2017

BY NEED AND BY NAME: SCHOOL LEADERS FOSTERING ENVIRONMENTS FOR GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN

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Digital Object Identifier: https://doi.org/10.13023/ETD.2017.487

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BY NEED AND BY NAME: SCHOOL LEADERS FOSTERING ENVIRONMENTS FOR GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education at the University of Kentucky

By
Rebecca Roach

Lexington, Kentucky

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Lexington, Kentucky
2017
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

BY NEED AND BY NAME: SCHOOL LEADERS FOSTERING ENVIRONMENTS FOR GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN

Children raised by their grandparents are a steadily growing demographic in schools throughout the United States. When parents are unable to care for their children, grandparents sometimes assume the role of primary caregiver. This is especially true when they are faced with the threat of placing their grandchildren in the foster care system. More often than not, these grandparents are not adequately prepared for the challenges of raising children who have lost their parent through death, drug abuse or incarceration and few resources exist to guide elementary school principals to engage this demographic. Regardless of the growing numbers of caregiving grandparents there exists a dearth of research and literature to guide school leaders in effectively engaging these grandparents in school involvement.

The purpose of this study was to understand principals’ experiences with grandparents raising grandchildren (GRG), to discover grandparent’s experiences and perspectives on their own experiences in their grandchildren’s schools, and finally, construct theory on how elementary principals create and nurture positive and productive relationships with grandparents raising grandchildren. Analysis of date contributed to the development of propositions that reflect study findings. These propositions contributed to the development of a framework toward theory: Although principals were cognizant of the challenges GRG face, this knowledge did not influence their leadership. As a result, their leadership practices created school environments in which GRGs were effectively engaged in two-way communication but limited decision-making. Furthermore, the
school did not provide a bridge to resources to meet many of the challenges GRG and their families faced.

KEYWORDS: Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, Educational Leadership, School Principals, Kinship Care, Appalachian
BY NEED AND BY NAME: SCHOOL LEADERS FOSTERING ENVIRONMENTS FOR GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this dissertation being official, I now acknowledge the help of family, faculty and friends. Without them, this study would have been initiated, let alone completed.

I am so grateful for my family’s support. First of all, I’d like to thank my husband, Randy Barrette, for his encouragement. He listened to the highs and lows of my doctoral classes and dissertation, brought me coffee in bed every morning to help me open my eyes after long nights of studying, and kept the household running when I was obsessively writing. He was also the most patient “tech. guy” ever! My children, William and Emma, were also been gracious and kind, enthusiastically praising every baby step I took along the way. This is all the more remarkable given that for a time, they too were university students. Being college students at the same time as my own children was a rewarding experience, one bonus I didn’t anticipate. My sister, Debbie Stevens, was also been a sounding board and role model, helping me understand that I could start over at any age, and regardless of the setbacks along the way, it would all turn out fine. Of course, I must thank my parents Bill and Agatha Roach. All my achievements lead back to my loving, supportive, brilliant parents who, through both their words and actions, instilled in me the value of lifelong learning.

I would also like to thank the faculty members at the University of Kentucky. Every class in the Educational Leadership program was enlightening, challenging, practical, and insightful. These classes went beyond earning a degree. They changed me and my paradigm of what is an educational leader. My dissertation chair, Dr. Wayne Lewis, was a highly effective teacher and mentor. His knowledge and wisdom guided me
through every step of the dissertation process. When my research started to travel off course, he quickly provided the reality check and roadmap I needed. Committee members Dr. Lars Bjork and Dr. Justin Bathon also provided feedback during my dissertation defense crucial to my final chapter. Although Graham Roles is not a faculty member of Educational Leadership, he enthusiastically embraced my topic. I am grateful for the extensive time he spent guiding me through the grounded theory approach, and I greatly enjoyed visits to his office where I learned from his extensive experience in qualitative research.

My friends also greatly influenced over the last 6 years. Dr. Melinda Willis was the first person to encourage me to embark on this adventure, picked me up when I fell, and applauded me from the balcony. She has and continues to inspire and motivate so many educators to reach for our dreams. I am so grateful for Sobia Nawaz who, even though several states separated us, continued to pray for me and give me encouragement. My colleagues, Krys Lynam, Jodi Blackburn, and Rachel Jo Blackwell kept me laughing when I sometimes wanted to cry, and helped me stay on track while I was juggled school, parenthood, and a demanding career. Finally, I’d like to thank Dr. Scott Niles. Scott and I embarked on this journey at the same time. Over the years he has been great company during our 2-hour Saturday commutes to campus. We edited each other’s work, debated and discussed class content, and shared a beer to celebrate the small victories. With his help, I earned more than a degree. I gained a brother.
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Mr. Carpenter, Principal

Mr. Carpenter is very proud of the school he leads. Notch Gap Elementary is housed in a small, neat brick building nestled between two hills with a patch of green grass and a small parking lot to separate it from the highway. When I visited, Mr. Carpenter he was pleased to give me a tour of the newly renovated school, a source of pride for the community it serves. An even greater source of pride is his school’s academic achievement. In terms of accountability, the school was ranked Distinguished, in the 99th percentile among other schools statewide in 2017 (KDE, 2017) for its 2016-2017 performance. In 2013, Notch Gap was declared a Blue Ribbon School by the United States Department of Education (USDOE), which recognized it as a Great American School (USDOE, 2016). According to Mr. Carpenter, regardless of tight district budgets, the school is safe from consolidation because it is so successful, despite its size.

Notch Gap is a small, rural school, serving fewer than 120 students in grades kindergarten through 5, and during a school tour, I observed many classrooms held fewer than 20 students. According to the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) School Report card, the teacher to student ration is 12 to 1, lower than the state average, 17:1 (KDE, 2017). This low enrollment number allowed the district to hire a part time principal paid fewer days than a full-time principal. Thus Mr. Carpenter, a formerly retired principal, was provided the opportunity to lead Notch Gap without endangering
his retirement benefits. It should be noted the term, *part time* is misleading; each day he puts in just as much time as a regular principal, he just isn’t paid as much.

A native of Hamilton County, Mr. Carpenter is no stranger to the community his school serves. Prior to assuming leadership at Notch Gap Elementary 19 years earlier, he was an active member of the school community. He has worked in every school in Hamilton County school district as a teacher or school leader, and even enjoyed coaching the varsity basketball team for 26 years. He attributes building an inclusive school environment that encourages family involvement to the trust that comes from being a known entity in the community and the strong relationships he has built over time.

Mr. Carpenter’s leadership is child-centered. His first priorities are the physical safety, psychological well-being, and social development of every child in his school:

You put them in the center and ask, what is the best decision for this child? Not what is the best decision for the grandparent, or what’s easy for me to do in this school, but what is best for this child, to make him feel successful and be successful, to develop a good, strong personality, and have confidence?

In order to meet the needs of his students, Mr. Carpenter treats grandparents raising grandchildren (GRG) as parents, and expects them to play the same role in the school as parents in their grandchildren’s education; therefore, they must be actively involved and engaged. They must attend conferences, be aware of their grandchild’s academic performance at home and at school, and make decisions. According to him, “They just need to be the parents. They’re not the grandparents; they’re the parents.”

Although he communicates with and supports grandparents, he makes it very clear his primary goal is to serve his students. This sometimes means confronting grandparents. In one instance, Mr. Carpenter engaged in a battle with a grandmother who insisted her grandson attend his school, Notch Gap, even though his small school did not
have the resources to address the child’s learning needs. Mr. Carpenter observed the boy suffering as a result. In the end, he confronted the grandmother and asked, “Do you want what is best for him, or do you want to do what’s best for you?” Eventually, the child was moved to a larger school within the district that possessed the physical and human resources to cater to the student’s needs. In the end, the grandmother agreed that the larger school environment, with its additional instructional assistants and spaces, was the best school for her grandson.

Conflicts with GRG should not be taken as indifference to the challenges these grandparents face, or the commitment they have made to their grandchildren. Mr. Carpenter spoke of GRG with admiration and respect. He poignantly described the decisions GRG must make when they take on the responsibility of raising a grandchild because the alternative, losing a child to the state foster care system, was unbearable. Furthermore, he is acutely aware of the challenges, financial, physical, and emotional many of these grandparents face:

The biggest thing I see with grandparents is the energy level is not there. I mean these are people that have already raised their families. They’re looking forward to having an easy life, and now that their kids are on drugs or in jail, they had to take control of the situation, and bring the grandkids in. They’re doing it with no help, no money. They’re not getting that assistance [from state agencies] because it’s family. But they didn’t want to see the state come in, take them out, and put them in foster homes. So they’re going to take them.

During our discussion, Mr. Carpenter made very personal and empathetic connections between the perspectives of GRG and his own feelings as a grandparent. According to his observations, grandparents were often more lenient than they were with their own children years earlier, a behavior he could easily understand because he indulges his own grandchildren when they visit. However, he has often observed these
grandparents’ struggle to establish behavioral expectations at home as a result. In many grandfamilies, the grandchildren are making the decisions instead of the adults; thus the school must step in and deal with behavioral issues at school. He also acknowledged grandparents face their own unique barriers to school involvement. Many of the grandparents have difficulty understanding the new state standards and lag behind in technology, a concern for the school since they have invested in tablets and computers.

According to Mr. Carpenter, fostering an inclusive school environment for GRG requires establishing and maintaining relationships with all families. In order to create these relationships he intentionally remains accessible and creates a welcoming school culture that invites two-way communication. He opens the school doors for the children every morning, and as parents and grandparents drop off students, he enjoys greeting them. At the end of the day, when they pick their children up, he is there to speaks with them. This parking lot ritual consistently creates opportunities for informal, spontaneous engagement where families ask him questions and provide their perspectives on school matters, perspectives he warmly encourages and receives, even if they are in opposition to his leadership. Mr. Carpenter does not only use this time to discuss school matters, it is time to converse with people on a personal level, to inquire about the health and wellbeing of family members. During these daily exchanges, he actively shows he cares about families as he listens to them express their joys, sorrows, and needs. He knows this is a crucial component of his leadership, especially with GRG. He has, from many years of experience, learned that family members are reluctant to make initial, proactive contact with school leaders unless it is a last result. He knows that if they come to his office, it is because they have a problem they want resolved, the situation has escalated,
and now they are frustrated. By establishing proactive, consistent, and informal availability, he can prevent such conflicts. He also feels that one-to-one contact creates opportunities to encourage GRG to become more involved. Personally inviting GRG to events and asking them to perform specific tasks may make them feel valued and more likely to attend events or volunteer for service.

Although he stressed the importance of communication and accessibility, Mr. Carpenter feels that trust is established through his actions, not only his words. These families respect a leader who will take the time to make a home visit if a child is ill or a quick trip to pick up forgotten homework for a distraught student, all services that he has provided. He also arrives early or stays late if a working GRG does not have childcare before or after school.

This personal approach is evident in the services the school has provided grandparents. Although Notch Gap does not have developed policies or implemented programs specifically for grandparents raising grandchildren, Mr. Carpenter responds to problems as they arise, taking into consideration the needs of the grandparents who have assumed care of their grandchildren. When two of his students lost their grandmother after a long battle with cancer, Mr. Carpenter met with their step-grandfather and promised the family would receive his school’s support. He said to the step-grandfather:

I really admire what you’re doing. We’re here with you. Whatever you need, we’re going to help you. If you’re at work, and they’re sick, we’ll keep them. If they need to get somewhere, and you’re at work, we’ll take them.

He spoke with admiration and respect as he described the enormity of this man’s long-term sacrifice. As a school leader, he followed through on his promise. To ensure
the needs of the two grandchildren in his care were met, the school worked closely and consistently with the step-grandfather, assisting with transportation and childcare.

Mr. Carpenter has the same expectations of his staff and teachers in regards to open communication, establishing a welcoming environment, and building trust. He expects teachers to communicate regularly with families, and encourages them to begin talking to families early about student performance concerns long before progress reports go home. Surprisingly, although his school is highly successful academically—particularly noteworthy considering the dismal socioeconomic indicators of the region—he did not discuss building community relationships as a tool for greater academic success. Instead, he seems to find sincere joy in building relationships with grandparents, parents, and other family members so that the school can better serve its students.

Mr. Carpenter understood that his relationship with grandparents is reciprocal. If an adult sees the school leader go the extra mile, then a grandparent is more likely to honor the school’s requests. However, one must not confuse *quid pro quo* with reciprocity. Mr. Carpenter does not engage grandparents in order to secure cooperation later, but he understands that showing others he is committed will build relationships conducive to cooperation. This reciprocity also speaks to the separate roles of school and home. He recognizes GRG have just enough time, energy, and resources to see to their grandchildren’s basic needs. In return, they expect the school to educate their grandchildren and keep them safe. This means a GRG is sometimes unable to fulfill traditional expectations, such as assisting grandchildren with homework. He spoke of a grandfather who became increasingly frustrated with the mathematics problems his granddaughter brought home:
We had a grandparent, he says, “I don’t know what you’re doing.” This kid was in the second grade. “I can’t help her.” He said, “I don’t mean to sound mean, but don’t be sending nothing home with her, because I can’t help her.” He was just saying “I’ll clothe her, I’ll feed her, I’ll send her to school. You educate her.” He said, “She’s getting frustrated. I’m getting frustrated,” and so we developed a way to help this child, and in turn help a lot of other kids. I knew that other people had the same problem. He was just voicing it.

Mr. Carpenter understood the GRG’s view of separate but interdependent roles, school and home, and instead of criticizing the grandparent, he created a program to address the problem. He worked with the special needs teacher provide after school services for the grandchild so she could complete homework. At the same time he relieved her grandfather from grappling with new and intimidating math procedures that led to strife and stress at home. Consequently, this program has been sustained and expanded to benefit more students who are not raised by grandparents but nonetheless need extra help with homework.

Mr. Carpenter believes principals can address the needs of GRG is through Family Resource Center (FRC). In his community social services do not always have the capacity to assist grandparents, but the FRC staff can assist in securing resources. In working with FRC, he can identify and provide assistance to students whose grandparents may not have the financial means to pay for school activities, even if that resource is pocket change for Ice Cream Fridays. The FRC coordinator can also provide basic needs such as clothing and food or even assistance if the electricity has been turned off. FRC can represent and serve grandparents, and at the same time, remain somewhat separate from the school. He summed up the role of FRC in his school thus:

I think the Family Resource Center people are great for that. That’s one of the best things they’ve [the state] added. Social services, they are overloaded, but with Family Resources, Emma and Debbie, having them around is a big plus.
They can go in and not be the school itself. They’re just out there representing you, the grandparent. Emma and Debbie, as I said, do a good job. If you need something, clothing, electric has been turned off, something like that.

Although Mr. Carpenter recommends principals take the time to talk to and listen to GRG, he feels grandparents would benefit from interaction with another professional, a counselor who could address their needs:

I would think that they need somebody to talk to. I wish we could have a guidance counselor to come in so they could say, ‘this is my problem. Listen to me.’ That would be a great resource. You know, another person to lean on.

Overall, Mr. Carpenter’s last statement during the interview summed up his philosophy of leadership: “One of the rules in life is that you have to show people that you care.”

**Carla, Grandparent**

The first time I called Carla to schedule an interview she was not able to come to the phone. She was caring for her terminally ill father-in-law. Her husband told me that she would be available later that day, and the family was hoping I could locate psychological services for their granddaughter, Ella, specifically to address behavioral issues. When I called a second time, Carla chose to meet with me at Ella’s school to learn more about my research, although she seemed disappointed I could not address her granddaughter’s tantrums as a part of the study. When I called to confirm the meeting a week later, she was forced to reschedule. It was a very hectic week. Hospice could not care for her father-in-law during the time we had planned to meet. We rescheduled.

The next week, we sat down together in a quiet corner of the school library, which was not in use at the time. I noticed that Carla was very soft spoken and shy when the interview began. I also realized Carla is a very busy caregiver. She assumed care of Ella,
her 3rd grade granddaughter, because her own son is a drug addict. He has been admitted to rehabilitation programs several times without success. A retired nurse, she also provides end-of-life care for her 81-year-old father-in-law who is presently living with her and her husband. Carla is a natural caregiver, patient and kind, so she has the skills and temperament to care for him:

I always liked helping people, and you know I worked in a nursing home for several years. Some of the care is really good there, but some of it’s not, especially on night shift and after the authorities go home. So I don’t want anybody to go through that, especially, you know, if I could prevent it for my loved ones. I’ll do it as long as I can.

She bathes, dresses, feeds, and puts her father-in-law to bed daily. She receives biweekly help from hospice workers. Her around-the-clock care for her father-in-law and raising her live-in granddaughter seemed a daunting combination, so I was amazed she also cares for two other grandchildren. Four days a week, she babysits her 2-year-old grandson, Carter. Around 4:00 pm the school bus drops Ella and her cousin, Brandon,—both 3rd graders—off at her house. She watches Brandon and Carter until her daughter finishes work. Her husband does help out when he can, but he has had open-heart surgery, and Carla fears for his health. She provides child care and hospice 13 hours a day, from 7:00 am to 8:00 pm when she puts Ella to bed. Overall, Carla is tired and overworked. She is sometimes irritated that she cannot keep her house cleaned to the standards she was once accustomed. However, in the little time she has to rest, she has decided, “when I get to sit down, I just sit there in my rocker. I got a real nice comfortable rocker, and I just will sit in it, take my little throw cover up, and read a book.”
Carla is deeply concerned about Ella’s behavior at home. Frequently, Ella throws herself to the floor, kicking, and screaming. During these tantrums, Carla feels overwhelmed and helpless. She tries to talk to Ella to determine the source of these outbursts but finds that Ella will not communicate. Ella sometimes yells, “You’re not my mom!” when Carla tries to correct her. Because Ella does not pay attention to her when she gives instructions, Carla is concerned that she may have an attention deficit disorder, but Ella’s teachers have not reported disruptive or inattentive behaviors at school. Ella also has earned very good grades.

It saddens Carla that Ella is not with her mother and father and worries Ella may experience feelings of inadequacy because her mother and father are not caring for her. Although Ella’s aunt, who is also Carla’s daughter, takes Ella on outings with her family, she sometimes prefers to plan events without Ella. This seems to make Ella jealous and resentful. Carla suspects these feelings may be the underlying cause of her tantrums. Ella sometimes says she hates her life.

Ella received counseling services at school and in the summer through a non-profit organization that partners with the school district. Carla didn’t think these sessions were effective because counseling sessions were infrequent and the organization had high staff turnover. As a result, Ella received very few sessions with three different counselors in one academic year. Counselors did not communicate with Carla nor did she receive advice or activities for home to address the tantrums. Carla did not know if the school counselor could provide services during school hours and did not know if the school had any other resources to address the problem. As a result, she has decided to seek out and
pay for services for Ella outside of school. Because she is already busy caring for others, she will ask her husband to transport Ella to sessions.

All this leaves Carla feeling uncertain about her role as caregiver. She feels that raising children today is more complex than earlier years when she raised her own children, and these changes make her feel uncertain about her role. She is fearful of the drug epidemic in her community and is hoping it will end soon. Although her daughter has recovered from her drug addiction, her son, Ella’s father, is still struggling, and Carla laments the lack of rehabilitation services in their community.

Overall, Carla’s experiences with Ella’s school have all been very positive. She reported, “I’ve always had a good relationship with the teachers.” She appreciates the welcoming environment and feels the personnel are “friendly and understanding.” She observed the people who work at the school smiled often and were open to discussing her grandchild. Our interview took place a week before the Christmas break, and she was impressed with the teacher’s ability to keep the students engaged during the holiday season. She wryly inferred the teachers were, “probably sick of Christmas.”

Concerning school participation, Carla feels that she and other grandparents raising grandchildren face the same challenges: lack of time, energy, and money. Because she is also a caretaker for her dying father-in-law, she does not have time or energy to devote to Ella’s school, and even if she had more time to volunteer, she is physically incapable of some activities. She suffers from debilitating arthritis in her knees. At first, when asked how the school may help her with the barriers of time, energy, and money, she said she had no expectations of the school to meet these needs. Instead, she expects that institution to play a traditional, separate role, stating, “I don’t
know for sure how they could. I don’t know how, what their part would be. Just treat her [Ella] good and keep her safe while she’s here at school.” When asked about services the schools might offer to compensate for insufficient resources, I was surprised she did not mention the Family Resource Center because they often provide food and clothing assistance. Regardless of the barriers, Carla is still involved in Ella’s education. She assists with homework throughout the week and provides snacks for the entire class monthly.

Carla is able to be more involved from home because the school provides ongoing, up-to-date written communication. For example, instead of assigning daily homework, Ella’s teacher sends home a list of assignments for the entire week each Monday. This helps Carla maintain a homework routine at home, and Ella has fewer tantrums as a result:

The teacher, which I love, always sends a notice home every Monday telling you what’s expected during the week. I guess I’m a routine person. I can look ahead and know what’s expected for the next day and be prepared. I’ll tell Ella, ‘OK, this is what we're going to do tomorrow evening.’ So when it comes tomorrow evening, she won’t be fussing. She’ll know ahead of time.

Ella’s teachers communicate frequently with Carla through printed announcements and personal notes in Ella’s journal, a daily bound daily planner book. At the beginning of the school year, every student is given a journal in which they write homework assignments. Journals are also utilized for two-way communication; teachers and parents can send notes to each other in the journals. Shortly before the interview, Carla received information on special clothing days at school; all the students were asked to wear a hat to school the next day. She didn’t mind preparing Ella for these days, and Ella seems to enjoy them. When Carla calls the school, she receives prompt feedback.
from the secretary, staff members, or the teacher. Overall, she cannot recall a time when
she had trouble communicating with the anyone at the school.

This does not mean Carla does not have concerns about school. She is worried
about Ella’s wellbeing, that other children may bully Ella, noting, “Sometimes I’m afraid
some of the other kids might realize that she don’t have a mommy and daddy and ask her
questions, and maybe even pick on her.” To help alleviate her fears, I shared with her the
statistics on grandparents raising grandchildren in the school district. Assisting in the
recruitment for the study, the six schools’ Family Resource Centers collectively
distributed nearly 300 letters to grandparents raising grandchildren. This number
surprised Carla. She wondered why she felt so isolated if there were so many other
grandparents raising grandchildren in her community. She knew of only one other
grandmother raising two grandsons, but was uncertain of the grandchildren’s ages.
Although she has seen other grandparents she assumed were raising their grandchildren,
she does not personally know them. Most of the caregivers she sees at school are parents,
and this sometimes this makes her feel uncomfortable. “When you go to the field trips
and stuff,” she stated, “you know, you see grandparents there, but the mothers and fathers
are so much younger than I am, and it’s hard to communicate with them.” During these
events she feels she “doesn’t belong”.

When asked what advice she would give principles on involving GRG, she was
very confident in her response. She would like principals to be aware of the feelings of
inadequacy, insecurity, and grief grandchildren raised by grandparents may experience.
She felt that schools could effectively help GRG by sending home written information,
advice on parenting a grandchild, and “not just things about school.” She would also like
group meetings specifically designed for GRG, preferably led by a grandparent who has successfully raised a grandchild. “It would be great if somebody would have it open to, you know, be free to talk. It would be great if it was someone who has been through raising a grandchild.” Finally, she felt that grandchildren raised by grandparents should have their own support group to talk to each other about issues they faced.

**Researcher**

I am no stranger to the GRG phenomenon. My parents assumed care for my niece and nephew for almost four years while my brother served in the U.S. Navy. As a single father, he could not care for them when his ship was at sea. In the 1980’s this was an unusual circumstance, and few researchers were examining the challenges facing grandparents who had assumed kinship care, challenges my own parents faced: financial, emotional, and physical, all related to assuming care of a toddler and an infant. There were few resources to help. Nevertheless, my parents, who were raised in Appalachian families committed themselves to providing for these two children. At the time they were in their late 40’s and had already successfully raised 5 children of their own. I grew up in Appalachia, and have been working in educational systems in this region for over 17 years. In short my parents did what we as Appalachians do. We take care of our families.

For 8 years I taught in a small, rural Appalachian school where the hallways were literally packed with family members during after-school functions. I think strong community and family involvement in our school was created and nurtured by a school principal who intentionally focused on involvement and collaboration. She made it known, through actions and words, that we, her teachers and staff, were a part of the
surrounding community. She encouraged me to become a Girl Scout leader and allowed me to send out messages to my troop parents through the school’s system. She applauded my decision to have troop sleepovers in the school gymnasium and instructed the school cooks to open the kitchens so that parents and I could make meals during activities. When I became the leader of the student environmental club, she brokered outside resources and manpower from the county sheriff’s department and local business people to build an outdoor shelter and wetland for inquiry based science lessons. She also valued parent input, and made it known they were welcome in the school. During her first week as principal she created a seating area in the entrance area of the school where parents and guests could comfortably sit when they visited. When I served on the site based decision making council, I observed her sincere desire for input from parent members and her commitment to understanding the needs of families. She attended the church that was located beside our school and hired her minister to be the school custodian. When the church was under construction, she allowed services to be held in the gymnasium every Sunday. She worked closely with the family resource center coordinator, a personal friend from high school. She had been raised in the county and could trace her family lineage back to its founders. Furthermore she had been a student, teacher, and central office staff prior to her service as principal.

During the 8 years I taught under her leadership, I encountered three grandparents raising children enrolled in my classroom. Regardless of the strong emphasis on family involvement in my school, I found communicating with them and involving them in decision-making difficult. I noted that although GRG were very committed to their grandchildren’s education, they seemed very protective of their grandchildren and were
often defensive when I discussed behavioral problems their grandchildren demonstrated in my classroom. In reference to his grandson, one grandfather told me I was, “too hard on the little feller.” I sensed an insecurity among these GRG in terms of their abilities to understand new content and standards. They would often speak of the differences in educational practices, and seemed to feel the systems and strategies of bygone years superior to those the schools were currently practicing. Two of these grandparents were physically disabled, and found attending school functions difficult.

Overall, I had always prided myself in my ability to foster family involvement in two-way communication and decision-making. Furthermore, I was praised for successful family involvement by both parents and my principal. Regardless, I was left with a disquieting feeling of inadequacy in my ability to engage those three grandparents, a feeling further exacerbated by the memory of my parents’ commitment to their grandchildren. When I discussed these issues with my principal, she agreed with my observations, but felt little could be done. At that time, in a school of approximately 130 students, few were raised by grandparents.

After I left the classroom I worked for a regional university as a professional development associate. I traveled to and worked in many schools in Eastern Kentucky. When I spoke to school leaders, principals, superintendents, and instructional supervisors, about GRG, they all agreed that engaging this demographic was a growing problem, but none had suggestions for addressing it.

Later, when I began reviewing literature on GRG extant findings corroborated my own experiences. As discussed later, GRG throughout the U.S. faced many of the same challenges I had observed in my earlier experiences. I was able to find and read many
articles on these challenges and involvement in their grandchildren’s education, but I could not find literature on school principals creating and fostering school environment that encouraged and supported GRG. Moreover, although Kentucky has been found to have the highest percentages of children raised by grandparents in the U.S., I found few that discussed GRG and schooling in this region.

Overall, I personally believe effective leadership, primarily principal leadership, to be an important factor to school success. Based on my personal experience and the growing number of GRG across the U.S., I felt compelled to explore how elementary school principals create and nurture positive and productive relationships with GRG.
CHAPTER 1

Purpose and Significance

Children raised by their grandparents are a steadily growing demographic in schools throughout the United States. The number of children living in a household solely run by a grandparent increased from three in every 100 children in 1970 (Casper & Bryson, 1998) to one in every 10 in 2011 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Presently Kentucky has the highest percentage of children raised by relatives who are not biological parents in the United States. Most of these children, specifically those raised by grandparents, live in Eastern Kentucky, the setting for this study. According to the Kinship Families Coalition of Kentucky (KFCK, 2017), over one-third are under the age of 6, and most likely attending elementary schools.

When parents are unable to care for their children, grandparents are often compelled to take their grandchildren into their homes, assuming the role of primary caregiver. This is especially true when they are faced with the threat of placing their grandchildren in the foster care system (AFC, 2007; Gleeson, Wesley, Ellis, Seryak, Talley & Robinson, 2009; Gordon, McKinley, Satterfield & Curtis, 2003). This is very common in Appalachian communities where historically a child was a cherished resource, a “gift from heaven” (Beaver, 1986b, p. 82). Even those who may have tenuous and stressful relationships with offspring fear the loss of the child through the intervention of outside forces. In more recent history, the intercession of government in family life through child protection laws and practices has changed the face of family life and added a disquieting aspect, the fear of loss of one’s children to the foster care system, which will separate them from friends and family (Fitchen, 1981).
According to the Administration for Children and Families more often than not, when GRG assume care of a grandchild, they are unprepared for the challenges of raising a child who has lost a parent to death, drug abuse, or incarceration (AFC, 2007). When these grandchildren attend school, few resources exist to guide elementary school principals in engaging GRG in two-way communication or decision-making, or how to leverage community and agency resources to meet their needs. Regardless of the growing numbers of grandparents raising grandchildren (GRG) there exists a dearth of research and literature to guide school leaders in effectively engaging these grandparents in school involvement.

The purpose of this study is to construct theory on how elementary school principals create and nurture positive and productive relationships with GRG. It attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How do elementary principals ensure that GRG are involved in two-way communication about the education of the grandchildren in their care?
2. How do these principals ensure that GRG are involved in decision-making regarding the education of the grandchildren in their care?
3. How do these principals bring together the resources of the school, family members, and community to benefit GRG and their grandchildren?

