05 level. Other ethnic backgrounds, which included Native American, Hmong, and African American scored higher ( $x=3.59$ ) than the Caucasian population ( $x=3.15$ ). Item 3 was written as a reversal stating “The English language is hard for me to understand”. A significant difference at the .01 level was found. The other ethnic cultures ( $x=2.09$ ) scored higher than the Caucasian population ( $x=1.10$ ). A significant difference at the .05 level was found in item 7 “I would like to see more parent/child events held at school. The non-Caucasian parents group scored significantly higher ( $x=3.59$ ), than the Caucasian group ( $x= 3.12$ ). See Table 17.

Therefore, ethnicity made a difference in relation to finding the Educational Talent Search Program helpful, that English was difficult, and wanting more parent/child events. In these three cases, non-Caucasian parents scored significantly higher than Caucasian parents.

Table 17: Significant Differences in Parental Attitudes Based on Ethnicity

Attitude Item	Multi		Caucasian			
	22		133			
	x	S.D.	X	S.D.	T-Test	Prob.
1. The program is helpful for my child.	3.59	0.88	3.15	0.91	-2.158	0.05
2. The English language is hard for me to understand.	2.09	0.42	1.10	1.38	-3.365	0.01
3. I would like to see more parent/child events held at school.	3.77	0.75	3.34	0.89	-2.171	0.05
4. The school values my ideas and suggestions.	3.64	1.05	3.12	0.99	-2.284	0.05

### Significant Differences in Parental Attitudes Based on Family Structure

Research question 1 intended to investigate whether or not a difference existed between parental attitudes and behavior, and family structure. In item 4 “A busy lifestyle keeps me from attending school functions”, the T-test results showed that there are differences based on family structure. The single parent category scored significantly higher means ( $x=3.47$ ) than the remarried ( $x=2.85$ ) and the first marriage ( $x=2.32$ ).

In item number 9 “The school values my suggestions as a parent” a positive difference was found with single parents ( $x=3.70$ ) over both first marriage ( $x=3.13$ ) and remarried ( $x=3.00$ ). See Table 18.

Table 18: Significant Differences on Parental Attitudes Based on Family Structure

Attitude Item	First Marriage n = 122		Single/Separated n = 19		Blend/Remarried n = 20		F-ratio Prob.	
	x	S.D.	x	S.D.	x	S.D.		
4. A busy lifestyle keeps me from attending school functions	2.32	1.17	3.47	1.31	2.85	1.23	8.596	0.01
9. The school values my ideas and suggestions as a parent.	3.13	1.02	3.70	0.92	3.00	0.86	3.230	0.042

### Significant Differences in Parental Attitudes Based on Level of Education

Research question intended to investigate whether or not a difference in parental attitudes existed based on level of education using an ANOV. Using the Duncan method

there was a significant difference at the .05 level on item #1 “The Educational Talent Search Program is helpful for my child”, parents with a masters degree or above ( $x=2.97$ ) and those with a college degree ( $x=2.98$ ) scored lower than those with some college ( $x=3.42$ ) and finally high school or less ( $x=3.45$ ). See Table 19.

Table 19: ANOV Results of Parental Attitudes and Behaviors by Level of Education

Attitude Item	Masters n = 31		College n = 52		Some College n = 38		High School N = 31		F Rates	Prob.
	X	S.D.	x	S.D.	x	S.D.	X	S.D.		
1. The program is helpful for my child	2.97	.95	2.97	.85	3.42	.79	3.45	.85	3.603	0.05
2. I would like my child to go to technical school or college	4.76	.75	4.82	.43	4.82	.39	4.39	1.12	3.119	0.05
5. The English language is hard for me to understand	1.03	.17	1.02	.14	1.26	.72	1.35	.66	4.638	0.05

The ANOV found a significant difference at the .05 level ( $F=3.119$ ) among parents based on educational level on attitude item #2 “I would like my child to go on to technical school or college. Using the Student-Newman-Keuls Range differences were



found between the parents with high school or less ( $x=4.39$ ), and those with some technical or college ( $x=4.82$ ), college degree ( $x=4.82$ ), and masters or above ( $x=4.76$ ). Parents were most positive about this item as education level increased. However, all parents strongly agreed that they wanted their child to go to college.

In item #6 “The English language is hard for me to understand” the Student-Newman-Keuls showed a significant difference at the .05 level between levels of education. Those with a master’s degree ( $x=1.03$ ), and college degree ( $x=1.02$ ) scored lower than those with some technical/college ( $x=1.26$ ) and high school or less ( $x=1.35$ ).

