

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: Perceptions of Schools and
Implications for Best Practices

by

Melissa D. Watson

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

In the

Educational Leadership Program

Youngstown State University

December, 2012

SIGNATURE PAGE HERE

©

Melissa D. Watson

2012

ABSTRACT

In response to changing social conditions, the role of grandparents in America is being redefined. Rather than playing the traditional role in the lives of their grandchildren, grandparents have assumed full responsibility for raising them during times of crisis. The number of children living in households headed by grandparents increased from 2.2 million in 1970 to 4.9 million in 2010. Since grandparents are raising 4.9 million children in the United States, the public school system has a responsibility to work with grandparents to ensure the success of those children. Educators such as classroom teachers and counselors must understand the specific needs and dynamics of the grandparent-headed household.

The purpose of this research is to record and analyze the perceptions, experiences, and perspectives of grandparents raising school-aged children about schools and to identify the manner in which schools are responding to their needs and to the needs of their grandchildren. This research provides a greater understanding of how custodial grandparents perceive schools and what they need from schools. A focus group design was utilized to gather and analyze the perceptions and experiences of grandparents regarding the school(s) in which their grandchildren are enrolled.

Grandparents want their stories to be heard. This research gives a voice to grandparents raising their grandchildren.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My sincere thank you is extended to my dissertation committee chair Dr. Charles Vergon as well as Dr. Richard Baringer who served as my chair until his retirement. Appreciation is also extended to the members of my dissertation committee: Dr. Victoria Kress, Dr. Karen Larwin, and Dr. Joseph Mosca.

I also would like to thank Leslie Reedy for sticking with me through all the editing and to the end of this long journey. The technical assistance, as well as the encouraging and supporting emails and words, were invaluable to me.

My inspiration to pursue this research came from my parents, Clifford and Marie Watson. Their devotion and love in raising my niece, Meghan, is the reason she has grown into a wonderful young woman and teacher. Thank you for the sacrifices you made for all of us.

Finally, I thank God for blessing me with the opportunity to pursue this research, and for surrounding me with such loving and encouraging people along the way.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated with much gratitude to the brave grandparents whose voices are represented. I have humbly attempted to spread the love and dedication you have for your precious grandchildren across its pages. Your stories brought me to tears on many occasions. You are true heroes, and you have saved the lives of your grandchildren- thank you. It was an honor to be in your presence.

Like many others, I had a special grandmother. My “Granny” left her imprint on my heart. While she herself could not read or write, I fondly remember sitting on her lap as a small child as she encouraged me to do well in school myself and learn to read and write. I hope this work honors her memory and everything she taught me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Dedication	vi
Table of Contents	vii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose of the Study	7
Significance of the Study	8
Limitations	10
Delimitations	11
Definition of Terms	11
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	13
Introduction	13
Factors Leading to Grandparents Raising Grandchildren	19
Challenges to Grandparents	24
Rewards of Raising Grandchildren	28
Characteristics of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren	29
Problems Experienced by Grandchildren	31
Custody Issues	33
Educational Implications	36
Resources Available to Grandparents	41
Conclusion	43
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	44
Design of the Study	44

Population and Sample	46
Data Collection	49
Data Analysis	52
CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS	59
Description of Focus Groups	59
Description of Participants	60
Focus Group Questions	64
Session 1: The Grandparents	65
Session 2: School Encounters	74
Session 3: Experience Speaks	97
Identification of Prevailing Themes	108
What Happened to Retirement?	109
School: It Isn't What It Used To Be	112
Communication: It Has To Be a Two-Way Street	114
Taking Courts to Task	117
The Selflessness Phenomenon	118
The Reunion	119
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	121
Introduction	121
Findings	124
Implications for Practice	131
Recommendations for Schools	132
Suggestions for Further Research	140
Conclusion	141
REFERENCES	144

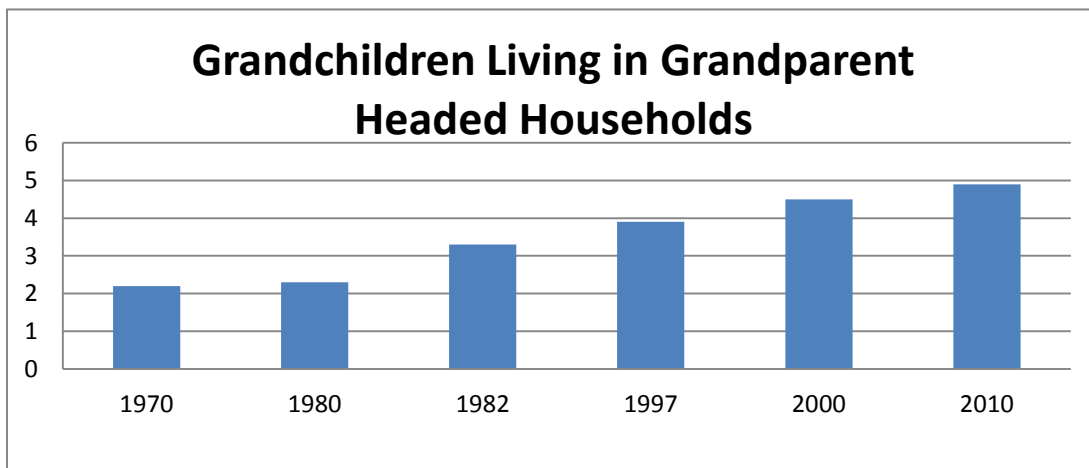
APPENDICES

Appendix A: House Bill 130	154
Appendix B: Letter to Superintendents	156
Appendix C: Permission to Contact Counselors	158
Appendix D: Introductory Letter to Counselors	159
Appendix E: Letter to Counselors/Selecting Names	161
Appendix F: Letter to Grandparents	163
Appendix G: Focus Group Questions	165
Appendix H: Informed Consent	167
Appendix I: Confidentiality Agreement	169
Appendix J: Peer Reviewer Letter	170
Appendix K: Prevailing Themes to Grandparents	171
Appendix L: Letter to Non-attending Grandparents	176
Appendix M: Graph of Growth of Grandparent Headed Households	177
Appendix N: 2000 U. S. Census Questionnaire	178
Appendix O: Stress Factors for Grandparents	180
Appendix P: Internal Review Board Documents	183

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In response to changing social conditions, the role of grandparents in America is being redefined. Rather than playing the traditional role in the lives of their grandchildren, grandparents have assumed full responsibility for raising them during times of crisis (Cox, 2003; Hay slip & Patrick, 2003). The number of children living in households headed by grandparents increased from 2.2 million in 1970, to 2.3 million in 1980, to 3.3 million in 1982. In 1997, 3.9 million children were living in homes maintained by their grandparents (Casper & Bryson, 1998). Census 2000 revealed another increase to 4.5 million, and in 2010 the number rose to 4.9 million children (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Between 1970 and 2010 the number of children living in homes headed by grandparents increased from 2.2 to 4.9 million.



This increase attracted the attention of the United States Congress. In 1996, through the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (PRWORA), Congress mandated the Census Bureau to collect information in the 2000 Census regarding grandparents raising grandchildren (Simmons & Dye, 2003). Census data revealed that

4.5 million children, 6.3% of all children under the age of 18, were reported living with 2.4 million grandparents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Of the reported 4.5 million children living with their grandparents, 2.5 million were in households without any parents present (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

According to Glass and Honeycutt (2002), these statistics focused greater attention on the parental shift of grandparents raising grandchildren. Scholars began studying the demographic profiles of grandparents and the situations that led to them raising their grandchildren (Fuller-Thomson, Hinkler, & Driver, 1997). At the same time, practitioners began to study the outcomes of intervention strategies and support groups for grandparents (Thomas, Sperry, & Yarbrough, 2000).

Mader (2001) stated that the circumstances surrounding the family structure of grandparents raising grandchildren needed to be addressed with innovative public policies and services. Extensive research was conducted on the impact that raising grandchildren has on grandparents (Cox, 2003; Glass & Honeycutt, 2002). Most of the reported data was negative (Fuller-Thomson, et al., 1997). Many grandparents reported feelings of isolation and frustration with the legal, educational, and welfare systems (Pinson-Millburn, Fabian, Schlossberg, & Pyle, 1996). On the other hand, some grandparents said that caring for their grandchildren made them feel useful, needed, and as if they “mattered” (Pinson-Millburn, et al., 1996).

Since grandparents are raising 4.9 million children in the United States, the public school system has a responsibility to work with grandparents to ensure the success of those children. Educators such as classroom teachers and counselors must understand the specific needs and dynamics of the grandparent-headed household (Edwards & Ray,

2008). Knowledge of the stressors that custodial grandparents report would be a valuable working tool. Research suggested that grandparents do not view the school setting as an ideal location for support groups or as sources of help (Smith, Savage-Stevens, & Fabian, 2002). The reasons for this view include: (a) not being aware of school resources that could help them; (b) a feeling of tension between school personnel and custodial grandparents; (c) outdated contact guidelines that do not reach out to grandparents raising their grandchildren (Smith, Savage-Stevens, & Fabian, 2002).

Because they have been away from the school setting for so long, grandparents also expressed uncertainty about what teachers expected of them. PTA meetings with mostly younger parents in attendance can send a message to grandparents that they do not really belong and are poorly prepared for the role of parenting (Strom & Strom, 1993). Further research is needed to understand the feelings and perceptions custodial grandparents have about schools and their experiences with them (Edwards & Ray, 2008). School administrators and teachers must have an understanding of the needs of grandparents in the context of school involvement to help them provide the best chance of academic success for children being raised by their grandparents.

In order to understand what grandparents need from schools, the schools must understand that grandparent-headed households represent a distinct group of caregivers. According to the 2000 Census, 2.4 million grandparents were responsible for caring for their grandchildren and of this number:

- 1.5 million were grandmothers;
- 40,000 were responsible for caring for their grandchildren for more than five years;

- 1.7 million were married;
- 1.3 million were in the labor force;
- 442,000 were poor.

Other data from the Census Bureau described the characteristics of grandparent-headed households and the children who live in them. This data was collected in 2000 when the Census first included a specific questionnaire for grandparents raising grandchildren. Children living in the home of their grandparent with no parent present were twice as likely to be in families that were living below the poverty level. This group of children also ran the risk of not being covered by health insurance and was twice as likely to receive public assistance when compared to homes that had at least one parent present (Simmons & Dye, 2003). These statistics confirm that children being raised by their grandparents are at a distinct economic disadvantage, often stretching their grandparents' financial and personal resources (Fields, 2003).