**Scope of the Problem**

According to the US Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (2013c), approximately 2.7 million grandparents were their grandchildren’s sole caregivers in 2013. During the same period in Kentucky, 102,198 grandparents resided with grandchildren under the age of 18 with approximately 66% of these grandparents acting
as sole caregivers for their grandchildren as GRG (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013a). Of these, 60% were female (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013g), 72.5% married (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013d), and nearly 50% were over 60 years old (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013a). Almost one-third (32%) of these grandparents were disabled (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013a). More than half (51%) of these GRG were not presently in the labor force, and 27% reported incomes within the previous 12 months that placed them below poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013f). Furthermore, nearly half of these grandparents lived in rural areas (U.S. Bureau, 2013e).

GRG often face challenges that act as barriers to involvement and inclusion in their grandchildren’s schools (Edwards, 2006; Kinship Families in Kentucky, 2013; Smith & Palmieri, 2007; Reynolds, 2003). They may find schools more intimidating than younger, biological parents (Edwards, 2006; Smith & Palmieri, 2007; Reynolds, 2003). The shifting role from permissive grandparent to authoritative caregiver can lead to discipline problems at school (Landry-Meyer & Newman, 2004). GRG may also find that schools’ expectations of caregiver-school engagement have changed over time. For example, when these grandparents were parents themselves, they may not have been expected to invest as much time and effort in their children’s education compared to what is now asked of them as caregivers in today’s schools (Miller, 2008). Furthermore, most grandparents in the U.S. have not completed legal processes to define and formalize their relationships to the grandchildren in their care. In the absence of legal custodial status, these grandparents may encounter policies that act as obstacles to involvement in the school systems where their grandchildren attend (Beltran, 2013; Kinship Families in Kentucky, 2013; Woodworth, 1996).
Family Involvement and Student Success

These impediments to school involvement may academically disadvantaged children raised by grandparents. Children whose families are engaged in school activities such as homework, academic programs at school, and monitoring of their children’s progress show greater academic achievement than those who do not (Anderson, 2000; Hill & Craft, 2003; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Topor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010).

Family involvement is also shown to have an effect on the perceptions and motivations of students, caregivers, and teachers. Topor et al. (2010) found caregiver involvement affected the bond between student and teacher. Students whose parents were positively engaged in school demonstrated more positive perceptions of their teachers, and children whose caregivers are more involved show greater motivation and have more positive self-perceptions of their academic abilities in the classroom (Topor et al., 2010). Hill and Craft (2003) reported parent involvement improved teacher’s perceptions of parent buy-in, which was associated with increased student achievement.

Studies also show a positive relationship between family engagement and school attendance and retention (Epstein, 2004; Sheldon, 2007). Sheldon (2007) found family engagement activities that were meaningful to caregivers improved student attendance. The results of Sheldon and Epstein’s (2004) longitudinal study on schools’ family involvement practices to address attendance indicated schools that engaged families showed a greater decrease in chronic student absences than schools that did not. Successful practices included providing parents data on their children’s attendance records, informing parents when their children were absent, assisting parents in strategies
to motivate their children to come to school, and school-wide celebrations for positive attendance (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004).

Sheldon and Epstein’s (2002) longitudinal study among elementary and secondary schools suggests increased family engagement shows a relationship to fewer classroom behavioral incidents and school-wide discipline interventions. Moreover, the schools that focused on increasing the quality of partnership programs as well as involving both family members and community reported fewer disciplinary actions than the schools that did not actively involve caregivers and community. Overall parental volunteerism, in which the parents are physically present in the school during or after hours, was found to be one of the greatest predictors in successfully decreasing the percentages of negative student behaviors (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002).

**School Leadership and Family Involvement**

School leaders are expected to “build and sustain positive relationships with families and caregivers” (Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2008a, p. 15). They are called upon to acknowledge and respect “the diversity of family composition” (CCSSO, 2008a, p. 22), expanding the traditional definition of families to encompass *grandfamilies*, grandparents raising grandchildren without the presence of parents. Engaging these grandparents may be challenging to school leaders. As cited above, studies have indicated grandparents raising grandchildren face significant barriers to school involvement (Edwards, 2006; Hayslip & Kaminski, 2005; Minkler, Fuller & Thompson, 1999; Landry-Meyer & Newman, 2004; Reynolds, 2003), and educational leadership literature on family engagement rarely provides guidance on how to create and nurture positive and productive relationships with GRG.
Today’s school leaders are asked to examine their own biases and acknowledge the complexities of family structure. In order to foster successful family engagement, leaders are encouraged to reflect on how their underlying biases may influence their decision-making, and their supervision of teachers and staff. Moreover, they are expected to be aware of how these biases may affect the way they communicate with families or may serve as barriers to family engagement (Henry, 1997; Pushor, 2013). It is important that leaders and teachers educate themselves the student’s entire world, which includes diverse cultures and family structures (Henry, 1997; Pushor, 2013). School leaders may also encounter teacher biases when attempting to foster family involvement. Many teachers admit that they lack the skills and knowledge necessary to engage parents, especially in diverse school communities where teachers do not share the cultural backgrounds of their students (Larocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011). In some cases, teachers assume caregivers who come from backgrounds that are not similar to their own are uninterested or intentionally uninvolved in their children’s education (Carlisle, Stanley & Kemple, 2005). As a result, children may find that their home-culture is not valued or acknowledged in their school (Henry, 1997).

For these reasons, it is important that school leaders model ethical behaviors that foster inclusive, collaborative, democratic learning communities that value all shareholders (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). School leaders must welcome all families into the school community with the understanding that caregivers want their children to be academically successful. In order to build an inclusive, caring learning community, school leaders are expected to celebrate the diversity in the communities they serve (Epstein, 2011).
Significance of the Proposed Study

National

Engaging all families, regardless of who the head of household may be, is an expectation of school principals. According to the Interstate School Leader Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Educational Leadership Policy Standards, school principals are expected to create school environments that foster positive and productive relationships with all families. Because these standards represent “the latest set of high-level policy standards for educational leadership” (CCSSO, 2008, Foreword, p. 1), they serve as exemplars for state policy makers in the creation of state leadership standards (Sanders & Kearney, 2008); as such, these standards may affect the daily roles and responsibilities of school principals.

Although family engagement, empowerment, and advocacy are integrated throughout these standards, Function C of Standard Four explicitly directs school leaders to “build and sustain positive relationships with families and caregivers” (CCSSO, 2008, p. 15). The inclusion of the word caregivers acknowledges that the most significant adults in the life of the students may not be biological parents. Performance indicators for Standard 4 also specify “others who provide care for children” (Sanders & Kearney, 2008, p. 23) in the collaboration of schools and family. These terms, both caregivers and others, affirm and validate the inclusion of adults such as grandparents providing care, as well as the significance of this study to the expectations of school leaders in the United States.

Although engaging all families is an expectation of school principals, there is a dearth of research on how these school leaders successfully engage GRG, a demographic
with diverse needs. Furthermore, current literature on family engagement does not explicitly address this group. The findings from this study seek to fill this gap in the research that may inform educational leadership literature that school principals may utilize appropriate methods to create positive and productive relationships with GRG.

**Kentucky**

In Kentucky, the majority of GRG may not have the power to formally influence decisions made in their grandchildren’s schools because they cannot serve on School-Based Decision Making (SBDM) Councils. Most GRG accept their grandchildren into their homes without going through the courts to establish legal relationships (Jantz, Geen, Bess, Andrews & Russell, 2002); as such, they are ineligible to run for election and serve on SBDM councils in the Commonwealth. According to KDE (2011), parents serving on the council must be “a parent, stepparent, foster parent or a person who has legal custody of a student pursuant to a court order and with whom the student resides” (p. 7) excluding informal GRG because they do not have legally acknowledged relationships with their grandchildren.

The Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) passed in 1990 requires that every school form a school-level SBDM council comprised of one principal and five elected members, three teachers, and two parents. High schools have the option to double the number of members provided the ratio of parents to teachers remains the same. Teachers who are employed by the school elect the teachers serving on the board, and parents elect the parents. This school decision-making group has the power to establish and revise all school policies, even those regarding curriculum and instruction, as well as influence
management issues such as budget, school dress codes, and discipline. Moreover, it is
the right and responsibility of this council to select a principal (KDE, 2013).

Parent representatives are expected to solicit input from other parents in order to
represent their needs and concerns (Hunter, 1999); however, as mentioned above, SBDM
statutes and regulations may stand in the way of access to representation of many
grandparents who have diverse needs regarding the schooling of their grandchildren. The
results of this study may bring to light alternative methods for school leaders to engage
these GRG in decision making in the absence of representation on SBDM councils.

Theory

Finally, the theory generated from this study may bridge the gap in literature on
school engagement needs specific to GRG so that school leaders can make informed
decisions that will foster positive and productive relationships with GRG. The
Administration for Children and Family (AFC, 2007) recommends schools and other
governmental organizations collaborate to improve school personnel’s understanding of
the challenges facing GRG; however, current literature for school leaders on family
engagement fails to provide information on specific pathways to overcome barriers
facing these grandparents (ACF, 2007).

Potential Limitations

It should be noted a study of leadership in Appalachian Kentucky neglects the
larger population of school communities that do not share the same culture and
demographics, therefore findings may not be applicable to GRG and school leaders in
other communities. In addition, the GRG who participated in the study did so voluntarily;
therefore they may share characteristics of self-advocacy or dissatisfaction with the
school system, characteristics that may not be present among other GRG who did wish to participate. Three of the GRG in this study became involved in the study because they hoped to ameliorate a person challenge. Moreover, these GRG had legally-established formal custody of their grandchildren, therefore their perspectives may differ from those expressed by GRG providing informal kinship care. As a result, findings may relate only to the perceptions of the school leaders and GRG who participated in this study.

Dissertation Organization

Chapter 1 discussed the study’s purpose and significance and provided a brief overview of the scholarly literature to elucidate the scope of the problem this study attempts to address. The following chapter provides a broader review of the scholarly literature in order to provide a historical view of family involvement in American schools, research on family involvement in schools, and the principal’s role in fostering this involvement. Chapter 2 also examines extant research findings on the school involvement challenges GRG face in the United States. In order to provide cultural context for the study, literature on family dynamics in Appalachian culture is included. The next chapter concludes with Epstein’s (1995) Overlapping Spheres, the theoretical framework for the study.

Chapter 3 describes the study’s methodology, the approach, Grounded Theory, and research methods that were implemented in this study. That chapter explains the purpose of the study, outlines the research questions and sub-questions, as well as the approach and methods for collecting and analyzing the data. Finally, it describes the study site and participants as well as ethical considerations relevant to these participants.
Chapter 4 and 5 present data collected from interviews. Chapter 4 includes a collection of narratives composed from interviews with principals and Chapter 5 from interviews with GRG. Each chapter concludes with tables illustrating line-by-line coding and categories that emerged from data.

Chapter 6 presents the study’s conclusions and discusses implications for practice and suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

This grounded theory study explores how elementary school principals create and nurture positive and productive relationships with GRG. Chapter 2 reviews the literature pertaining to the key components of this study and is organized conceptually.

This chapter begins with a discussion of literature on school-family involvement with an emphasis on school leadership. It includes historical background, seminal works on effective family engagement, and findings on administrative and social barriers to school-family involvement. This chapter also reviews literature on GRG relative to the challenges they face to school engagement. In order to provide a cultural context for this study, this chapter includes scholarly literature on the family dynamics of Appalachian culture as well as more recent studies on family, place, and schooling within this cultural context. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Epstein’s Overlapping Spheres of Influence (Epstein, 1995), the theoretical framework for the study.

The literature reviewed here was selected through a search of the scholarly literature on grandparents raising grandchildren; school-family involvement, with a focus on the role of school leaders; and family dynamics in Appalachian communities.

Historical Background on School Family Engagement

The Colonial Period

During the U.S. Colonial period, a child’s education was integrated into daily family life. According to Cherlin (2013), during this period, “there was no school…because family was school” (p. 47). Most children performed physical labor on farms, in households, and small businesses; therefore much of the education provided
was practical, not literary (Good & Teller, 1973). Laws in the mid 1500s enacted in Massachusetts Bay, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Maryland declared that all youth must be skilled to prevent the spread of unemployment and poverty among its citizens, but institutions to carry out this charge were not widely established. Instead it was the responsibility of families and tradesmen who supervised apprentices to carry out this task (Good & Tell, 1973).

Later in 1642, Massachusetts enacted a law that required families to add literacy to apprenticeship so that their children would be able to read the Bible and become moral citizens (Good & Teller, 1973). The Massachusetts School Law of 1642 is considered a turning point for education in America, because although it does not establish public schools in that colony, it is the US’s earliest historical evidence of compulsory literacy (Gross & Chandler, 1964). Regardless of the laws governing education, as the colonies grew and developed, both public and private schools were established and governed under community control (Gross & Chandler, 1964). In short, during the US’s Colonial Period it was the responsibility of families to see that their children became literate and skilled members of society, and even under the established public system, parents exercised significant control over curriculum and governance (Hiatt-Michael, 1994; Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglall, Gordon, 2009).

The Industrial Revolution (1870-1919)

After the Civil War, industrialization, immigration, and changing attitudes among Americans on the functions of and right to public education led to an increase in the number of public schools. During this period, the U.S. also began to place greater expectations and responsibilities on these schools. These expectations went beyond
educational needs, encompassing both the social and moral welfare of the children they served. Consequently, these factors are historically significant to family involvement in education (Weiss et al., 2009).

The American Industrial Revolution shifted the economy from agrarian to industrial, creating a demand for literate workers. Consequently, the economic viability of its citizens depended on the attainment of basic reading and mathematical skills. During the same period, an increase in the immigrant population also impacted the demand for public schools. In response to the influx of immigrants to the U.S., schools, not parents, were deemed to have the most effective and appropriate tools for socializing and educating the children of immigrants (Graham, 1974). The expansion of schools was also supported by mainstream ideology “that a free government cannot function successfully if the people are shackled by ignorance” (Kennedy & Cohen, 2013, p. 554), especially among families that were viewed by mainstream citizenry as disadvantaged by race, economics, or country of origin (Weiss, et al., 2009). According to Weiss et al., 2009:

All these factors, along with deficit views of disadvantaged families and their capacity to support learning, have shaped conceptions of roles and responsibilities of families, schools, and communities with respect to learning…They have reinforced the view that schools alone are where children learn and have limited public and policy awareness of the significant role that family involvement plays in children’s learning and school success. (p. 8)

During this period, child labor reform inspired the development of policies on compulsory school attendance in an attempt to deter impoverished parents from sending
their children into the factories and mines and to reduce the number of immigrant youth roaming the streets. By 1918, every state had compulsory school laws on their books. Parents who refused to send their children to school faced severe punishments, further widening the rift between schools and parents (Hiatt-Michael, 1994). This is evident in the following statement made in 1872 by B. G. Northrop, Secretary of the Connecticut Board of Education: “It [compulsory education] interferes with the liberty of parents. I reply again it ought to, when they are incapacitated by vice or other causes for the performance of essential duties as parents” (Northrop, 1872, p. 195). Moreover, these laws marginalized parents’ rights. Bremner (1971) argues that through these compulsory school laws, “More forcefully and effectively than in any previous way, the states required parents to surrender much of their control over their children’s time and activities” (p. 1420).

Scientific principles underlying the reorganization of factories during the Industrial Revolution also influenced schools during this period, reshaping them into hierarchical bureaucracies that emphasized efficiency, clearly defined procedures, and professional roles (Hiatt-Michael, 1994). Family access to school environments was controlled by rigid policies and procedures developed and enforced under the assumption that such bureaucracies were efficient and unbiased (Henry, 1997; Sergiovanni, 2006). Educational leaders supported the professionalization of administrative and instructional roles and a reduction in the influence of parents who “did not possess the time, knowledge, or talents necessary for a child to meet the challenges of emerging technology” (Hiatt-Michael, 1994, p. 253). This underlying philosophy further widened the chasm between family home life and school systems (Hiatt-Michael, 1994).
National Reform

After World War II, policy leaders looked upon education as the solution to socioeconomic inequalities (Wells, 2006). Through a philosophy fueled by mainstream American values that expounded the virtues of hard work and self-improvement, many of the educational reforms during the this period were based on the assumption that poverty was generational, passed from parent to child and could only be broken through schooling. This underlying philosophy led many Americans to believe the public school system was the sole provider of learning, which in turn “limited public and policy awareness of the significant role that family involvement plays in children’s learning and school success” (Weiss et al., 2009, p. 8). However, adamant researchers who argued the importance of family engagement and federal court rulings helped shift the national conversation on family engagement and influence national legislation (Hiatt-Michael, 1994). As a result, in 1965, U.S. Congress passed the most expansive federal education bill in the country’s history, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). ESEA and its later revisions further strengthened the role of families in school, primarily through parent classroom participation, (Hiatt-Michael, 1994) and parent advisory councils (PACs) so that parents would be assured participation in the creation of school and district policies (Epstein, 1984).

Federal legislation to address the needs and rights of children with special needs provided greater access to educational decision-making and communication. In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) mandated parental rights in making educational decisions made for students with special needs. These parents now had the right to initiate entry into and exit from programs designed to meet the individual needs
of their children. In addition, EHA required parents be involved in making decisions regarding these programs (Hiatt-Michael, 1994). In 1990, Congress reauthorized EHA and changed the title to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA’s reauthorization extended parental rights, mandating that parents be informed of, consulted in, and in agreement of all decisions made regarding their special needs children’s education (Lipsky & Gartner, 1997).

Section 1118, Title I of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, mandated that schools serving low income children must create an environment that fosters the engagement of parents and community. Any school receiving Title I funding, federal funding to meet the needs of economically disadvantaged students, must create a parent engagement plan that is developed in collaboration with parents. NCLB also allows for Title I funds to be used on strategies to educate parents on accountability measures as well as home visits by school staff. In addition it pays for services to enable families to become more engaged in school community including transportation to and childcare during school events (U.S. Department of Education [DOE], 2004; Sanders & Sheldon 2009).

**Kentucky Reform**

The Commonwealth of Kentucky has also implemented educational reform to increase family involvement in schools. In *Rose v. Council for Better Education* the Kentucky Supreme Court declared the state’s education system unconstitutional, which led to the passing of Kentucky’s Education Reform Act (KERA) in 1990. Still considered the most comprehensive state education reform legislation in American history, KERA required schools to include parents on decision-making councils and
established resource centers for families in low socioeconomic status (SES) communities (Hunter, 1999).

Parent representation on SBDM councils attempts to ensure family participation in school governance. The function of the SBDM council is to promote shared leadership among teachers, administrators, and parents (Hunter, 1999). Each school council must be comprised of a ratio of three teachers, one principal, and two parents. It is the responsibility of this council to establish and revise all school policies, including those regarding curriculum and instruction. They also influence management issues, budgets, school dress codes, and discipline. Moreover, it is the right and responsibility of this council to select the school’s principal. Parent representatives are elected by other parents whose children attend the school. These parents cannot be appointed by school administrators (Kentucky Department of Education, 2015a). This representation also seeks to empower all parents in decision-making, charging parent council members with the responsibility to solicit input from other parents. In 1992, to address the need for greater minority input, the General Assembly required that schools serving diverse communities with a minority percentage of eight percent and higher have at least one minority representative on the council (Kentucky Department of Education, 2015a; Hunter, 1999).

In addition to the creation of school governing councils, KERA mandated the creation of Family Resource and Youth Service Centers (FRYSC) in each school. In 1990, Family Resource and Youth Service Centers were established as a key component of the Kentucky Educational Reform Act (KCFS, 2011, Kalafat, 2004, Doktor & Poertner, 1996). The term Family Resource and Youth Service Centers encompasses
Family Resource Centers serving families of children preschool to grades 5, and Youth Services Centers for the families of middle and high school students. This study focuses on FRCs because the purpose addresses leadership in elementary schools.

According to Doktor and Poertner, 1996, “Kentucky became the first to make the delivering or brokering of additional services an integral part of statewide educational reform package” (295). These centers are charged with providing services to address barriers to student learning by bridging education and social services (Doktor & Poertner, 1996; KCFS, 2011, 2016a, 2016b) and increase family involvement in schools (Illback & Kalafat, 1995; Kalafat, 2004). Furthermore, FRYSCs are charged with identifying and addressing gaps in services to families, both in the school and community (KCFS, 2016b). These school resource centers collaborate with external agencies to provide school-linked services health, career readiness, advice on child development and childcare, assistance with housing, and continued education (KCFS, 2011, 2016a, 2016). Schools are convenient locations for families to meet with family resource directors and through interagency collaboration, schools can help provide services without creating their own systems for delivery (Doktor & Poertner, 1996).

In 2008, Kentucky Governor Beshear signed Senate Bill 192, a law that enabled Family Resource Centers (FRCs) to coordinate childcare for preschool and afterschool, family training and literacy services and health services and referrals (KCHF, 2011). Schools may have their own FRYCs or share a district center. Each center is staffed by a coordinator (Illback & Kalafat, 1995; KCHF, 2011; Kalafat, 2004) who works in the center throughout the year (KCHF, 2016b). This coordinator may have formal education
and experience in social services or knowledge of the community the center serves (Illback & Kalafat, 1995; Kalafat, 2004).

The center is governed by its own advisory board council, which is comprised of parents, school representatives, community members, and students (KCHFS, 2015). The overarching purpose, according to KCHF, is to make the program “community-centered rather than coordinator-centered, or school-centered” (p. 1). In order to ensure this school and family center, at least one-third of the council must be comprised of parents, and no more than one-third school personnel membership. The rest of the council is made up of community members and students. This council is charged with overseeing budget, identify needs, and creating a plan for action that guides the center activities. The council may have input on the hiring of the center coordinator, but does not make the final decision. Instead, it makes its recommendations to the SBDM in the cases of school centers or the superintendent if the coordinator serves a district FRYSC (KCHF, 2016b).

**Research on School-Family Engagement and the Role of Principal**

Principals who are effective leaders and managers have a positive impact on the efficacy of their schools (Leithwood, Louis, Wahlstrom, Anderson, Mascall & Gordon, 2010; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). Although current research does not show a direct link between school leadership and student achievement as a measurement of leadership effectiveness, studies indicate a relationship between student achievement and the mediating factors that are affected by school leaders, such as teacher motivation and positive work setting (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). Furthermore, research indicates principals both exercise the most influence among their staff, and are the most involved in leadership initiatives and activities in public schools (Leithwood, Louis, Wahlstrom,
Anderson, Mascall & Gordon, 2010; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008), especially when the principal is perceived by teachers as trustworthy and sharing in instructional leadership with others (Leithwood et al., 2010).

**Principal Leadership and Family Involvement**

Students are more successful when families are engaged in the planning, implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvements of school programs (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). Children whose families are engaged in school activities show greater academic achievement than those who do not (Topor et al., 2010). This impact has been demonstrated in both mathematics (Hill & Craft, 2003; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005) and literacy (Anderson, 2000; Epstein, 1991; Lee & Croninger, 1994; Koskinen, Blum, Bisson, Phillips, Creamer, Baker, 2000; Westat, 2001). School-family involvement has also been shown to positively impact student motivation (Hill & Craft, 2003; Topor et al., 2010) student attendance (Haynes, Comer, & Hamilton-Lee, 1989; Sheldon, 2007; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004), and discipline (Amato & Rivera, 1999; Domina, 2005; Ma, 1999; Sheldon, 2007; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002; Simons, 2001).

Regardless of the evident success of family engagement on student achievement, schools are still plagued by barriers to family involvement. Highly specialized roles and hierarchical structures established in the 19th century continue to dictate how and when families may engage in their children’s education (Henry, 1997; Pushor, 2013; Sergiovanni, 2006). Schools often share the mainstream ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic values of the community’s middle class so that only the concerns of these caregivers are heard and validated by school leaders (Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis & George, 2004; Henry, 1997). Moreover, according to Sanders (2009), recent challenges
such as reductions in government funding and educational goals based primarily on high-stakes testing sometimes reduce the resources, time, and energy leaders have to dedicate to families. Flynn and Nolan (2008) assert that the daily demands of running their schools prevented principals from concentrating on family involvement, further supporting principals’ claim of limited time.

Principals are also expected to create school environments that foster family involvement through their influence and management of teachers. Principals must work with teachers to create classroom environments that engage families. According to Leithwood et al. (2010), “If principals are to forge more productive forms of parent/school engagement, they will need to direct their efforts toward ensuring that teachers understand and believe in the role of parent involvement” (p. 625). However, principals face significant challenges to this task (Dembo & Gibson, 1985; Flynn & Nolan, 2008). According to Flynn and Nolan (2008), the principals in their study on leadership and family involvement claimed the majority of new teachers under their supervision were not adequately prepared to effectively engage families. Moreover, these leaders also maintained teachers do not make substantial efforts to nurture parent involvement through positive communications.

**Principal Self-Identified Roles.** A principal’s success at school-family involvement may be contingent on knowledge base and self-identified leadership role. Mandell and Murray, (2009) found that administrators who demonstrated an understanding of family-centered practices worked to educate and encourage both their teachers and parents in collaborative communication and school governance. Conversely, administrators who possessed limited knowledge of these practices were more likely to identify parents as
passive supporters in their children’s education, and less likely to engage families in collaborative roles (Mandell & Murray, 2009). Griffith (2001) asserts that specific roles and behaviors of principals are associated with parent involvement. His study found that principals who viewed themselves as instructional and curriculum supervisors and those who were concerned with meeting the needs of their communities had greater parent involvement than those who saw their role as political or managerial. Furthermore, he concluded that principals’ roles are most effective if they reflected an awareness of the “life circumstances” of the community they served (Griffith, 2000, p.162).

**Two-way Communication.** School leaders are expected to foster and create school environments that engage families in both two-way communication and decision making (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2009). Research has shown that principals face many barriers to leading a school that engages families in two-way communication. Storer’s (1995) research found principals cited lack of parent willingness or interest as a barrier to communication. To further complicate the role principals must play fostering this two-way communication, teachers may be reluctant to reach out to parents and initiate conversations (Broderick & Mastrilli, 1997; Dornbusch & Ritter; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Nevertheless, Epstein (1997) identifies communicating in her Framework of Six Types of Involvement for Comprehensive Programs of Partnerships. As a part of this framework, she recommends schools hold conferences with every parent annually with additional meetings scheduled as needed. She also suggests schools send home student work for family review and feedback. Schools can communicate with families through “useful notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters” (p.8). Epstein
recommends that content include any school reforms, policies, activities, and be included in communication in the language most familiar to families.

**Decision Making.** Involving families in decision-making is consistent with the overall shift in the role of principal from strictly managerial to collective leadership that shares decision-making and influence with others (Hoyle & Bjork, 2005; Leithwood & Prestine, 2002). Epstein et al. (1997) recommend schools maintain an active PTO/PTA and district and school-level councils to include families in school decision-making. Principals may interact with family members in decision-making through SBDMs. The state mandates all SBDMs have at least 2 parent members, and these parents are charged with soliciting input from other family members when making decisions. Although the intention was to empower parents in school-wide decision making, Shatkin and Gershberg (2007) are critical of the outcomes, arguing that KERA left the greatest decision-making power over schools to the state, and the implementation of decisions in the hands of school principals. Furthermore, they assert that a council comprised of school faculty and staff members and only two parents limits real parental empowerment.

**Bringing together the resources of school, family and community.** Principals are also expected to reach out to stakeholders in the surrounding community who possess resources that will benefit the families they serve (CCSSO, 2008). Sanders (2009) suggests school leaders utilize this collaboration to provide *family-centered activities* that bring together community resources to provide services such as “parenting workshops, GED and other adult education classes, family incentives and awards, family counseling, and family fun and learning nights” (p. 4).
**Principle Role and FRC.** In Kentucky, the Family Resource Center is an integral part of creating and maintaining lines of communication between home and school. FRC Coordinators are given the task of building relationships with families to make families more comfortable. They are also charged with collecting information on family concerns and communicating this data back to the school principal (2016b). KCHF (2016b) recommends coordinators play an integral role in their schools, and principals are the key component of this involvement. Principals are encouraged to meet with coordinators regularly, share school learning needs, goals and objectives. In return, the coordinator provides the principal vital information on families and their needs as well as relevant community resources. The coordinator may also act as intermediary between the school and families, bridging cultural gaps and helping to create welcoming environments for families. Principals supervise coordinators and conduct the coordinator’s evaluation in the cases of single-school centers. In addition, coordinators are required to provide input on the school’s comprehensive improvement plan (KCHF, 2016b).

Principals in Kentucky may utilize the Family Resource Center Coordinator to partner in family involvement. According to the online slide presentation, FRYSC Training Principal Module (KCHFS, 2016b), it is the role of the Family Resource Center to “seek to broker with existing services to provide needs families may have” (slide 16). One slide (36) entitled “What can YOUR FRYSC do for you?” lists homework help, volunteer in-service coaching as services the coordinator can provide. Furthermore the FRC Coordinator must identify gaps in services and seek out ways to fill these gaps with community services. School principals are expected to work closely with FRC Coordinators. Furthermore, if the FRC Coordinator serves only one school, the principal
will, most likely conduct that coordinator’s evaluation if this evaluation is consistent with
district practices and policies. In return, it is the responsibility of the principal to inform
the FRC coordinator of issues that impact student learning in the school (KCHFS, 2016b).

In conclusion, the expectations of schools to engage parents in their children’s
education have shifted throughout the history of the U.S. and the Commonwealth of
Kentucky. With these transitions, the leadership expectations of school principals have
also changed from bureaucratic manager to collaborative leader who involves families
and community members in daily decision-making and communications in order to create
an effective learning environment for the children they serve. However, principals face
significant challenges to creating these collaborative environments, in their self-perceived
roles, knowledge levels, and the bureaucratic, hierarchical systems they lead. Regardless
of social and policy reform, these challenges have continued to plague school systems
from the 19th Century to today. Most recently, school leaders and national school
leadership standards have changed language on family engagement to encompass adults
caring who may not be biological parents (CCSSO, 2008), which may introduce new
challenges for family engagement.

