Parent involvement is considered a vital educational factor that is associated with students' academic success. Engaging parents in the educational process is a challenge confronting many school districts across the United States. This is a significant problem for schools in low socioeconomic communities where lack of resources for parents and teachers creates barriers to involvement initiatives. This qualitative study analyzes how low socioeconomic parents' perceptions of their involvement with their elementary children compare to the expectations, experiences, and perceptions of teachers. The findings are drawn from original, in-depth focus group discussions with a sample of elementary school teachers and low SES parents. As teachers and parents revealed their views and experiences pertaining to parent involvement, deeper understandings evolved of what it means to be either a parent or a teacher.

Parents emphasized wanting to be involved and active at the school, whereas teachers stressed their frustration with parents who were not present at school or at home and who did not support teachers' educational efforts. Although parent participants struggled with life stressors, they also discussed their efforts to overcome those stressors and work with their children. Teachers stressed their desire to have parents engage in parenting activities, such as providing adequate health-care and discipline. Both teachers and parents believe in positive communication between home and school; however parents who aggressively advocate for their children are seen as negative participants by the school. Parents want to volunteer at the school, but teachers revealed concerns about parents with skill deficits. School safety and the overall school climate was a concern for many of the parents. All participants suggested actions that the school could take to promote collaboration, understanding, and stronger parent involvement, including professional development for teachers, having more staff in the building, and engaging in more empowering conversations and actions between teachers and parents.

A comparison of the findings from teachers and parents revealed some divergent perspectives on the concept of parent involvement, what it means to be involved, and what involvement looks like at Emerson School.

These findings suggest that the experiences of both parents and teachers, including life context, role adherence, and teacher-parent interactions, have shaped their conceptualizations of what parent involvement means to them. The accounts of both parents and teachers have provided a more authentic picture of parent involvement as it relates to their individual lives.