Being responsible for the financial, social, educational, and emotional needs of their grandchildren can create hardships for custodial grandparents to the point of frustration, anger, and discouragement (Glass & Huneycutt, 2002). In addition to economic problems, grandparents who are raising their grandchildren often face other stressors such as their own health problems (Fuller-Thomson et al., 1997). Grandparents who are raising their grandchildren are doing so because their own children cannot, or refuse to, provide care. Research has consistently identified four factors that lead to grandparents taking in and raising their grandchildren. These factors are parents who (a) abuse drugs and alcohol; (b) neglect or abuse their children; (c) are incarcerated;

(d) are dead from AIDS, other illnesses, or accidents (Pinson-Millburn et al., 1996; Fuller-Thomson et al., 1997).

Many of these families in which grandparents are raising grandchildren come together in the middle of a crisis causing additional stress for grandparents and their grandchildren. Research also indicated that the health of custodial grandparents is generally worse than that of non-custodial grandparents (Casper & Bryson, 1998; Silverstein & Vehvilainen, 2000; Marx & Soloman, 2000). Given the often fragile condition of grandparent-headed households, it is important for schools to understand this situation in order to appropriately respond and offer assistance and intervention.

Another factor that schools must understand is how the grandchildren who are often thrust into this new living arrangement without warning or time for transition are affected. These children have faced, and may continue to face, turmoil at home. They come into their grandparents' care as the result of one or more negative situations including parental drug abuse, death of a parent, or incarceration of a parent (Roe & Minkler, 1998/1999). These children are often victims of emotional and physical abuse. These types of trauma can understandably cause problems in school, and consequently affect the child's functioning (Kropf & Burnette, 2003). Compared to children living with their biological parents, children being raised by grandparents experience higher levels of behavioral and emotional problems (Silverstein & Vehvilainen, 2000; Edwards, 1998; Thomas et al., 2000). Although some of these problems experienced by children being raised by their grandparents are typical of any child, others, such as those related to loss, abandonment, and depression are characteristic of children whose parents experienced a marital breakup or who have a history of being placed outside the home.

Furthermore, children raised by grandparents encounter multiple stressors such as custody battles, changes in home or school environment, divided loyalties, and uncertainty about the future that are atypical among children of intact families (Smith et al., 2002.)

A growing number of students are being raised by grandparents and are experiencing problems and challenges specific to this living situation. School personnel are often the first to recognize a child's behavior, health, and learning problems and, therefore, should be aware of the child's family circumstances. As cited earlier, research has focused on the factors leading to grandparents raising their grandchildren as well as health and economic consequences on these grandparents. There has also been much research on the needs of the grandparents. However, less work has been done to identify the specific issues related to school and grandparents' interactions with the educational system (Edwards & Ray, 2008).

Of equal importance are the strategies schools use to identify and provide services for these grandparent-headed families. Research by Dannison and Smith (2003) revealed that school personnel have little formal knowledge about grandparent-headed households, are unsure how to enrich the children's learning, and cannot serve as a resource for the grandparents. In order to address the needs of grandparents and their grandchildren, schools must take seriously what custodial grandparents say and what they need from the school community. The focus of this research was on custodial grandparents and their interactions with schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to record and analyze the perceptions, experiences, and perspectives of grandparents raising school-aged children about schools and to identify the manner in which schools are responding to their needs and to the needs of their grandchildren. This research provides a greater understanding of how custodial grandparents perceive schools and what they need from schools. After completing the research, the researcher will use the findings to further the knowledge level of schools and educators regarding grandparents raising grandchildren and the impact this family structure has on school performance. Best practices will be identified and shared with schools.

Custodial grandparents were specifically identified as participants in this research. Research suggested that having legal custody clarifies the role of the grandparents and provides clear expectations pertaining to parental behaviors and authority (Landry-Meyer & Newman, 2004). Grandparents without legal relationships often focus on the issues related to gaining custody.

An understanding of the perceptions, experiences, and perspectives that grandparents have of schools will allow school personnel to better serve the needs of these grandparents and their grandchildren. This approach is consistent with the ecological framework that is especially relevant to the circumstances of grandparents raising grandchildren and the professionals who interact with them. The primary assumption of the ecological framework is that the individual and the environment are inseparable (Cox, 2003). In order to help the grandchildren and their school functioning, it is necessary to help the entire family. The ecological framework includes the social

environment as a significant influence on the well being of families (Dolbin-MacNab & Targ, 2003). For grandparent-headed households, school personnel are an important component of the said environment.

Schools are in a position to assist children being raised in grandparent-headed households by working together with these families and outside agencies. Before the issue of grandparents raising grandchildren drew attention, grandparents who were raising their grandchildren relied on family and friends. Grandparents did not realize others were sharing their experience and many were unaware of community resources and supports. Grandparents slowly began reaching out to other grandparents through support groups (Britnall-Peterson & Targ, 2005).

Programs began to develop and advocacy programs began to emerge calling for reforms in laws and policies (Britnall-Peterson & Targ, 2005). One example is the Association for the Advancement of Retired Persons (AARP) which led the way with the formation of the Grandparent Information Center (AARP, 2004). This web site and printed newsletter provide much needed advice for grandparents raising their grandchildren. The challenges facing custodial grandparents must now come to the attention of school personnel.

Significance of the Study

According to the 2010 Census, even greater numbers of grandparents are raising their grandchildren. Researchers have observed that these grandchildren are entering the educational system with specific and distinctly different challenges than those children with at least one parent in the home. It is important for schools to work with both the grandparents and the grandchildren. In order to help grandparents and their

grandchildren, schools need to understand the issue of grandparents raising grandchildren and the possible impact on the children's educational experiences. Communication between grandparents and the school is an important step in helping grandparents who are raising their grandchildren.

The research questions used for this study were:

1. What is the existing knowledge base regarding the issue of grandparents raising grandchildren and the impact it has on school functioning?
2. What school-related factors most effect the perception that grandparents have about their grandchildren's school experiences?
3. What are the obstacles that are preventing open lines of communication between grandparents raising grandchildren and schools?
4. What needs do grandparents have and how can schools help these grandparents?

Grandparents want their stories to be heard. Dannison and Smith (2003) reported that grandparent participants in their study of support programs wanted time to tell their stories. Custodial grandparents need schools to recognize their efforts, their situations, and their specific problems. Schools have begun to offer strategies that support grandparents by creating policies that support appropriate referrals to educational services, health agencies, and social services (Reynolds, Wright, & Beale, 2003). In their discussion on the next stage in helping custodial grandparents, Hayslip and Patrick (2003) suggest that schools (a) better publicize the benefits of support groups for grandparents raising grandchildren; (b) take seriously what custodial grandparents say and need; (c) give research "away" so that it can inform policy.

This research sought to accomplish all of the above. As schools gain and increase knowledge of grandparents raising grandchildren, they become better equipped to refer grandparents to support agencies and to assist grandparents and their grandchildren within the school setting. To this end, the grandparents in this study were given an opportunity to discuss their experiences and their perspectives regarding schools and the school system.

Schools are in an ideal situation and position to support and help grandparents raising grandchildren. This researcher found that when grandparents and school personnel communicated and worked together, everyone benefitted. Throughout this study, the researcher personally worked with many grandparents who were raising their grandchildren. While each of their stories was unique, they all shared the common threads of dedication, love, and a stubborn persistence to do what is right for their grandchildren. As one grandparent raising her grandchild said, *“I don’t think about the heartaches, I think about her future.”* Mostly though, I don’t have much time to think about anything!” Grandparents raising their grandchildren are brave, selfless, and heroic people who are saving an entire generation of children. Their voices need to be heard.

Limitations

There are many different types of grandparent-headed households. For example, some have one parent present and, in others, no parents are present. This poses a problem with the collected data because it is not consistent across these different types of households. Even when grandparent-headed households are specifically identified, it may be that many relatives are providing assistance to the grandparents. The influence of these other caregivers was difficult to measure. Other limitations of this study include the

(a) facilitator skill level; (b) honesty of responses received; (c) ages of the grandparent participants; (d) ages of the grandchildren being raised; (e) grade levels of the grandchildren; (f) number of grandchildren being raised; (g) health of the grandparents; (h) health of the grandchildren; (i) income levels of the grandparents; (j) education levels of the grandparents.

Delimitations

The researcher set the following delimitations:

- The research included only grandparents living in Trumbull County, Ohio;
- There were approximately 15 grandparents involved in this study;
- The grandparents in this study either have custody of their grandchildren or have assumed primary care responsibilities for at least six months.

Definitions of Terms

- Grandparent-headed household: A home in which a grandparent holds the primary responsibility for their co-resident grandchildren (Simmons & Dye, 2003).
- Legal custody: A legal status that vests in the custodian the right to have physical care and control of the child and to determine where and with whom the child shall live, and the right and duty to protect, train, and discipline the child and to provide the child the food, shelter, education, and medical care, all subject to any residual parental rights, privileges, and responsibilities. An individual granted legal custody shall exercise the rights and responsibilities personally unless otherwise authorized by any

section of the Ohio Revised Code or by the Court (Ohio Revised Code 2151.011 A (19)).

- Temporary custody: Legal custody of a child who is removed from the child's home, which custody may be terminated at any time at the discretion of the court or, if the legal custody is granted in an agreement for temporary custody, by the person who executed the agreement. (Ohio Revised Code 2151.011 A (53)).
- Guardian: A person, association, or corporation that is granted authority by a probate court pursuant to Chapter 2111 of the Revised Code to exercise parental rights over a child to the extent provided by the court's order and subject to the residual rights of the child's parents.
- Custodian: A person who has legal custody of a child or a public children services agency or private child placing agency that has permanent, temporary, or legal custody of a child (Ohio Revised Code 2151.011 A (11)).

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Research regarding grandparents raising grandchildren is a new phenomenon. Almost no studies existed prior to the 1990s. From 1990 to the present, an “explosion” of research has occurred (Grinstead, Leder, Jenson, & Bond, 2003). The early 1990s saw increased attention focused on the number of grandchildren living in grandparent-maintained households (Casper & Bryson, 1998). This happened when the Census Bureau reported that the number of children under 18 living in grandparent-maintained households increased from 2.2 million in 1970, to 2.3 million in 1980, to 3.3 million in 1992 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1998). Data from the 2000 Census showed that 4.5 million grandchildren lived in homes headed by a grandparent. 2010 Census data revealed another increase to 4.9 million children being raised in homes headed by a grandparent. Between 1990 and 1997, the greatest growth occurred among families where no parents are present in grandparent-maintained households (Casper & Bryson, 1998). These families are described as “skipped generation” families (Fuller-Thomson et al., 1997). The number of grandchildren living with their grandparents without a parent present increased again from 935,000 in 1990 to 1.416 million in 2003, representing a 51% increase in 13 years (U.S. Census, as cited in Casper & Bryson, 1998).