**Grandparents Raising Grandchildren**

**Caregiving Grandparent Rights and Responsibilities**

According to U.S. Census Bureau, in 2013, approximately 10% of U.S. children
under the age of 18 lived with and received care from a grandparent, a demographic that
only accounted for 3% of all American children in 1970 (Casper & Bryson, 1998).
Without grandparent care, Letiecq, Bailey and Porterfield (2008) estimated that the majority of these children would have been placed in foster care.

When parents are unable to provide care for their children because of death, drug addiction, incarceration, abuse, mental illness, or financial difficulties, caregiving responsibilities often transfer to grandparents (Gleeson, Wesley, Ellis, Seryak, Talley & Robinson, 2009; Minkler, 1999) who are motivated by a desire to keep their grandchildren out of the child welfare system (Gleeson et al., 2008; Gordon, et al., 2003). This decision is sometimes at the expense of grandparents’ physical (Baker, 2000; Minkler & Fuller-Thomas, 1999; Musil, Gordon, Warner, Zauszniewski, Standing & Wykle, 2010; Solomon & Marx, 2000), psychological (Baker & Silverstein, 2008; Kelly, Whitley, Sipe, & Yorker, 2000; Musil, et al., 2009; Phillips & Bloom, 1998), financial (Myadze, 2012; Gordon et al., 2003), and social well-being (Baird & Hayslip, 2000; Gordon et al., 2003).

When grandparents take grandchildren into their care they assume the role of parent. As such, they must also assume responsibility for their grandchildren’s education within their legal relationship status as caregivers (Beltran, 2013; Kinship Families in Kentucky, 2013). State—not federal—jurisdiction governs family law; consequently, schools must rely on state kinship care regulations to determine legal relationships between grandparents and grandchildren (Geen, 2004; DeToledo & Brown, 1995). Grandparents may have one of two types of kinship care status: formal kinship care or informal kinship care. Formal kinship care establishes a legal relationship between adult and minor and the rights and responsibilities therein. In the Commonwealth of Kentucky formal kinship care includes legal custodianship, guardianship (§KTRS 387.025), de
facto guardianship (Brandt, 2004; §KRS 403.270) and formal power of attorney (§KRS 27A.095).

Should a grandparent fail to establish a legal relationship with the grandchild their care falls under informal kinship care. It should not be presumed the term informal implies care for a short period of time. The majority of children in kinship care spend infancy to adulthood in informal status with kin providing for all their needs, food, shelter, clothing, education, and emotional support without ever establishing a legal relationship (Geen, 2004). Grandparents motivated by the desire to avoid public court involvement that may strain already fragile family dynamics, often opt for informal over formal kinship arrangements (Wallace, 2001). Unfortunately, when grandparents opt for informal kinship care they are sometimes unaware of its disadvantages (Gleeson et al., 2009; Phillips & Bloom, 1998; Wallace, 2001). In many states informal care provides fewer legal rights and less authority than formal, compromising caregiving grandparent’s rights to engage in their grandchildren’s schools (Beltran, 2013; Kinship Families in Kentucky, 2013; Woodworth, 1996).

Unlike most states, in Kentucky, the law allows informal caregivers to engage in most school activities, specifically to present a grandchild for school enrollment, access to educational documents, and decision making on behalf of a grandchild. State law, specifically §KRS 158.030 and KRS §159.010, legally allow any adult with “custody or charge” to present a child for enrollment, which include grandparents with formal custody as well as informal arrangements (§KRS 158.030; §KRS 159.010). If the child has been placed in the care of a grandparent because the parent did not have the economic means to support that child, Kentucky Department of Education policies adhere to the
McKinney-Vento Act (KDE, 2013), which defines homeless children as those “who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reasons” (§ H.R. 1144). The McKinney-Vento Act requires schools to immediately register homeless children in the most convenient school as defined by the student and family without the presence of a legal guardian. It is the enrolling school district’s responsibility to contact the previous school of enrollment to obtain all necessary records after enrollment (U.S. Congress, 1997; 1991; Miller, 2011a, Miller, 2011b; KDE, 2013).

The Family Education Right of Privacy Act (FERPA) protects students’ rights to privacy of their educational records. FERPA also allows access to these records to family members who are in charge of students under the age of 18. FERPA includes in its definition of parent “an individual acting as a parent in the absence of a parent or a guardian” (34 CFR § 99.3). KDE adheres to this definition of parents, but advises school districts to encourage informal kinship care providers to obtain power of attorney (KDE, 2013).

Informal caregivers may also make educational decisions for their grandchildren. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) guarantees the right to free and appropriate education for children with disabilities based on students’ individual needs and the input of their parents in educational decision-making (American Psychological Association, 2014). According to the U.S. DOE (2004), IDEA changed its definition of parent:

The definition of parent in Sec. 300.21 has been revised to substitute ‘biological’ for ‘natural’ each time it appears in the definition, and to add language clarifying that to be considered a parent under this definition a ‘guardian’ must be a person generally
authorized to act as the child’s parent, or authorized to make educational decisions for the child. (para. 11) KDE has interpreted this definition of parent to include an individual acting in the place of a biological or adoptive parent (including a grandparent, stepparent, or other relative) with whom the child lives, or an individual who is responsible for the child’s welfare. This definition encompasses grandparents raising grandparents who have informal custody of grandchildren” (Peabody & Wickersham, 2013). Therefore, grandparents who have all forms of formal or informal custody have a right to make decisions on behalf of their grandchildren and be informed of any plans the school makes in regards to their education (Peabody & Wickersham, 2013).

School procedures for sharing information regarding disciplinary hearings or criminal activities fall under §KRS158.148 and §KRS 158.444. These statutes define adults who may have access to discipline records as “parents, legal guardians, or other persons exercising custodial control or supervision”. In addition, §KRS 158.444 refers to FERPA, which under the interpretation of KDE, includes all informal and formal caregivers with whom the child resides. Therefore, all GRG have the right to review and challenge student discipline records (§KRS 158.444).

Currently, permission for medical services for grandparents with no legal relationship or power of attorney appears to be a district decision and ambiguous at the state level. Formal kinship care providers may consent to medical examinations or treatments at school, advise the child under their guardianship, and have access to medical records (§KRS 387.065; §KRS 403.270; §KRS 27A.095). However, KDE does not provide information on consent for treatment if the grandparent does not have a legal relationship with the grandchild. In fact, such decisions appear to be the prerogative of
the school district. The KDE (2013) Health Reference Guide (HRGS) states, “Each school district is responsible for developing written policies and procedures that identify and remove physical and mental barriers to learning.” (p. 1)

In addition, KDE online medical forms that verify consent for outside treatment ask for signature from parent or legal guardian, implying that only formal caregivers or caregivers with power of attorney may provide consent. Conversely, KDE states in a letter to school districts on caregiving, “As stated in the statute, an informal caregiver may be given the authority to make educational and medical decisions for a child by the parent/guardian and this arrangement is informal” but appears to be referring to those caregivers who have obtained power of attorney (KDE, 2013).

**Barriers to School Engagement with Grandparents Raising Grandchildren**

Even though Kentucky state-level policies provide informal kinship caregivers rights to their grandchildren’s education, these grandparents may still be at a disadvantage. There are no guarantees that every school system is aware of, or strictly adheres to KDE regulations regarding caregiver rights. Moreover, research indicates grandparents who provide informal care are less secure in their roles as caregivers, and may refuse to ask school staff for assistance fearing that to do so may reduce or diminish their own authority or cause them to be declared unfit (Letiecq et al., 2008; Strozier, McGrew, Krisman & Smith, 2005). Also, grandparents who have established a legal relationship with their grandchildren expressed greater confidence in their authority, rights, and responsibilities as caregivers, specifically in school engagement (Landry-Meyer & Newman, 2004). Regardless of legal caregiving status, many grandparents are
unsure of their role in supporting their grandchildren’s education (Strom & Strom, 2000; Strozier, 2012).

Research suggests children raised by grandparents have significantly greater levels and intensities of behavioral and emotional difficulties than same-age peer groups who were raised by biological parents (Edwards, 2006; Smith & Palmieri, 2007) as observed by both teachers (Edwards, 2006) and GRG (Smith & Palmieri, 2007). Furthermore, Edwards (2006) found that teachers referred these grandchildren to counselors and principals more often. It should not be assumed that these problems are the result of poor parenting skills on the part of grandparents. Some research suggested that these emotional and behavioral challenges are most likely the result of traumatic circumstances and events that led to grandparents assuming care (Dobowitz, Fiegelman, Harrington, Starr, Zuravin, & Sawyer, 1994; Edwards, 2008) such as abuse, neglect, and deprivation of cognitive stimulation (Dobowitz et al., 1994). However, Doblin-McNab (2006) suggests that these grandparents may be less strict with grandchildren than they were with their own children, and that they may experience more difficulty dealing with grandchild conflict and discipline. Grandparents have also expressed dissatisfaction with non-corporal punishment policies that they feel leave schools powerless to effectively discipline their grandchildren (Baird & Hayslip, 2000).

The perceptions of grandparents raising grandchildren among professionals providing services may also have an impact on the services grandparents receive. In their study of young professionals’ perceptions of GRG, Hayslip et al.(2009) found grandparents who assumed the care of their grandchildren as a result of child abuse or parental incarceration were perceived by young professionals as less competent
caregivers than grandparents whose children had died and left grandchildren in their custody. These young professionals also assumed behavioral difficulties among grandchildren were the result of poor parenting on the part of grandparents. Ironically, Hayslip et al. (2009) assert such biases may have a greater negative impact on grandparents who are perceived as more competent to care for their grandchildren.

Grandparents who provide kinship care because parents were engaged in illegal activities or had grandchildren with disabilities were perceived to need more assistance than grandparents who inherited their grandchildren as a result of the death of parents. These perceptions may result in the latter receiving less help and fewer resources regardless of their actual need for services (Hayslip et al., 2009).

School Practices to Engage Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Research findings suggest that grandparent-school engagement challenges can be met through special services provided by schools (Doblin-McNabb, 2006; Strozier, 2012) such as parenting classes (Doblin-McNabb, 2006), support groups (Strozier, 2012), and access to outside resources (Strom & Strom, 2000). Chenoweth (2000) recommends these programs be catered to the specific needs of grandparent, not general kinship care or parenting, with goals and objectives based on the specific needs of the ethnic, cultural, and geographic demographics of each group. Instead of focusing on the weaknesses and limitations, these services should build on the strengths of these grandparents. Recommended content may include helping grandparents meet their personal needs as well as becoming empowered self-advocates (Chenoweth, 2000). Although these services could be offered in community centers or churches, Montoro-Rodriguez, Smith, and Palmieri (2012) found that grandparents are more likely to use services provided in
the schools than in the surrounding community. In addition, schools are convenient in timing and location. Many grandparents transport their grandchildren to school and find they can more easily attend support groups after dropping off their grandchildren (Burnette, 1998).

**Appalachian Culture**

Appalachian values and cultural practices are similar to those in other rural American settings; however, this region possesses its own history and distinctive practices, setting it apart from other regions that share its demographics (Keefe, 1998). Geographically, Appalachia is comprised of 13 states that include parts of Alabama, North Carolina, Georgia, New York, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and all of West Virginia (Keefe, 1998). The region’s history is known for the exploitation of its natural resources and labor, which has resulted in persistent poverty for its inhabitants (Eller, 1982; Lichter & Cimbaluk, 2012; Loof, 1971; Walls & Billings, 1997). Derogatory stereotypes cultivated during the turn of the century are still referenced in discussions of Appalachian people and evident in the use of the terms *rednecks* and *hillbillies* in pop culture (Batteau, 1982; Banks, Billings & Tice, 2007; Walls & Billings, 1977).

**Family and Place**

Kinship and family relations are highly valued in Appalachia (Beaver, 1986a; Eller, 1982; Halperin, 1990; Keefe, 1988). Unlike mainstream culture in the U.S., the term family often extends beyond the nuclear unit to encompass aunts, uncles, and cousins (Keefe, 1988). Although sometimes subtly expressed through deeply rooted social norms, kinship provides networks of support and reciprocity (Batteau, 1982;
Beaver, 1986a; Halperin, 1990; Keefe, 1988) that affect political decision-making (Batteau, 1982; Billings et al., 1986; Eller, 1982; Keefe, 1988), and the sharing of resources (Billings et al., 1986; Keefe, 1988). According to Keefe (1998), “These obligations and benefits demonstrate why kinship is so important in Appalachian communities; kinship is intertwined with all aspects of life: political, economic, social, and moral” (p. 29).

According to Jones (1994), “Our place is close to our minds…and it makes it hard for us to leave the mountains, and when we do, we long to return” (p. 99). Place, as it is often connected to family history, is also highly valued by Appalachians (Eller, 1982; Jones, 1994; Keefe, 1988). Kinship ties the people of this region to the land, to other Appalachians, within both family and community, and to a history that is deeply rooted in the concept of place (Beaver, 1986a; Halperin, 1990). In many communities being able to trace one’s lineage back to their founders is key to acceptance and identity (Beaver, 1986a).

A deeply rooted sense of place and resistance to leaving the community may also extend to the concept of the family school. According to Howley (2006), it is not uncommon for generations of Appalachian families to attend the same school, and regardless of changes in the economic conditions or quality of educational resources, these families may not consider relocating to another area for better educational opportunities. They may work hard to avoid consolidation of smaller rural schools, especially if it means losing the school where generations of their family members attended (Howley, 2006).
According to Beaver (1986), children are a valuable and cherished resource in Appalachian communities, a “gift from heaven” (p. 82). When a child is born the entire community celebrates because “culturally, children are a source of joy, pride, and pleasure,” (Beaver, 1986b, p. 82). Fitchen (1982), in her study of Appalachian families, found that even those who may have difficult relationships with their offspring, fear the loss of the child through death or in more recent times the interference of government in family life through child protection laws and practices.

Among the earliest Appalachian settlers, “transgressions against the social mores left its mark not only upon the individual, but upon the larger family unit” (Eller, 1982, p. 30). Even in modern times the collective reputation of a family acts as a framework for the community to interpret and understand the character and behaviors of all its members (Batteau, 1982; Bryant, 1981). Kinship groups are presumed to show similar personality traits among its members, a result of family genetics and socialization. Kinship groups, through association of last name, may also be referred to as though they all share the same social attributes (Beaver, 1986b; Bryant, 1981; Keefe, 1988).

**Schooling**

The lines between family, community, and school are often blurred in smaller, rural communities. It is not uncommon for teachers and administrators to serve as church elders, Sunday school teachers, or leaders for civic and community groups. Many of these activities take place at the school after hours because, other than churches, the school building is one of the only places to meet. As a result, many school staff members have intimate knowledge of schools’ families and their histories (DeYoung, 2002).
Tension between family, place, and school may have an impact on schooling in the Appalachian region. Students may feel conflicting social pressures between home and school, and families must sometimes choose between supporting their children’s educational and career aspirations and resisting education to insure the continuity of family and place (Brown, Copeland, Costello, Erkanli, & Worthman, 2009; Hendrickson, 2012; Howley, 2006). Some of the poorest counties in the U.S. are located in Central Appalachia; therefore, upward mobility very often means relocating to another place and the loss of future generations’ connection to the land they call home. School values may also become increasingly unfamiliar to rural Appalachians and lead parents and students to question application of educational values to daily life (Brown et al., 2009; Hendrickson, 2012; Howley, 2006; Schwarzeller & Brown, 1962). Howley, (2006) describes the social tension between school and family thus:

School, then, socializes students to behave in ways that are not distinctively rural, so that they might pursue a broader spectrum of employment opportunities, a circumstance that undermines the family’s commitment to rural ways of living and behaving. This tension is one a colleague of mine has called “learnin’ ‘em to leave”. In other words, rural parents often see schools as educating their children for jobs and lifestyles not available in rural places. (p. 75)

Students whose families seek to keep them in the community may send messages, some overt and some subtle, on the choices that will eventually be made between careers far away and family back home (Hendrikson, 2012; Howley, 2006). Some students who wish to remain in the community may find the academic subjects completely irrelevant to their futures in small rural communities (Hendrickson, 2012).
Theoretical Framework

Epstein’s Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence provides a rationale for the interaction among the three distinctly different, but interdependent parts of a child’s life. Each of the three spheres of influence—school, family, and community—overlap, with the children they serve as the central focus (Epstein, 1995; Epstein, 2011; Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders & Simon, 1997; Simon & Epstein, 2001).

Epstein places the child in the center of these three spheres, and draws a distinction between the term student and child in her theory, arguing that in order to be effective learning institutions, schools must reframe their perspectives to serve children instead of students. Epstein makes this distinction because children, as opposed to students, have influences outside of school that are crucial to their academic and developmental success. Therefore, schools must make conscious decisions to engage the family and community spheres in order to provide the most effective education to each child.

When all three spheres communicate and collaborate, they help to create family-like schools that nurture and care for their children and families, and school-like families that acknowledge the importance of school in the lives of their children. When schools encourage families to work together for their schools, they foster a wider community that creates new opportunities for their children. At the same time, community-minded families are aware of and supportive of their school communities and neighbors (Epstein, 1995; Epstein, 2011; Epstein et al., 1997; Simon & Epstein, 2001).
Figure 1.1 Overlapping Spheres of Influence of Family, School, and Community on Children’s Learning: External Structure


The external structure demonstrates the contextual influences, practices, philosophies, and histories of each sphere on a child’s learning. The arrows in this model represent the movement of these spheres according to their perspectives and practices. Spheres may be “pushed together or pulled apart” (Simon & Epstein, 2001, p. 3) according to the degree to which responsibilities are interconnected in supporting the educational needs of the child as well as the vision and perspectives of the actors. The overlapping of spheres may change with time. The age and grade level of the student may dictate the extent to which family and community may overlap because parents may
feel less confident in their ability to engage in schools as their children become older (Epstein, 1995; Epstein, 2011; Epstein et al., 1997; Simon & Epstein, 2001).

Overlapping spheres indicate the sharing of influence and activities among families, school, and community. All three do not have to share in practices. For example, school and the family share activities such as parent nights and orientations while some activities such as service learning projects may be organized and implemented by a community group and school without family involvement. Family and community, such as church gatherings, are shared between family and community to benefit the child. Finally, school, community, and family share activities when community organizations provide educational or health services to families at the schools (Epstein, 1995; Epstein, 2011; Epstein et al., 1997; Simon & Epstein, 2001).

Figure 1.2 Overlapping Spheres of Influence: Internal Structure

The internal model represents interpersonal interactions among school, family and community that may be activated through the collaborative efforts of the people in each sphere (Epstein, 1987, 2001; Epstein et al., 1997) and sets the child at the center of the model as the reason why parents, educators, and community interact. These interactions may take place as the institutional level such as activities in which community and/or family is invited, or individual level such as a private meeting between parent and teacher (Epstein et al., 1997; Simon & Epstein, 2001). Epstein’s complete internal model includes the community sphere the community and business represented in interactions. The original internal model included the community sphere with business and community agents. However, Epstein later modified this model to include only family and school to focus on the interpersonal relationships of family and school to meet the developmental and needs of the child (Epstein et al., 1997).

It must be noted that the completion of shared activities does not ensure their efficacy. In order to have a positive impact, activities must be well designed and implemented. However, the connection among spheres may create family-like schools, and school-like families, meeting the needs of each individual child (Simon & Epstein, 2001).

As an extension of this theory, Epstein developed a framework of Six Types of Involvement for Comprehensive Programs of Partnerships. Family engagement is comprised of six categories including: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. Each type of involvement presents its own challenges and rewards (Epstein, 2011).
According to Epstein (2001), parenting involves providing assistance to caregivers in refining parenting skills, gaining a greater knowledge in the development of children, and creating a home environment conducive to intellectual development. In turn, this category also involves helping the school better understand families and their communities. Communication involves two-way communication between families and schools so that parents are not always the recipients of information, but also have a voice in asking questions and offering insight on their children’s needs, challenges, and strengths as well as their goals for their children’s futures. In order to be effective, this communication should be free of jargon and messages culturally sensitive.

Volunteering includes the recruitment, training and retention of families in meaningful school activities (Epstein, 2001). Volunteers can do more than make bulletin boards and photocopies. Parents can act as mentors and coaches as well as language interpreters (Epstein, 2008). Learning at home takes place when parents engage in homework and meaningful learning activities at home with their children. It may also include home support for students struggling in academic subjects as well as exercises to lead parents through goal setting based on students’ academic reports (Epstein, 2008). Parents must be involved in decision-making, beginning with the school’s mission statement. Their voices should be heard in designing school policies and procedures, on school-improvement committees and school-based councils (Epstein, 2008). Collaboration with the community involves the school acting as a bridge between parents and essential services for families (Epstein, 2011). Working as a mediating force, schools can help families receive information from religious organization, government
services, and religious communities and assist families in volunteering for organizations in the communities they serve (Epstein, 2008).

This chapter reviewed literature relevant to the study. The following chapter describes the research methods that were implemented in this study. It includes the purpose, research questions and sub-questions, as well as the approach and methods for collecting and analyzing data. Finally, it describes the study site and participants as well as some ethical considerations relevant to these participants.
CHAPTER 3
Methodology

The previous chapter provided an overview of the scholarly literature, law, and policies related to this study. This chapter describes the methodology for this study. It describes the approach, Grounded Theory, its history, philosophical and theoretical assumptions, and methods of collecting and analyzing data as employed in this study. It also provides the rationale for selecting this approach to answer the research questions. Finally, this chapter includes descriptions of the setting, participants, and discussion of ethical considerations in regard to the participants as well as the study’s limitations.

Grounded Theory

In the mid-1960s, qualitative research was losing its standing in the research community (Charmaz, 2006). The positivist view perceived qualitative methods as unreliable, biased, and lacking in rigor, relying more on vague impressions than valid data. In response, Glaser and Strauss (1967) pioneered systematic guidelines for the collection and analysis of qualitative data through the ongoing, constant comparison of data. Exploring the experiences of terminally ill patients, Glaser and Strauss were able to collect rich, in-depth materials on the lived experiences of these individuals and construct theories relevant to the field of medicine (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1999). Over time, grounded theory has taken different forms but maintains its focus on continuous collection and analysis of data, the emergence of categories, theoretical sampling, and the construction of theory (Charmaz, 2006).

Grounded theory was the best approach to answer this study’s research questions and develop original theory. School leaders creating and nurturing positive and
productive relationships with grandparents raising grandchildren, like many social phenomena, is complex and multifaceted. Grounded theory design addresses the complexity of this topic because it allows for the development of multiple concepts and identifies their connections in order to form a theory on the phenomenon that is “conceptually dense” (Strauss, 1987, p. 10).

Furthermore, Creswell (2013) recommends grounded theory design when theory on the phenomena in question has not yet been developed, or if extant theories on the same topic have been developed among a different sample population different from that of the study. Earlier studies on grandparents raising grandchildren focus on the wellbeing of GRG (Baird, John & Hayslip, 2000; Baker, 2000; Baker & Silverstein, 2008; Doblin-MacNab, 2006; Hayslip & Kaminiski, 2005; Kelly, Whitley, Sipe, & Yorker, 2000; Laudry-Myer & Newman, 2004; Minkler & Fuller-Thomson, 1999; Musil, Nahida, Warner, Zauszniewski, Standing & Wykle, 2010; Musil, Warner, Zauszniewski, Wykle, & Standing, 2010; Myadze, 2012; Phillips & Bloom, 1998; Solomon & Marx, 2000; Strom & Strom, 2000) and barriers to school involvement from grandparent perspectives (Baird, John & Hayslip, 2000; Baker, 2000; Gerard, Landry-Meyer, & Roe, 2006; Letiecq, Bailey & Porterfield, 2008; Rogers, 2000; Smith & Palmieri, 2007; Strozier, McGrew, Krisman & Smith, 2005). Although studies have documented successful grandparent support programs implemented in schools, (Burnette, 1998; Chenoweth, 2000; Gerard, Landry-Meyer, & Roe, 2006; Rodrigues, Smith, Palmieri, 2012; Strozier, 2012) there is a dearth of literature on how school leaders effectively engage grandparents raising grandchildren. Moreover, none of the studies above focus on school leaders in Central Appalachia.
This study’s purpose and design adhered to grounded theory’s philosophical and theoretical assumptions. Consistent with this approach’s underlying ontological assumption that acknowledges multiple realities as reported through the different perspectives of the people who experienced these realities (Creswell, 2013), I examined how school leaders create and nurture positive and productive relationships with grandparents raising grandchildren through the multiple lenses of those experiencing this phenomenon: elementary school principals and GRG.

In keeping with the epistemology of grounded theory, the subjectivity of knowledge gained from information collected, I reduced the distance between the topic and myself and spent significant time with both principals and grandparents (Creswell, 2013), and sought to better understand the phenomenon through their subjective voices. As recommended by Charmaz (2006) I remained cognizant of my inability to perceive or recreate these experiences exactly as perceived by the participants.

Grounded theory’s axiological assumption acknowledges the existence of values and biases of both researcher and actors (Cresswell, 2013). In memos and field notes I acknowledged and explored the assumptions, values, and interpretations that both the actors and I brought to this emergent study. Through field notes and memos, I also document preexistent personal experiences, knowledge, and attitudes that influenced the interpretation of data and overall direction of the study.

Consistent with grounded theory’s methodological construct, this study relied on both inductive and deductive processes (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2013) as discussed later. Adhering to the earlier works of Strauss and Corbin (1987), this design drew on the interpretational framework of post positivism, which approaches research through
systematic and structured steps to analyze data (Creswell, 2013; Strauss, 1987). Rigorous and consistent methods were employed to gain insight of multiple perspectives that were continuously reduced to their key theoretical constructs. I acknowledged the deductive nature of selecting a topic based on my past knowledge and experiences and the formation of categorical hypotheses based on coding and later verified by fieldwork (Creswell, 2013; Strauss, 1987).

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Like many qualitative approaches, this study’s design was emergent, and utilized the researcher as the primary instrument for the study, but unlike other approaches, I began to analyze, categorize, and code data early in the study, allowing this analysis to shape the study. It did not follow a linear approach in which the data collection and analysis phases were kept separate; instead, as new data were collected they were continuously compared to earlier established patterns that emerged from earlier data. This *constant comparative method* pioneered by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s involved the ongoing, systematic merging of the data and collection process from which relevant theory emerged (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). Although I followed the advice of several grounded theorists, the methods for collecting and analyzing data relied heavily on the work of Strauss and Corbin (1998) in coding procedures.

Ongoing comparative analysis of data served different purposes. First, the comparison of data as it was collected generated properties for defining and redefining categories. Second, this analysis sifted and sorted data within each category, and thirdly, it verified data. Finally, this analysis determined whether or not the data was saturated and the theory fully conceptualized (Glaser & Strauss, 1999).
Data collection included intensive interviews composed of semi-structured questions (Appendix A). Intensive interviews allowed me to dig deeper into the information presented by each participant, refocus the conversation to zero in on the most relevant statements, and explore the emotions and impressions the participants associated with these experiences. During these interviews I asked follow-up questions based on the responses of the participants, seeking clarification to gain accurate information from all the actors (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1999). I followed the advice of Charmaz (2006) to novice researchers and relied on brief, open-ended questions constructed to encourage each participant to join in the conversation and allow for spontaneous sharing of experiences, thoughts, and feelings. I remained cognizant of hesitations and body language that may have indicated the emotions connected to statements. Moreover, I made it my priority to attempt to understand the point of view of the participants and “validate its significance to this person” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 29). Because this research topic examined the work of principals within their schools, I followed Charmaz’s (2006) advice and first concentrated interview questions on institutional practices, then later during the same interview, focused on the participants’ experiences with and within their schools.

The interview questions (Appendix A) were aligned to the research questions and sub questions. These questions were also influenced by knowledge I gained from my review of literature (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) on ways schools create and sustain positive and productive relationships with families, as well as challenges facing grandparents raising grandchildren. The length of time for each interview varied because some participants were very comfortable talking about their experiences on the topic and
connected to the initial interview questions. These participants spoke freely and easily, providing ample details that allowed for an in-depth exploration of the topic without the need for many follow-up questions. Other participants provided limited, less in-depth responses and called for further questions (Charmaz, 2006).

Because this study examined principal leadership within school environments, I based the types of questions on the advice of Charmaz (2006) about constructing interview questions designed to explore topics on organizational practices keeping in mind practices and leadership are not interchangeable. This design directed “questions to practice first, and later … to the individual’s participation in them and views of them” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 29). Furthermore, I replicated her three-step interview protocol and designed initial open-ended questions, intermediate questions, and ending questions. Open-ended questions sought to evoke a broader exploration of the topic, in this case, focusing on school practices. Intermediate questions have been designed to dig deeper into the participant’s personal experiences, actions and feelings. These questions circle back to those explored in the initial open-ended questions, seeking evidence to affirm and elucidate at a more personal level data collected earlier in the interview. As Charmaz (2006) suggests, I focused the ending questions on positive experiences with the purpose of closing the interview on a positive and less intensely personal note (Charmaz, 2006). Further, Charmaz (2006) advises, “No interview should end abruptly after an interviewer has asked the most searching questions or when the participant is distressed. Bring the interview back to normal conversational level at the end” (p. 29). All questions employed language familiar to both the grandparents and the school principals.
Charmaz (2006) suggests the use of audio recorders so the interviewer can fully attend to the interviewee, maintain eye contact, and allow the interviewer to absorb all the details discussed in the interview. However, McMillan and Schumacher (2010) recommend the use of handwritten notes as part of the data in order to encourage the interviewer to stay focused and provide greater insight on observations collected during the interview. Therefore, I used the iPad application QuickVoice Pro downloaded to my iPad to record the interviews. Originally I planned to simultaneously take notes during the interview; however, during the first interview I observed this practice detracted from my focus on the conversation and appeared to make the participant uncomfortable. As a result, adhering to the advice of McMillan and Schumacher (2010) I wrote field notes by hand after each interview to fill in any gaps on observations of body language, tone, or hesitations. Moreover, I recorded notes on my own reflexivity, any biases I may have perceived in my inward and outward responses to the data revealed and explored during the interview (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

I transcribed interviews verbatim, listening to the audio and typing both my interview questions and participant responses. I then listened to the audio a second time while reading the transcription to verify word-for-word accuracy. During the second audio review, I also took notes on any changes in the tone of the participant's voice or hesitations that may have indicated discomfort or reluctance with exploration of the topic (Charmaz, 2006).