## DISCUSSION

This study focused on the attitudes and behaviors of parents with adolescent's in the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. Demographics were investigated to determine their effects on the variable.

### Gender

Significant findings were found in the study related to gender. This study found that males were slightly more positive ( $x=3.404$ ) than females ( $x=3.247$ ) about the Educational Talent Search program (attitude item 1). Item number 3 "It is important to expose my child to career education" females scored higher ( $x=3.34$ ) than males ( $x=2.76$ ). On item number 7 "I would like to see more parent/child events held at school" females scored more positively ( $x=3.52$ ) than males ( $x=2.97$ ). In two out of three of these items females felt more positive than males. These findings may be supported by the research conducted by the U.S. Department of Education (1997), which stated that mothers of first marriages tend to be more involved with the adolescents education. (U.S. Department of Education, 1997) The majority of the respondents ( $x=122$ ) are from a first marriage.

### Ethnicity

Significant differences were found related to ethnicity. Interesting data was found in item #1 "The program is helpful for my child" with multi-ethnic ( $x=3.59$ ) being more positive than Caucasian ( $x=3.15$ ). The Hmong culture feels very strongly about their child's education. According to Watts and Tutwiler, "Asian Americans have high academic expectations for their children, and value moving up the economic and career ladders" (Watts & Tutwiler, 2003, p.54).

In item #7 “I would like to see more parent/child events held at school” the multi-ethnic group scored more positively ( $x=3.77$ ) than the Caucasian group ( $x=3.34$ ). Again, according to Watts & Tutwiler “Asian parents value the family as the primary social unit with the strongest bond being between parent and child not the parents themselves”. (Watts & Tutwiler, 2003, p.54).

In item #9 “The school values my ideas and suggestions as a parent” the non-Caucasian group ( $x=3.77$ ) scored more positively than the Caucasian group ( $x=3.12$ ). With the language and cultural differences as stated by Watts & Tutwiler in Chapter 2 this is an interesting finding. It is supported in another statement by Watts & Tutwiler “Their views of education reflect respecting teachers and their knowledge and expertise” (Watts & Tutwiler, 2003, p.54). They may not be giving a lot of input to the school.

### Family Structure

Significant differences were found related to family structure. An interesting, but not surprising piece of data was found by investigating item #4 “A busy lifestyle keeps me from attending school functions”. Regarding family structure, the first marriage families ( $x=2.32$ ) and remarried/blended families ( $x=2.85$ ) responded less positively than the single parent families ( $x=3.47$ ). This positively relates with research done by Fuller “Low income families are often single or dual-income working parents. These parents have little extra time or energy to spend on parent involvement in the school”. (Fuller, 2003, p.282)

In item #9 “The school values my ideas and suggestions as a parent” was most positive for single parent families ( $x=3.70$ ) than for remarried/blended ( $x=3.00$ ) and first marriage ( $x=3.13$ ). This is in disagreement with what Fuller says about single parents

and communication “When creating a partnership with low-income or single parents, educators need to consider issues that are part of their lifestyle. Partnerships must be built on respect. The stresses of life may be so overwhelming at times that it is difficult for parents to put a lot of energy into their child’s educational success. (Fuller, 2003, p.282)

### Level of Education

Significant differences were found based upon level of education. Interesting statistics found differences in the parent education level regarding attitudes toward education and the Educational Talent Search Program. Those with a masters degree ( $x=2.97$ ) and a college degree ( $x=2.98$ ) scored lower on item #1, “The educational Talent Search Program is helpful for my child”, than those with some college/technical school ( $x=3.42$ ) and high school ( $x=3.45$ ). This relates to statements made in section five regarding additional comments made by parents about the Educational Talent Search Program. Some parents with higher education levels felt that their adolescent had already developed adequate study skills and the Educational Talent Search Program was a repetition. Those with a lower education level felt more positive about the help the Educational Talent Search program provided for their child. According to the U.S. Department of Education, parents with higher education levels tend to be more involved with their children (U.S. Department of Education, 1997). The more highly educated parents may be teaching their child study skills before they reach middle school.

In item #6 “The English language is hard for me to understand”, the lower the education level, high school ( $x=1.35$ ), some college/technical school ( $x=1.26$ ) scored higher than those with a college degree ( $x=1.02$ ) and a master degree ( $x=1.03$ ). This

relates to the research done by Fuller, which states, “Low-income parents may be unwilling or uncomfortable in communicating with the teacher. In any case, it is important that educators keep parents informed. If there is a combination of a language barrier and low-income, an interpreter may be needed” (Fuller, 2003, p.282).