At the same time that attention and research on grandparents started to rise, the media also began to focus on the growing number of children being raised by their grandparents. Major newspapers and magazines brought the subject to the public at large. In 1992, policy makers also began to take notice of the growing numbers of

grandparents caring for their grandchildren. Both houses of the United States Congress held hearings in 1992 (Casper & Bryson, 1998). The Senate's Special Committee on Aging and the House of Representatives' Select Committee on Aging focused on (a) the causes of the growing numbers; (b) the changing roles and responsibilities of grandparents; (c) the deficiencies in the areas of grandparents' rights and their access to public assistance (Casper & Bryson, 1998).

In 1995, the White House Conference on Aging designated grandparent caregivers as one of 40 priority issues for increased attention (Burnette, 2004). Areas of specific concern included poverty, health, mental health, and legal issues. The final resolution called for:

- A comprehensive program for care giving grandparents, including respite and day care, legal assistance, advocacy services, health care and substance abuse treatment, and mental health support;
- Financial, social, and legal supports for care giving grandparents raising grandchildren;
- Removal of legal and regulatory barriers that make it difficult for care giving grandparents to receive help from Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), food stamps, and other safety net programs;
- Programs through the U.S. Administration on Aging to provide services for grandparents and their grandchildren, and to develop support groups in senior centers and other settings;
- Intergenerational programs to strengthen the family unit in grandparent-headed households;

- Legal surrogate decision-making authority for care giving grandparents in cases where the parent or other guardian is absent;
- Education for human services providers about the rights of care giving grandparents;
- Protection of grandparents' visitation rights;
- Use of existing federal, state, and local revenue streams to accomplish the above purposes (Glass & Huneycutt, 2002).

Another act of Congress in 1996 also had a major impact on grandparents raising grandchildren. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), also known as the welfare reform bill, had both positive and negative effects on grandparents raising grandchildren. The two specific pieces of this Act that benefited grandparents raising grandchildren are Section 105 and Section 505.

Section 105 called for the Secretary of Commerce to expand data collection regarding the growing trend of grandparents who are the primary caregivers for their grandchildren (H.R. 3734). The 2000 U.S. Bureau of the Census long form contained specific questions pertaining to grandparents raising grandchildren. This was the first census to ask such questions. The questions were used to distinguish between grandparents who have children temporarily living with them and grandparents who are the primary caregivers for their grandchildren (Simmons & Dye, 2003).

A reproduction of questions regarding grandparent caregivers as asked on the U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 questionnaire, is included here:

19a. **Does this person have any of his/her own grandchildren under age 18 living in this house or apartment?**

- Yes

- No – skip to 20a

b. **Is this grandparent currently responsible for the basic needs of any grandchild(ren) under the age of 18 who live(s) in this house?**

- Yes

- No- skip to 20a

c. **How long has this grandparent been responsible for the(se) grandchildren?** *If grandparent is financially responsible for more than one grandchild, answer the question for the grandchild for whom the grandparent has been responsible for the longest period of time.*

- Less than 6 months

- 6 to 11 months

- 1 or 2 years

- 3 or 4 years

- 5 years or more

The data gathered from the 2000 Census further demonstrated the growth in grandparent-maintained households in the United States. Advocacy groups such as the American Association for Retired Person (AARP) and Generations United very often cite statistics derived from the Census data to lobby their positions and to advocate for changes at the local, state, and federal levels.

The other outcome of PRWORA (1996) favorable to grandparents raising grandchildren is Section 505. This section directs states to give preference to an adult relative over a non-related caregiver when determining placement for a child. This edict makes it easier for grandparents to have their grandchildren placed in their care.

While the PRWORA had some favorable outcomes for grandparents raising grandchildren, it also brought unintended negative effects on their financial status (Burnette, 2004). The PRWORA replaced AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) with TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families). Information from the 2000 Census supported earlier data regarding the poverty level of grandparent caregivers. The data found that, on average, 19% of grandparent caregivers had income below the poverty level while only 14% of families with related children were living in poverty

(Simmons & Dye, 2003). However, many grandparents do not apply for benefits because they do not realize that they can obtain benefits without legal custody of their grandchildren (Bell & Johnson, 2006). Another reason that grandparents do not apply for aid is a fear that if they apply, their grandchildren will be taken away (Bell & Johnson, 2006).

To better understand the impact of TANF on already financially troubled grandparent caregivers, the AARP (2000) published a report conducted by Faith Mullen and Monique Einhorn which specifically focused on the effect TANF had on grandparents raising grandchildren. Mullen and Einhorn examined how the states, in implementing TANF, may have developed policies that were not tailored to the unique needs of grandparent-headed households. The study looked at four such policies: benefit levels, time limits, work requirements, and support enforcement. The Public Policy Institute worked with AARP's Grandparent Information Center in developing a survey instrument that focused on state-specific TANF rules that apply differently to grandparent-headed households than to households where a parent is present (Mullen & Einhorn, 2000). The findings suggested that states have largely neglected the question of how welfare reform policies affect grandparent-headed households (Mullen & Einhorn, 2000).

For example, only 18 states had identified criteria for hardship cases, meaning grandparents raising their grandchildren could have their benefits cut off after 60 months. In some cases, grandparents are required to work or even conduct job searches while their application is pending. Several states allow grandparents between 55–65 years old to be excluded from the work requirement. The child support enforcement section of TANF is

particularly troubling to grandparents who, in order to continue to receive benefits, must divulge information on the whereabouts of the grandchild's parents. This can cause some parents to become angry and, grandparents fear, they may cause problems with the custody or care of their grandchild. The report also offered suggestions for states that will help them fairly implement TANF requirements. These include exempting time limits and work requirements and establishing a separate application process for grandparents (Mullen & Einhorn, 2000).

Factors Leading to Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

In recent decades, abuse and neglect of children have become a societal rather than a family issue. More cases are being identified, those who are required by law to report those cases are doing so, and grandparents are increasingly assuming the role of caregiver (Nicholson, Leder, Jenson, & Bond, 2003). The majority of grandparents heading these new households never anticipated becoming parents again. In most instances, they are thrust into the role as a result of the loss of their own child (Cox, 2003). In reality, the only reason grandparents are raising their grandchildren is because the children need someone to raise them (deToledo & Brown, 1995). As one grandparent put it, "*The bottom line in this whole thing is I didn't need another child; the child needed a mother*" (deToledo & Brown, 1995).

Pinson-Millburn, Fabian, Schlossberg, and Pyle (1996) identified four major factors that contribute to the creation of grandparent households. These factors are (a) the inability of parents to provide care due to drug abuse problems; (b) parents who are incarcerated or imprisoned; (c) physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse or neglect by the parents; (d) parents who have died from AIDS or other illnesses. Other factors suggested

in the research include increased life expectancy, maternal employment, increased divorce rates, death of natural parent(s), and increased unemployment of natural parents (Mader, 2001).

Grandparent care arrangements come about in different ways. The National Survey of America's Families (NSAF) data suggest that for most children (1.1 million in 1999) these arrangements are made privately within the family. For others (200,000 in 1999) child welfare is involved (Scarcella, Macomber, & Geen, 2003). Sands and Goldberg-Glen (2000) conducted a cross-sectional study of the stress factors associated with grandparents raising their grandchildren. The data gathered from their research was ranked in order of reference and illustrated those situations that precipitated the formation of grandparent-headed households (see Table 1).

Glass and Huneycutt (2002) pointed out that while grandparents have often raised their grandchildren in times of family crisis, the number of families in crisis is growing. The following statistics compiled by deToledo and Brown (1995) point to a nation of children in crisis:

- One in two marriages ends in divorce. Nearly one million children experience divorce each year. Some parents go on to remarry with little interest in their own offspring;
- Reports of child abuse and neglect are up 300% annually since 1976;
- The prison population has exploded; 80% of inmates have dependent children;
- Teenage pregnancy is on the rise;

- More women are using drugs, especially crack cocaine. Every year 375,000 babies are born addicted to crack;
- AIDS is taking its toll on American families. Nearly 125,000 children will have lost their mothers to AIDS by the year 2000.

Table 1. Stress Factors That Precipitated the Formation of Grandparent-Headed Households

<u>Situation</u>	<u>% Mentioned</u>
Substance abuse	<u>70</u>
Parent unable to care for child	<u>60</u>
Child neglect	<u>59</u>
Psychological problem	<u>55</u>
Financial problem	<u>53</u>
Abandoned child	<u>44</u>
Housing problems	<u>37</u>

Family violence	<u>29</u>
Child abuse	<u>28</u>
Prison	<u>26</u>
Child removed by child welfare	<u>24</u>
Divorce/separation	<u>19</u>
Abuse of grandparent	<u>17</u>
Death of grandchild's parent	<u>15</u>
Health problem	<u>11</u>
Suicide attempt	<u>9</u>
Physical disability	<u>6</u>

Special Circumstance: Parental Drug Abuse

Research suggests that parental substance abuse is the major contributing factor that leads grandparents to raise their grandchildren (Pinson-Millburn et al., 1996; Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 2000a). DeToledo and Brown (1995) and Burnette (2004) reported that drug and alcohol abuse account for more than 80% of grandparent-headed families. They are combined with other reasons such as teenage pregnancy, neglect, incarceration, and abandonment. Because drug addiction is so wide spread in our society, it affects suburban, middle class, and white families as well; they only hide it better (deToledo & Brown, 1995). The growth of the crack epidemic (1980–1990) coincided with the 40% in grandparents raising their grandchildren (deToledo & Brown, 1995). Descriptive findings by Sands and Goldberg-Glen (2000) involving a cross sectional study of 129 grandparents raising their grandchildren identified substance abuse as the most common factor associated with problems in the homes of grandchildren's parents that led to grandparents assuming custody of their grandchildren. Estimates that 15% of women ages 15–44 are substance abusers and that almost 40% these women have children living with them suggest that drug and alcohol abuse are likely to remain important contributing factors (Roe & Minkler, 1999). An especially painful result of the drug epidemic is the number of children living with their grandparents because their parent or parents are sick with AIDS or have died from the disease. By 2010, it was predicted that hundreds of thousands of grandparents and other family elders will be raising children due to a parent dying from AIDS (Joslin, 2002).

Special Circumstance: Parental Incarceration

The American penal system has seen initiatives such as “three strikes—you’re out” and truth-in-sentencing mandates lead to an increase in the prison population and an increase in the average sentence duration as well (Porterfield, Dressel, & Barnhill, 2000). This has taken a toll on families. Sixty-three percent of federal prisoners and 55% of state prisoners are parents of children under the age of 18. The average age of these children is 8 years old; 22 % are under age five (Mumola, 2000).