**Coding**

Grounded theory methods of interpretation and collection of data involve inductive, deductive, and verification processes, in a constant comparative method of
collecting and analyzing data (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1999). Throughout the
data collection and analysis, the categories were combined or discarded according the
direction the data took. As more data were collected and compared to earlier materials
categories were refined or refuted. Data were continuously collected until no new
categories emerged. In the end, theory emerged grounded in the data collected (Charmaz,
2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1999).

In this study, coding was divided into a two-stage process of initial and axial
coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Initial coding placed labels on segments of data, lines
of transcription, with the intent to both summarize each piece and then place them into
categories. This initial phase was completed quickly, applying simple, concise and brief
codes, concentrating on the actual words of the participants without ignoring any
materials or reflexivity (Charmaz, 2006). Adhering to Charmaz’s advice, these codes
were stated in gerunds (Charmaz, 2006). This stage allowed for the collection of a wide
variety of data that was carefully disassembled into smaller parts, line-by-line (Straus &
Corbin, 1998). Some of these codes were based on my past experiences as a teacher or
leader and knowledge of extant literature on challenges facing grandparents, while some
were taken directly from the language of the participants in vivo (Strauss, 1998). For
example, one of the principals used the term meeting GRG needs by need and by name, to
describe the approach she takes to meeting the needs of families in her school district.
This term became a category, and subsequently part of the dissertation title.

Once these data were disassembled, smaller pieces were analyzed and grouped
into categories according to their “conceptual similarities” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.
102), data that shared similar ideas and concepts. These similarities became “provisional
hypotheses” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 68) on the engagement of GRG. In order to verify these hypotheses, I continued to collect data and made continuous comparisons to earlier data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

During the axial coding phase, I examined the properties and dimensions of each category and looked for relationships among other categories unified by the central, axial category. Through selective coding, categories were further refined and combined into core categories. Throughout the process I remained reflective and sensitive to the data, allowing impressions and intuition to help guide my process while remaining objective and giving voice to the respondents (Straus & Corbin, 1998). As stated earlier, this step was not linear. I often choose to return to line-by-line, segmented coding to identify new codes to verify newly formed axial codes. I also returned to earlier coded data and recoded according to new discoveries (Charmaz, 2006).

**Member Checking**

In order to verify the data I recorded accurately reflected the information and perspectives communicated by the participants, I sought feedback from the respondents on the data I previously collected. I typed descriptions of each interview, which included my impressions and relevant participant narrative. These narratives were mailed to the participants who were asked to modify any information for accuracy. The data obtained from the participants were integrated into the study’s data.

**Memos**

Memos consisted of handwritten notes I created on ongoing comparisons of data, codes, definitions, and categories as well as my thought process and decision-making. Memos explored implicit meanings and intuitive impressions I perceived leading to
revelations on data or directions the research took. I continuously classified memos into their own categories and integrated them into theoretical constructs. Memos also documented the saturation of data through duplications of concepts and properties (Charmaz, 2006).

**Saturation**

According to Charmaz (2006), “Categories are saturated when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of these core theoretical categories” (p. 112). Saturation in this study was determined when each theoretical category was thoroughly examined and gaps were filled. This stage was determined through careful analysis of the data collected for each theoretical category, the relationships among the categories, and the richness and thoroughness of data collected to explicate them. This determined the completeness of the theories developed through the process, not the repetitive statements of participants. I continued to theoretically sample and collect data on each category until the process no longer yields new properties for these categories (Charmaz, 2006).

**Researcher as Instrument**

As the researcher conducting a qualitative study, I was the instrument. I played the part of active learner as I continuously interacted with the data that guided and refined the study (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It was necessary to remain flexible and sensitive to the narratives of the participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As the instrument, I interpreted the subjective perspectives of these actors as they expressed their experiences and impressions, acknowledging that values, knowledge, and
experiences influence the data that emerged from this inductive process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The role of researcher utilizing the grounded theory approach also demanded creativity as described by Strauss and Corbin (1998):

Creativity manifests itself in the ability of researchers to aptly name categories, ask stimulating questions, make comparisons, and extract an innovative, integrated, realistic scheme from masses of unorganized raw data. It is a balance between science and creativity that we strive for in doing research. (p. 13)

As the instrument, I began this study with previous experiences related to the research question. I have experienced the phenomena as a child raised in a grandfamily. For five years, my own parents raised my biological niece and nephew in the same home where I grew up. For eight years I was a third and fourth grade teacher, and struggled to communicate and collaborate with grandparents raising grandchildren. These experiences enhanced my role as the instrument.

Consistent with the advice of Taylor and Bogden (1998), I worked to establish common experiences with the participants. When appropriate, I shared my experiences as a child raised in a grandfamily and teacher in the school district with participants to both establish rapport and to communicate my personal motivation for pursuing the answers to my research questions. My own experiences also created a context to better understand the phenomenon being studied in the language interviewees employed. Additionally, they allowed me to convey a sincere empathy for the participants to prevent defensiveness on the part of the participants (Taylor & Bogden, 1998).

I also entered this research with extant knowledge on the topic. I have reviewed literature on the challenges facing GRG, educational leadership, and Appalachian culture. Glaser and Strauss (1999) caution against the intrusion of extant experiences or literature
that may consciously or unconsciously shape coding of data, the emergence of categories, or the construction of theory. As stated above, I have both extant knowledge and experiences related to the research question that influenced my interpretation of data and the direction of the study. In order to address these threats, reflexivity strategies were implemented. Throughout the study, I remained reflective of my earlier involvement in the phenomenon in order to bracket, or set aside, preconceptions connected to the phenomenon that intruded on my interpretation of data so that the participants could speak for themselves (Creswell, 2013). This allowed me to accurately interact with the data in coding and categorizing data (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1999). These practices were documented in my field notes and coding memos.

In addition to the aforementioned factors, gender, educational, and economic demographics must be acknowledged, understanding that these differences between participants and myself posed potential impact on the responses each participant provided (Charmaz, 2006). I am college-educated and relatively affluent compared to the grandparents selected for this study, which could have created communication barriers. I am also female which could have presented barriers to communication with the male participants selected for the study. It was important that I remained aware of these differences during my collection and analysis of data so that these differences did not unduly influence my decision-making (Charmaz, 2006).

Participant Selection

The purpose of this study was to examine how school principals create and nurture positive and productive relationships with grandparents raising grandchildren. I interviewed school principals to collect data on if and how they brought together the
resources of the school, family members, and community to positively affect the learning of GRG and the grandchildren, ensure that grandparents were involved in decision-making regarding the education of the grandchildren in their care, and ensured that grandparents are involved in two-way communication about the education of the grandchildren in their care. I also interviewed grandparents whose grandchildren were enrolled in the schools. As categories emerged through coding, relational and variational sampling was conducted in order to identify grandparents and school principals who could provide data on properties and ranges of these properties and lead to the emergence of theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Sampling continued until saturation of the categories took place.

Initial sampling cast a wide net to collect data on the participants listed above, then as coded data merges and memos begin to bring theoretical categories to the surface, sampling decisions reflected the data needed to further explain, provide further analysis, or fill in gaps. I also identified negative cases, those participants in the theoretical sampling stage whose perceptions and experiences were not consistent with the identified categories and utilized the data collected to refute these categories (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1999).

**Study Sites**

The selection of sites was directed by the research questions. I worked with six elementary schools located in the southeastern region of Kentucky. As indicated in the descriptive data below, the schools serve a low-socioeconomic region where a substantial number of grandparents raising grandchildren reside (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013d). The sites were also selected because they provided accessibility and availability to me
(Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I had established rapport with the central office staff as a professional development provider and grant writer.

The following data provides information on the county, schools, and study participants. These data are not comprehensive. Instead, only the information relevant to the research question has been included. To maintain the anonymity of the participants, fictitious names were created for the county, school district, and schools. The school demographical data were collected from the most recent Kentucky Department of Education’s (KDE) online 2014-2015 School Report Cards.

**Hamilton County**

Hamilton County is located in Eastern Kentucky. According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s 5-year estimate (2009-2013), 20% of Hamilton County’s adults fell below the poverty line in income with 29% of the county’s children living in poverty. Only 52% of the population was classified as in the labor force. Approximately 18% of the county’s population was enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), a food-assistance program based on income, and 42% receive income from Social Security (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (2013), 347 grandparents, both single and married, living in Hamilton County were living with and responsible for grandchildren during the period of 2009-2013. Most (94%) of these grandparents self-identified their race as White and all were native U.S. citizens. The majority of these grandparents (68%) were under 60 years old, 74% were female. Most grandparents were married (57%). Only 18% of these grandparents were still in the labor
force, and 29% had incomes that fell below the poverty line. Most of these GRG owned the homes they lived in (84%). Over half the grandparents were disabled (58%).

Culturally, the inhabitants of the county are identified as Appalachian. Studies have suggested strong familial bonds direct social practices in Appalachian communities (Batteau, 1982; Beaver, 1986a; Bryant, 1981; Jones, 1994). This research acknowledged, when relevant and appropriate, the emergent theory’s connection to earlier research on Appalachian culture and familial ties. However, reflexivity strategies, as previously described in researcher as instrument, were employed in order to prevent cultural generalizations contaminating data.

**Hamilton County Schools**

According to the Kentucky School Report Card for 2015-2016, Hamilton County Schools served approximately 4,500 students kindergarten through 12th grade. The district experienced a decrease in enrollment by nearly 100 students from the previous year, a concern for many of the principals in this study. Membership by gender was 52% male and 48% female, and 97% were identified as White (Not Hispanic). Sixty percent of the students received free or reduced price lunches. During the cited academic year, over half the students’ parents attended at least one teacher conference, and 95 of the parents or guardians voted in the SBDM elections. The district logged 20,856 hours of volunteer service hours provided in the schools, nearly twice the numbers reported the previous year.

In terms of academic performance accountability, the district scored in the 74th percentile in the state’s school and district accountability system, substantially higher in comparison to neighboring school districts (Phillips 69.8, Greenhill 68.1, Wilburn 60.8,
Easterling, 62.6, and Phillips 70.1). As a result, the district was classified as *Distinguished* and was placed in the category of *School of Distinction*. Of the 2016 graduating class, 56% of Hamilton’s students attended college full-time, 5% reported attending college part-time and working, and 4.9% were enrolled in technical or vocational school. A quarter (25%) of these high school graduates were employed and 1.7% were serving in the military. Almost 10% fell under KDE’s category of *unsuccessful*, meaning they were not employed, nor were they enrolled in postsecondary education or training.

During the 2014-2015 academic year, Hamilton School District employed 296 teachers. The staff was not diverse; 80% of the teachers are female and only one teacher is not white. The majority of the teachers have a graduate degree (approximately 80%), and 19 teachers were National Board Certified. Only 1% of teachers held emergency or provisional certification, meaning that these teachers do not hold teaching certificates in the subject or grade level they have been assigned to teach. The teacher to student ratio was 1:15. Table 3.1 below provides student enrollment, teacher demographics, and parent involvement data for the Hamilton district schools included in the study.
Table 3.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Ebon Hill</th>
<th>Notch Gap</th>
<th>Lincoln Clay</th>
<th>Pine Grove</th>
<th>West Mason</th>
<th>Whitman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Blevins</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>Sloan</td>
<td>McPherson</td>
<td>Gleson</td>
<td>Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRL %</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Non-Hispanic %</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student: Teacher</td>
<td>16:1</td>
<td>12:1</td>
<td>12:1</td>
<td>14:1</td>
<td>15:1</td>
<td>15:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Rating</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>Distinguished</td>
<td>Distinguished</td>
<td>Distinguished</td>
<td>Needs Improvement</td>
<td>Needs Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer Hours</td>
<td>2,009</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>1,124</td>
<td>2,600</td>
<td>9,898</td>
<td>1,150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children whose parents attended teacher conference</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants

In order to proceed with the study, I obtained institutional approval from the University of Kentucky’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) to collect data. The topic of this study is sensitive. Often custodial grandparents express feelings of shame for the events that led to their own biological children’s inability to raise their children (Joslin,
Grandparents become caregivers because their own children are unable or unwilling to care for their own children as a result of death, drug addiction, incarceration, abuse, mental illness, or financial difficulties. Unless a parent dies, the circumstances that lead to a grandparent assuming responsibility of a grandchild are usually considered socially undesirable (Gleeson, Wesley, Ellis, Seryak, Talley & Robinson, 2009).

I obtained informed consent from all the participants. This consent included an explanation in language that was understandable to each different group according to educational level. Prior to the interview I provided the written copy of the consent information to the adults in the study and verbally review of consent information, which included the study’s purpose and the voluntary nature of their participation in the study, the participants’ right to refuse to answer any questions posed, or to withdraw from the study at any time. Information for consent also provided the anticipated duration of the interview, information on any follow-up interviews and the duration of the study. Because this study did not provide any obvious foreseeable benefits, the participants were informed of the potential positive impact this research may have on the lives of grandparents, school leaders, and grandchildren engaging in the school systems. Finally, the consent form described measures taken to preserve confidentiality and anonymity. The identities of the county, school district, and participants all remained confidential through the assignment of fictitious names. I maintained a list of the participants’ actual names and pseudonyms kept in a locked cabinet until the end of the study when this list will be destroyed. All identifiers were removed from field notes and transcriptions.

All interview audio recordings and notes were maintained on a single computer. All backup copies of audio interviews, field notes, memos, and transcriptions were
recorded on an external storage device, which along with all printed materials and notes, remained in a locked cabinet. Due to the sensitive nature of the study, I transcribed the interviews myself. During member checking, I encouraged participants to remove all information they feared might identify them. Transcripts will be retained indefinitely, but are only identifiable by a code assigned to each participant with the key assigning the participant name to an identifying code destroyed at the end of the project. The information obtained in this study may be published in journals or presented at professional meetings, but the names of the participants, schools, or districts will not be revealed in any future publications that may result from the study.

Participants were assured that if they chose not to participate, they would not be penalized by the school system in anyway. This study was not a part of the school district’s procedures therefore their refusal to participate would have no negative ramifications (Hicks, 2014a).

School employees may fear the study could threaten their livelihoods or result in the exposure of what may be perceived as poor performance. For this reason it was important that principals understood how the data would be collected and controlled, who would have access to the data, and how the information would be shared (Rose & Pietri, 2014).

**Principals**

The principals enrolled in this study were all natives of the region. Most were born in Hamilton County or neighboring counties. Their experience serving as principals in their current school ranged from three months to over 20 years, and they all had previously served as teachers and principals in other schools within the school district.
They all described student-centered leadership. Each principal, when asked what
influenced their decision making, reported student need was a central consideration when
making decisions for their schools. Sometimes these needs were collective, sometimes
individual students needs on a case-by-case basis. Although most discussed community
expectations and funding issues, they viewed school accountability and state policy
secondary to student need in making decisions for their schools.

Prior to interviews, the district instructional supervisor scheduled a meeting with
5 of the 6 principals. During this meeting I shared the study’s purpose, timeline, and plan
for data collection and analysis. I answered questions and scheduled interview
appointments with the principals. Mr. Smith did not attend the meeting because he was
not yet the principal of Whitman Elementary. All the principals wanted to be interviewed
at their schools.

Grandparents

The principals of each school gave recruitment letters to the FRC directors to mail
to grandparents raising grandchildren. Mailings included a recruitment letter, my contact
information, a form to indicate interest in participation, and an addressed and stamped
envelope in which to return the form. Collectively, FRC directors requested 237 letters.
Nine grandparents returned interest forms. When contacted, six agreed to participate.
One GRG did not return my phone calls requesting an interview, one scheduled an
interview, did not show up and did not respond to follow-up attempts to schedule another
interview. One GRG could not make time in her busy schedule to meet after
rescheduling three attempted interviews.
All but one grandparent, Karen, chose to be interviewed at their grandchildren’s schools. Karen invited me to her home. All were interviewed during school hours; therefore grandchildren were not present.

The 6 grandparents in this study ranged in ages from 60s to 70s. Half were married, and half were divorced. Only one was a grandfather, and he participated in the interview with his wife. Half were raising only one grandchild and the majority assumed care when the children were infants. All had legally defined relationships with their grandchildren. Only two, the married couple interviewed together, received state financial assistance to compensate for the care of their grandchildren.

Researchers are divided on the inclusion of elderly participants in the vulnerable category (Lawton, 1980; Ostfeld, 1980). Ostfeld argues that the elderly are too heterogeneous in their abilities and empowerment to be considered a vulnerable class, while Lawton (1980) believes that due to cognitive impairment, communication difficulties, and feelings of dependency, this group should be considered vulnerable. I implemented Lawton’s (1980) recommendations and provide written materials in bolder, larger fonts as well as oral explanations of consent form. Otherwise, all other consent considerations were applied to the collection of data and consent for older grandparents.
CHAPTER 4
Principal Data and Findings

The previous chapter described the methodology of the study. The following two chapters, 4 and 5, include a compilation of narrative composed from interviews with principals and grandparents.

Mr. Blevins, Ebon Hill Elementary School

Ebon Hill is the largest elementary school in Hamilton School District, serving nearly 500 students, kindergarten to grade five. A former high school, the building is located on the outskirts of the city of Grundy, and serves both rural and town children. Despite its size, Ebon has a small-school feel. Over each classroom doorway hangs an individually decorated, fabric flag declaring the teacher’s name, and wreaths and posters decorate their doors. Student work is prominently displayed in every hallway. During each of my school visits, the students make eye contact with me, smile and wave. The teachers say, “good morning,” and ask me how I am. It is a highly personal school that exudes a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. However, the calm exterior should not be confused with laissez-faire. Student lines are orderly and straight. The school is very clean. The school schedule is adhered to down to the minute.

This school’s academic data is positive. The free and reduced price lunch (FRL) rate is approximately 15% higher than the state’s but this is not reflected in the school’s academic achievement. In reading, the school outperforms the state average, with 64% of students achieving proficient and distinguished performances. The school is classified as Proficient, ranking it in the top 30th percentile in the state. However, this isn’t good
enough for Ebon’s principal, Mr. Blevins. His goal is at least 80% proficiency for all of his students.

**Leadership**

Mr. Blevins has been the principal of Ebon Elementary for over 13 years. Based on his experience, he knows that on any given day, he may encounter a new challenge, but that the previous outcomes he has experienced as a school leader help him make decisions. As problems arise, he analyzes their causes and decides—based on previous similar situations—what will result in the greatest benefit for the individual child.

He also takes changing community dynamics into consideration: an aging population, economic stagnation due to job loss, and an increase in drug abuse. Consequently, he keeps a close eye on area demographics. Ebon’s FRL percentage has increased by 13% during his tenure as principal, so many of his decisions when dealing with families are influenced more on economic need than who is raising the students. Specifically, he recalled a decision he made to veto raising ticket prices for school dances because he knew the parents in his community were struggling financially.

Another concern for his leadership is the shrinking school population. He has lost over 75 students in the last 10 years, which affects class sizes and the number of teachers he supervises. His current student to teacher ratio of 16:1 is higher than the state’s average of 15:1. Moreover, this decrease in student enrollment has an impact on his school’s funding. He has found that very few mandates from the Kentucky Department of Education have a great impact on his leadership unless they result in funding decreases. He acknowledges that test scores do influence his leadership, and although Ebon’s test scores are positive, he is not in favor of ranking schools.
Mr. Blevins bases his decisions on the individual needs of the child first. As a result, he considers the needs of his students not their caregiving demographics:

The child is the most important part of this whole equation, whether it is raised by a grandparent or parent... Kids who are raised by grandparents don’t necessarily have different situations than kids raised by parents. It’s how they react to those situations that will give us the outcome.

He is aware of which students are raised by grandparents from his daily observations and interactions; however, he does not differentiate between students raised by grandparents and those raised by parents. He feels that it is important school provide the same opportunities to all students regardless of family dynamics or socioeconomic status. He warns that focusing on a child’s circumstances and family background instead of the individual child may lead to biased decision-making. Conversely, decision-making based on individual need, case-by-case, allows him to remain flexible and open in serving both children and their caregivers.

He admits that schools are now responsible for more than just academic achievement. According to Blevins, “We pour all we’ve got into every child. When kids get here we have to educate them first and foremost. We also need to feed and clothe them. When you think about it, we’re about as Christian as an organization can get without being one.”

He also reads a wide variety of research on topics ranging from school leaders to behavioral difficulties among students. During our conversation he referred to findings on parents’ involvement, homework, and shifting learning standards. These influence his leadership, and he shares this information with his teachers when justifying and explaining his decisions.
Family Involvement

In terms of communication, he first adheres to legal rights when sharing information. Once that criteria is met, he and his staff openly share information with the adult who is most invested in the student’s education regardless of who that adult is.

Under his leadership, teachers are expected to utilize the school planner to facilitate two-way communication with caregivers. School planners resemble weekly calendar pages with spaces for students to write homework assignments. These usually have pockets for printed formal communication such as announcements or upcoming events. Teachers also send individual notes home to caregivers in these planners, and in return, parents are encouraged to write notes to teachers written in the planner. Most teachers and parents check each child’s planner daily. At the beginning of each academic year the school hosts a kick-off event where adults and children come to the classroom and meet with teachers. The atmosphere is relaxed and informal and the emphasis is on getting to know one another.

Conferences are based on student performance. Officially, teachers are required to meet with the guardians of any student who is below grade level by the second grading period. Parents are invited to these conferences to discuss their children’s progress, and teachers are encouraged to call to set up these appointments for meeting times during their planning periods.

According to the Kentucky School Report Card (KDE, 2017), the school logged over 2,000 volunteer hours during the 2015-2016 academic year. Each spring, the school invites their students’ grandparents to a breakfast. During the fall 2016 semester, the
school experienced record high numbers of grandparents who attended, although these grandparents included custodial and noncustodial.

Participation is often low among all adults if activities take place in the evenings. He has observed that one exception, the *Meet Your Teacher* night at the beginning of the year, is very well attended. Even though the students already know their new teacher, the community attends this event in greater numbers. Mr. Blevins feels this is due to the hectic lifestyles of active families who are involved in sports and music, and it is very difficult for families to come home, make dinner, then go back out for a school event. As an alternative, his school plans activities during and right after school when parents are picking up their students. *Gallery Walks* are scheduled every nine weeks. The school is open to the public, and student work is posted on the walls for adults to view with their children and discuss what is happening in their classrooms. He is highly aware and respectful of parents’ time and tries to create opportunities for them to be involved without making unrealistic demands.

**Grandparents**

Although he did not discuss the exact number of children raised by grandparents, he did observe that last year in one of his classes, nearly 50% of the students were living with a grandparent. All but three of the rest of the class were being raised in a home with both biological parents present.

*Grandparents as Parents*

Overall, he treats grandparents the same way he treats parents. In most cases, like parents, if he is seeing a grandparent, it is to address a problem the grandparent has not resolved with the teacher. Consistent with his leadership decisions, he looks at each of
these situations case-by-case, analyzing specifically what the grandparent or parent hopes to resolve from the meeting. He has found that sometimes the meeting is the result of miscommunication or an underlying issue. Overall Mr. Blevins has found that grandparents raising grandchildren, “are doing an excellent job with the children, and I’m thankful that that child has someone in their life that cares about them.”

**Discipline Challenges**

He has found grandparents to be challenging to work with at times because, in his experience, they tend find discipline challenging. Some grandparents are too lenient because they wish to avoid confrontation. On the other hand, others are too strict. Grandparents sometimes find it difficult to find the balance between the two and as a result some of their grandchildren have difficulty socializing. He feels that some of these students may act out because they are frustrated and confused by why they are not being raised by their parents. He did note than many parents have the same challenges in discipline. The school has an Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBD) unit and a highly effective EBD teacher who teaches lessons on social skills and communicates regularly with parents and grandparents. She is able to work with grandparents to set realistic boundaries for grandchildren struggling with social behavior. The school also facilitates structured Response to Intervention (RTI) sessions to correct behavior. In one case, he has worked with the EBD teacher, grandparent, and child’s physician to create a schedule that best meets the learning needs of the child in regards to his medication.

**Time and Energy**

Work schedules, age, and diminished energy level result in tired caregivers. However, Mr. Blevins has observed that many of the grandparents raising grandchildren
enrolled in his school are still in their 40s. That may make their situation similar to parents. As the father of two school-age children, and the spouse of a working wife, he can commiserate with the lack of time. Afternoons and evenings can be very hectic, rushing to sports and trying to find time to eat dinner.

Conversely, he has observed that older grandparents, although they may not have as much energy, may not work outside the home, giving them more time to become involved. He compared this experience to that of his own parents. His mother did not work outside the home and therefore had more time to prepare meals ready and devote attention to school activities such as sports. Regardless of energy or time, the challenges to get everything done in a day are very similar among all caregivers.

To assist working grandparents, he has allowed them to drop off grandchildren early so they can get to work on time, or pick them up later so that they can complete a full workday. As he sees it, as principal he has to be at the school extended hours anyway.

**Academics**

Mr. Blevins observed that research demonstrating the positive relationship between family involvement and student success has led to higher expectations for parent involvement than seen in earlier generations:

I think research has told us that parents or grandparents who are highly involved have children who are going to be more academically successful. So I think having that knowledge, we push and promote. The biggest thing is to try to educate them on what good parent involvement is, and so I think there’s a certain amount of expectations that have changed.

Although he does encourage family involvement, his own review of research on homework has led him to conclude that: Homework is most effective when it involves
practicing a skill the child has already mastered and can complete without the help of an adult. He shared comments from a television interview he’d seen recently. The actor, Adam Sandler, was joking about hiring a private tutor to help him with the homework so that he wouldn’t look “dumb” in front of his kids.

Most of the problems he has observed with homework were related to the new math standards. However, he defended these standards because they are teaching students mathematical thinking instead of procedural mathematics without deeper understanding of the concepts. He inferred that the emphasis on mathematical thinking may make homework more difficult for grandparents than younger parents.

*Empathy and respect for grandparents*

While Mr. Blevins’ decision-making is student-centered, he has advocated for grandparents. In one circumstance, he refused to side with a biological mother who attempted to coerce him into assisting her in a court battle against the custodial grandmother when he thought this was in the best interest of the grandchild.

Mr. Blevins expressed appreciation, respect, and empathy for grandparents raising grandchildren. He feels that grandchildren are fortunate to have a grandparent willing to assume care when their parents cannot. He was able to imagine himself in the same situation, and said that he hoped he would do a good job caring for his own grandchildren if he needed to. He says he does not judge grandparents for their circumstances.

*Family Resource Center and Teachers*

Mr. Blevins often depends on the Family Resource Center to stay in touch with families to find out what they may need for support. The coordinator meets with him weekly to update him on families’ situations and he has done home visits with her in the
past. He describes the center as an “invaluable resource” when grandparents “are struggling in whatever way.” He went on to describe a clothing drive the coordinator organized to provide coats and gloves for their students.

He also feels that creating a caring and nurturing community for grandparents depends largely on the teachers and the classroom community. He is able to guide this through his leadership, but it is dependent on how the teacher makes the grandparent feel as well as the community she creates in her classroom. When this relationship begins to break down, he is often called upon to intervene. He has mediated a conflict between a teacher and a grandparent, getting to the heart of the problem, which was a very simple matter: A quiz needed to be retaken because the grandmother was not happy with the grade. In the end, he allowed the grandmother to serve as advocate in decision-making to resolve the conflict. He feels he is able to resolve conflicts by admitting that he himself was not a perfects child, nor are his own children are not perfect; in short, children are just not perfect. This often makes the grandparent more comfortable and opens communication during tense meetings. In one meeting he allowed the teacher to step in and mediate when the grandparent was attacking him and the school, which diffused an otherwise difficult situation.

Mrs. McPherson, Pine Grove Elementary

Pine Grove Elementary is a mid-size, rural, community school. It serves approximately 500 students, grades preschool through fifth grade. Approximately 74% of the students are eligible for free and reduced lunches, and 98% of the students are white.
The school employs 35 teachers. Nearly 40% hold Rank I certification, and 4 are National Board Certified. The school has both a full-time principal and assistant principal. In terms of accountability, the school is ranked *Distinguished* in 2016 and was awarded Readers’ Choice Best Elementary School, a national honor, the same year. The school logged 2,600 volunteer hours, and over half of the students’ parents met with a parent or guardian for a conference.

**Leadership**

Mrs. McPherson has a deeply personal connection to her school and the families it serves. She has spent her entire life in or near Hamilton County. Years of experience have led to a deep and rich knowledge of the community’s expectations. After 11 years as principal, she is able to observe the influence and outcomes of her leadership. Now she feels she is able to claim ownership for her school. Her high expectations for herself, her faculty, and her staff transfer to the students. She also delegates responsibilities to a staff she knows and can trust.