Item #2 states, “I would like my child to attend technical school or college”. The higher the education level of the parent relates slightly with their intent for their child to attend technical school or college. At the masters level ( $x=4.76$ ), the college level ( $x=4.82$ ), some technical or college ( $x=4.82$ ), and the high school level ( $x=4.31$ ). All parents had high aspirations for their child. This attitude result supports Fuller’s research done on low-income families and expectations for their child. “Lack of resources does not mean these parents don’t have dreams and expectations for their children” (Fuller, 2003, p.283)

Research question number one asks whether parents are aware of the Educational Talent Search Program. Questions one in Section II factors affecting parent participation asks, “Are you aware of the Educational Talent Search Program?” One hundred and thirty three out of one hundred and sixty- four responded yes to this question. Thirty-one families did not have an awareness of the program. According to Penna, middle school age students want a distance put between themselves and their parents. They are establishing their independence, having parents involved in their education is not as appealing as it was in grade school. (Penna, 2001). Communication may also be hindered at this age.

Question two in Section II asks, “What type of communication would parents prefer?” Answers to choose from were the telephone, written in a letter, or e-mail. A

total of 85.1% of parents would prefer written communication. According to Fuller, low-income families may not have access to phones or e-mail (Fuller, 2003). Many Hmong families also have limited resources. Language can also be a communication barrier along with access to computers and phones. Written communication sent to the home may be the most effective.

Question three in Section II Factors affecting parent's participation, asks if they would come to a parent education night if there were childcare and a complimentary meal. A small percentage (13.9%) said they would be more likely to attend if a meal were included. An even smaller percentage (7.3%) said they would prefer childcare in order to attend. The time of the session was also asked in this question. The largest percentage of parents (58.8%) were likely to attend if it were between 5:30 and 7:00 p.m. The second largest percentage (13.4%) were likely to attend if it were at 3:00 p.m. when they are picking their child up after school. The smallest percentage (6.1%) of parents said that they would be likely to attend if it were held at 7:30 a.m. when they are dropping off their child at school. This data supports Johnson & Fogelman who stated that the timing of parents education meetings is imperative for strong attendance. It is important to offer them at convenient times, also to offer seminars at various times and dates to accommodate more schedules (Johnson & Fogelman, 2003).

Question five in Section II asks parents what topics they would choose in attending a parent education event. "Understanding and communicating with your teenager", was selected by 79 respondents out of 165 as a topic for a parent education event. The topic, "Helping your child develop a career path", was selected by 78 of the 165 respondents. "Coaching your child academically", was selected by 73 of the 165

respondents. “Study skills” were selected by 65 of the 165 respondents. This information meets the National PTA expectation that every school will promote partnerships that should increase parent involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children. The National PTA also states that teachers must recognize parent roles and responsibilities. They should ask parents what support they need and work to find ways to meet those needs. (National PTA, 1998).

Section four of the instrument asks parents for additional suggestions regarding the Educational Talent Search program. A small percentage of parents responded to this question. The most common response wanted more information on the program and the topics we cover. A couple of parents felt that their child already had good study skills and then the program was not as necessary for their child. On the other hand, some parents wrote about the effectiveness of the program for their child. There were a couple of parents that felt career exploration at the middle school level was to soon to be presenting it.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Summary, Conclusions, & Recommendations

#### Introduction

The last chapter of this research study includes a summary of the methodology and findings. Conclusions from the findings will then be presented, followed by recommendations for future research. Chapter five will conclude by addressing the educational implications for the Educational Talent Search Program at the Menomonie Middle School.

#### Summary

The purpose of this study was to survey the needs of the parents at the Menomonie Middle School in terms of their involvement in the Educational Talent Search Program. The survey-included demographics, a parent need section, attitudes and behaviors regarding parent involvement, and additional comments parents may have regarding the Educational Talent Search Program.

#### Methods and Procedures

The survey was sent out to approximately 807 parents from the Menomonie Middle School. Each parent of a student in either the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, or 8<sup>th</sup> grades received in the mail a survey with its rationale (see appendix A). One hundred and sixty parents returned the survey, and 13 surveys were unusable due to questionable respondents. This was 1.6% of the surveys sent out to parents.

The demographic information collected provided a description of the sample population that participated in the survey. Frequency counts and percentages were tabulated on the demographics. Section II was constructed to determine parent's



preference on variables that affect their participation in parent education events. Section III attitudes, was designed to measure parents attitudes toward being involved in the Educational Talent Search Program. Information was collected from an instrument, which contained five questions regarding parent participation, twelve attitude items, and suggestions for the Educational Talent Search program. The instrument was sent out by mail on March 13<sup>th</sup> 2003.