Challenges to Grandparents

The above-mentioned factors, which lead to grandparents assuming the care of their grandchildren, can leave the grandparents facing many problems and struggles. Grandparents raising grandchildren are reported to have higher than expected rates of depression (deToledo & Brown, 1995). There are many problems in homes that lead to grandparents assuming care or custody of the children. These situations leave the grandparents with the difficult task of getting their grandchildren’s lives in order and keeping them safe. Simply transferring the children to the grandparents’ homes does not eliminate the trauma that has occurred. Grandparents themselves may have psychological and physical problems to deal with which are significantly related to their stress level (Sands & Goldberg-Glen, 2000). Assuming the responsibility of raising their grandchildren causes major changes in the lives of grandparents. It is generally expected that grandparents will play the role of fun-loving, occasional caregivers. The time during which grandparents act in these roles is referred to as “off-time” (Pinson-Millburn et al., 1996). When this off-time becomes full-time parenting, everything in the lives of the grandparents changes including leisure time, friendships, work, health, and finances.

Relationships with families and friends are altered and there is perhaps an unexpected loss of freedom (Pinson-Millburn et al., 1996).

The psychological consequences may be great. Often grandparents are dealing with the grief of losing a child, or drug addiction, unemployment, child neglect or abuse, and other psychological or physical disabilities in the life of the child. Grandparents report feelings of isolation and frustration in dealing with the legal, education, and welfare systems that offer little support (Pinson-Millburn et al., 1996). Grandparents have feelings of guilt because they feel if they had been better parents themselves, then their own children would have been more successful as parents. Since many grandparents still live in the same community as their children, they fear that the same drugs, gangs, and violence will tempt their grandchildren as they did their children before them. Grandparents may feel inadequate in learning how to combat these influences in the lives of their grandchildren (Cox, 2000). The health of these grandparents also can suffer. Some grandparents ignore their own health issues because of the new role they are playing (Glass & Huneycutt, 2002). Financial issues are also a major source of stress and problems for grandparents raising their grandchildren. U.S. Census 2000 showed that, on average, 19% of grandparent caregivers had incomes below the poverty level in the United States in 1999.

The remainder of the literature review focuses on the following problems faced by grandparents raising grandchildren: Physical and psychological health of grandparents, poverty, access to healthcare, legal issues, and adjustment issues.

Physical Health

Physical and functional problems affect the quality of grandparents' lives, compromise their ability to meet the physical demands of the caregiver role, and are likely to worsen with advancing age (Burnette, 2004). Results of the 1999 National Survey of American Families (NSAF) revealed that 54% of children in grandparent-headed homes were living with a caregiver who was either in poor health or had a limiting condition (Scarcella et al., 2003). As more and more grandparents raise their grandchildren, the question of their physical health is an important one.

Research prior to the late 1990s was limited to small, convenient samples in particular geographic areas. A study by Minkler and Fuller-Thomson (1999) used subjects that were demographically representative of the United States population, compared grandparent caregivers to non-caregivers, and revealed data about grandparents raising grandchildren in the 1990s. The results of their study showed that custodial grandparents were significantly more likely to have concerns than non-care giving grandparents. These concerns were in the areas of doing heavy tasks (50%), working for pay (40%), climbing stairs (40%), walking 6 blocks (40%), completing daily household tasks (30%), and mobility inside the house (17%). Grandparents raising their grandchildren had a lower level of satisfaction regarding their health. These same grandparents had poorer self-reported health than non-care giving grandparents with 36% rating their own health status as fair, poor, or very poor (Minkler & Fuller-Thomson, 1999).

The question of health is especially relevant for grandparents of color, who represent a higher population of grandparents raising grandchildren and who are at

greater risk than White grandparents to have health problems (Kelley, Yorker, Whitley, & Sipe, 2001). When studying the effects of care giving in regards to African Americans, it is necessary to compare African American caregivers to other non-care giving African Americans. On average, older African Americans have more health problems (Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 2000a). The results of such a study conducted by Fuller-Thomson and Minkler (2000a) showed that African American custodial grandparents of the 1990s (a) began care giving when their grandchildren were very young; (b) were more likely to be females; (c) had more grandchildren; (d) were poorer; (e) were more likely to have limitations in daily living activities; (f) did not have a difference in self-reported health status.

The health problems of grandparents raising grandchildren are not limited to grandmothers. Grandfathers also reported having serious health problems and many had chronic health problems (McCallion, Janicki, & Kolomer, 2004). These types of health problems leave grandparents wondering what would happen to their grandchildren if their health worsened.

Worrying about their own health and the well being of their grandchildren is just one stressor for grandparents raising grandchildren. The research team of Meredith Minkler, Esme Fuller-Thomson, Doriane Miller, and Diane Driver used a longitudinal, large data set, the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), to examine the link between depression and grandparent care giving (Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 2000b). The results of their survey revealed elevated rates of depression among grandparents raising their grandchildren. Furthermore, it directly associated the depression to care giving itself. It was found that grandmother caregivers are nearly

twice as likely to report being depressed as non care-giving grandparents (Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 2000b). A number of factors are linked to the increase of psychological distress in grandparent caregivers. They include (a) poor physical health; (b) social isolation; (c) financial difficulties; (d) disrupting family events preceding the grandparents assuming the caregiver role (Kelley & Whitley, 2003). Additional stress arises from grandchildren who may be having behavior problems as a result of parental neglect or grief over the loss of normative parenting (Chase-Goodman & Hayslip, 1998).

Rewards of Raising Grandchildren

Not all the data from grandparents is negative. Many grandparents report very happy feelings, saying they feel useful, needed, and as if they “matter” (Pinson-Millburn et al., 1996). Most research on care giving grandparents has highlighted the negative impact that care giving responsibilities have on grandparents (Giarrusso, Silverstein, & Feng, 2000). Studies also showed that care giving for a grandchild can provide a meaningful, new role for a grandparent and that it can be rewarding to care for a child (Giarrusso, Silverstein, & Feng, 2000).

According to Giarrusso, Silverstein, and Feng (2000), 81% of grandparents in their sample thought it was “extremely rewarding” to raise a grandchild. Only 9% reported it was “extremely stressful” to raise a grandchild. Their research also identified several predictors of a grandparent’s perception of raising a grandchild as rewarding. The predictors are (a) education of the grandparent; (b) normative solidarity; (c) age of the youngest grandchild raised; (d) performance as a grandparent; (e) involvement as grandparent. Those who are college educated, raising younger grandchildren, have stronger normative solidarity, better self-rated performance as a grandparent, and more

involvement as a parent (Giarrusso, Silverstein, & Feng, 2000). The same study found the majority of grandparents thought that raising a grandchild was both stressful and rewarding.

Characteristics of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Data from the 2000 Census showed that among grandparents responsible for the care of their grandchildren, the following percentages describe the co-resident grandparents where the grandparents are responsible for the actual care of their grandchildren: White, 41.8; Black, 51.7; American Indian, 56.1; Alaska Native, 20; Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders, 38.7; and Hispanic 34.7 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). These statistics showed that Asian and Hispanic grandparents were less likely to be responsible for their grandchildren while American Indian and Black grandparents were most likely to be responsible for the care of their grandchildren. In 2002, Black children were more likely than children in other groups to live in their grandparents' households. Two-thirds of these Black children were living with only their grandmother (Fields, 2003).

The 2000 Census also specifically asked about the length of time grandparent caregivers cared for their grandchildren. The largest percentage for length of care was 39% representing those who cared for their grandchildren for 5 or more years, followed by 23% who cared for their grandchildren 1-2 years, 15%, 3-4 years, 12% fewer than 6 months, and 11% cared for their grandchildren 6-11 months (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The distribution of the duration of time showed Black, Pacific Islander, and Alaska Native grandparent caregivers had the highest percentages responsible for the care of their grandchildren (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Another characteristic of grandparents

who are raising their grandchildren is age. Of co-resident grandparents 30-59 years old, 50% were responsible for their care compared to 31% of grandparents over 60 years of age.

Children living in a household where no parent is present were twice as likely to be in families that were below the poverty level (30%) than those where a parent was present. The same is true with regard to lack of health insurance. Thirty-six percent of children in their grandparents' care were without health insurance. This is higher than the 23% of all grandchildren who were without health insurance. Likewise, 17% of the homes where the grandparents were responsible for the care of their grandchildren received public assistance. This is nearly twice the 9% that represents all grandchildren (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Children living in their grandparents' households without a parent present are at a distinct economic disadvantage, often stretching their grandparents' financial and personal resources (Fields, 2003).

Regional and state differences in percentages of grandparent-grandchild co-residence reflect a variety of factors such as migration, patterns, and racial compositions in different areas (Simmons & Dye, 2003). The South had the highest percentage of grandparent caregivers at 48%, while the Northeast had the lowest at 34%. Oklahoma and Wyoming had the highest percentages of grandparent caregivers (55 and 59 percent). The lowest percentages were in Hawaii with 28% and Massachusetts at 31%. Counties in the Midwest and the upper Northeast generally had the lowest percentages of grandparent caregivers, while counties in the South and Southwest had the highest (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Problems Experienced by Grandchildren

Children being raised by their grandparents are at a higher risk for developmental delays and emotional problems than children in general (Smith & Palmieri, 2007). Even though the care being provided to these children by grandparents may be superior to the care they were receiving with their parents, they still have several challenges facing them. Children being raised by their grandparents have often been through extreme trauma. Some have lost a parent; others have been victims of abuse and/or have witnessed violence for most of their lives. This affects their health, both physically and mentally. DeToledo and Brown (1995) described some of these situations. In one instance, a grandchild, whose mother was a crack addict, was taken in by his grandparents at the age of two. The child was so traumatized he would not eat or talk and screamed and cried most of the time. He hoarded food and was not able to function in any type of social situation (deToledo & Brown, 1995).

Grandchildren often feel angry and confused because they still love their parents even though they condemn their actions (Glass & Huneycutt, 2002). Some of these children will defy authority. Many have been taking care of themselves and other siblings and resist the efforts by grandparents to intervene. They often defy the rules set forth by grandparents (deToledo & Brown, 1995). Grandchildren may also be physically and/or verbally aggressive. They may have been in situations where the only way to get attention was to act out and push the limits of rules. A study by Edwards (2006) found that teachers perceived children being raised by their grandparents as experiencing significantly more emotional and behavioral problems.

On the other hand, many grandchildren being raised by grandparents appear to be model students (Glass & Huneycutt, 2002). This, however, is not always a sign that everything is fine. Often children will mask their real feelings and emotions by being obedient and mature. Grandparents need to pay attention to their grandchildren's true feelings. The feelings often turn inward and can cause depression (deToledo & Brown, 1995). Professionals in the field agree that most children in this situation could benefit from therapy.