Her own daughter attends Pine Grove, and as a result, Mrs. MacPherson's personal parental role influences her leadership. She often asks herself:

*Would I want this for my daughter? Is this something that would benefit her? Because I want to benefit every child, not just mine, but every child that walks through that door. They’re ours from eight to three. They’re our kids.*

Furthermore, she feels placing her own child in her school causes the community to view the school as trustworthy because she, the principal, trusts her teachers with her own child. The trust she has placed in these teachers to care for her daughter may help to alleviate any fears or doubts Hamilton’s families may have about classroom placements.
Family Involvement

According to Mrs. McPherson the school works for the families in the community. Pine Grove’s motto, *By Name and By Need*, reflects her emphasis on making connections. Family outreach is often very personal. The school looks first at the needs of the child, which leads to identifying a family need the school can address. In order to encourage involvement, she cultivates an open and welcoming school culture. This begins with a friendly secretary in the office near the front door. Families are given phone numbers and told the entire school “is working for you.” She seeks to provide the best services for her families, regardless of the caregiver.

According to Mrs. McPherson, relationships between school and family are two-way and reciprocal. The school needs the help of families to effectively educate their children; the school can also help children be more successful at home. To facilitate this relationship she also makes certain all families receive her contact information, both phone and email, so they can communicate with her directly. The teachers utilize student planners to engage in written two-way communication. Teachers also utilize email to communicate with families. Families are encouraged to volunteer at school, although she admits few have the time.

Grandparents

Mrs. McPherson speaks with admiration and empathy when she talks about grandparents raising grandchildren, their needs, and the challenges they face. She has personal, first-hand experience to shape her perspective. Her own family members assumed care for a grandchild in the 6th grade when the child’s parents divorced. She witnessed the impact this had on their lives: “They were retired, happy-go-lucky, going
camping every weekend, and all of a suddenly things changed.” This may be why she seeks to empower these grandparents. She acknowledges the relationship Appalachian culture plays in grandparents’ willingness to take in their grandchildren with little hesitation:

You take care of your family. We don’t think about it. We just do it. And normally, if the grandparents are not able to do it, there is an aunt or an uncle who will step up and take that role. They get no money whatsoever. They just shoulder the burden and do it.

Consistent with her outreach to all families, her involvement with grandparents is primarily based on the needs of the children: “We are trying to make a difference for the students, so we have to take care of our grandparents too.” Her intervention is based on student need, and is case-by-case as problems arise at school. Otherwise, she allows the grandparents to initiate the conversation on assistance. She may recommend resources to grandparents, but does not insist they follow-up on her advice.

*Grandparents as parents*

Mrs. McPherson treats the grandparents as though they are the biological parents, mainly because most of the grandparents raising grandchildren have legally acknowledged relationships, so they have access to all the services, decision-making, and communications that biological parents do. The school offers traditional events and avenues for involvement in the school, such as parent-teacher conferences. She acknowledges grandparents, “want the best for these children, and they realize they’re the caregiver, so they automatically show up for those.”

She has observed many children are living with grandparents as a result of drug abuse. This problem has been exacerbated by the downward spiraling economy. Some parents must accept jobs that require frequent travel, migrant schedules, or demand they
move away from the region. In these cases, grandparents often assume care for children to provide stability.

Discipline and Behavior

She acknowledges grandparents may be more lenient with their grandchildren than they were with their own children, and in some cases, this impacts the grandchildren’s school behavior too. However, she does not blame grandparents. Instead, she is sympathetic to their struggles with discipline at home. According to her observations, these discipline challenges may be the result of changing grandparent roles and subsequently, their rules for grandchildren. Prior to living full-time with their grandparents, these children may have visited regularly, and in such cases behavioral expectations were more relaxed. It is difficult to change these expectations.

She also felt this change in status from doting to discipline is confusing and difficult for grandparents. At this stage in life, they should be able to enjoy spoiling their grandchildren then sending them home to parents. They have been denied this natural progression in their own lives, an experience that would have given them pleasure and joy, a progression they have earned and deserved after raising their own children, “because you should be able to spoil them. You let them jump on the bed, even though you never let your kids jump on the bed. And you send them home. You can’t do that”. Further confusing the situation, oftentimes parents come and go from their children’s lives if parental rights have not been terminated. This instability causes some children emotional turmoil and impacts their behavior at school.

The school makes it clear that the staff and faculty are available to provide advice on discipline. However, Mrs. McPherson is careful not to overstep social boundaries,
honoring grandparent privacy and rights. She allows the grandparent to take the first step in asking for help. She also stresses the importance of keeping an open mind, and avoiding judgment.

Do not be judgmental in any shape, form, or fashion. Their discipline methods may be different from yours. You might not agree with that. We can always show them there are different ways to handle situations and what worked with your kids may not work with your grandchildren.

Time and Money

Mrs. McPherson realizes grandparents do not have time to volunteer. Some still work outside the home during the day, interfering with most volunteer opportunities, and often grandchildren are involved in activities after school, which take up grandparent’s time. In terms of finances, most of the grandparents in her community do not receive financial assistance for taking in their grandchildren. They are not able to take relatives to court to receive compensation, so they alone take on the financial burden of raising grandchildren.

Academics

Grandparents sometimes find the new standards in mathematics difficult to understand because they focus on mathematical thinking over finding the correct solution to problems. However, she has pointed out that this is also a challenge for parents, teachers, and administrators, so it is not necessarily a grandparent barrier to involvement. Unlike mathematics, reading has remained basically the same over the years, so grandparents feel comfortable helping their grandchildren with homework in literacy.

Empathy and Respect

Mrs. McPherson expressed empathy for grandparents raising grandchildren. She acknowledges many grandparents may not have expected the challenges they face as
GRG, and many may experience shame for the circumstances that led to their new role.

She recommends leaders remain open minded and empathetic. She refuses to judge grandparents’ discipline methods or decisions. She also admonishes people who would blame the grandparents for the decisions their own children made.

You should try to put yourself into that situation. Try to put yourself in their shoes, because that may be us one day. That truly may be one of us one day. I would hope someone would have the grace and compassion to help me through that.

She feels many grandparents do not ask for assistance from the school because they are ashamed of the circumstances that caused their own children to abdicate or lose their parental rights. In some cases, she feels these grandparents may assume blame because they fear they “failed with their own children.” She feels this is more common in a small community. She has observed many of the problems that led to parents losing custody are a result of drug abuse, and this has been a major social change in her community. She has had one-on-one conversations with these grandparents, their desire to keep grandchildren out of foster care, and their fears:

I can remember one grandparent in particular, he said, “I lay awake at night and I wonder where I went wrong” talking about his child. “And I lay awake at night and I wonder what's going to happen to these children if something happens to me?”

**Family Resource Center**

Mrs. McPherson relies on the FRC to serve as an intercessor between school and grandparents because the FRC Coordinator may be perceived as less intimidating. She has considered designing a survey for grandparents in order to analyze their specific needs, and offering classes during the day at the school while their grandchildren are in
class. The grandparents in her school may need to see options presented because there may be problems or solutions they have not considered until they are made aware of them. She has considered collaborating with the former vice principal, now the principal of a neighboring school to provide these services.

Mrs. Sloan, Lincoln-Clay Elementary

Lincoln Clay Elementary is a small, rural, community school. It serves approximately 120 students, grades kindergarten through fifth, and employs 13 teachers. Although none of the faculty have National Board Certification, approximately 20% hold Rank I certification. In terms of accountability, the school is ranked Distinguished in 2016. The average student to teacher ratio is 12 to 1. According to the state report card, 100% of the students’ guardians met with at least one teacher for a conference during the 2016-2017 academic year, and 24 parents voted in the school council elections. The school reported 1,124 volunteer hours for their school. The school communicates with families through the weekly newsletter and an automated message system that calls each child’s home. The PTO is very active, and the Family Resource Center facilitates a community volunteer program. The school’s preschool faculty conducts home visits. The school also utilizes digital technology to keep in touch with families. The teachers text and maintain Facebook accounts to disseminate information and correspond with families through the student planners.

Leadership

Mrs. Sloan has a long history in Hamilton County. For four years she served as a principal for a small, rural school that has since been consolidated, and worked in the central office for 27 years before retiring. She then left retirement to become the principal
of Lincoln Clay Elementary. She believes that knowing her students and families, and
developing strong, personal relationships is crucial: “I think that that personal contact it is
so important. I know these people one on one.” She knows every child in the school by
name and understands their unique family dynamics. Most of her decisions are based on
this knowledge.

**Grandparents**

Mrs. Sloan, her faculty, and her staff treat grandparents raising grandchildren like
biological parents, mostly because her grandparents have clearly defined legal
relationships with their grandchildren, or the school has the necessary paperwork on file
to treat the grandparent as a guardian. This does not mean she is unaware of their
distinctively different needs. She described the challenges in discipline, and laments the
unfairness of the situation for grandparents who would like to play the traditional role of
doting grandparent, but now cannot. She has also observed GRG’s physical limitations
and their lack of skills in some academic areas, primarily mathematics. She also spoke
about the need for additional funding to help grandparents. “I wish grandparents received
funding- you know like foster care- for these kids. But they don’t, so the burden falls on
them because they don’t receive any kind of support as far as taking care of those kids.”

She expressed empathy for grandparents raising grandchildren. She believes
some of the grandparents are still traumatized by the circumstances that led raising their
grandchildren. She sees grandchildren who experience emotional confusion and
subsequent discipline problems because their parents may come and go from their lives, a
common result of drug addiction treatment and relapses. She recalled an incident in
which she personally helped in a similar situation. Instead of relying on the counseling
services provided at the school though an outside agency, she assisted in locating another
counselor to help. The grandchild received treatment.

Her school does not validate assumptions of grandparents’ inability to use
technology to communicate or understand the new academic standards. According to
her, “I think just about everybody’s got a cell phone now,” which is the primary
technology Lincoln Clay uses to correspond with families. Laughing, she said that
parents had similar problems with the new math concepts. She tells her staff to avoid
sending home math work that children cannot already complete independently.
According to her observations, many grandparents are less physically able to be involved
in their grandchildren’s extracurricular activities that are held at school.

Overall, the size of her community enables her to address the needs of families on
a case-by-case basis. She knows the GRG personally and knows “every kid by name.”
She is well aware of the problems facing grandparents, but believes many parents face
the same difficulties. She recommends personally making personal contacts and
communicating clear expectations, “Just be sure to include them. You know, just be sure
that you know who they are and you know those expectations are there.”

Mr. Gleeson, West Mason Elementary

West Mason Elementary is a mid-sized, rural school. Created when the district
decided to consolidate two smaller schools, West Mason is located only minutes from the
county border. The school serves approximately 340 students in grades preschool
through 5th. Approximately 73% of its students are eligible for free or reduced lunches,
and 99% of these students are White. In terms of school administration, the school has
one full-time principal, Mr. Gleeson, and an administrative manager who assists with school discipline and facilities management.

The school employs 24 teachers. Approximately 20% of these teachers hold Rank I certification, the highest certification rank in Kentucky, and 3 have National Board Certificates. All of the teachers are White. The average student to teacher ratio is 15 to 1, the same as the average state ratio. In terms of accountability, the school was ranked as Needs Improvement in 2016.

West Mason’s KDE School report card demonstrates positive data on family involvement. During the 2016-2017 academic year, the school reported 9,898 volunteer hours for their school, nearly half of all the hours reported for the entire district. According to the same report, 100% of the students’ guardians met with at least one teacher for a conference during (KDE, 2017).

Leadership

Two important factors shape Mr. Gleeson’s leadership: His childhood and his faith. Mr. Gleeson grew up poor, and by today’s educational definitions, homeless, in the community he now serves. He knows firsthand the battles his students face. They look around them and see adults whose personal goals are stymied by few choices and dwindling resources. They live in a community culture that may not always cultivate personal ambition. As Mr. Gleeson has observed, the general philosophy among many in the community is, “you get what you get, and you make the best of it.” But Mr. Gleeson doesn’t accept that. He knows that with hard work and faith he escaped poverty, and he wants the same for the children in his school. That does not mean he is unaware of
school, state, and federal expectations and regulation; he does comply with all these.
However, his mission is to see that the children in his school become successful adults.

He describes his leadership style as collaborative. He allows the teachers to be involved in instructional decision-making and works to empower the people working under his supervision as well as the adults caring for their children. He works closely with the Family Resource Center director to better understand the needs of his families. He also communicates to his teachers his expectations for communication with caregivers.

When conflicts arise with parents or grandparents he remains patient, and analyzes the problem itself instead of engaging in personal battles. He first determines why the guardian is upset and then determines how to address and solve the problem. He acknowledges that sometimes the solution is not within his control, and in these cases, he does his best to explain to grandparents why he is unable to ameliorate the situation. Empathy and understanding are key factors. He feels that conflicts arise because adults are advocating for their children using the only means they know how to apply. They may be angry and frustrated because they care about their children, and sometimes they are not aware of all the information to fully comprehend the situation. Occasionally, the Family Resource Center director will intercede after the conflict to smooth over hard feelings.

**Family Involvement**

When he first inherited the two schools that were consolidated to create West Mason, Mr. Gleeson had to walk a fine line between student safety and fostering an environment that was welcoming to the community. The parents from the two former
schools were accustomed to interacting with much smaller schools, and therefore greater accessibility to the school building. However, with shifting security concerns in his community and nationwide, he had to make changes. This did not mean he discouraged family involvement. Recent data demonstrate West Mason has worked hard to open its doors to the community. Regardless of the schools positive family involvement numbers, Mr. Gleeson feels the school could do more:

I still feel like we don’t always reach everybody. We’re not always successful with getting every parent onboard and helping them meet their needs, but I think we’re closer today than we were eight years ago when I came, and hopefully we will continue to go down that road.

One of his priorities is to make families feel welcome in the school. He tries to let families into the school as much as possible without sacrificing student security so that they can observe first-hand what goes on in the school.

West Mason has a very active parent volunteer program that is planned and implemented by Family Resource Center staff. The school currently has volunteers that work in the building daily. Mr. Gleeson has found that these volunteers have been instrumental in building a positive rapport among families because they witness not only the challenges the staff and teachers face daily in their work, but also their dedication to educating their children. These volunteers can convey this dedication to others in the community. Although any and all adults in the community are encouraged to apply, volunteers must complete a background check before they can work in the school.

The school also facilitates two-hour family nights from 5:00 pm to 7:00 pm in the evening every month with activities for both the parents and the students. Local businesses donate food and refreshments at all of these events. These events were first established to promote literacy in the home and encourage and strengthen what Mr.
Gleeson terms “school-to-home connections”. Although these family nights were not created to benefit GRG, he has observed that grandparents do attend these events. Additionally, the school plans celebrations to share with families throughout the year, often centered on holidays such as Christmas, Easter, Grandparents’ Day, or Veteran’s Day.

Mr. Gleeson is very passionate about pre-school education and working with families to provide readiness skills to young children. The school now has a Born Learning Academy that works with families to build these skills in children under 5. He was instrumental in the school receiving grant funding from Toyota and the United Way to pay for the program.

The school hosts an open house at the beginning of each academic year in which adults meet and speak with teachers. Mr. Gleeson also encourages all his teachers to reach out to caregivers to set up a meeting to discuss student progress and to make educational decisions, and emphasized these meetings were at the family member's’ “discretion”. As noted above, the school has documented 100% participation in one-on-one conferences between teachers and adults. These conferences may take place face-to-face or over the phone. The teachers communicate regularly with families by email.

Information is also disseminated to families in a newsletter that is both printed and sent home and electronically published. This newsletter includes all upcoming events as well as advice on academic subjects. The school also has a phone-messaging program that sends pre-recorded audio announcements out to the phones of families. Mr. Gleeson admits phone messaging can be problematic because they are sent to the number listed in the state’s database, and this information may not be accurate or current in terms
of where and with whom the child is living. The phone numbers listed on forms filled out at the beginning of the year may have changed because parents have moved, cell phone numbers have changed, or the child is no longer living with the person who completed the paperwork.

Parents communicate with the school through surveys. The school sends out an annual Title I Parent Involvement Survey as required by Title I, a program that provides financial assistance to his school based on the percentage of low-income students it serves. In addition, as specific issues arise, the school solicit feedback from families throughout the year on those specific issues through additional surveys.

Some of the communication takes place parent-to-parent through word-of-mouth. He has found that this not always effective because it sometimes fosters misconceptions and miscommunication. He has found that the best way to mitigate miscommunication is to invite people into the school to volunteer so that they can see how the school runs, as well observe first-hand the daily challenges he and his personnel face. This helps to change the dialogue among families outside the school when these volunteers share their knowledge out in the community. Volunteers also run a Facebook site with information about the school, but this is not an official site sanctioned or edited by the school. However, in his member-checking notes, Mr. Gleeson informed me his school has “launched our own official school Facebook page.”

In terms of decision-making, the school-based decision-making council (SBDM) currently has two parents serving, a legal requirement in Kentucky. In order to serve as a member of this decision-making board, adults must be legal guardians to a child in the school. However, serving on the board as an elected member is not the only way to
become involved with SBDM. The council also oversees three standing committees on which family members may serve without proving legal relationship to a student. Sign-up sheets are available at the school so that community members can sign up for a committee, and the PTO announces and organizes elections. There are no GRG serving on SBDM.

Overall, Mr. Gleeson feels that involving families in educational decision-making is challenging. He finds that the school, with its duties to keep students safe and adhere to regulations, has little time to provide adults the support they need to make decisions. The school has planned and implemented educational workshops for adults, but they have not been well attended.

Mr. Gleeson expects teachers to provide GRG access to involvement regardless of family circumstances. However, he also stresses the importance knowing who is legally responsible for the child. This has become more difficult over time with shifting family dynamics. Quite often a child lives with a family member with whom a legal relationship has not been established. To remove this barrier to communication and decision-making, he has designed a user-friendly form parents can complete to designate another person to have access to school involvement. This form lists all the ways a person may be involved in a child’s education at his school that are instructional, behavioral, or medical. The legal guardian may identify another responsible adult with whom they wish to share this information or decision-making capacity, and then check off the specific information or rights they wish that person to have. Once the form is notarized, it is kept on file at the school. This form is necessary to protect not only the
child’s privacy, but also the school’s legal standing. Implementing this practice has benefited parents who must travel for work and need someone to stand in for them.

According to Mr. Gleeson:

All I have to say in our paperwork is “Mr. Johnny Joe, you are dad, and you are telling me verbally you want your mother to deal with this. I just need you to put that in writing on this paper form for me. You write your name-give information to -write her name -to talk about- and check all the things, and then you sign the bottom, and then you have it notarized. I don’t need to know the history. It’s none of my concern.

With this documentation, relatives who regularly care for students can be involved in communication, events, and decision-making regardless of legal custodianship. The decision-making rights do not extend to meetings to provide students special education services.

Grandparents

Mr. Gleeson finds it difficult to gauge the number of grandparents who are raising grandchildren because many of these caregivers are still relatively young. As a result, without further investigation, they may be confused with parents. In addition, some actively involved grandparents may not be full time caregivers; they may be standing in for busy parents.

The first test to family involvement is identifying legal status of the caregiver to the student. Grandparents raising grandchildren, if they have a legal relationship to the student, have the same access to decision-making, volunteerism, and communication as parents. The school does not facilitate special programs for grandparents raising grandchildren; however, the school provides the same information on opportunities to these grandparents. Mr. Gleeson knows that sometimes a parent may hand a child over to
the grandparents without warning or preparation time. In these cases, he works with the grandparents to obtain legal documentation for involvement. He has never had to turn away a grandparent who wanted to be involved. In every case, the school has been able to obtain documentation.

Mr. Gleeson refrains from making assumptions about grandparents raising grandchildren that may overgeneralize their capacity for involvement because he has personally known grandparents “who are on top, trying to stay on top of it as much or more so than a regular parent.” He made it very clear that his statements about grandparents raising grandchildren are based on inferences, not always first-hand observations. He believes that the best way to maintain grandparent involvement is to deal with people respectfully and personally. When dealing with a problem that involves a grandparent, he feels that it is important to attack the problem, not the people involved. He remains patient and concentrates his energy on solving the problem. He understands that when people come to the school upset, they are advocating for their child the only way they know how. In these circumstances, he tries not to judge the families involved, and conveys his caring. He sometimes collaborates with the Family Resource Director to help smooth out rough situations.

Discipline Challenges

Mr. Gleeson was unable to discuss discipline concerns because in most cases the school manager meets with parents and students for behavioral issues. Occasionally he has been called on to meet with GRG to discuss discipline problems. He has observed that some grandparents can be traditionalist in their childrearing practices and stricter than parents. On the other hand, he has also met grandparents who treat their
grandchildren like “grandbabies” and are less strict than they were with their own children. Overall, he did not observe significant discipline challenges among grandparents raising grandchildren that were greatly different from parents’.

*Grandparents as Parents*

The school does not have any involvement programs specifically for GRG, but the principal makes certain that, like parents, they are made aware of all involvement activities:

They have the same access to the involvement avenues as a biological or adopted parent would as long as they’re the one who listed in our computers, the ones who’ve got custody or guardianship. Then they have all the same parent rights. We don’t have any particular programs that I can think of that are targeted specifically grandparents to help them be involved, but we just make certain that they are invited to everything the same as everybody else.

He feels that the main problem facing families, regardless of caregiver, is financial difficulties. Like parents, poorer grandparents find becoming involved more difficult than those who have monetary resources. During our initial interview, he recalled a grandfather and grandmother who, although not wealthy, have the financial means to raise their granddaughter. They seemed more active in the school than many parents, so active that when they once missed a family night, he and his faculty and staff were alarmed and checked on their whereabouts. Mr. Gleeson discussed the potential for grandparents to have less energy. However, he did not want to generalize because his personal experience did not provide specific instances in which this was a first-hand observation.

*Academics*

Initially in my conversation with Mr. Gleeson, he said he believed there might be a generational gap, difficulty understanding curriculum and the way schools function
compared to when they raised their own children, but he later revisited that statement. He felt that based on his experience he did not have sufficient evidence to make this assumption. In terms of the new Common Core State Standards in mathematics, he found that most parents struggled with the new mathematical processes, so much so that he facilitated a workshop on the math standards with caregivers.

**Time and Money**

Mr. Gleeson has known grandparents who have sufficient resources to raise grandchildren, and some who struggled on fixed income. Regardless of their limitations of their incomes, experience, and knowledge he has seen grandparents care and provide for their grandchildren the best they can. He understands some grandparents do not know how to seek and receive needed physical resources; however, he feels that this is a poverty issue, not a grandparent issue, and that parents face the same difficulties. Although he thinks that the Family Resource Center has the most accurate information on families to discuss the needs of these grandparents, he also feels the school is obligated to help remove these obstacles for grandparents within the limits of the law and the school’s ability.

**Empathy and Respect**

Mr. Gleeson was very sympathetic to grandparents who have made the commitment to raising their grandchildren. He acknowledged the sacrifices they must make to provide for these children, and that grandchildren may not have survived without the intercession of a grandparent:

I thank God for them, because if it wasn’t for them some of these kids would- I mean there are some that would be dead right now. I’m convinced they would not have survived physically had a grandparent not intervened. I applaud them
for what they’re doing and what they’re trying to do because these kids need it. That’s all I can say. They are Godsendsto these grandkids.

He believes that grandparents, like parents, are individuals and some are better at being involved than others. He did feel sometimes they have difficulty with school engagement and decision making because they may not understand some of the educational language and the instructional content. At the same time, it is very difficult for school personnel, given the demands of their daily duties, to find the time to help these grandparents catch-up.

*Family Resource Center and Teachers*

As previously mentioned, Mr. Gleeson is very confident in the Family Resource Centers’ ability to know and understand the personal stories and need of the grandparents who are raising grandchildren in his school. He sometimes relies on them to intercede or follow up on a case-by-case basis. He also feels the school is responsible for proactively involving grandparents, and he expects his teachers to be instrumental in this involvement. Fortunately, most of the teachers he supervises are very open to family engagement. He feels much of this success is due to the positive attitudes of his faculty. They do not judge adults for their circumstances or the personal decisions they have made. He hopes that this is because they know and understand his expectations for family involvement as well as the kind of person he is:

I’d like to think that it’s because they know my expectations on how to treat parents, how to treat grandparents, even the ones who have made poor decisions in their lives. Again this goes back to my faith and my personal belief system, everyone is to be treated with respect whether we feel they deserve it or not. I don’t care. You are another human being on this planet… I’m still going to make certain that you understand that I care about you. That’s important to me, and I believe I’ve communicated that to the staff, and I believe that is reflected in how my staff treats people for the most part.
Recommendations

Mr. Gleeson felt that state and federal programs might not be effective in assisting grandparents raising grandparents. Instead, he recommends sitting down with stakeholders and discussing the issues surrounding grandparents involvement. He recommends bringing together Family Resource Center staff, teachers, school staff members, parents, and grandparent volunteers to collect data on grandparent challenges to involvement. He has found that bringing people together for discussions is often more effective than surveys because these discussions not only collect important data to inform decision-making, but they also create enthusiasm for the programs that might result from the interaction.

Mr. Smith, Whitman Elementary

Whitman Elementary is a small, rural school. It serves approximately 370 students, grades kindergarten through 5th, and employs 26 teachers. Over 40% of the faculty hold Rank I certification, the highest ranking certificate in Kentucky with the highest pay. In terms of accountability, the school is rated Needs Improvement in 2016. The average student to teacher ratio is 15 to 1. According to the state report card, almost half of the students’ guardians met with at least one teacher for a conference during the 2016-2017 academic year, and 19 parents voted in the school council elections. The school reported 1,150 volunteer hours for their school.

At the time of the interview, Mr. Smith had served as principal for only three months. He transferred from another school in the district where he served as assistant principal. Overall, his perception of his role as principal focuses on academics:

Ok, my job first of all, above everything else is as an instructional leader in the school so my job is to ensure that the students stay the focus of everything that
we’re doing, and that teachers are prepared with the best possible resources and the best possible training, and that they’re monitored as they provide instruction to students to give them the best possible education that they can have.

Mr. Smith believes deeply in the rights of his students, that they should be treated with respect and dignity, and this guides much of his leadership practices. He encourages adults, teachers and parents, to have empathy for the children in their care. Although he admits the churches contribute to the community through acts of charity, he is sometimes pessimistic about their negative influences, part of what he terms “the good-old-boys’ club” church membership influencing hiring decisions. He also expressed dissatisfaction with his observed attitudes of racism, misogyny, and fear of transgender people that are often self-perpetuating. In his experience, he has found that the community is often fearful of what is different, and this sometimes conflicts with education standards and expectations.

He is a collaborative leader. Although he takes responsibility for final decisions, he often consults others: teachers, staff, and the Family Resource Center, then takes into consideration their perspectives before making a decision.

The school has an active Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). The school holds community events monthly and all families are welcome. Communication centers primarily on academics, data notebooks with monthly academic goals, and information on assessments. Parents supervise homework, although the school is considering a no-homework policy. He feels it is necessary to communicate with the adult who cares for the student, regardless of caregiving status, provided that adult has the legal right to be involved.

I’m trying to foster this idea of open communication between whoever it is at home that is receiving information- whoever it is that is getting the child off the
bus, or picking them up from school and spending the evenings with them—knows what we’re doing, knows why we’re doing it and feels comfortable coming and asking questions, and calling and saying…“how do you do this?” I guess that’s my biggest role—is to foster communication, when it comes to making sure that everybody’s on the same page.

Like the other principals, he feels it is important to be welcoming to families. The school also utilizes student journals as a vehicle for communication. Teachers summarize information in these calendar books for parents to read each day. Whitman Elementary also manages a school web page and sends out a school newsletter. He regularly attends meetings between grandparents and teachers, and emphasizes to his staff the importance of communicating positive news to families. He reports all parent involvement written communication, phone calls, conferences, and meetings to the central office quarterly. This is an expectation of every school leader in Hamilton School District. Sometimes communication with families begins with the FRC, then the coordinator communicates the issue to the school counselor who, in turn, contacts him. He meets with both staff members to determine the steps that must be taken to address a concern.

**Grandparents**

Mr. Smith emphasized the importance of ensuring adults have established legal rights before communicating with them or allowing them to make educational decisions for their children:

In order for us to provide any information about a specific child to any adult, we have to have something that says this person has educational rights at the very least, even if they don’t have custody…it has to be granted by a court or something like that, or the parent can come in and give us a letter that says, ‘I’m ok with my mom, or whoever, to get progress reports, sign progress reports.’ If that’s the case, then we’re fine.
Currently, he has not encountered grandparents who are caring for grandchildren without established legal relationships. He believes he has not observed grandparents struggling for the right to access to school involvement because, “I think the county judicial system works really well to make sure that kids get what they need…that’s what everybody’s trying to do.”

Grandparents as Parents

Although he treats grandparents as parents when communicating and making decisions, he acknowledges the differences between the two. He feels that a grandparent raising their grandchildren is “not ideal.” Although he empathized with these grandparents, he questioned the decision to allow them to assume custody:

At some point, it doesn’t matter how you raise children, they have to make their own decisions. However, it doesn’t make a lot of sense to me that grandparents who raised one set of children at a young age who grow up to make seriously bad decisions and lose their children’s custody for drugs or whatever, would be given custody again of another set of young children to make decisions for them.

He drew a distinct difference between providing basic, physical needs for a child, and creating a home environment for that child to develop into a fully functioning, successful citizen. However, he admitted many parents in his community are unable to provide homes that met this expectation.

Academics

He believes that schools have changed significantly from the time some grandparents raised their own children. Culturally the community is changing and as a result, the school is promoting social changes. As a result, older people in the community may retain values held as norms for earlier generations, and this may result in conflicts with his leadership. According to Mr. Smith, “I think their 1960’s 1970’s conservatism is
not the way the world operates anymore… so I think that generation of people view what we’re doing as this liberal, godless, education that we’re trying to provide these kids.”