Section 1 of the instrument provided a description of the sample population that participated in the survey. Frequency counts and percentages were tabulated in Section 1. Section 2 gathered preferences that parents had regarding aspects of attendance of a parent education event. Section 3 was designed to measure attitudes parents had regarding their involvement in their adolescent's education. T-tests, ANOV, and Duncan were run on the data to calculate any specific finding. Section 4 was designed to obtain any additional input that parents had regarding the Educational Talent Search program.

#### Data Analysis

The University of Wisconsin Stout Computer User Support Services, analyzed the responses of the survey frequency and percentages were tabulated for Sections I, II, and III of the survey. Additionally, the mean, standard deviation, and rank order were computed. T-tests, ANOV, Duncan, and the Student-Newman-Keuls Multiple Range Tests were conducted as well. The independent variable included gender, education level, ethnicity, and family structure.

The findings in Section I based on the analysis of data showed that 22.3% (n=37) of the participants were male and 77.7% (n=129) were female. Of the one-hundred and sixty-four participants 10.2% (n=17) were 30-34 years old, 14.5% (n=24) were 35-39

years old, the highest percentage 39.8% (n=66) were 40-44 years old, 30.1% (n=50) were 45-49 years old, and lastly 5.4% (n=9) were 50-56 years old.

The majority of participants were Caucasian 84.8% (n=140), 7.9% (n=13) were Asian, 4.2% (n=7) were Native American, 1.8% (n=3) were multi-racial, 0.6% (n=1) were Hispanic, and finally 0.6% (n=1) were African American.

In the family structure category, the largest group of respondents were first marriages (n=126, 75.9%), 12% (n=20) were single, separated, or divorced, 12% (n=20) were remarried and/or part of a blended family.

Level of education was divided into five categories. The highest percentage of respondents 34% (n=55) held a college degree, 23.4% (n=38) had some technical or college education, 20.4% (n=33) held a masters degree, 20.4% (n=33) had a high school degree, and finally 1.9% (n=3) had some high school education.

### Findings

*Research Question 1: How do education level, family structure, ethnicity, and gender of parents affect their attitudes toward education and the Educational Talent Search Program?*

Results of the Duncan concluded that there was a positive increase in respondent's attitude in relation to education level. The lower the education level, the more positive parents were toward helpfulness of the program. Masters degree had a mean of 2.97, college degree had a mean of 2.97, and some college or technical school had a mean of 3.45.

T-test results concluded that non-Caucasian parents were slightly more positive ( $\bar{x}=3.59$ ) about the Educational Talent Search Program being helpful for their child than

Caucasian parents ( $x=3.15$ ). Non-Caucasian parents also were more positive ( $x=3.77$ ) about wanting more parent/child events held at school than Caucasian parents ( $x=3.34$ ). They were also more positive ( $x=3.64$ ) than Caucasian parents in responding about the school valuing their ideas and suggestions ( $x=3.12$ ). The English language being difficult was the final attitude statement that Non-Caucasian parents scored more positively (2.09) than Caucasian parents (1.10).

*Research Question 2: How important is the time of day, childcare, and a meal to parents in attending an educational event?*

By calculating the frequency and percent, over one half of respondents, ninety-six (58.5%) wanted to attend an educational event between 5:30 pm and 7:00 pm, twenty-three of the respondents (13.9%) indicated that they would be more likely to attend if a complimentary meal was provided. Twelve (7.3%) of the respondents indicated that they would be more likely to attend if they had childcare during the time the education event was held.

*Research Question 3: What are the topics that parents are interested in being more informed about?*

The topic most respondents selected (79 out of 165) was “Understanding and communicating with your teenager”. The second topic selected (78 out of 165) was “Helping your child develop a career path”.

*Research Question 4: Do parents feel the school values their suggestions and opinions?*

By calculating the mean and standard deviation, the results of attitude statement number nine was a mean of 3.19 and a standard deviation of 1.00.

*Research Question 5: Do parents perceive the school as welcoming?*

By calculating the mean and standard deviation, the results of attitude statement twelve “I feel welcome by the school environment” had a mean of 3.77 and a standard deviation of 1.03. Parents were positive on this item.

*Research Question 6: How helpful is the Educational Talent Search Program perceived by parents in its present form?*

By calculating the mean and standard deviation on this item the one hundred and fifty-six responded positively with a mean of 3.21 and standard deviation of .89. Some were neutral on this item because of lack of awareness of the Educational Talent Search Program.

Recommendations for Future Research

The surveys were mailed to 807 families during spring break, with only 165 being completed and returned. The ideal situation would be to hand the surveys out during parent teacher conferences, or sent home with the students. A time of year that would be optimal for survey returns would be during the fall open house or conferences.