There are specific problems that grandchildren being raised by their grandparents face due to the conditions under which they came to live with their grandparents. Children from homes where drug abuse was prevalent have a higher instance of attention deficit disorders and these children may have a higher predisposition toward substance abuse themselves. These children may also have emotional and psychiatric disorders, which often result in being placed in special education programs in the schools (Pinson-Millburn et al., 1996).

Another reason cited for children living with grandparents is parental incarceration. The children may experience shame and isolation or be subject to stereotyping by the school or other agencies. Children who have experienced abuse or neglect will often be depressed or agitated. They may also express behavioral disorders which may lead to suicidal tendencies. Post-traumatic stress disorder is also a concern with these children. A final contributing factor to grandparents raising grandchildren is death from AIDS, other illness, or accidents. The result for children could be their own health problems, or dealing with death and bereavement issues (Pinson-Millburn et al., 1996). Similar to other children in kinship care arrangements, custodial grandchildren

are reported by their caregivers to have higher levels of behavioral and emotional disturbances than children in the overall U.S. population (Smith & Palmieri, 2007).

It isn't surprising that many children being raised by grandparents have developmental disabilities since these disabilities are prevalent in children living in poverty, in single parent homes, and where substance abuse and neglect are present (Heller & Ganguly, n.d.). These are all factors that contribute to grandparents assuming the role of raising their grandchildren (Heller & Ganguly, n.d.).

Custody Issues

All of the above effects on grandchildren as a result of their situations can, and most likely will be evident as these grandchildren enter school. However, many grandparents have difficulty even getting their grandchildren enrolled in schools. School policies are often geared towards nuclear families, resulting in obstacles for grandparents raising grandchildren. These could include the inability of a student to be enrolled without proof of legal custody, ineligibility for transportation to another school district, and additional fees for out-of-district enrollment (Heller & Ganguly, n.d.). Grandparent custody and visitation rights are different in each state. Each state has its own requirements that grandparents must fulfill to obtain legal custody. The burden generally is with the grandparent to overcome the standing presumption that children should be with a parent (Glass & Huneycutt, 2002). Age is a major obstacle for grandparents seeking custody. The judge has to consider whether the grandparents are physically able to care for children (deToledo & Brown, 1995).

In 2004, the Ohio legislature passed House Bill 130. This bill, sponsored by Linda Reidelbach, 21st District Representative, was introduced on March 18, 2003, and became effective on July 20, 2004(Appendix A). In summary, the bill:

- Permits the execution of a power of attorney or caretaker authorization affidavit that provides a grandparent with whom a child resides authority over the care, custody, and control of the child, including ability to enroll the child in school and to consent to medical care for the child;
- Provides that a military power of attorney, executed under federal law to grant authority over the care, custody, and control of a child, is considered a power of attorney under the bill;
- Establishes procedures and forms for executing a power of attorney or caretaker authorization affidavit;
- Provides that the execution of a power of attorney or caretaker authorization affidavit does not affect the rights and responsibilities of the parent, guardian, or custodian regarding the child, does grant legal custody, and does not grant authority to consent to adoption or marriage of the child;
- Provides that, generally, a caretaker authorization affidavit may be executed only if both of the parents or the child's guardian cannot be located;
- Permits a parent, guardian, or custodian to take action to negate or reverse any decision made by a grandparent granted authority over a child pursuant to a caretaker authorization affidavit;

- Provides for termination and notifications that must be made on termination of a power of attorney or caretaker authorization affidavit;
- Provides immunity from civil and criminal liability for all persons who, in good faith, rely on or take action in reliance on a power of attorney or caretaker authorization affidavit;
- Prohibits the creation of a power of attorney or execution of a caretaker authorization affidavit for the purpose of enrolling a child in school so the child may participate in interscholastic athletic programs or academic programs provided by a specific school or school district.

According to Ohio House Bill 130, a power of attorney may be executed only if any the following circumstances exist:

- The parent, guardian, or custodian is (a) seriously ill, incarcerated, or about to be incarcerated; (b) temporarily unable to provide financial support or parental guidance; (c) temporarily unable to provide adequate care and supervision of the child because of a physical or mental condition; (d) homeless or without residence because the current residence is destroyed or otherwise inhabitable; (e) in or about to enter a residential treatment program for substance abuse; (f) deceased and the other parent seeks to execute the power of attorney;
- The parent, guardian, or custodian has a well-founded belief that the power of attorney is in the best interest of the child.

This bill was an effort to help grandparents who find themselves in the position of taking care of their grandchildren. In the absence of this legislation, these grandparents

had to rely on local districts to help them get their grandchildren enrolled in school. If the parents of the children could be found, they would have to turn over legal custody or guardianship to the grandparents in order for the children to be enrolled in the school where the grandparents resided. Without this custody or guardianship, grandparents were forced to lie about the children's actual residence or attempt to transport the children to and from their home district. This situation caused problems for both the grandparents and the school district.

Ohio House Bill 130 provides an opportunity for grandparents to enroll their grandchildren in school and authorize medical treatment. However, a very important clause in this bill is that it does not terminate parental rights. In the case of school, the parents still maintain the right to review school records and participate in school activities. The bill amends Ohio law to include "grandparents" along with "parent" in terms of determining where a child attends school and when medical decisions need to be made.

Under current law, in order to be enrolled in school, the enrolling pupil must provide (a) records from the most recent school attended; (b) a certified birth certificate; (c) a certified copy of any order or decree pertaining to custody. This bill inserts the power of attorney or caretaker affidavit as one item to be provided for the purpose of school enrollment.

Educational Implications

Schools need to be more sensitive to enrollment problems because many grandchildren have to move and change schools as a result of moving in with their grandparents. While schools may not be able to enroll children without proper

documentation, they can be aware of local agencies that can provide support and help to grandparents with this and other issues. Schools can also institute classes on “parenting as grandparents.” Such classes can help grandparents be aware of many of the issues that come with raising grandchildren (Glass & Huneycutt, 2002). School systems have developed a number a ways to assist grandparents in dealing with school issues. These include developing school policies that support appropriate referrals to educational services, health agencies, and social services (Reynolds, Wright, & Beale, 2003).

Strom and Strom (1993) identified support groups that can help grandparents raising their grandchildren. Grandparents often rely on these support groups. There are specific things that schools can do to be part of support groups that can aid grandparents. Grandparents sometimes express uncertainty about what teachers expect them to do. PTA meetings are usually attended by much younger parents, which can cause grandparents to feel uneasy or feel like they do not belong. The administration and faculty can invite grandparent support groups in to serve as resources and help grandparents overcome these types of anxieties.

Another way schools can help grandparents is with tutors. Many grandparents feel they cannot help their grandchildren in today’s public schools (Glass & Huneycutt, 2002).

Educational efforts to help grandparents understand the effects of drug abuse and how to cope with it would also be effective. The schools could provide the services directly or an agency could be brought in to help.

Glass and Huneycutt (2002) offered the following recommendations for schools in dealing with grandchildren being raised by grandparents:

- Teachers and administrators need to give the family time to adjust to the new routine;
- Look for the grandchildren's strengths and build upon them;
- Place the children in the classrooms of the most stable and experienced teachers. Grandchildren being raised by their grandparents experience much instability and need the extra attention experienced teachers may be able to provide;
- Avoid singling out these children before their peers or other teachers because of their family status. Shame and the feeling of being different need to be avoided.

School personnel can help grandchildren and grandparents by being aware of the situations in which the children live and being supportive and positive. Rather than immediately suggesting medication to control hyperactive and aggressive behavior (as many educators do), school personnel should develop a broad approach by developing intervention programs to help families (Edwards, 1998).

A compelling theoretical framework that suggests why grandchildren perform more poorly in school is found in the field of child development. Many studies indicate that a child's ability to function appropriately in the social world comes about as a product of experience in close relationships (Edwards, 1998). Considering the situations that the children who are being raised by their grandparents come from, they have not typically had a chance to experience stable and loving relationships. Consequently, grandchildren being raised by their grandparents are at risk to experience problems in school and other settings.

The issue then becomes one of how to help these families. According to Edwards (1998), one project designed to help intergenerational families is the Grand family School Support Network (GSSN). It began in Broward County, Florida, as a means of examining the problems faced by grandparents or “grand kin” and their grandchildren. It was designed as a structured academic and social support system for “grand families.” The aim of the project was to improve students’ school performance and aid grand kin or grandchildren in the school setting.

There are several strategies that are employed to accomplish these goals. The school registrar notifies the GSSN that a grand kin has entered the system. A school counselor then makes contact with the grandparent to see if there are any services needed at school or at home. The grand kin is paired with a peer who helps the student adjust to the school environment. Each child is provided a teacher, paraprofessional, or student service staff member who serves as a surrogate parent. Another service provided is group counseling for the grandparents and grandchildren. Grandparents are invited in after school for sessions on parent effectiveness training. Through support groups, grandparents are taught to utilize other family members or friends to help with homework, babysitting, or transportation and to serve as a general back-up for the grandparents.

The program was examined biweekly to see if it was making a difference in the lives of the grandchildren. Teachers reported on students’ behavior and achievement. The surrogate parent and peer partner component was also closely examined. Referrals were made to agencies if issues arose that warranted more professional help. Reports from teachers, grandparents, and grand kin suggested a reduced level of stress in the

grand family. School administrators saw a 20% drop in referrals for improper behavior from the first to second quarter (Edwards, 1998). Clearly, this program should be evaluated more in depth to make any conclusions about its effectiveness. Nevertheless, it is a model to look at for school districts thinking of implementing a program to assist grandparents and their grandchildren.

A study by Smith, Dannison, and Vach-Hasse (1998) described the needs of grandchildren being raised in grandparent-headed households. Listed below are the feelings they found common to grand-parented children:

- Grief and loss. Children who have lost parents to death or desertion may be grieving. Strategies for teachers include acknowledging the feelings of loss even if they are expressed as inappropriate behaviors;
- Guilt. Children may feel that they were the cause of the problems that led to the move to the grandparents' home. Educators can help by doing things to boost self-esteem and self-confidence through such activities as assigning jobs or earning privileges;
- Fear. Life for children being raised by their grandparents has been traumatic and full of change. Forming trusting relationships will be difficult. Teachers need to nurture these children and understand they may cry when the grandparent leaves them. Small group settings are recommended;
- Embarrassment. Children living in non-traditional homes may be sensitive to the living arrangements. Teachers need to be especially aware of the comments of classmates regarding these arrangements. Also,

schools can make sure that grandparents are aware of special events.

Grandchildren want to take part in peer social events. Another strategy is to invite other grandparents into school as tutors or helpers. The grandchildren and the class will see that older adults can be a part of the normal activities. Teachers need to understand the differences in schooling now from schooling when the grandparents were in school or were raising their own biological children;

- Anger. Anger may be expressed inappropriately in school. There is a lot of anger in these children, and it can be directed at anyone from classmates to the teacher. Again, educators have to be aware of the root of the anger and provide acceptable means of expressing it such as running, kicking a ball, or pounding clay. Additional outside resources may be needed in extreme cases.