This shift in cultural norms is exemplified in a conflict with a grandparent who wished to spank her grandchild during the school day at the school. Although corporal punishment is still permitted by law in Kentucky, and some schools still implement this form of discipline, Mr. Smith does not facilitate corporal punishment as a discipline technique in his school:

There were two kids. One of them was hers. One of them was not. She was a grandparent. She said, ‘I can come up there and spank them both for you if you want me to.’ It was like, ‘you’re not allowed to spank your own kid here, but you’re definitely not going to spank someone else’s child that you don’t know.’ You can’t do that, but that was the offer, and because that’s the mentality, I hear over and over and over again.

Unlike reading approaches, processes for solving mathematical problems have become more abstract. He also reported a generation gap among grandchildren and grandparents that “is a lot wider” than children and parents in terms of recent issues in education:

With parents and children there’s a generation gap, but with grandparents and children again the generation gap is a lot wider. And so we do try to take, you know…care to make sure that when we talk about what’s going on in education now…we explain to grandparents the differences between, you know, what it was 50 years ago to what it’s like now. And the changes five years ago to now are great, so the changes 50 years ago to now are even greater.

Furthermore, he believes that many grandparents in their 70s may lack the desire to learn new approaches to learning.

According to his observations, grandparents have more difficulty with making decisions for their grandchildren regarding technology use at home ranging from a
complete mistrust of technology so that the child does not have access at home to a complete lack of supervision of the grandchild’s technology use:

We also see issues where, you know, grandparents go to bed at nine o’clock. Kids are getting back up at 9:30 or 9:45 and staying up until 1, 2 o’clock in the morning. They’re coming to school exhausted. They’re telling us this is what’s going on. Everyone at home is clueless.

*Family Resource Center and Teachers*

Within the first three months of assuming leadership, he had attended a meeting with grandparents who had recently and suddenly assumed care for grandchildren, at the request of the GRG. In these circumstances he “connected them with the Family Resource Center so they could get some services to help them with the child.” One service that he feels benefitted these grandparents is the after-school services in which students can stay at school until 5:30 pm to receive free tutoring. This helps provide the grandparent with child care and the grandchild can return home in the evening with homework completed.

*Empathy and Respect*

In the end, Mr. Smith sided with empathy and understanding. He admitted he does not fully understand the daily lives of grandparents raising grandchildren, and that communication between school and home is crucial. He believes that the key to helping grandparents is for the school to help educate them. He stated, “Educating parents and grandparents about what we’re doing, why it’s important, challenging status quo, challenging preconceived notions, explaining ourselves.” He believes, in turn, school leaders could be educated in the daily lives of these grandparents:

Tell me what a day looks like for you. What’s it look like when your kids come home? When you’re on an oxygen tank, you know, and you got to take care of a
six-year-old, what does that look like? I think that and a little bit of empathy would probably go a long way. As judgmental as I sound when it comes to people knowing and not knowing—I don’t back off of those statements—I think that there is a lot of ignorance, and I think that’s exactly what it is. We just don’t understand or don’t know. There’s also a part of me that says it’s sad that these people who, whether they did a good job or not as parents, now they’re 70 or 80 or however old, and they’re taking care of—I know what it’s like to take care of a three year old and a 19 month old so to say. You’re talking about a 60 year old taking care of an 8 year old. It’s not going to happen. I don’t know how we can expect anything good to come from that. But the solution I guess it’s always education, empowering people through education is the catch-all solution it seems for all the problems. The more we know, the better we are.

**Line by Line Coding**

Adhering to the advice of Charmaz (2009), the tables below display the line-by-line coding. Although Learning at Home (Epstein, 2011) was not initially included in the research questions, principals identified learning at home as a form of parent involvement, therefore an additional category emerged from data.

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Table 4.6 Decision Making

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Table 4.6 Decision Making (continued)

| Basing leadership decisions on community needs | Yes | Yes | Yes | - | Yes | Yes |
| Making decisions contrary to GRG desires | Yes | Yes | - | - | Yes | Yes |

Table 4.7 Bringing Together Resources of Family, School, and Community

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<th>McPherson</th>
<th>Sloan</th>
<th>Gleeson</th>
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Findings

The purpose of this study was to construct a theory on how elementary school principals create and nurture positive, productive relationships with grandparents raising grandchildren (GRGs). It attempted to answer the following questions:

1. How do elementary school principals ensure grandparents are involved in two-way communication about the educations of the grandchildren in their care?
2. How do principals ensure that grandparents are involved in decision-making regarding the educations of their grandchildren?
3. How do principals bring together the resources of the school, family members, and community to benefit caregiving grandparents and their grandchildren?

Influences on Leadership

Although this study addressed specific ways principals engage GRG in school, interview data emerged regarding influences on principal leaderships. Principals reported three influences on their leadership in regard to GRG involvement: student need, community, and legally established rights to involvement in school.

Student need. The principals in this study viewed their roles as student-centered. They reported the greatest influence on their leadership roles was the needs of the children they served. First and foremost, their priorities encompassed the physical, emotional, and cognitive well-being of their students. According to Mr. Carpenter, he placed his students, “in the center”. Furthermore, he clearly stated he does not make leadership decisions based on “what is best for the grandparent.” Mr. Blevins also emphatically stated that his leadership was not influenced by who was raising the child. Mrs. McPherson, while relating the children in her school to her own daughter, placed
students in the center of her leadership, asking herself what she would think best for her own child when making her leadership decisions, and Mr. Smith placed the educational growth of his students first and foremost in his mind.

**Community.** Data indicated principals’ leadership decisions were influenced by the rural, Appalachian communities their schools served. Principals reported the influence of demographics on their leadership roles, primarily poverty and community values, and described in detail their personal knowledge of their communities. Both Mrs. McPherson and Mr. Smith identified religious values as a community influence. Moreover, all six principals chronicled their personal histories and longevity in the region, discussing in detail the length of time they’d lived or worked in the community, as well as their family connections to the county and school district. It should be noted data did not suggest all principals viewed community norms and values as positive influences. Mr. Smith and Mr. Gleeson, both natives of the county, held negative perceptions of their communities in regard to impact on student motivation and biases. Both principals strived to foster student success despite what they perceived as negative community values and norms. These negative impressions also served as motivation and a reference for leadership decision.

**Legally established rights.** Principals reported the role grandparents played in school involvement depended upon legal relationship to the student or parental consent. The decision to treat each GRG as parents—as with any adult—was dependent upon established legal relationships or educational rights conferred by biological parents. Regardless of adherence to law or policy, none of the principals could recall refusing access to school involvement to GRGs because they did not possess the necessary
documentation. Principals reported most of the GRGs in their schools either established legal relationships or provided documentation from the grandchildren’s parents bestowing educational rights to communication and decision making. In the absence of formal paperwork, one principal, Mr. Gleeson, created his own form to document parents’ decisions to confer upon another adult access to their children’s educational information, involvement in events, and decision-making. In order to simplify the process, he listed on this form numerous ways adults may be involved.

**Caregivers.** Overall, leadership did not focus on the family members raising the students. Although this student-centered leadership role was consistently evident in principal interviews, it should not be presumed these principals were not aware of or were indifferent to the life circumstances of the GRGs, or that they did not take into consideration GRGs’ needs and opinions when making case-by-case decisions as discussed later. The analysis above describes school-wide decision making. With the exception of Mr. Smith, principals spoke with empathy, admiration, and respect for GRGs. They did not blame these grandparents for their circumstances, and spoke with gratitude for the commitment they’d made in caring for their grandchildren. When speaking of these grandparents, both Mrs. McPherson and Mr. Gleeson became briefly overwhelmed with emotion. Although Mr. Smith did not feel it was in the best interests of students to be raised by GRGs, even he advocated for understanding the their daily lives and challenges.

Finally, although this study based research questions on the national school leadership standards in place during the period of time data was collected, none of the
principals identified national standards as an influence on their leadership, nor did not principals identify Kentucky Leadership Standards (KDE, 2008).

**Principal Leadership Practices: Grandparent as Parent**

All the principals reported they treated GRGs the same as parents. This was evident in Mr. Carpenter’s statement concerning GRG roles: “They need to be the parents. They’re not the grandparents. They’re the parents.” Mr. Blevins discussed GRG roles in relationship to students: “Kids who are raised by grandparents don’t necessarily have different situations than kids raised by parents.” Consistent with the principals’ treatment of GRG as parents, the schools in this study did not create policies or institute practices in anticipation of needs specific to GRGs, nor did they plan and implement activities solely for GRG participation in their grandchildren’s educations. Processes and procedures for involving GRGs in communication and decision making were also the same as those instituted to involve all parents. It should be noted principals’ treatment of GRGs, giving them the role of parent, should not be confused with principals’ perceptions of GRGs. As discussed later, principals viewed the role GRGs played in their grandchildren’s lives, and the challenges they faced in this role, as different from that of biological parent.

**Two-way communication.** According to principal interview data, their schools communicated with grandparents as they did with parents, through written, face-to-face, and digital means. Most described written communication as the prevalent means for communicating with families, and teachers were expected to regularly engage in two-way communication, usually through notes in student journals. The principals leading smaller schools, Mr. Carpenter and Mrs. Sloan, described communicating through individual,
personal contact with GRGs. Mr. Carpenter met and greeted all families before and after school, and Mrs. Sloan was able to pick up the phone and personally call families because she knew them all by name.

According to principal interview data, teacher expectations included communicating with families through annual conferences, traditionally known as *parent-teacher conferences*. However, in some cases, such these conferences could by phone, or conditional to the academic standing of the students. Mr. Blevins made conferences mandatory for the families of students who were not thriving academically.

**Decision-making.** The principals in this study intentionally involved GRGs in decision-making in response to a problem on a case-by-case basis. Sometimes, principals did not abide by a decision suggested by GRGs. Four of the principals discussed incidents in which they were forced to make decisions contrary to GRGs wishes. Mr. Carpenter decided to transfer a grandchild with behavior disabilities to another school with more resources to address the child’s disability against the GRG’s desires. Mr. Smith described a confrontation with a grandmother who wanted to spank her grandchild at the school regardless of his policies forbidding corporal punishment. Mr. Gleeson and Mr. Blevins spoke of the difficulties dealing with GRGs who did not agree with their decisions. In all cases, the principals’ decisions were based on what they perceived as the best interests of the students involved, not the GRGs’. This decision-making is consistent with the influences to their leadership as described earlier, primarily student-need and students’ best interests. In each case, they place their perceived needs and solutions for the child before the desires of the GRG.
None of the principals could recall GRG active involvement in schoolwide
decision-making through SBDM or schoolwide committees. When discussing FRC, the
principals did not discuss the FRC advisory board council.

**Bringing Together Resources of School, Family, and Community to Meet the Needs of Families**

Although principals did not take into consideration the needs of GRG in their
leadership, it should not be presumed these principals were not aware of or were
indifferent to the life circumstances of the GRG, or that they did not take into
consideration each GRG needs and opinions when making case-by-case decisions as
discussed later.

**Financial.** Principal interview data suggest principals were aware of the financial
hardships facing GRGs. Mr. Carpenter, Mrs. Sloan, Mrs. McPherson spoke of the
unfairness in the state system because GRGs were providing the same services as foster
parents; however; unlike foster parents, they could not receive foster care financial
benefits. Moreover, according to Mr. Gleeson’s observations, GRG with greater
financial resources were more involved in school.

**Role and Discipline.** All of the principals discussed discipline and behavior
problems among children raised by grandchildren, and felt sympathy for grandparents
who were confused by their role in setting expectations at home. Although principals
treated GRGs as parents, principals were aware of GRG *role ambiguity*. Role ambiguity,
whether to self-associate with the role grandparent or parent, is not uncommon for GRGs,
and this role ambiguity may lead to childrearing challenges (Doblin-MacNab, 2006;
Gordon et al., 2004; Laudry-Myer & Newman, 2004; Strom & Strom, 2000). Mr.
Carpenter, Mrs. McPherson and Mrs. Sloan all observed role ambiguity among the GRGs in their schools, and although they expressed understanding and empathy for grandparents’ right to indulge and spoil grandchildren, they found this role ambiguity negatively influenced some GRGs’ ability to discipline at home and resultant negative behaviors at school.

**Physical.** Although principals were aware of GRG’s physical limitations, they only discussed reduced energy levels of grandparents. They did not report observations of physical conditions or disabilities among GRGs, nor did they speak of specific physical impediments to school involvement.

**Emotional.** Two principals reported emotional distress among GRGs in their school communities. Mrs. McPherson believed GRGs were less likely to attend school functions because they were ashamed of the circumstances that led to their caregiving, and Mrs. Sloan described GRGs as “traumatized” by the situations they faced. Mrs. McPherson also described a grandfather’s tearful distress describing his greatest fear— that he would die leaving his grandchildren with no one to care for them. Mrs. Sloan observed grandparents forced to deal with their own children’s drug addiction when rehabilitation repeatedly failed, disrupting their lives and the lives of their grandchildren that created cycles of hope and despair.

**Generational.** In terms of generational differences, principals observed grandparents faced greater difficulty in understanding instruction, although they believed most adults were struggling with the recent mathematics standards. Principal interview data indicated most adults struggled with homework assignments related to the new state standards, specifically Common Core State Standards in Mathematics. In response,
principals developed services at school. It should be noted, these solutions were not designed to ameliorate caregiver discomfort with mathematics content. Instead, with the exception of Mr. Gleeson, these programs removed the responsibility of learning at home from the caregivers altogether. Mr. Smith and Mr. Carpenter created an after-school homework tutoring program that also provided free childcare until 5:30 pm and has influenced his teachers to consider a no-homework policy. Mrs. Sloan and Mr. Blevins have instructed their teachers to design homework assignments that students can independently complete without family intervention and assistance. Only one principal, Mr. Gleeson, reported addressing the challenges adults face understanding the math standards. He has facilitated a workshop to explain and provide assistance. He reported very poor attendance. Specifically, Mr. Smith was aware of generational differences among GRGs on discipline, religion, and politics that may result in grandparents’ views and perspectives that may conflict with his school’s mission.

FRC. On a schoolwide basis principals reported that bringing together the resources of the school, family, members and community to benefit GRGs were the role and responsibility of Family Resource Centers, and all the principals spoke very highly of FRCs’ successes in regard to meeting the physical needs of all families, including grandfamilies. Principals reported meeting regularly with FRC coordinators, and were confident their own FRC coordinator knew the lives of their grandfamilies, so much so that they enlisted the assistance of these coordinator in the recruitment for this study. Principals did not communicate a disinterest in fostering the overlap of community, family, and school, as evidenced in Mr. Blevin’s statement in the schools need to “feed
and clothe” students, and that schools are “about as Christian as an organization can get without being one.”

**By need and by name.** Although principals reported treating all GRGs as parents, they did deviate from this norm when an individual student in his or her school experienced a barrier to learning. With the exception of Mr. Gleeson, every principal had a story to tell in which they personally engaged GRG. Mr. Blevins supported a GRG in a custody battle with the biological mother. Mr. Carpenter worked with a grandfather who refused to assist his grandchild with homework. Mrs. Sloan assisted a grandparent in making decisions concerning counseling and medical help. Mr. Smith met with a GRG in her early stages of custody to help her navigate the challenges she faced, and Mrs. McPherson works personally with GRGs at their request.

It must be noted in each case that the principal was responding to a student in need. Although these circumstances called for the principal to acknowledge and take into the consideration problems unique to GRGs, the principal was acting in the best interest of the individual student: **by name and by need.** When the need arose, the principal deviated from viewing the GRG as a parent and acknowledged the separate and unique role they assumed. These actions were not the result of a school-wide policy or procedure that met the collective needs of GRGs; instead, these family dynamics were taken into consideration as a strategy to best serve the learning needs of their grandchildren.
CHAPTER 5
Grandparents Data and Findings

The previous chapter includes principal data. The following chapter provides narratives describing the data collected during interviews with GRG. The chapter concludes with tables demonstrating line-by-line coding and themes based on Epstein’s (2011) 6 Types of Family Involvement, and findings.

Table 5.1 Grandparent Demographics

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<th></th>
<th>Lauren</th>
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Anna

Anna is 70 years old and raising a 6-year old granddaughter named Chloe. Anna describes herself as a “naturalized citizen”. She is from Austria, but has lived in the
United States of America (USA) for more than 40 years, long enough to raise three
grown children here. One of her children, Chloe’s mother, is unable to care for Chloe
because she suffers from mental illness. Chloe has been in Anna’s care since birth. Anna
has legal custody, and is seeking to adopt Chloe.

Anna never expected to raise a grandchild in rural, Appalachian Kentucky. She
moved from a major city in Kentucky to Hamilton County after her second divorce
because her son was fond of the region. Consequently, when her son was unable to find
work, he moved away from the county. She, on the other hand, grew to love the rural
setting and remained.

Anna was a teacher in Austria. Her experience as an educator in Europe has led
her to compare the two systems: Austria’s and America’s. She feels that in the USA, time
is wasted sitting in a classroom instead of on active engagement, the school days are too
long, and that curriculum is not rigorous.

**Communication**

Anna receives communication from the school from newsletters, which she sees
as a beneficial resource.

Well, they are calling for [announcing events] in the newsletter. They are really,
really good at sending letters out continuously on what’s going on. Sometimes
the letter is still a little too late for what is happening but that is getting better.
They are trying to improve this situation so that we don’t have [changes]from
one day to the next.

Although she finds communication helpful, she was sometimes overwhelmed by the
amount of paperwork sent home, and is sometimes confused about the system and
expectations.

I’m still at the start of that path. So I read everything, and it seems to me like it’s
at least a half-time job. I mean, I had a box beside my chair full of folders of
paperwork that comes home from school, and I try to keep up with this date and that date, the different fundraisers, and different activities, and then the little things like on Wednesday I get a note that on Friday the children are supposed to wear red in kindergarten. And I go, and I say, ‘Chloe has nothing red,’ so I have to go to Kmart and get a red outfit on Thursday so she can take part.

Anna receives classroom management and behavioral reports on Chloe through an online program called Class Dojo. The program assigns a percentage that represents Chloe’s reprimands. Anna has mixed feelings about the program.

Because when I see every day she got reprimanded for this, she got reprimanded for that, and they let you know. Now it is my responsibility to fix it [laughs]! The times when my kids were in school, and I didn’t know about all the reprimands, well it would be easier for me.

Anna was also unsure about the behavioral expectations for Class Dojo. She wonders what a “normal behavioral score” is, and decided to talk to the teacher about this so that she can work with Chloe on a goal.

Prior to attending kindergarten, Anna experienced communication barriers with the Head Start program in the school district. Attempting to register Chloe in Head Start, Anna ran into many roadblocks. Head Start administrators did not return her calls, and information on the program was not readily available. She sought advice from her friends in the community without positive outcomes to registering her grandchild. In the meantime, she returned to Austria to be with her family when her own father died. She registered Chloe for preschool while she was there, and it was a very positive experience. Chloe began to learn German and “fit right in.” Anna returned to Kentucky and enrolled Chloe in a private daycare. It was very costly in tuition and transportation costs, so Chloe could only attend two or three days a week. The experience was a financial hardship.
When she discovered from friends that the school district had a free preschool in her local school, she called the district central office for information. Like Head Start, they did not return her calls to answer her questions on registration. This worried Anna; however, once Chloe was registered and she began attending preschool, she felt better. “I enrolled her, and we came up here, and she had [Mrs. Paulo] in preschool, and was in I would say the first month, I just felt relaxed because the school was open.”

**Family Resource Center and School Activities**

Anna has felt deeply touched by the kindness of Chloe’s school, especially when the school gave her and Chloe a special Thanksgiving gift from the Family Resource Center.

Last year Thanksgiving I got the call from the school. I went [gasp] ‘Oh, I got a call from the school!’ So, ok, I called back. They said, ‘Well, there is a package you need to pick up for Thanksgiving.’ And there was this big Thanksgiving collection with a turkey and I mean it was…[crying] I cried. This is a friendly school!

Anna said that she felt very welcome at the school now.

One of Anna’s most positive experiences was a pumpkin decoration project. Families worked with their kindergarten children to decorate pumpkins to resemble a storybook character. She and Chloe created a Mother Goose pumpkin with goslings made from gourds. All the participating families met in the library to present their projects. She also enjoys the family meals in which caregivers visit the school to eat with their children. During these events she is able to meet and network with other caregivers. As a result, she has added friends to her Facebook account, and invite children to a birthday party for Chloe at her church. One of the most positive aspects of the party was
talking with and sharing the experience with other caregivers. She was able to meet another caregiving grandparent through the birthday party.

**Volunteering**

Anna is aware of volunteer opportunities. She has received invitations to volunteer as well as information on volunteer training. Still, given her previous experience in another school district when she was raising her daughter she worried the school will judge her.

She is aware of the PTO, and praised them for their activities, but does not attend the meetings. She knows that PTO is involved in classroom activities, but is not aware of specifics. Instead, she has “taken part at a distance,” primarily through fundraising projects. She assisted in a yard sale the previous year, noting that, “It was an enormous amount of work.” She has had positive experiences with the school bake sales, and she has integrated these sales into fiscal education at home and church.

Chloe loves the snack sales. And I have taken that as an opportunity on money, so that she has a certain amount of money that she can take along and make sure she understands that she doesn’t have to spend it all because if you keep some for next time that gives you more because it gives you that amount again, and then she can also save some and take it to the church. We have a financial thing there.

She utilizes the school transportation system, and is happy with the service. She feels that her grandchild is safer in a school bus than in a private vehicle when the weather is bad. Allowing Chloe to ride the bus also provides her with much-needed time to herself “to get things done at home.”

**Decision-Making**

Anna has met with the teacher for a formal conference and has received information on Chloe’s academic progress. Anna expressed appreciation for advice she
received from Chloe’s kindergarten teacher that prevented placement in special services her granddaughter did not need. According to Anna, the district policy advocates placing any child who speaks a second language in English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction. The teacher recommended that Anna conceal information on Chloe’s German language skills so that she would remain in the classroom for language instruction. Together, they decided it would be best to omit Chloe’s proficiency in German from school documents. Chloe’s teacher has also discussed with Anna opportunities to come to the classroom and share German language activities with the children.

**Challenges and Barriers**

Anna found her age and physical challenges limiting. “I’m 70 years old,” she cried. “It’s so hard. For me, the day from 5:00 am to 8:00 pm seems endless.” She also had a debilitating digestive condition that made traveling from home difficult. Anna was on a fixed income and did not receive state financial assistance to compensate for Chloe’s care. She made extra money cleaning her church.

One barrier to involvement for Anna is a physical condition that affects her digestion. She is fearful of missing the bus when Chloe is dropped off at the end of the day:

> I have this colitis. What if just at the time the bus comes and I have to be out there I have to go to the bathroom? It’s a scary thought [laughs]. Or I sit in the car and the belly starts rumbling. I might not even be able to get out of the car to go get her. I may need to wave at that lady and bring her over and put her in the car.

She had not spoken to the school about this issue and felt that it would be helpful to grandparents if the school sent out a questionnaire for grandparents, asking them if they have any physical limitation.
Anna also reported feeling uncertain about the current educational system.

Raising a granddaughter posed a new challenge:

But now I have this little one, and I had not planned to raise a little one in this place. I’m also not up to par with what the educational system is anymore because I didn’t pay much attention once my kids were out of the school system, which actually happened in ’96.

Completing homework is a challenge when Chloe had soccer practice due to time constraints. During the season, she had soccer activities three times a week, and this made it difficult for Anna to work with Chloe to complete the 30-minute assignments each night. Fortunately, Chloe’s teacher assigned a weekly homework packet each Monday that was not due until the following Monday, so during soccer season, Anna worked with Chloe on all the assignments on Saturday. Anna had difficulty with time constraints, so she appreciated the flexibility the weeklong packet offers. “That makes it possible to move things around and not be having practice and the homework having to be done. That would be awful. The way it is right now, there is so little time.”

Regardless of the schedule, Anna felt the assignments were, “quite a lot of homework, especially for kindergarten.”

Anna also faced financial limitations because she was on a fixed income. At one time she received Kinship Care through the state, but she was continuously asked to provide information on Chloe’s father so that he could be contacted for child support. She provided all the information, his name and address, but she was asked continuously to provide more information. She wanted to maintain a positive relationship with Chloe’s father, and felt that given his situation, he was doing best he could to help. In the end, she dropped out of the Kinship Care program. The administrators of the program said that she could not re-enroll once she was removed. Although that was a $300 per month
benefit, she felt harassed by the Kinship Care workers. “They had all the information from me. They had all the information. Why did they keep harassing me for more information when I didn’t have anymore? Oh, it was awful. It was just awful.”

**Recommendations**

To better address the needs of GRG, Anna suggested the school distribute a survey to determine special needs such as health or transportation challenges that may act as barriers to involvement. She also recommended the school plan special days for GRG, and hoped this may lead to a support group:

We have the parent days and the grandparent lunches but it would be nice to get grandparents together with the kids to just visit with each other… so that we can make some sort of support each other group. That would, I think, help a great deal!

In addition, she would find it helpful if there was a source at school to help with legal questions as well as clarifications on school expectations.

Yeah, one thing would be great, to have a source where you can go for legal questions, stupid little questions on what can I do, what should I do in this case? We don’t want to go back down to an attorney, you know? Am I required to do this, or is this just a voluntary request, just to find out. Like this dressing red? Do I have to do this? And if I don’t, you know, and my next thing is, when I didn’t for the big kids and they came home and others were mad with them. Well, I don’t want kids to be mad at Chloe because I don’t have a red pullover for her! So, you know it’s Christmas time already, so I just got something red.

**Karen**

Karen has been raising Gareth, now a 2nd grader, since he was an infant when her daughter became a drug addict. Her daughter is a recovering addict now and has contact with Gareth. She is married, and both she and her husband find caring for Gareth deeply rewarding and enjoyable. To her, Gareth is a blessing, not a burden:
I don’t find it’s a hard role. I don’t find it’s a difficult role. I mean, I think it’s a blessing. I can’t tell you! Gareth, he has been just such a blessing to me and to my husband, and we just couldn’t imagine doing anything else other than what we’re doing. I wouldn’t want to be doing anything else other than what I’m doing!

She views herself as his mother, not his grandmother, and wants others to view her in this role. Gareth calls Karen his mother along with his biological mother. According to Karen, he is comfortable with having two mothers.

Karen maintains structure and communicates clear expectations for Gareth. She knows that some grandparents may be lenient because they feel guilty for the circumstances that led to assuming care for their grandchildren, but Karen doesn’t feel this guilt. She may spoil Gareth, but she does not tolerate disrespectful behavior. She is proud of Gareth’s positive behavior in public, and that others notice this good behavior. When she takes Gareth to meetings with her and he will sit quietly and playing with her iPad for hours. Karen wants Gareth to grow into a successful adult, and she sees education as an important part of this preparation. She also wants Gareth to enjoy school and see education as a positive experience.

Karen’s Christian faith is a significant factor in her daily decision-making. Although one of her greatest challenges involves trusting others to look after her grandson, she has reconciled this through faith and prayer.

I have two other ladies and before school starts, we go down to the schools. We don’t just do the schools our kids go to. We try to get all of them in the east end. We go down to that school, and we march around that school and pray. And they’ll have a list of the kids, and we go there, and call out all their names, but we pray over the school, pray over the students, pray over the staff before our kids go.
She communicated mistrust for the new state standards, but believes this will not be an issue for Gareth until middle school because she plans to place him in a private, Christian school at that time. Karen also volunteers assisting recovering drug addicts with spiritual counseling and support. She did not report any physical or financial limitations.

Karen enjoys being involved with parties at school. She finds the school open and welcoming, and although the teachers are younger than she, this is not a barrier to her involvement. She feels very comfortable working with the teachers.

And you know, I’ve heard a really this one lady- I knew her. I know her real well. I remember hearing her one day say, ‘Well,’ she said, ‘I don’t have anything in common with those young girls.’ Some of those young girls are like my daughters now, and they’ll call me Mommy-K, and stuff. It’s just a matter of being open with them, and talking with them, you know, and developing that rapport with them.

Karen acts as both educator and advocate for Gareth. She keeps a daily routine to foster this role:

Well, I just make sure that I’m in his education. I make sure that every night we go through his backpack. We go through his planner. I sit at the table with him while he does his homework, and I oversee that, to make sure you know that he’s keeping his direction, and that’s a top priority. I mean education is very, very important, and he knows that, and so you know that’s one of the things before we do anything else, you know, maybe other than eat a little bit we’re going to get the homework done and everything prepared for the next day.

She trusts the professional expertise of the faculty in Gareth’s school, and works closely with them to make educational decisions at school and home. As an advocate, she asks questions, makes recommendations, and follows-up both during the school year and the summer. During the summer vacation, she reviews key skills with her grandson so that he does not lose ground. When Gareth was in first grade, she was concerned about his pronunciation. She initiated decision-making and spoke to his teacher who then
arranged speech therapy services for him. She feels that this partnership will lead to positive outcomes for Gareth.

Karen relies on written communication to receive information, asks questions, and communicates with Gareth’s teachers. She sends notes or writes in his planner. She also feels comfortable going to the school and talking with teachers. She feels that communication is key to helping grandparents raising grandchildren.

What can the schools do? Well, just keep the lines of communication open. I think that that’s key and to keep, you know that communication going so that everyone knows exactly where the child is, what they need, the goals ahead of them, and to prepare them for that, and to include the parent, grandparent, in everything that’s going on in their child’s life.

Karen has kept positive notes from teachers in a scrapbook for Gareth. She enjoys hearing about him from his teachers. She expressed appreciation for the teachers keeping her updated on his progress and activities. She especially enjoys reading positive notes written on his schoolwork by the teachers.