The Hmong population was not strongly represented in the survey. The culture might be better reached by going through the Hmong Association in Menomonie or by giving the survey to students through the Multi-Cultural Club at the Menomonie Middle School. A researcher may consider doing research with only the Hmong population. Questions should be specific to them to obtain a larger sampling and more specific information on how to involve that population.

The largest group completing the surveys were first marriage parents with college degrees. High school educated, low-income parents were the parents the researcher

wanted to get feedback from for the Educational Talent Search Program. Again, catching the parent at a parent teacher conference might be a better time to respond to the survey. Offering incentives to students to take surveys home to have parents to complete might also increase the return rate.

#### Recommendations for Educational Talent Search Staff

It would be important for Educational Talent Search staff to study this document to gain a broader perspective on parent involvement, and its significance in the academic success of a student. The document should also be shared and discussed with staff when planning upcoming parent education events. Following the research conclusions will help to enhance attendance and effectiveness of the event. Those findings should also be considered but not used as a sole document with planning parents events in the other schools that the Educational Talent Search Program services.

Educational Talent Search personnel should also consider the research results on communication that the staff has with parents. They will want to look at the results and consider the type of communication that is most desired.

Research was limited from parents who do not speak or read the English language well. Establishing a telephone network among non-English speaking parents might help to pass along information. Keeping language deficits in mind, information would be best understood at a sixth grade level. In closing, it is important to recognize that there is no precise method that will automatically lead to enhanced parent involvement. Doing a survey like the one that was tailored for the Menomonie Middle School and the Educational Talent Search Program is a beginning. A continual assessment of parent and

student needs along with sensitivity to the many factors that make up the culture of parents and students at the Menomonie Middle School will be beneficial.

It would be to the advantage of the Educational Talent Search staff to have one or two parents on an advisory board to assist with program decisions. As stated in the Review of Literature in Chapter 2, an important aspect of parent involvement is to have parents on an advisory board to gain the parents perspective on issues and make them feel a part of the decision making.

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## APPENDIX A

## APPENDIX A

### Parent Involvement Survey

Dear Parent/Guardian:

My name is Teresa Snyder, an Academic Advisor for the Educational Talent Search Program. The Educational Talent Search Program is part of the Menomonie Middle School. We work in classrooms and with small groups to help students achieve in school and develop a career path. We have also provided information for parents on study skills and career development.

**The purpose of this survey is to find out how parents feel about involvement in the Educational Talent Search Program. The results of this survey will be used to better serve parents in the future. This is also part of my thesis at UW- Stout. Please mark with an (X) the following as they apply to you. Please do not sign your name.**

I understand that by returning this completed survey, I am giving my informed consent as a participating volunteer in the study. I am also aware that this survey is anonymous and confidential and it will be used to help the Educational Talent Search Program better serve parents in the future. If you have any questions please call Teresa Snyder at 232-3399 or Karen Zimmerman, research advisor at 232-2530. If you have any questions about the rights of human subjects please call Sue Foxwell, Human Protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research at 232-1126.

#### Section I: Demographics

1. Gender    ☐ Male    ☐ Female
2. Your age     years old
3. Ethnicity (check all with which you identify):
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Native American	<input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic
<input type="checkbox"/> Caucasian	<input type="checkbox"/> African American
<input type="checkbox"/> Asian	
4. Family Structure/Marital Status:
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Married (1 <sup>st</sup> )
<input type="checkbox"/> Single
<input type="checkbox"/> Blended/remarried family
5. Number of children under 18 in your household:  children
6. Your Educational level:
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Some high school
<input type="checkbox"/> High school degree
<input type="checkbox"/> Technical training/some college
<input type="checkbox"/> College degree
<input type="checkbox"/> Masters degree or beyond
7. Your Employment Status:
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Part-time
<input type="checkbox"/> Full-time
<input type="checkbox"/> Stay-at-home parent/unemployed by choice
<input type="checkbox"/> Unemployed

**(Please turn sheet over)**



1	2	3	4	5
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<b>Agree Strongly</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>

\_\_\_\_7. I would like to see more parent/child events held at the school. .

\_\_\_\_8. I am adequately informed on the Educational Talent Search Program.

\_\_\_\_9. The school values my ideas and suggestions as a parent.

\_\_\_\_10. I am the greatest influence in the life of my child.

\_\_\_\_11. It is important for my child to do well in classes.

\_\_\_\_12. I feel welcome by the school environment

**What suggestions do you have that would be helpful to the Educational Talent Search Program?**

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**Thank you for filling out the survey! Please return by Thursday March 27, 2003.**