The above symptoms and strategies for dealing with the problems faced by grandchildren being raised by their grandparents need to be addressed by involving the grandparents and the grandchildren. Schools must recognize the students who fall into these categories and take specific steps to understand their situation. It is imperative that these children have consistency in school and have role models who provide nurturing and self-assurance. The most important thing educators can do is to make sure that there is open and consistent communication between school and home (Smith et al., 1998).

Resources Available to Grandparents

Research suggests that an area in need of attention surrounding grandparents who raise their grandchildren is the utilization of and need for counseling services (Silverstein

& Vehvilainen, 2000). This is particularly relevant to school systems. A specific issue that grandparents need help with is special education services. As previously noted, children being raised by grandparents are at a higher risk to have a learning disability or be diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder. Grandparents have an especially hard time with terms such as “special needs.”

Silverstein and Vehvilainen (2000) suggest four areas in which schools can act as a resource for grandparents and grandchildren. The first is to provide information to grandparents on outside resources available, including state and federal programs. An example is the creation of a support group by a school counselor. The counselor or school nurse can help grandparents make contact with these outside resources as well as provide support in the school. The second suggestion is that schools, specifically teachers, be “sensitized” to the family situations where these children reside. Professional development classes on the topic of grandparents raising grandchildren are one way this could be accomplished. The third suggestion is to provide some type of respite care for grandchildren such as before and after school care. The fourth suggestion has been mentioned previously, and that is to provide grandparents help in accessing outside support groups.

Outside the school setting there are numerous groups who offer help, information, guidance, and assistance to grandparents raising children. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) has been among the most vocal and accessible. The organization created the AARP Grandparent Information Center (GIC) with funding from the Brookings Institute (AARP, 2004). The GIC Voice is their published newspaper. The information online in the Grandparent Information Center ranges from legal advice

and current law updates to advice for grandparents on a wide range of issues. Other national organizations placing priority on this issue include the Children's Defense Fund, Generations United, and the Child Welfare League. On the state and local levels, help can be found in the Offices of Job and Family Services, Kinship Care organizations, adoption aid centers, and local educational service centers.

Conclusion

While an increasing number of researchers have explored the needs of custodial grandparents, an underreported area remains: The study of how grandparents interact with the school systems responsible for their grandchildren's care (Silverstein & Vehvilainen, 2000). The growing number of children being raised by grandparents suggests a need for school systems and school personnel to understand the topic and educational implications. Identifying how school systems come to know when grandparents are the custodial parents is important. Understanding the grandparents' perspectives of their experiences with school will help identify opportunities for professional growth on the part of educators. Identifying ways in which community agencies are willing to work with schools to help the schools and to help the grandparents and their grandchildren will yield suggestions for both groups.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

A focus group design was utilized to gather and analyze the perceptions and experiences of grandparents regarding the school(s) in which their grandchildren are enrolled. The focus group is defined as an interview style designed for small groups (Berg, 2007). Focus group interviews were used during World War II to determine the effectiveness of radio programs designed to boost army morale (Merton, 1987). Until recently, focus group interviewing was used more extensively by marketing researchers (Berg, 2007). Focus group interviews are widely accepted within marketing research because they produce believable results at reasonable cost, and the technique grew in popularity with educators (Krueger, 1994). One of the main reasons that focus groups were not accepted by academics was analysis (Krueger, 1998). Protocol to address different and diverse situations encountered in focus groups was difficult to develop in a systematic way. However, during the 1980s, the use of focus group techniques re-emerged among social scientists (Hamel, 2001; Berg, 2007). In 1998, the first edition of David Morgan's book, *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*, was released, and in 1994 Richard Krueger's book, *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*, was released. These books have contributed to focus groups becoming an increasingly accepted method for collecting qualitative data in the social sciences.

The focus group is appropriate for collection of data because it allows participants to openly answer questions and expand on their answers. A focus group is a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a

permissive, non-threatening environment and when the goal is to explain how people regard an experience, idea or event (Krueger, 1994). The attempt of the focus group is to learn about the biographies and life structures of group participants (Berg, 2007). The focus group works because it taps into human tendencies. The permissive group environment gives individuals license to divulge emotions that often do not emerge in other forms of questioning (Krueger, 1994). Interactions among and between groups members stimulates discussion in which one group member reacts to the comments made by another. A far greater number of ideas, issues, topics, and solutions to problems can be generated through group discussion than through individual conversations (Berg, 2007). Focus group interviews are particularly useful when participants can express multiple perspectives on a similar experience (Glesne, 2006). The focus group design allows the researcher to gather multiple perceptions, experiences, and perspectives in order to draw conclusions and identify trends associated with grandparents raising grandchildren.

The focus group interview process is particularly suitable because it provides structure in the form of specific questions that are asked, yet allows the researcher to add questions in the course of the interview to follow upon unanticipated responses. The process also permits in depth probing to ensure that all points of view represented in the group are captured.

Glesne (2006) concluded that focus groups can have emancipatory qualities if the topic of discussion gives voice to silenced experiences. The goal of the researcher is to give a voice to the grandparent participants and allow them to “tell their stories.”

The focus group participants in this study were identified with the assistance of school guidance counselors in 14 school districts in Ohio's Trumbull County. Mary Olesh, a grandparent raising her grandchild and a member of the staff at the Solace Center in Warren, Ohio, helped the researcher set up the focus groups. The Solace Center is a children's social service and welfare agency. She was chosen because she is a grandmother raising her grandchild, and she interacts with grandparents raising their grandchildren as a part of her position at the Solace Center.

Population and Sample

One may find grandparent-headed households among the poor and minorities; one may also find them in every segment of society. There are grandparents raising their grandchildren who are wealthy and who represent every race and nationality. These families live in urban, suburban, and rural areas (Edwards, 1998). The focus of this research was to identify the experience of the growing number of grandparents raising grandchildren as they interact with the public schools that serve their grandchildren

Ohio has a significant number of grandparent-headed households. The 2000 Census revealed that Ohio's grandparents are raising 157,298 [or over 5 %] of the state's children. This represents a 13.8% increase from the number of children being raised by grandparents in 1990 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The 2000 Census also reported that in Trumbull County, Ohio, there were 1,712 grandparents responsible for raising their grandchildren. In addition, the researcher, in discussion with guidance counselors and principals across the county, learned that there may be grandparents raising grandchildren that have not been formally reported, but rather are known to classroom teachers and other school contacts.

The sample grandparent groups were gathered using three steps. The researcher first sent letters through U.S. mail and email to the twenty superintendents of schools in Trumbull County, Ohio, requesting permission to contact their school district guidance counselors for assistance in identifying grandparents raising their grandchildren (Appendix B, Appendix C). Written permission was secured from 14 superintendents. Three superintendents declined permission and three did not respond.

In the second step the researcher contacted counselors in approved districts via U.S. mail and email explaining the research project and asking them to respond if they were willing to assist by gathering names of grandparents raising grandchildren in their school or district (Appendix D). Counselors were asked to use the most reliable and available means of collecting the names of the grandparents. This included school records, school EMIS data, and emergency cards as well as their own personal knowledge and that of other school personnel to identify children who are being raised by their grandparents.

Once participating counselors identified grandparents they were initially asked to send invitations to three grandparents from their list using a random selection process prescribed by the researcher (Appendix E). A similar process was used in successive waves of mailing of invitations to grandparents inviting them to participate in the study until the requisite number of grandparents agreed to participate. Overall 13 counselors in eight districts identified 203 grandparents, issued invitations to 92 grandparents, of which 17 agreed to participate in the study. These grandparents represented 8 districts in the county, including urban, rural, and suburban districts.

In the final step of identification of the sample, the researcher met with Mary Olesh and determined that each of the 17 returned letters met the dual criteria for participation— providing primary care for the grandchild and the child’s enrollment in a county school district, both for a minimum of six months. The researcher then contacted each grandparent by telephone. After phone conversations, there was a final total of 15 grandparents who joined the study. These 15 grandparents were divided into two groups according to their geographic location to limit travel time as much as possible. For various reasons five grandparents agreed to be in the groups, but did not come to the first focus session and decided to drop out. Four grandparents also brought their spouses to the sessions. After the first session one grandparent suggested she knew other grandparents who were raising their grandchildren. Due to the drop out of other participants and the fact that two of the grandparents suggested met all of criteria they were admitted to the study. A final total of 16 grandparents attended at least two of the three focus group sessions.

All grandparents in the focus groups had at least one child enrolled or previously enrolled in a Trumbull County school for at least six months. The grandparents were also providing primary care for their grandchildren for at least six months. The grandparents were asked in the letter forwarded to them by the counselors (Appendix F) to indicate (a) how long they had provided primary care of their grandchildren; (b) the current grade level of their grandchildren; (c) how long the grandchildren were enrolled in a Trumbull County school; (d) how many grandchildren they were raising.

Data Collection

The researcher conducted multiple sessions with each of two focus groups comprising between six and eight grandparents in each. The settings were in public areas that met ADA requirements. The setting of the first focus group was chosen by the facilitator with an attempt to make it as centrally located as possible for the participants. The researcher gave each focus group the opportunity to provide input on the location of subsequent sessions. Childcare was offered for grandchildren and a light dinner was provided by the researcher.

Each focus group was moderated by the researcher. According to Krueger (1994), the moderator must be comfortable and familiar with group processes and have some experience in working with groups. The researcher's personal experiences with grandparents raising grandchildren created a sense of trust that allowed the participants to honestly and openly answer the questions. The researcher was a discussion leader and the group interactions were stimulated by the questions. The researcher, a 10 year veteran school administrator, also has extensive experience in facilitating groups of parents as well as educators in her professional capacity. Guidelines on facilitation of focus groups (Morgan, 1988) were also reviewed to reinforce the researcher's prior training and group facilitation experience.

Three sessions were conducted for each of the two groups of grandparents. Each session was between 60 to 90 minutes in length. Morgan (1997) recommends sessions of 90 minutes but suggests allotting two hours. Time was allowed for each participant to answer the questions and for feedback and responses from the rest of the group. Grandparents were allowed the time they needed to answer the questions without being

rushed or forced to limit their responses. A prepared list of questions was used for each session (Appendix G). These questions were a starting point and guided, but did not rigidly dictate the flow of the group. Morgan (1997) recommended using four or five questions for a somewhat structured focus group. A somewhat structured forum was needed to help the grandparents stay focused and prevent time from running out. When needed, the facilitator acted as a moderator and/or discussion leader by asking follow-up questions and questions of clarification. This allowed the interactions with and among the group participants to flow throughout the allotted time.