Karen is aware of the perceptions of grandchildren raised by grandparents, primarily that they lack discipline. She works very hard to provide structure, consistent expectations with consequences for misbehavior. One teacher observed Gareth’s good behavior in school and told Karen this was not typical for grandchildren raised by grandparents.

Karen’s most positive experiences occurred when Gareth was in the Head Start Program. Although she likes the school he now attends, it is very large, with almost 700 students. The Head Start Program was much smaller and more personal in communication, relationships, and outreach. She enjoyed the parties they hosted and the home visits in which staff members worked with her to create goals for Gareth. For
example, she found that Gareth did not enjoy a variety of foods, and the Head Start staff worked with her on nutritional goal, then follow-up at school by introducing him to new foods. She also enjoyed attending holiday parties.

Karen emphasized the importance of her role as Gareth’s parent. She sees herself as his mother, and she wants the school to treat her like any other parent. She believes this should be the approach the principals take with all grandparents raising grandchildren.

Well, treat the grandparents just like they treat the parent. The grandparents don’t want to be treated any differently. I don’t want to be treated differently, I don’t want to be viewed differently, you know. I mean they’ll tell you, like I said, ‘That’s my little boy!’

She acknowledged that not all grandparents feel the way she does in her role as caregiver. She realized that she is an exception, and that many grandparents need a more support.

I see a lot of grandparents that start raising the children, they’ve gone through a battle, and they’re weary. Sometimes it’s even financially for some of them. It’s a struggle to have that added responsibility. They just need a support group, just someone to talk to, someone to give them a little relief or something. Not everyone needs that resource, but I see a lot of them that really do. It would really be helpful because they feel overwhelmed, and some of them even feel a little resentful. I mean, I’m just being real honest, that some of them feel just a little resentful. They’d raised their children, and all this has happened, and they’re angry at their own child because the child has done this, and put them in this position. So it’s all on how you view it, but I think that a lot of the times, if they just had someone to talk to, someone to help them get settled back and get started, that it would be helpful for them. But I don’t know that it’s the school’s place.

Laura and Phil

Laura and Phil are GRG of two children, a boy in middle school, and a girl in the 4th grade. They are very fond of their grandchildren, and proud of their academic successes. Both grandchildren have been on the honor role. Their granddaughter is very
talkative, and loves helping others in her class. Their grandson is kind-hearted and affectionate, although he often questions their decisions (a trait they acknowledge is common among adolescents). As a family, they are active in their church and enjoy membership in a close-knit, interdependent community. Their grandson sings in the choir.

Phil and Laura were both in previous marriages. These marriages produced two sons for Phil, and three daughters for Laura. The two children presently in their care are Laura’s biological grandchildren; their mother is currently incarcerated. Laura could recall in vivid detail the day she assumed care of her grandchildren. She was on her way to a funeral when she received a call; she was told by the social worker she had to pick up the children from her daughter’s apartment immediately, or they would be placed in foster care that day. She remembers the police officer, a man she had known for years, saying that he wouldn’t handcuff her daughter and son-in-law until after Laura had left with the grandchildren. He also carried the two car seats to her vehicle for her. Her grandson was a toddler, her granddaughter an infant. Because they assumed custody very suddenly, they did not have the necessary physical resources to accommodate young children, and continue to struggle financially to make ends meet.

After assuming care, Phil was in a truck accident that left him disabled and Laura serving as caretaker for both him and the grandchildren. Although Phil is better now, he still suffers from pain. Laura, although able-bodied, has diabetes that must be managed. During the beginning of Phil’s recuperation, Laura felt the pressure of caring for an injured husband, the two grandchildren she’s assumed custody for, as well as her other grandchildren. As a result, she needed to ask her mother-in-law for help. Even now,
both money and time keep them from being as active with the grandchildren as they would like.

Like Carla, Laura helps her other daughter, who has a demanding work schedule, with childcare. They expect her and her children to move back in with them eventually. Even though this will make the house crowded, it will help lighten the load for Laura because her daughter can help out.

Even though raising grandchildren is challenging and changed their plans for Laura to travel with Phil on long-haul trips, Laura said she “would do it all again.” Phil, however, confessed he is, “having second thoughts”, although he laughed when he said this.

They both find the government assistance system difficult to navigate, and they are seeking to adopt both grandchildren so that they are no longer reliant on Kinship Care. Instead, they can receive financial assistance through Phil’s disability. It will not result in receiving more money, but it will involve less hassle.

They have met with a lawyer to begin the process, but felt the legal counsel didn’t help them much. They both feel that it would be beneficial to kinship caregivers if the school would provide information on resources available to help the early in the school year.

According to Laura and Phil, the school does not provide many resources to assist them in the daily care of their grandchildren. Although they were aware of the family resource center, specifically the backpack program that sends home food to children and Christmas gift program, they felt this office did not provide the support needed by relatives caring for children. Instead, Phil and Laura receive support from private
organizations and community members. People in the community are aware of their family’s personal story, Phil’s accident and the grandchildren coming to live with them.

Neighbors have mowed their lawn, plowed their garden, and planted vegetables for the family. In return, they have helped another neighbor who is disabled. Regardless of their own financial challenges, they have sent extra funds for field visits and snacks to school to help children who are have greater financial hardships.

Sometimes Laura and Phil find the math their grandchildren bring home overwhelming. They feel that math instruction has changed, and although they may know how to get the right answer in the end, they are not able to demonstrate the process the way their granddaughter has learned it in school. Laura doesn’t have any problem with the reading homework, which entails listening to her granddaughter read aloud. Mark also felt frustrated when helping grandchildren with math homework, mainly because it had been a long time since he’d done the same kind of math problems. He spoke specifically of fractions. Laura and Phil felt that this problem could be addressed through homework tutorials for grandparents. Laura also suggested that school send home step-by-step instructions and math examples in print to provide guidance to grandparents as well as the reasons students must follow the procedures given.

Laura and Phil receive most information from the school through the newsletter or notes in their student journals. They both feel the school effectively informs families of upcoming events through the newsletter. They like receiving information at the beginning of each week so that they can be prepared for homework assignments and events. Their granddaughter is also very talkative, and tells them what is going on at school.
Laura wishes the school would go back to traditional parent-teacher conferences. She agrees that her granddaughter is very well behaved, but she would like a meeting with a teacher to discuss assignments. Right now she feels teachers only reach out to caregivers if there is a problem.

Laura recalled one experience in which she had trouble communicating with the school. Her granddaughter cried every night because she didn’t want to go to school anymore. This was very unusual because her granddaughter previously loved school. Laura tried to contact the teacher through a note in the daily planner, but the teacher did not respond. She was then told to talk to the assistant principal. Laura had previous experience dealing with the assistant principal and did not feel her concerns would be addressed. Instead, she wanted to talk to the principal. Eventually, she had a meeting with the principal who promised to follow-up. The teacher finally contacted her after the meeting with the principal and said that she didn’t understand what was causing her granddaughter to cry. Shortly afterwards her granddaughter stopped crying, but Laura never learned how the issue was resolved. She just knew that it “went away.”

Laura and Phil felt that most of the teachers in their school cared about their grandchildren. They fondly remembered when a teacher recognized their grandchildren when visiting a nursing home. The teacher was very happy to see them, and hugged them and talked about how well behaved her grandson was. Laura was surprised and happy that the teacher had remembered her grandson even though he was no longer her student. Mark and Laura are pleased that the teachers have told them that they enjoyed having their grandchildren in their classes:

I guess it would be how they react with the kids, even after the kids have moved on. They see it out on the street and give it a hug, you know, ‘How you doing?’ You know
that, to me, is important. That they noticed that child, that they seen that child, that you
know, the child was there. They weren’t just looked over, and I have seen that. You can
tell in a school.

When asked how schools could provide caring and nurturing environments for
GRG, Phil and Laura recommend the school provide special support services to any
relative caring for a child, not only grandparents raising grandchildren. They personally
know aunts, uncles, and siblings who have assumed care for young children. These
meetings could address legal difficulties, information on finding resources, and
workshops on homework. Child Care can often be an issue for grandparents, so they
suggested meetings during school or right after so that the students could work on their
homework, or play in the gym while caregivers meet. They suggested school distribute
to caregivers lists of organizations, religious, private, and governmental, that provide
both money and materials such as food, clothing, and children’s furniture. They both
thought it was important that schools understand, more often than not, grandparents
must assume responsibility of their grandchildren without any warning. In such cases,
grandparents rarely possess the physical resources necessary to caring for young
children. By the time Kinship Care workers are informed and make initial home visits,
the grandparents have often already been forced to purchase these materials with their
own financial resources which are often scarce. To address this problem, they suggested
schools have resources to provide support, especially in the first days of assuming
custody. They also suggested the support group share clothing and furniture with other
members so that as grandchildren grew out of items, they could be passed to another
grandfamily.
They expect Laura’s other daughter and her children to move back in with them eventually. Even though this will make the house crowded, it will help lighten the load for Laura because her daughter can help out.

**Madeline**

When Madeline’s husband left, she was quite happy. She was planning to create a new life for herself, and had dreams of becoming an author. All this changed when she assumed care of her three grandchildren. At the time of the interview she was a single grandmother raising two grandsons, one in first and one in 2nd grade, and a granddaughter in kindergarten. She opened her home to these children when her son and daughter-in-law decided they did not want to care for the children anymore. They are not incarcerated, nor do they suffer from chemical dependency. They have no contact with the children, nor do they desire to. According to Madeline, the children were neglected for some time before she assumed custody. When the grandchildren were living with their parents, the oldest rarely attended school. The granddaughter was left alone in a room without intellectual stimulation or emotional support. Madeline was proud to report the grandchildren had nearly perfect attendance since she assumed custody. She is also pleased with her oldest grandchild’s behavior and academic achievement.

Madeline loved her three grandchildren fiercely, and although she found the role daunting, she found joy in their daily interactions. She enjoyed watching them say grace before meals. She recalled her grandson expressing gratitude for her care, saying, “We wouldn’t have this bed if it wasn’t for Nana.” Regardless of her love for them, and the pleasure raising them brings, she wished their lives were different. She believed her grandchildren deserved both a mother and a father in their lives. She wished she had the
resources to take the children on vacation, even though she did her best to entertain them, taking them on picnics in the field.

This year, Madeline has been called to school often to discuss her granddaughter’s behavior. The school principal, guidance counselor, and teacher have told Madeline that Jaclyn has been disruptive in the classroom and on the school bus. Madeline dismissed the reports and thinks the teacher was overreacting. She also felt the teacher in the classroom, not the school principal, should address these problems. Madeline did not observe these behaviors at home and believed the teacher should establish more effective discipline practices, specifically the threat of corporal punishment. She wished discipline were handled the same way it was when she was in school.

The best thing for them to do is put some kind of discipline back in school ‘cause there’s none. When I was in school, the teacher had that paddle on her desk. She didn’t have to do anything. She hardly ever paddled anybody because they [students] had respect for her.

She feels that if the school used physical punishment, the threat of a spanking would curtail Jaclyn’s disruptive behaviors. Although Jacklyn was rarely spanked at home, the threat usually deterred negative behavior, although she is still very curious about what others are doing and, as Madeline describes her behavior, has to “touch everything”. Regardless of school practices, Madeline worried that Allie’s school behavior stemmed from the neglect she experienced as an infant.

Madeline was dismayed and angered when she discovered Jaclyn’s classroom behaviors were photographed to show to an outside agency without her permission or knowledge:
They were planning to have an outside person come in. They were gathering up all their information to give that outside person. I don’t know if they were going to tell me about it before or after, but they would have told me something before they had done anything. They can’t do anything unless you tell them that they can. But, I didn’t like it. It felt like they were going behind my back.

She is aware of her rights as a guardian, and that she must give permission for any treatment Jaclyn receives. Although she resented being unaware of the plans the school had for her granddaughter, she is willing to work with the school now that she has been given specific details by the school principal:

Since he’s telling me about it now, and I’m finding out what’s going on, I’m on board with it. If they’d asked me about it I might have said, ‘Yeah let’s do that,’ to start with, but they didn’t asked me about it.

However, she is still mistrustful of the school. Although they have promised to destroy the photographs they took earlier, she is still not certain they will.

Sometimes she feels the discipline techniques used to modify her granddaughter’s behavior are punitive to grandparents. When her granddaughter was banned from riding the bus for a day, Madeline was told she’d have to drive her to and from school. According to Madeline, “Grounding her from the bus was not punishment to her it was punishment to me, and I’m not being punished by no school for anything.” Furthermore, if she is asked to pick up Jaclyn from school because she is misbehaving, she must modify her own schedule. She feels it would be more appropriate for discipline to be addressed at school without involving her. Overall, her visits to the school are frequent, at least 10 in the first three months of school. When asked for an exact number, Madeline admitted she’d lost count. She has only encountered one problem at school, other than Jaclyn’s behavior. This involved having paperwork to register her oldest grandson. Eventually the issue was resolved.
As a single grandmother, Madeline struggled to find the time, money, and energy to raise her three grandchildren. The grandsons were in soccer, and this sport was both time-consuming and expensive. She found it difficult to wake early in the morning and maintain a hectic and busy schedule around the children’s needs. Although she finds the staff in the Family Resource Center is kind, she has only been given assistance during the holiday through what she described as, “just that project Merry Christmas thing.”

Madeline feels that there are too many bureaucratic hoops to jump through. In the spring, she would be admitted to the hospital for open-heart surgery. Her daughter would be responsible for the children during her hospital stay and recuperation. The school demands notarized documents granting her daughter permission to assume this role. Madeline felt that this is unnecessary:

I think if I’m saying that my daughter can come to school and pick Jaclyn up or come and deal with her for being mean, that she ought to be able to. That would be easier cause there’s so much paper work, so much paperwork, so much paper work!

Madeline is able to effectively communicate with the school through written notes and letter from the school. She reads all school correspondences that come home in order to keep up with what is happening with all three grandchildren’s schoolwork and activities:

They have a folder that they bring home and in that folder it says, ‘for the teacher-for the parent’ and stuff like that. If I’m sending the teacher something I stick a note in through that, and usually they answer it all the time. They’re usually pretty good at doing that.

Although the grandchildren enjoy telling her about activities and assignments, if she has a question, she prefers sending a note directly to a teacher. She also consults with the teacher instead of the school secretary, even when it is a school-wide event. She
expressed disappointment in the lack of parent-teacher conferences: “I’ve not had any here, like they did. My kids had them routinely whenever they were in school.”

In previous years, she has experienced difficulty with the homework assignments, primarily essay writing, but was relieved the homework demands were reduced during the current year, and subsequently, helping the grandchildren was much easier.

Regardless, she finds homework a challenge:

I don’t want homework because it’s too time consuming. I have too many kids, and I’m too old for this. I’ve done it once, I went to school myself, and my kids were in school then. Now it’s different.

Madeline does not have a computer, so she is unable to access digital academic resources for her grandchildren. She worries that this disadvantages her grandchildren because they cannot access educational programs recommended by the school. Although the grandchildren can access these programs at school, she feels disadvantaged: “I don’t know what it is. It’s stuff they can read, and it’s supposed to help them at school. I don’t know how it helps because I can’t see it. I don’t have a computer to do it with.”

Madeline does not attend parent events at the school, nor does she attend field trips or volunteer at school. She feels uncomfortable and isolated among younger caregivers at the school functions:

I don’t do anything to get involved. I don’t. I really don’t. I just don’t want to. It seems like everybody here is younger than me—much younger than me! They’re mommies, not grandmothers. You’re the weird one. You’re the strange one. [laughs] Yeah, the mommies are all chatting real pleasantly and everything about all this stuff, this mommy stuff. I’ve got grandma stuff, and there are no grandparents.

Madeline said she would become involved if the school organized and facilitated social activities designed for grandparents raising grandchildren and their grandchildren to
attend together. Such events would provide her opportunities to meet and network with other grandparents like herself. She also recommended the school organize a grandparent support group that could provide her useful advice, specifically on discipline. Finally, she suggested the principal remain approachable, “because old people like friendly people, you know.” She then commented on the age of her current principal, “This one here is younger than my daughter, younger than my son.”

**Line by Line Coding**

The tables below display the line-by-line coding categorized by Epstein’s Framework of Six Types of Involvement. These data do not indicate the level or frequencies of these involvement types. Instead, coding was organized according to application of sample school practices and results as described by Epstein (2011). Moreover, Epstein’s Framework did not influence the initial line-by-line coding, rather, this framework has been applied as a tool for alignment to the framework. According data, grandparents participated in their grandchildren’s education. With the exception of volunteering, their involvement and challenges aligned to Epstein’s 6 Types.

Table 5.2 **TYPE I: GRG Parenting**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line-by-Line Codes</th>
<th>Anna</th>
<th>Carla</th>
<th>Laura</th>
<th>Karen</th>
<th>Madeline</th>
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<td>Relying on written communication-newsletter</td>
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Table 5.3 *TYPE II: GRG Communicating (continued)*

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Table 5.4 *TYPE III: GRG Volunteering*

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<th>Laura</th>
<th>Karen</th>
<th>Madeline</th>
<th>Phillip</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering at school</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of volunteering opportunities</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of PTA</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing financial barriers</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.4 *TYPE III: GRG Volunteering (continued)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Anna</th>
<th>Carla</th>
<th>Laura</th>
<th>Karen</th>
<th>Madeline</th>
<th>Phillip</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing physical limitations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to volunteering</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing time barriers to</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>volunteering</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling discomfort with younger</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parents at events</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 5.5 *TYPE IV: GRG Learning at Home*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line-by-Line Codes</th>
<th>Anna</th>
<th>Carla</th>
<th>Laura</th>
<th>Karen</th>
<th>Madeline</th>
<th>Phillip</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty with homework content</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciating flexible,</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weekly homework schedule</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relying on written</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communication-letters from teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining homework routine</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.6 *TYPE V: Decision Making*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line-by-Line Codes</th>
<th>Anna</th>
<th>Carla</th>
<th>Laura</th>
<th>Karen</th>
<th>Madeline</th>
<th>Phillip</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in decision-making for</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grandchild</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending parent-teacher conferences</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.7  TYPE VI: GRG Collaborating with Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line-by-Line Codes</th>
<th>Anna</th>
<th>Carla</th>
<th>Laura</th>
<th>Karen</th>
<th>Madeline</th>
<th>Phillip</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supporting grandchild’s sports</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing difficulty with Kinship Care</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommending school liaison with other community services</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommending social/sports events for GRG</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings

The purpose of this study was to construct a theory on how elementary school principals create and nurture positive, productive relationships with grandparents raising grandchildren (GRGs). It attempted to answer the following questions:

1. How do elementary school principals ensure grandparents are involved in two-way communication about the educations of the grandchildren in their care?
2. How do principals ensure that grandparents are involved in decision-making regarding the educations of their grandchildren?
3. How do principals bring together the resources of the school, family members, and community to benefit caregiving grandparents and their grandchildren?

Two-way Communication

Although all the GRGs described incidence in which they did not receive clear communication on specific events or incidents, all GRGs reported feeling the school
effectively communicated with them. GRG interview data indicated written correspondence to be the most frequent form of two-way communication. This written communication served to guide them through their role as school partner in their grandchildren’s educations. GRGs reported they effectively corresponded to and received correspondence from teachers through notes in student journals, and GRGs read newsletters for information on school expectations and upcoming events. For Madeline and Karen, reviewing homework and correspondences was part of the daily after-school ritual. Although one GRG, Anna, felt overwhelmed by the amount of paperwork that was sent home from school, Karen enjoyed the written communication she received, so much so that she created scrapbooks to memorialize these artifacts of her grandson’s education. Only one GRG, Anna, utilized digital means to receive information from the school. Madeline, although she enjoys texting, does not own a computer.

GRGs reported feeling comfortable calling or having face-to-face conversations with school personnel. GRGs expressed a desire for conferences with teachers. Anna and Karen reported attending parent-teacher conferences, and enjoyed discussing their grandchildren’s progress and educational goals. Conversely, Madeline, Phil, and Lauren, whose grandchildren are all academically successful, were disappointed teachers had not scheduled meetings with them, and they desired conferences. These three GRGs assumed schools no longer arranged conferences for all families.

**Decision-making**

GRGs in this study were personally involved in decision-making for their grandchildren on a case-by-case basis when they perceived problems at school. For example, when a teacher did not respond to Laura’s questions regarding her
granddaughter’s evident unhappiness at school, she spoke directly to the principal and together they decided the situation would be further investigated. Madeline confronted school staff regarding the collection of data on her granddaughter’s behavior, and as a result, the school agreed to include Madeline in decision-making before seeking outside counseling. Karen, observing problems in her grandson’s speech, worked with his teacher to secure special services for him, and when she decided to provide home instruction, sought materials from his teacher. Anna collaborated with her granddaughter’s teacher to prevent misdiagnosis of Chloe’s language needs and together they decided to omit information regarding Chloe’s second language, German, on school paperwork. Carla decided to withdraw her granddaughter from counseling services provided at the school without consulting school personnel. In each situation, GRGs stepped in to make decisions for their grandchildren’s education and school services in response to perceived problems.

It must be noted that decision-making for their grandchildren is not the same as influencing school-wide decisions on policies, procedures, the allocation of funding, or hiring. Although principal reported active PTOs and SBDMs in their schools, GRG interview data indicate these grandparents did not attend SBDM meetings, serve on SBDM, nor did they attend PTO meetings. Data did not indicate GRGs were aware of the Family Resource Advisory Council or its purpose. All were aware of the PTO as an organization for volunteer involvement, but did not discuss PTO when asked how they were involved in making decisions for their grandchildren’s educations. None discussed SBDM as a vehicle for making decisions for their grandchildren.
Resources of the school, family members, and community to benefit caregiving grandparents and their grandchildren

**Poor health and physical mobility.** Anna, Carla, Phil, Lauren, and Madeline all reported health conditions that made both caring for grandchildren and visiting the school challenging. Phil and Carla experience limited mobility and constant pain that prevented them from attending school activities, and Anna’s colitis deterred her involvement because she was never certain she would have access to a bathroom on field trips or in transit to her grandchild’s school. At the time of her interview, Madeline was worried about securing educational rights for her daughter to become involved in the grandchildren’s educations while she recuperated from open-heart surgery, and Carla did not seek assistance from her husband in caring for grandchildren because she worried about his heart condition. Although principals acknowledged age as a deterrent to school involvement, they did not discuss disabilities or illnesses among GRGs.

**Emotional, generational challenges, and social challenges.** During interviews, GRGs spoke at length about the circumstances that led to caregiving: drug addiction, mental illness, and child neglect, and Madeline expressed confusion for her own son’s neglect and abandonment of his three children. Although GRG did not report these circumstances made them uncomfortable being involved at school, Carla and Madeline discussed feeling out of place at family events because the other parents were younger and they felt they did not fit in socially. All the GRGs spoke of a need for social contact with other GRGs to network, socialize, and share resources. Anna reported feeling confused by her school’s expectation that had changed since she raised her own children.
As a result, she feared her granddaughter would be punished or ostracized if she did not participate in a nonacademic, fun activity at school.

GRG interview data suggest generational challenges and changing school expectations. Phil and Laura found math homework confusing and difficult, a challenge they said did not face when raising their own children. Karen was suspicious of the new state standards, and unaware these standards were implemented in her grandson’s school. Instead, she thought Common Core State Standards guided instruction in the middle school; therefore, she would send him to a private school when he completed elementary to avoid his exposure to these standards. Madeline felt confused and angry by the shifts in discipline approaches and desired a return to corporal punishment in the classroom.

All the GRGs reported discipline challenges. Phil and Laura struggled with disciplining their grandson, and Carla felt helpless facing her granddaughter’s frequent temper tantrums. Madeline felt her own discipline methods more appropriate than the school, and was frustrated with the school’s inability to control her granddaughter’s behavior at school. Barbara was uncertain of discipline expectations for Chloe, and was uncertain of how to respond to behavior reports from school. Although Karen did not experience discipline challenges with Gareth at home or at school, she did feel a sense of pride when his teacher praised Gareth’s good behavior, noting it was not typical for grandchildren raised by grandparents.

**Time and money.** Participating GRG, with the exception of Karen, reported financial challenges. Although Kinship Care financial assistance was available to Kentucky GRG over the age of 55 at the time of the interviews (KCHFS, 2017), only two grandfamilies, Anna and Phil and Laura, had enrolled. Anna withdrew from the program
the previous year, sacrificing a $300 per month payment to avoid coping with what she perceived as unrealistic and unreasonable demands from Kinship Care personnel. Laura and Phil were seeking to adopt their grandchildren so that they could be free of Kinship Care services. Doing so would make their grandchildren eligible for assistance related to Phil’s disability. In both cases, GRG were their own advocates when dealing with Kinship Care personnel. They did not report seeking FRC intervention, assistance, or advice.

**FRCs.** GRGs did not describe support services FRC provided other than gifts and meals during holidays. Instead, GRGs recommended the school provide organized, systemic services to address their needs. They identified two areas: social and educational. They wanted social activities to validate and normalize their role as caregivers and venues to network with other GRGs. Currently, all schools included in the study had special activities for mothers, fathers, and non-custodial grandparents. Although each school hosted grandparents’ breakfasts, these were not events planned solely for GRGs. GRGs also wanted the schools to host workshops on legal matters, childrearing, and academic subjects. They also expressed a desire for schools to assist them in financial help, physical resources, and networking opportunities between GRGs and outside agencies. Even though Karen did not feel she needed a support group, she observed the needs of other GRGs and felt groups would be beneficial to other GRGs; however, she was not certain this was the role of the school to provide.

According to GRG interview data, two GRG received financial assistance from community and agency resources. Laura and Phil received assistance from neighbors, their church, and nonprofit organizations. Anna received financial assistance from her
church. Madeline and Carla also struggled financially as a result of assuming care for their grandchildren, but did not discuss outside financial assistance. Although the grandparents reported receiving occasional food assistance and holiday gifts for their grandchildren, they did not report FRC providing information on financial assistance programs or financial planning.

**Overlap of Family, School, and Community**

According to GRG interview data, GRGs felt school was important and made efforts to integrate school activities into home environments. They read correspondences from school, completed homework, and spoke with their grandchildren about school events. Anna worked with her granddaughter, Chloe on a craft activity that was shared during a family event at school. Karen provided her grandson, Gareth, instruction throughout the summer. According to GRG interviews, their grandchildren were academically successful, and GRG were pleased with this success. GRG made homework and reading school communications part of their routines. These data would indicate the evidence of school-like families, families that value school and have integrated school into their daily lives and routines. Data also indicated school expectations and communication had strong influences on the academic activities and learning environment at home. With the exception of German instruction provided by Anna, all the learning activities at home originated from school. All seemed to align their expectations to the school expectations with the exception of Madeline, and her concerns were discipline rather than academic.

GRG felt that an open and welcoming environment was important to their involvement. They all said they felt comfortable visiting their grandchildren’s schools.
GRG spoke of trust in their schools, although they did express some apprehensions in terms of safety. Barbara, Carla, Madeline worried their grandchildren may be mistreated by their peers as a result of their family dynamics and circumstances. GRG did not describe incidences in which their grandchildren’s safety had been endangered. Regardless, in order to overcome her fears, Karen collaborated with peers in her faith community, visited the school, and prayed for the safety of students and staff. Overall, GRGs wanted the schools to treat their grandchildren with kindness and fairness.

When asked to describe their most positive school involvement experiences, GRGs spoke of personal encounters with teachers and staff, incidences in which school personnel praised their grandchildren or family events that validated their roles as caregivers. Karen was pleased when a teacher praised her grandson’s good behavior. When asked for the most positive events they experienced in their grandchildren’s educations, Phil and Laura described a teacher hugging her grandchildren and praising their good behavior at school. Anna was touched when the FRC gave her the ingredients for a Thanksgiving dinner, and Karen enjoyed parties when her grandson attended a Head Start program. These personal interactions and activities helped build rapport and trust and rapport with GRG.

GRG did not report the school brokered community services or involved the community in developing programs. GRG interview data indicate grandfamilies did not receive health or family services from the community through the school. Some of the participants in the study received services from the community without the school acting as broker. Laura and Phil received financial assistance from nonprofit organizations, church, and neighbors. Carla was forced to seek outside counseling for her
granddaughter and her husband will have to provide transportation because the counseling services provided at the school are insufficient. She did not plan to seek help through the FRC in identifying a counselor. Laura, Phil, and Anna experienced difficulties navigating the Kinship Care system to receive services. They did not seek out help from the school to mediate these challenges or broker similar services. Furthermore, the GRGs in the study expressed a desire for further services: support groups, counseling for grandchildren, recreational activities for grandchildren, and suggested the school broker these services that could be provided by outside services.
CHAPTER 6

Conclusions and Recommendations

The previous two chapters presented the data collected from interviews with principals and GRG in both narratives and tables. This chapter presents conclusions and recommendations for both practice and research based. The purpose of this study was to construct a theory on how elementary school principals create and nurture positive, productive relationships with grandparents raising grandchildren (GRG). It attempted to answer the following questions:

1. How do elementary school principals ensure GRG are involved in two-way communication about the education of the grandchildren in their care?
2. How do principals ensure that GRG are involved in decision-making regarding the education of their grandchildren?
3. How do principals bring together the resources of the school, family members, and community to benefit caregiving GRG families?

This dissertation resulted in a conceptual framework that may serve as elements in the construction of theory on how principals foster positive and productive relationships with GRG. Like many qualitative studies emergent data revealed conclusions that shaped the focus of the study. For this reason, this chapter discusses the influences on principal leadership and the resultant impact on two-way communication, limited decision-making, and bridging of resources to benefit GRG families.
Conclusions

The figure below illustrates the study’s conclusions: the influence of principal perceptions and knowledge on their leadership practices and resultant GRG involvement. Although principals were cognizant of the challenges GRG face, this knowledge did not influence their leadership. As a result, their leadership practices created school environments in which GRGs were effectively engaged in two-way communication but limited decision-making. Furthermore, the school did not provide a bridge to resources to meet many of the challenges GRG and their families faced.

Figure 6.1 *Influences on Principal leadership and subsequent outcomes with respect to GRG involvement*
Influences on Principal Leadership

During interviews principals discussed the unique challenges facing GRG, and these challenges were similar to those described by both GRG enrolled in this study and extant literature. However, interview data indicate this knowledge did not influence their schoolwide leadership. Instead, principals reported student needs and community identity influenced their leadership practices. Furthermore, when asked questions concerning bridging resources to meet the needs of GRG and their families, principals discussed the role of the FRC and their collaboration with FRC coordinators as an influence.

Student and community. The principals in this study reported their priorities encompassed the physical, emotional, and cognitive well-being of their students. It should not be presumed these principals were not aware of or were indifferent to the life circumstances of the GRG, or that they did not take into consideration GRG’ needs and opinions when making case-by-case decisions as discussed later.

Secondly, data indicated principals’ leadership decisions were influenced by the identities of the rural, Appalachian communities their schools served, primarily poverty and community values. During interviews they described in detail their personal knowledge of their communities. Moreover, all six principals chronicled their personal histories and longevity in the region, discussing in detail the length of time they’d lived or worked in the community, as well as their family connections to the county and school district. According to extant research, this may be a characteristic of Appalachian culture, where personal connections to place (Beaver, 1986a; Eller, 1982; Halperin, 1990; Jones, 1994; Keefe, 1998) and family history (Beaver, 1986a; Eller, 1982; Halperin, 1990;
Keefe, 1988) are valued. Chronicling their histories in the region may have been meant to validate to their leadership. However, data did not suggest all principals positively viewed community norms and values. This is not unusual when schools serve communities that do not hold values consistent with those identified as middle class (Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis & George; Henry, 1997).

**FRC Role.** In Kentucky, bridging resources to meet the needs of families falls under the responsibilities of the FRC coordinator, not the school principal. Although the principal is expected to communicate academic needs to the FRC coordinator, evaluate the FRC coordinator, and may have input on the advisory council which pre-assesses needs of families, plans activities and creates and oversees budgets, it is the FRC coordinator, not the principal, who is charged with carrying out and securing services for families (KCHF, 2016).

Furthermore, the Kentucky Principal Performance Standards do not direct principals to meet the needs of families. Instead, Sample Performance Standard 6: Communication and Community Relations directs principals collaborate with “colleagues and stakeholders to effectively utilize the resources and expertise available in the local community (KDE, 2011b, p. 7)” in performance indicator 5.8. This differs from national school leadership performance indicator which state: “Links to and collaborates with community agencies for health, social, and other services to families and children (p. 24).” Unlike the national standard, Kentucky’s does not direct principals to locate and utilize the resources specifically for families.

Overall, in Kentucky FRC coordinators are charged with development of family programs in the school, brokering outside services, and identifying gaps in services in the
community. Therefore providing homework-help classes, arranging counseling for grandchildren and GRCs, establishing support groups, mediating barriers to Kinship Care, developing recreational programs for GRG and their grandchildren all fall within the duties of the FRC coordinator (Doktor & Poertner, 1996; Kalafat, 2004; KCHF 2016b). The FRC is also charged with opening channels between the school and families.

It should be noted that although this study’s research questions and interview protocol were based on ISLLC Standards (2008), principals did not identify these standards as influences on leadership. Furthermore, they did not discuss Kentucky Principal Performance Standards (KPPS).

**Principal Leadership Practices**

Overall, because principals placed students at the center of their leadership, and considered the needs and expectations of the community when making decisions for their school as a whole, their schoolwide leadership did not focus on the family composition. Instead, all the principals reported they treated GRG the same as parents in programs, policies and rights.

It should be noted that Kentucky principal standards do not employ language that acknowledges diverse family composition. Unlike ISLLC standards, which use the term family involvement, Kentucky Principal Performance Standards (KPPS) specifically refer to family members involved in their students’ education as parents (KDE, 2011) regardless of caregiver status. This may suggest that, even at the state level, all adults involved in a child’s education should be treated as parents.

Consistent with the principals’ treatment of GRG as parents, the schools in this study did not create policies or institute practices in anticipation of needs specific to
GRG, nor did they plan and implement activities solely for GRG involvement. Processes and procedures for involving GRG in communication and decision making were also the same as those instituted to involve all parents. As with all parents, bridging resources to meet the needs of families was the responsibility of the FRC coordinators.

Principal treatment of GRG, giving them the role of parent, should not be confused with principals’ perceptions of GRG. As discussed later, principals viewed the role GRG played in their grandchildren’s lives, and the challenges they faced in this role, as different from that of biological parent.

**Legal Right to Involvement.** Principals reported the role grandparents played in school involvement depended on legal factors. The decision to treat each GRG as parents—as with any adult—was dependent upon established legal relationships or educational rights conferred in writing by biological parents.

Interestingly, KDE (2013) allows informal caregivers who have no legal relationship to a child to enroll, view educational documents, and make decisions regarding that child’s education. During interviews principals did not discuss this policy. Regardless of adherence to law or policy, none of the principals could not recall refusing access to school involvement because the GRG in their schools either established legal relationships or provided documentation from the grandchildren’s parents bestowing educational rights to communication and decision making. Furthermore, the GRG in this study reported they provided formal kinship care with legally established relationships to their grandchildren through legal custodianship, therefore the schools bestowed on them the same rights to communication, decision-making, and access to resources they would biological parents.
Although GRG in this study had legal custody of their grandchildren, and the principals viewed this demographic as parents, GRG interview data did not indicate all the grandparents self-identified as parents. Only one of the grandparents, Karen, called herself Gareth’s mother and wished for the school to do so. The other grandparents referred to themselves as grandparents and, with the exception of Karen, did not report they wanted the school to assign this title to them.

**By Need and By Name.** Although principals reported treating all GRG as parents in their schoolwide leadership, they did deviate from this practice on a case-by-case basis, primarily when the principal became aware of a student whose individual need presented a barrier to learning. When the need arose, the principal deviated from viewing the GRG as a parent and acknowledged the separate and unique role they assumed as GRG: by need and by name. These actions were not the result of a school-wide policy or procedure that met the collective needs of GRG; instead, family dynamics were taken into consideration as a strategy to best serve the learning needs of their grandchildren on an individual and personal level. These circumstances called for the principal to acknowledge and take into the consideration problems unique to GRG.

**GRG Involvement**

Both principal and GRG interview data suggests GRGs are effectively involved in two-way communication, but limited decisions-making. Furthermore, GRG families’ needs were not met through the bridging of resources by the school.

**Two-way Communication.** One form of family involvement is two-way communication: schools inform families on their children’s education and families provide information to the schools about their children. According to both principal and
GRG interview data, schools effectively communicated with grandparents as they did with parents, through written, face-to-face, and digital means. GRG reported written communication as the prevalent means for communicating, and teachers regularly engage in two-way communication, usually through notes in student journals. According to GRG, this written communication effectively guided them through their role as school partner in their grandchildren’s education. GRG reported they effectively corresponded to and received correspondence from teachers through notes in student journals, and GRG read newsletters for information on school expectations and upcoming events.

According to principal interview data, teacher expectations included communicating with families through annual conferences, traditionally known as parent-teacher conferences. In some cases, such these conferences could by phone, or conditional to the academic standing of the students. GRG expressed a desire for conferences with teachers and some were disappointed teachers had not scheduled meetings with them.

**Limited Decision-making**

Historically, schools have not always welcomed families into decision-making for their children. During the Industrial Revolution, scientific principles applied to the reorganization of factories shaped an authoritative, bureaucratic structures, specialized roles, rigid policies and procedures (Hiatt-Michael, 1994) which sometime disempowered parents in the decision-making process (Henry, 1997; Sergiovanni, 2006). Recent trends in school leadership call for collaborative family-school partnerships in which parents’ ideas, leadership, concerns, and skills are all sincerely valued and integrated into school systems (CCSSO, 2008) and principal roles have shifted from managers who oversee
workers to leaders who share decision-making with other shareholders (Hoyle & BJork; Leithwood & Prestine, 2002) involving families and community (CCSSO, 2009).

In Kentucky, family members may be involved in school decision-making through holding SBDM office, serving on SBDM committees, membership in the Family Resource Advisory Council, and PTO. Parent service on SBDM and FRAC is mandated. At least two parents must serve on SBDM, and schools with 10% or greater minority demographics, must have at least one minority representative on SBDM (KDE, 2015a; Hunter, 1999). In addition, families must be involved in Family Resource Centers; one-third of the Family Resource Advisory Council governing the activities and budget of the FRC, must be comprised of family members (KCHF, 2015). Furthermore, principals must also serve with these family members on both SBDM (KDE, 2015a; Hunter, 1999) and FRAC (KCHF, 2015).

The principals in this study intentionally involved GRG in decision-making on a case-by-case basis, by need and by name. This decision-making is consistent with the influences to their leadership as described earlier, primarily student-need. In some cases, principals reported they place their perceived needs of and solutions for the child before the desires of the GRG. Similar to principal data, GRG in this study reported working with the school to make decisions for their grandchildren on a case-by-case basis in reaction to perceived problems.

GRG decision-making was limited. Decision-making for their individual grandchildren should not be confused with influencing school-wide decisions, providing input on policies, procedures, the allocation of funding, or hiring. Although principals reported active PTOs and SBDMs in their schools, GRG interview data indicate these
grandparents were not aware of and did not attend SBDM meetings, serve on SBDM, nor did they attend PTO meetings

**Bridging school, community, and resources to address GRG challenges**

GRG in this study identified challenges to involvement in their grandchildren’s education: financial, time, material need, poor health and physical mobility, emotional, social, and generational. These challenges are not unique to the GRG in this study, nor are these problems recent developments. Interview data described challenges consistent with those described in extant research and literature on GRG (Doblin-McNab, 2006; Gordon et al., 2004; Myadze, 2012.)

Although principals reported they treated GRG as parents, interview data suggest they were aware of the challenges in GRG’s personal lives; however, they did not appear to identify these as impediment to involvement. As a result, they did not create or foster schoolwide programs or systems to broker services to address GRG challenges. As in decision-making, principals reported brokering outside resources for GRG families when an individual student learning need arose. These stories, as mentioned above, involved the principal intervening when an individual student experienced a barrier to learning.

On a schoolwide level, principals reported that FRCs proactively provided resources and brokered outside services for all the families in their schools. All the principals spoke very highly of FRCs’ successes in meeting the needs of all families, including grandfamilies, reported meeting regularly with FRC coordinators, and were confident their own FRC coordinator were aware of the needs of their grandfamilies.

Conversely, GRG did not describe support services FRC provided other than gifts and meals during holidays. Instead, GRG relied on community services outside the
Several GRG recommended the school provide organized, systemic services to address GRG needs.

**Theoretical Framework: Epstein’s Overlapping Spheres of Influence**

Epstein’s Overlapping Spheres of Influence (Epstein et al., 1997) demonstrate the interactions among home, school, and community. Each of the three spheres of influence—school, family, and community— overlap, with the child in the center (Epstein, 1995; Epstein, 2011; Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders & Simon, 1997; Simon & Epstein, 2001). Even though these three spheres overlap, they do not necessarily share activities and practices. It is necessary though that schools engage family and community to provide an effective approach to educating the child.

Epstein’s theory (Epstein, 1995; Epstein, 2011; Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders & Simon, 1997; Simon & Epstein, 2001) calls for *family-like schools*, environments that care for the needs of children and families, and *school-like families* in which home affirms the importance of school. Community is also involved in the development of these environments. The school involves the community in meeting family needs and academic goals and encourages family and school to engage in community involvement (Epstein, 1995; Epstein, 2011; Epstein et al., 1997; Simon & Epstein, 2001). Epstein et al. (1997) reports these overlapping influences, practices, and relationships fostered academic achievement. According to Epstein, “With frequent interactions between schools, families, and communities, more students are more likely to receive common messages from various people about the importance of school, of working hard, of thinking creatively, of helping one another, and of staying in school (p. 3). Figure 6.2 illustrates the overlapping of influences according to this study’s findings. Both the
overlap of family and school and the overlap of family and community was greater than overlap of community, school, and family.

Figure 6.2 Overlapping Spheres of GRG Family Influence

School-like Families

Interview data suggest school and home overlapped to create school-like families. GRG reported the importance of education and made efforts to integrate school activities into home environments. They read correspondences from school, completed homework, and spoke with their grandchildren about school events. GRG made homework and reading school communications part of their home routines. These data indicate the evidence of school-like families, families that value school and have integrated school into their daily lives and routines.

Data also indicated school expectations and communication had strong influences on the academic activities and learning environment at home. Both principals and GRG
discussed learning from home, primarily homework, as a form of family involvement. With the exception of German instruction provided by Anna, all the learning activities at home originated from school. All seemed to align their expectations to the school expectations with the exception of Madeline, and her concerns were discipline rather than academic.

Principal reported that GRG, like most adults, struggled with homework assignments related to the new state standards, specifically Common Core State Standards in Mathematics. In response, principals developed services at school. It should be noted, these solutions were not designed to ameliorate caregiver discomfort with mathematics content and encourage school-like families. Instead, the schools provided tutoring sessions to remove learning from home. With the exception of Madeline, none of the other GRG suggested they be completely relieved from learning at home responsibilities.

**Family-like Schools**

Both principals and GRG reported three common school characteristics to involvement: welcoming environments, trust, and relationships. Interview data suggested principals worked to ensure their schools were welcoming to families and community and all six reported their leadership influenced teachers and staff to create and nurture school cultures that embodied these characteristics. Most principals discussed the need to remain non-judgmental of GRG circumstances and expressed empathy for GRG challenges.

GRG, like principals, felt that an open and welcoming environment was important to their involvement. They all reported they felt comfortable visiting their
grandchildren’s schools. GRG spoke of trust in their schools, although they did express some apprehensions in terms of safety. Furthermore, GRG valued personal interaction with school personnel and reported these experiences as positive.

Both principal and grandparent interview data suggested home and school are overlapping and interdependent. GRG have expectations of schools and schools have expectations of homes. The relationship is pseudo-reciprocal, but not *quid pro quo*. Principals see the school role as education and safety; the GRG role is to support school’s goals at home and the school is responsible for helping the GRG fulfill that role. Mr. Carpenter and Mrs. McPherson’s comments suggested reciprocity, that if families observed principals’ dedication to their children’s care, families would, in turn, cooperate with schools. This reciprocity may be influenced by Appalachian culture, where reciprocity is a valued norm (Beaver, 1986). GRG interview data suggested GRG were satisfied with the degree to which school and home overlapped, and they did not express a desire to become more involved in school activities, or have become more active in learning at home.

**Community, School, and Home**

Overall, data did not fully align with Epstein’s overlapping spheres of community with family and school. The principals assumed FRCs were meeting the needs and addressing barriers facing GRG, however, GRG did not report the school brokered community services or involved the community in developing programs.

GRG interview data indicate grandfamilies did not receive services to benefit their families from the community through the school. Instead, some of the GRG reported
receiving services from the community without school acting as broker. They also reported involvement in their communities, helping neighbors and volunteer work.

Furthermore, the GRG in the study expressed a desire for further services: support groups, counseling for grandchildren, recreational activities for grandchildren, and suggested the school broker these services that could be provided by outside services. It should be noted that principals did not report a disinterest in fostering the overlap of community, family, and school, as evidenced in Mr. Bleven’s statement in the school’s mission to “feed and clothe” students, and that schools are “about as Christian as an organization can get without being one.” Although the principals discussed the positive role FRCs played in providing resources to address physical need, they reported bridging resources on a case-by-case individual basis.

**Recommendations for Practice**

The purpose of this study was to construct theory on how elementary school principals create and nurture positive and productive relationships with grandparents raising grandchildren. Resultant research findings suggest recommendations for practice in the role of GRG, methods for communication, unlimited decision-making, and bridging resources to benefit GRG families.

**Influence on Leadership: Acknowledging GRG Unique Role and Challenges**

Extant research suggests principals most effectively engage families when they are aware of their communities’ circumstances and possess a knowledge base in community and family collaboration. Because more children are being raised by grandparents in the United States than in earlier years, and over a third of these children are under the age of 6, it is essential that elementary school principals acknowledge the
unique roles and barriers to involvement GRGs face and utilize this information in their schoolwide leadership.

Principals should not assume GRGs have the same needs as all parents, nor should they assign the title of parent to all GRGs without GRG expressed desire. Only one of the GRG enrolled in this study expressed a desire to be called a parent. Role confusion, the battle between assuming the role of parent or grandparent, is common among GRG (Doblin-MacNab, 2006; Laudry-Myer & Newman, 2004). School leaders should avoid exacerbating role confusion and validate the unique role GRG play by acknowledging them as a distinctive family dynamic and an influence on their leadership, especially in Eastern Kentucky where greater percentages of children raised by grandparents reside.

**Policies and Programs**

Acknowledging the unique challenges GRG face, principals should create and facilitate programs and policies that take into consideration the needs of this growing demographic. In doing so, the principals will not be shifting their focus away from student need. Research indicates the learning needs of students are best served when their caregivers are involved in their educations (Anderson, 2000; Hill & Craft, 2003; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Topor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010). Leadership practices should address legal rights to involvement, communication, decision-making, and bridging resources to meet GRG family needs.

**Legal Rights to Involvement**

In the United States, many GRGs do not have legally established relationships with the grandchildren in their care. As a result, many face legal and policy hurdles to
involvement in their grandchildren’s educations (Beltran, 2013; Kinship Families in Kentucky, 2013; Woodworth, 1996) and may prevent them from becoming involved in their grandchildren’s schools (Letiecq et al., 2008; Landry et al., 2004; Strozier, et al., 2005). Principals must not presume that all GRG caring for students have legally established relationships to grandchildren or parent consent. This ignores the possibility that GRG are secretly caring for grandchildren and avoiding school for fear of losing their grandchildren to the Foster Care system (Emick & Hayslip, 1996; Letiecq et al., 2008; Wallace, 2001). Informal caregiving GRG are reluctant to voice concerns over school decisions as they fear they will be seen as uncooperative and reported to child welfare agencies. As a result, school staff members may think informal care grandparents are uninterested in their grandchildren’s school lives (Strozier, McGrew, Krisman & Smith, 2005). Consistent with KDE (2013) policy regarding informal caregiver involvement, Kentucky principals should seek out informal caregivers and allow access to involvement without legal documentation. This may encourage informal caregivers become fully involved in their grandchildren’s educations.

**Communication**

Epstein (1997) recommends schools utilize written communication through report cards, weekly or monthly folders, notes, and newsletters as well as phone conversations. She also advises schools conference with families annually with additional sessions as needed. Fostering two-way communication is not always easy.

Findings suggest the GRG in this study depended on written correspondence both to and from the school to create two-way communication. Although recent trends have led to schools increasing use of digital technology, most of the GRG reported little or no
access to computers or reliable Internet, therefore schools should not rely solely on digital communication. Furthermore, because trust and building relationships were valued by GRG, and these were created and fostered through personal interaction and communication with school personnel, principals should direct teachers to make efforts to reach out to GRG to establish rapport with GRG so that they feel welcome and valued.

To address GRG uncertainty with generational changes in curriculum and expectations, principals should not presume GRG possess current knowledge of educational practices. Written information may include homework tips and information on current educational practices. Clear and consistent written homework instructions and routines should be established at the beginning of the year to establish routines at home.

**Decision-making**

According to Epstein (2008) families should participate in decisions made for their children. She recommends families serve as representatives on “school councils, school improvement teams, committees, and the PTA, PTO, or other parent organizations” (Epstein et al., 1997, p. 8). To involve family members who do not serve on decision-making school groups, she recommends parent representatives serve on decision-making bodies to engage in two-way communication with families. These representatives should disseminate information to and solicit feedback from families so that non-members can exercise influence over decision made for the school (Epstein, 1997).

Although GRG reported decision-making for their grandchildren when individual problems arose, findings suggest GRG are not involved in decision-making at the
schoolwide level. Two vehicles for school-wide decision-making is involvement in PTO and SBDM.

In some Eastern Kentucky school districts up to 11% of the student population are being raised by grandparents. Because the Kentucky General Assembly mandated school have minority representation on SBDM if the student population was comprised of 10% or more, it may be argued that a significant percentage of families may not currently be represented in schoolwide decision-making. Although ethnicity and race cannot be equated to family composition, it must be acknowledged GRG face distinctively unique challenges and needs that may not be addressed by SBDM.

However, mandatory GRG participation on SBDM is not recommended. Many GRG lack mobility and time to attend meetings; therefore, principals should recommend parent representatives make greater efforts to reach out to GRG in order to solicit input on decision-making for the school. Principals should not presume parent representatives address GRG’ perspectives and opinions. Younger parents may not have contact with GRG, and as evident in this study’s findings, GRG may not feel comfortable expressing their ideas and opinions to their SBDM representatives without solicitation.

**Bringing Together Resources to Benefit GRG**

Epstein recommends schools seek out and utilize local services and resources to benefit school, families, and students, and providing information to families on a wide variety of community services that meet health and social needs including recreational, cultural, and civic. In addition she suggests schools include written materials, workshops, and videos for families that provide information and advice on child development and rearing. Schools are also recommended to provide health and nutrition
programs at school and visit homes as well as orchestrate neighborhood meetings to foster understanding between schools and families (Epstein, 1997).

**Assessing needs.** GRG interview data identified financial, health, emotional, and social challenges that were not addressed by FRCs. Efforts should be made to assess the needs of grandparents raising grandchildren in each school understanding the demographics may vary from community to community. Through the FRC, principals should design and send out surveys to GRG that collect data on needs specific to grandfamilies, and principals should recommend FRC Advisory Councils solicit input and consider GRG needs.

**Developing programs.** School leaders should not presume all GRG needs are met through general services offered to all families. Instead, they should instruct FRC coordinators to design programs catered to the specific needs of grandparent, not general kinship care or parenting, with goals and objectives based on the specific needs of the ethnic, cultural, and geographic demographics of each group. Instead of focusing on the weaknesses and limitations, these services should build on the strengths of these grandparents. Recommended content may include helping grandparents meet their personal needs as well as becoming empowered self-advocates (Chenoweth, 2000).

GRG in the study recommended schools host support groups offering counseling services, networking, and the sharing of resources. These recommendations are consistent with extant research findings. GRG challenges may be alleviated through activities offered by school (Doblin-McNabb, 2006; Strozier, 2012) such as parenting classes (Doblin-McNabb, 2006), support groups (Strozier, 2012), and access to outside resources (Strom & Strom, 2000). Although these services could be offered in
community centers or churches, Montoro-Rodriguez, Smith, and Palmieri (2012) found that grandparents are more likely to use services provided in the schools than in the surrounding community because schools are convenient in timing and location. Many grandparents transport their grandchildren to school and find they can more easily attend support groups after dropping off their grandchildren (Burnette, 1998). Finally, in Appalachian communities, it may not be uncommon for community activities to take place in school buildings (DeYoung, 2002) therefore, the school may be the most appropriate place for these services to be provided.

**Recommendations for Research**

In order to build on the theoretical elements of this study, further research is recommended in the area of GRG legal right to involvement, limited decision-making, and the bridging of resources to meet GRG family needs.

**Formal Caregiving Status as a Test to Involvement**

The principals in this study treated and viewed GRG as parents; however, they ensured legally established rights before engaging GRG in their grandchildren’s education. As noted earlier, KDE does not require formal kinship care be established to involve adults as student advocates, decision-makers, and recipients of educational information. Further research is needed to discover how Kentucky principals interpret state laws and policies regarding informal kinship care and potential impact on GRG involvement.

**GRG Use of Technology in Two-way Communication**

GRG in this study only discussed the use of computers to become involved in school. Protocol did not ask questions regarding the use of phones or tablets to
communicate. Therefore, future research might examine technology GRG utilized to communicate or complete homework assignments, and how schools might utilize these technologies to involve GRG.

**Principals and Family Resource Center**

Finally, although principals presumed GRG needs were met through FRC resources and services, this was not corroborated by GRG interview data. FRCs are responsible for brokering community and agency resources, therefore further research might examine the role of FRC coordinators, specially their awareness of GRG needs as well as how coordinators perceive FRCs are meeting these needs. Furthermore, research regarding effective FRC programs established to meet GRG needs in Kentucky.
**APPENDIX A: ALIGNMENT OF TO ISLLC PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS AND INDICATORS TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Performance Expectation 4: Collaborating with Families and Stakeholders  
Research question: How do school leaders collaborate with families and community stakeholders to nurture positive and productive relationships with grandparents raising grandchildren?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element/Indicator</th>
<th>Research Sub-questions</th>
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| **Element A: Collaboration with Families and Communities**  
Indicator 1: Brings together the resources of schools, family members, and community to positively affect student and adult learning, including parents and others who provide care for children.  
Element C: Building on Community Resources  
Indicator 1: Links to and collaborates with community agencies for health, social, and other services to families and children.  
Indicator 4: Secures community support to sustain existing resources and add new resources that address emerging student needs. | How do school leaders bring together the resources of the school, family members, and community to positively affect the learning of caregiving grandparents and the grandchildren in their care? |
| **Element A: Collaboration with Families and Communities**  
Indicator 2: Involves families in decision making about their children’s education. | How do leaders ensure that grandparents are involved in decision making regarding the education of the grandchildren in their care? |
| **Element A: Collaboration with Families and Communities**  
Indicator 3: Uses effective public information strategies to communicate with families and community members (such as email, night meetings, and written materials in multiple languages). | How do leaders ensure that grandparents are involved in two-way communication about the education of the grandchildren in their care? |
APPENDIX B: PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Initial Open-Ended Questions (Focus on the school)

1. This first question is not specifically about grandparents raising grandchildren. Instead, this first question addresses any adult caring for children in your school, biological parents, foster parents, kinship care providers to name a few. How are caregivers involved in their children’s education her at ______________? (Research questions 1 and 2.)

2. Can we discuss grandparents raising grandchildren specifically now? How are they involved in their grandchildren’s education her at ________________? (Research questions 1 and 2.)

3. Let’s think about the life of a family where the head of the household is a grandparent. Based on your observations, what challenges does this kind of family face in their everyday lives? What are your thoughts and feelings on the school’s role in helping these families overcome these challenges? (Research question 3.)

Intermediate Questions (Focus on the principal’s role, individual thoughts, and feelings)

1. Let’s go back to the role of caregiving grandparents in their grandchildren’s education. You said their role(s) was\ were ______________. How, as a school principal, does your leadership help to create an environment that fosters that role? Can you recall a situation or event when your leadership made this happen? (I will ask this question for every role identified in the initial open-ended questions.)

2. Now let’s talk about the school’s role in supporting grandparents raising grandchildren. You talked about ___________. As a principal, what is your role in making this happen? Can tell me a story about a time that you made this happen?
3. Tell me your thoughts and feeling on the role of caregiving grandparents in their grandchildren’s education.

4. What factors influence your leadership as a school principal? How do these influences that you just described shape your decisions regarding grandparents raising grandchildren?

**Ending Questions**

1. Can you recall an experience when you influenced a positive outcome for a grandparent who was raising a grandchild in your school? Would you tell me that story?

2. Based on your personal experiences, how do you think elementary schools can create and nurture positive and productive relationships with grandparent raising grandchildren?

3. What resources would help principals create and nurture positive and productive relationships with grandparents raising grandchildren?

4. What do you feel would make principals more effective at creating and nurturing positive and productive relationships with grandparents raising grandchildren
APPENDIX C: GRANDPARENTS INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Initial Open-Ended Questions (Focus on the school)

1. Let’s pretend I am a grandparent raising a grandchild, and I’m about to move into your school district. My grandchild is going to attend the same school that your grandchild now attends. What is it like being part of your grandchild’s education here at ______________? (Research questions 1 and 2.)

2. Can you tell me a little about how adults are involved in the education of their children at your school? (Communications/Decision Making) (Research questions 1 and 2.)

3. Let’s think about the lives of the families in your community. What problems do families face in their everyday lives? Can you think of ways your school helps families with these problems? (Research question 3.)

Intermediate Questions (Focus on the grandparent role, individual thoughts, and feelings)

1. Earlier we talked a little about how adults become involved in their children’s education. You said they _______. Do you become involved in these activities too? Can you tell me a story or stories about how you were involved in your grandchild’s education?

2. Can you recall any problems you’ve run into that might make it difficult for you to be involved?

3. Can you recall ways the school made it easier, given your personal situation, to become involved?
4. Can you tell me how you go about getting information on your grandchild’s school or classroom? Are you able to recall a time that you had difficulty getting the information you needed?

5. How about working with the school to make decisions for your grandchild? How does this happen? Can you tell me about a time you worked with the school to make decisions for your grandchild? How did that go?

6. As you look back on all the time your grandchild has been in school here, are there any events that stand out in your mind?

7. What would you say was the most difficult moment you experienced at your child’s school?

8. As a grandparent raising a grandchild, what do you need to make your role easier? Has the school been able to help? If yes, can you remember a time that they helped out in some way?

**Ending Questions**

1. In your opinion, what are the best ways that schools can support grandparents raising grandchildren?

2. If I was going to design a training about grandparent raising grandchildren that principals were going to attend, what would you like them to know about helping grandparents like you?

3. Can you recall the most positive experience you’ve had in your grandchild’s school? Can you tell me what made this experience positive for you?
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*Appalachian Journal, 5.*


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