The researcher conducted a pilot focus group for the purpose of finalizing questions and to make necessary adjustments regarding time management. Information gathered from this pilot group through face-to-face and written feedback was used to finalize the questions for each session of the focus groups. Participants in the pilot study did not participate in the actual focus groups.

During the first focus group, the facilitator suggested general group norms. Participants were encouraged to speak freely while refraining from using specific names of school personnel or other identifiable information. The facilitator also discussed the importance of confidentiality before the participants began to divulge specific and sensitive information about their personal lives.

The questions for the first focus group session were designed to establish trust within the group and to establish a comfortable and safe climate for the grandparents. The questions for the second focus group session were centered on the schools and the grandparents' perceptions of the schools their grandchildren attend. In the final session, grandparents were asked to give suggestions and advice for other grandparents who are

raising their grandchildren and to the schools and teachers who may have such children in their schools and classrooms. The goal of the last session was to obtain closure and give the participants a sense that their participation was valuable and will help others.

The focus group sessions were both video and audio taped. One video recorder was set up to capture the entire group. Videotaping was used to capture body language (including facial expressions) and for referencing and verifying participants after the groups concluded. One digital voice recorder was placed in the center of the table to ensure that all conversation was recorded. The researcher also took notes on a notepad. Taking thorough notes is important to capture cues offered by participants such as head shakes and side comments that might be lost in translation (Berg, 2007). The participants were assured that their comments would only be used for the purpose of this study and would only be shared with school districts or others in the form of general statements. The researcher made every attempt to keep specific or unique issues anonymous. Informed consent forms were completed and collected during the first session of attendance (Appendix H).

Confidentiality issues were addressed with the groups as well. Participants were told that the informed consent would only ensure confidentiality on the part of the researcher and that it did not ensure that individual group members would keep the information shared in the focus group confidential. It was also explained that a member of the group could easily go away from the session and share names and personal situations. To address these issues, each participant was asked to sign a confidentiality agreement (Appendix I). The agreement covered all group members and the researcher. This arrangement is fairly common practice in other forms of research (Berg, 2007).

Enforcement is largely one of honor rather than law, however, the mere presence of the agreement and the ensuing conversation allowed each participant to think about issues of confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research is an umbrella term used, especially in the social sciences, to describe various research methods or approaches. A commonality shared by these methods is a concern with an investigation of the research phenomena *in situ*; that is, within their naturally-occurring context(s). One aim of the qualitative researcher is to tease out the meaning(s) the phenomena have for the actors or participant (WordIQ.com, 2010).

Qualitative research has several hallmarks. It is conducted in a natural setting, without intentionally manipulating the environment. It typically involves highly detailed, rich descriptions of human behaviors and opinions. The perspective is that humans construct their own reality, and an understanding of what they do may be based on why they believe they do it. The researcher becomes a part of the study by interacting closely with the subjects of the study. It is not necessarily assumed that the findings of one study may be generalized easily to other settings (AECT, 2001).

There are a number of approaches or traditions used to analyze qualitative data. A qualitative “approach” is a general way of thinking about conducting qualitative research. It describes the purpose of the qualitative research, the role of the researcher, the stages of research, and the method of data analysis (Creswell, 1998). There are multiple ways to conduct qualitative research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Different varieties of qualitative research have different things to say about analysis. Miles and Huberman (1994) looked

at three major arrays of qualitative study approaches beginning with Wolcott's work (1992) whose array shows a literal "tree" of nearly two dozen strategies organized according to data collection styles. Miles and Huberman note his classifications are about methods. Another array was formed by Tesch (1990) whose computer-generated tree sorts identified 27 types of qualitative research. Miles and Huberman note his classification is about research purposes. A final array that Miles and Huberman looked at is Jacob's (1987) taxonomy of five major qualitative traditions. These are sorted by using dimensions including assumptions about human nature and society, the focus, and the methodology.

Although there are several different types and styles of qualitative research and data analysis, there are similarities or commonalities amongst them. Miles & Huberman identified six analytic practices that may be used across different qualitative research types (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 8):

Affixing codes to a set of field notes drawn from observations or interviews;

1. Noting reflections or other remarks in the margins;
2. Sorting and sifting through these materials to identify similar phrases, relationships between variables, patterns, themes, distinct differences between subgroups, and common sequences;
3. Isolating these patterns and processes, commonalities and differences, and taking them out to the field in the next wave of data collection;
4. Gradually elaborating a small set of generalizations that cover the consistencies discerned in the database;

5. Confronting the generalizations with a formalized body of knowledge in the form of constructs or theories (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Berg (2007) also identifies a set of analytic activities that recur across or within several types of qualitative analysis:

1. Data are collected and made into text (field notes, transcripts);
2. Codes are analytically developed or inductively identified in the data;
3. Codes are transformed into categorical labels or themes;
4. Materials are sorted by the categories of identifying similar phrases, patterns, relationships, and commonalities or disparities;
5. Sorted materials are examined to isolate meaningful patterns and processes;
6. Identified patterns are then considered in light of previous research and theories, and a small set of generalizations is established.

Miles and Huberman also outline qualitative data analysis as usually consisting of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles & Huberman 1994, p. 10).

Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in field notes. This analysis includes coding, teasing out themes, making clusters, and writing summaries. It sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards, and organizes data in a way that final conclusions can be drawn (p. 11).

The second major part of the data analysis flow as defined by Miles and Huberman is data display. Data displays such as matrices, graphs, charts, and networks are designed to assemble organized information into an easily accessible form so the

analyst can see what is happening and draw conclusions or move to the next step in the process (p. 11).

The final part of the data analysis flow according to Miles and Huberman is conclusion drawing and verification. From the beginning of the study the analyst is making conclusions by noting irregularities, patterns, and explanations. Miles and Huberman contend that drawing conclusions is not enough. Conclusions must also be verified. The meanings that emerge must be tested for validity; their sturdiness and plausibility. Without this part of the flow we are left with accounts of things that happened but also with unknown truths (p. 10). This flow of data analysis is cyclical and interactive. They are interwoven before, during, and after data collections.

A specific qualitative approach or tradition in analyzing data that lends itself to this particular study is phenomenology. Phenomenology emphasizes a focus on the meaning of lived experiences of several individuals (Creswell, 1998). This study seeks to understand the experiences of grandparents raising school-aged grandchildren and their interactions with schools. Such phenomenology origins can be traced back to German philosopher Edmund Husserl and his writings addressing phenomenological philosophy beginning in 1913 (Cresswell,1998). It has been used in the social and human sciences, psychology, nursing and health services, and education. Cresswell (1998) describes Husserl's tenants of phenomenology data analysis as proceeding through the methodology of reduction including the following steps:

1. Researchers search for the essential, invariant structure (or essence) or central, underlying meaning of the experience;

2. Emphasize the intentionality of consciousness where experiences contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on memory, image, and meaning.

To understand the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or group of people, Creswell puts forth steps to analyzing data using a phenomenological lens (1998 p.148-149):

1. Create and organize files for data;
2. Read through text, make margin notes, form initial codes;
3. Describe the meaning of the experience for the researcher;
4. Find and list statements of meaning for individuals, and group statements into meaning units;
5. Develop a textural description, “What happened”, develop a structural description, “How” the phenomenon was experienced, develop an overall description of the experience- the “essence.”

Building on this foundation of qualitative research methods and confluence of strategies, the following steps were taken in analyzing the focus group data collected for this study:

1. Field notes, audio, and video recordings were reviewed;
2. Audio tapes were fully transcribed ;
3. Transcript data was organized by question for each of the three focus group sessions and for each of the groups;

4. Video recordings were reviewed and margin notes were made identifying the speaker, and situational details and characteristics of both an individual and organizational nature;
5. Similar responses that emerged in the group and across the groups were clustered together and organized into themes;
6. Overarching or prevailing themes were identified and their meaning and implications explored.
7. The researcher met with a peer reviewer to review the manuscript and data analysis. The reviewer was asked to confirm the consistency between the transcribed data and dissertation text in terms of quotations, representation, and the meaning ascribed to them. The peer reviewer stated there was consistency and that the voices of the grandparents were accurately represented. This is represented in a statement of confirmation found in Appendix J.
8. The grandparents were reconvened at the conclusion of the study and presented with a written outline of the prevailing themes (Appendix K) and a four-page narrative summary of findings to review, after which they were given an opportunity to discuss the findings, ask questions, clarify, and suggest additions. Grandparents who were not in attendance were mailed a copy of prevailing themes (Appendix L).

In the next chapter the collected data are analyzed and themes are developed illuminating the life experiences of the grandparents and the meaning they ascribe to their experiences. In the final chapter the implications of the experiences of the grandparents

are reviewed and recommendations are made for school districts responsible for educating children who are in the custody and care of their grandparents.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS

The goal of this analysis is to bring the experiences of grandparents raising their grandchildren to life, and to record their personal stories in a way that will accurately reflect those experiences specifically as they relate to their interactions with schools. Toward that end, the grandparents' own words are used as much as possible to capture the essence of their stories. Further, the analysis will consider the educational implications and inform best practices for schools.

This chapter is organized into several sections. It begins with a description of the focus groups and a profile of the grandparents including the circumstances of how and why they attained custody of the grandchildren, their family structure, their greatest challenges in raising their grandchildren, and also the most rewarding part of raising their grandchildren. The experiences of the grandparents are recounted as they responded to questions about schools and their experiences with topics such as homework, school events, and communications between school and home. Next, grandparents' "voices of experience" are captured as they offer suggestions to schools and other grandparents who find themselves raising their grandchildren. The final section identifies common themes that emerged across the groups and relates them to what is found in literature.

Description of Focus Groups

There were two focus groups conducted for this research. They will be referred to as focus group number one and focus group number two. Both groups were conducted in Trumbull County, Ohio. The focus groups were formed based on geographical convenience and meeting time availability. Each group had grandchildren who attended

a school in Trumbull County, Ohio. At least three different school districts were represented in each group. The groups met separately on three different occasions across a two week time span. Focus group number one met in a fire station meeting room for the first two sessions and at a local restaurant meeting room for the final session. Focus group number two met in a meeting room at a local restaurant for all three sessions. Both focus groups were reconvened after the data analysis was completed. Those grandparents present were provided a summary of prevailing themes and given the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback on the accuracy of the themes.

Description of Participants: The Grandparents

Focus Group 1

GP1: Maternal divorced grandfather with legal custody of his 12 year old step-granddaughter for the past 10 years. He is divorced from the grandchild's maternal grandmother. He and his ex-wife divorced when the child was nine months old. Grandfather continued visitation with the child. The visits increased, and he eventually obtained custody of the grandchild. On occasion, the grandchild visits her mother, who lives out of state. The grandfather works full time. The grandchild attends a small elementary school.

GP2: Maternal grandmother responsible for the care of her 12 year old grandson for approximately one year. She is currently fighting for legal custody in the court system. The child's father, who abuses drugs, was incarcerated, resulting in the grandmother assuming primary care of the grandchild. The child attends a small middle school. Grandmother works full time.

GP3: Maternal grandmother who, along with her husband, was awarded temporary emergency custody of their now 16 year old grandson when he was six months old. This was supposed to last until her daughter “got her act together.” Mother was suffering from substance abuse and father is an alcoholic. Grandparents have also been caring for the grandchild’s half sister for most of the last three years. Grandmother works part time. The grandson they are raising attends a high school in their small community.

GP4&5: Maternal grandparents who have custody of and have been raising their now 16 year old grandson since he was six months old. Grandfather is a step grandfather. The child’s parents could not decide who was going to raise him, and because he was being neglected, the grandparents were awarded custody. No drugs or alcohol were involved. Mother and father were unmarried and both now have other children. Both grandparents work on their family-owned farm. The grandfather is a step grandfather. The grandchild attends a small high school.

GP6&7: Maternal grandparents who have been raising their 9 year old granddaughter for most of her life. Grandfather is a step grandfather. The daughter’s biological father died and mother remarried. The child is the result of a teen pregnancy and her father was incarcerated shortly after her birth. Mother does not have a stable lifestyle and is not consistently present in the child’s life. The mother has been involved in relationships where she has been physically abused resulting in the grandparents seeking and the courts awarding them custody. The grandchild attends a small elementary school.

Focus Group 2

GP1&2: Maternal grandparents who have been raising a 14 year old grandson and a 12 year old granddaughter for most of their lives. The mother had a mental breakdown and

attempted suicide and was unable to meet their needs. Grandparents sought and were awarded custody in order to fulfill medical needs of the children. The grandson is a special needs child. The children attend a mid-sized urban school district.

GP3&4: Maternal grandparents who have legal custody of their now 14 year old grandson and a 4 year old granddaughter. They were also awarded custody of another granddaughter who is now an adult and no longer living with them. Their daughter was struggling with drug abuse and unable to care for the children. When Children's Services became involved, the grandparents were awarded legal custody.

GP5: Grandmother who is raising two granddaughters. One is 16 years old, and grandmother has had legal guardianship of her since she was a baby due to the health problems of the child's mother. She was recently awarded custody of her 12 year old granddaughter. The child's father, who is an alcoholic, re-married and the step mother was abusive toward the child. The mother did not intervene. Children's Services became involved and grandmother was awarded custody of the child. Grandchildren both attend the same small school district.

GP6: Paternal grandmother whose husband is on an organ transplant list. They have been raising their now 9 year old grandson since he was one year old. The child's parents are divorced. The father has Asperger's, an autism spectrum disorder, and the mother suffers from bipolar issues. The father currently lives with the grandparents. Grandparents lived in another state when the parents were having marital problems and not taking care of the child. The grandparents sought and were awarded custody. Mother continued to take the grandparents back to court. The grandparents finally made an agreement with the mother to pay her sums of money in exchange for not going to court to seek custody. The mother

agreed. The grandparents have a signed paper from the mother agreeing to not seek custody provided they pay a certain sum each year. To this point the mother has accepted the money and has not been involved in the child's life or sought custody. They have been paying her since the child was three years old. The child attends a mid-size elementary school.

GP7: Paternal grandmother who has had temporary custody of two grandsons ages 7 and 10 for six years. Both parents have struggled with drug abuse for years. The courts awarded temporary custody to the grandmother when the child's parents were homeless and Children's Services became involved. The 10 year old grandson suffers from physical problems.

GP8: Grandmother became legal guardian of her grandson while he was in high school. He graduated one year ago. His parents are in his life. (Grandmother joined the group in session two and did not provide many details of the situation that led to her taking custody.)

GP9: Maternal grandmother raising three grandchildren including a grandson in ninth grade of whom she has had custody all his life, a granddaughter in third grade of whom she has had custody since she was one year old and another granddaughter in second grade, of whom she has had custody for three years now. Mother struggles with substance abuse.

Focus group two had a unique make up. Five of the seven families represented in the group live in the same urban community and their grandchildren attend the same mid-size urban school district. The remaining grandparents (numbers 4&5) live in suburban communities and their grandchildren attend smaller schools.

Focus Group Questions

The researcher was the facilitator of each focus group, and made an attempt to go through each question and elicit responses from each participant in the time allotted. There was also a concerted effort to ask quality follow up questions around topics of interest or topics that were important to the participants. Follow up questions were also asked to get more direct or detailed responses and for clarification. A problem that arose during data analysis was the merging of questions with each other. The grandparents often did not directly answer the question asked but referred to an earlier question or elaborated in another area. This was expected by the facilitator as the subject was very emotional and the grandparents were very passionate talking about their grandchildren. As the sessions moved along the facilitator also made the decision to focus more on questions that were clearly important to the grandparents and not focus on questions that appeared to have already been answered or did not seem relevant based on other responses.

As the sessions proceeded other topics emerged that prompted follow up questions. These included questions about the court system and the struggle to get custody, a subject about which many of the grandparents were very vocal and eager to discuss. Another follow up that elicited much response was in relation to school events and special days, such as mom's day or dad's day, that may have caused issues for the grandchildren and grandparents. Also, although not a question, the grandparents in both groups were passionate about the generational changes that have occurred since they were parents. This topic sparked much conversation.

The questions that were the most fluid were those surrounding the schools. These questions often merged as the grandparents' responses sometimes proceeded in different directions. Each group had their own unique topics that arose and the researcher allowed each group to express themselves on topics that obviously mattered a great deal to them. One group was very vocal about homework while the other group was very detailed about the schools' communication with them. As the sessions progressed, uninterrupted by a strict adherence to the intended sequence of questions, the grandparents began to open up and rich dialogue occurred. The researcher has personal knowledge of the topic and was able to use this to probe with additional questions and make the participants feel at ease when answering the questions. This allowed them to share personal stories and details of their lives, and the lives of their children and grandchildren.

Session I: The Grandparents

This first session focused on the grandparents. The questions explored the circumstances leading to their attaining custody of their grandchildren and some of the challenges and rewards associated with their new role.

Attaining Custody

Group 1

Parental dysfunction played a role in every case of the grandparents taking or assuming custody of their grandchild. The grandparents were faced with taking custody of their grandchildren or watching them suffer and not be taken care of due to parental problems. These problems ranged from conflict between the mother and father, to the children not being taken care of, to one of the parents being in prison. While these grandparents' lives were interrupted with the reality that they would need to take these

children, thinking for a only short time, they did not relay any feelings of regret for having done it: "...we thought it was going to be a couple of weeks, our daughter would get her act together, and we would get our life back...that's not gonna happen." As horrific as some of the experiences were they each agreed they would each do it over again and continue to put their grandchildren's best interest over their own. The group of grandparents unanimously supported this sentiment:

I took custody of [my grandson] when he was six months old. His mom and dad did not know what they wanted to do. [Parents said to each other] 'You take him, no I'll take him.' He was six months old and unable to hold a bottle, and was underweight....

I'm just the strangest case-she is a step-granddaughter so I kinda started with her and [then] I got divorced. I didn't see the ex or the kid for 9 months. I started taking the little one for the weekends and that turned into months. I finally just said 'you gotta give me custody.' So I've been legally like raising her for 10 years.

I had to be escorted by the police the same night [name of grandson] called the police twice on his father. The next day his dad went to jail, and I had to go get him [grandson]and right now I still don't have any legal binding piece of paper saying that I have custody again.

[My] daughter got pregnant at 16 -17 I think, and the father of the child that we have custody of now promptly went off to prison. We never really got to see the child born and I [grandmother] was basically the sole provider and caretaker. I tried to channel my daughter and get her into the maternity home down by Vienna where she was required to do blah, blah, blah, [have a]set regime and go to school there. She delivered [name of grandchild] and he [father of the child] was in prison... [She had a boyfriend] and he got up one morning looking for her – low and behold where does he find her, but with another guy in the back of a pickup truck with alcohol so we went for exparte custody immediately. It was the hardest thing that I could ever do. You know it's a lose-lose for me because I lose my daughter if we get custody and we lose my daughter and grandchildren if we don't get custody.

We took temporary emergency custody when [name of grandchild] was 6 months old. He was 16 last week. So much for temporary emergency custody, you know, which I don't think we realized obviously was going to be for the long haul

Group 2

Parental dysfunction played a role in each grandparent taking their grandchildren in to raise them. There were no situations, for example, where a parent died or simply moved in with the parents. Substance abuse and alcohol abuse played a role in the majority of the situations. In a few of the cases the parents had serious health problems. As a result grandparents stepped in and eventually obtained permanent custody. The dire circumstances of the children forced the grandparents to seek custody: “*We've had them*

most all their lives. We got custody cause when they changed the Hippa Laws we had to because they wouldn't let us give [name of grandchild] his [medical needs]. Taking custody of the grandchildren was not something these grandparents set out to do. They went to great lengths to help the parents and grandchildren cope with physical, emotional, and financial circumstances. In most cases the grandparents took custody as a last resort; when it was obvious that no one else could or wanted to take care of the children. The grandparents talked about being in a "catch 22". They cannot help the grandchildren without helping the parents, and the cycle keeps going and going. For example, a grandmother expressed it this way: "They would call us up and say, 'we don't have any food grandpa and nothing to eat', so grandpa would go buy food and take it to them."

Others in the group agreed, *"And I would say at least 3 or 4 times I paid for their apartment."* A third echoed, *"Yeah, me too."* Every grandparent did it out of love and a desire to see their grandchildren safe and loved. Some of the situations they rescued their grandchildren from were horrific as indicated in their testimonies:

She was on drugs, and they weren't taking care of the kids. They were locking them out of the house, they were not eating properly, and the neighbors started complaining about them being on the street at night. Children's Services stepped in and it was either us take them or Children's Services.

I have two [grandchildren]. [Name of grandchild] is 16 and I've had her since she was a baby. I also have [other grandchild's name] who is 12, and I got her in October. [16 year old grandchild] is my problem child because she's had an abusive life. Her mother abandoned her when she was 10 months and her father

is a diabetic alcoholic so it was rough getting her, but I finally got her. [12 year old grandchild] is my adventurous one-likes everything and everybody, but she wants you to keep your space and don't get into her space. Don't touch her unless she wants you to....

My son and [name of grandchild's] mother were married. My son has problems and she [mother] was bipolar. For [name of grandchild] to be kinda normal was amazing. We were living in Kentucky when they were having marital problems, and she was not taking care of [name of grandchild] and threatening [us]. We spent a lot of money on lawyers . Of course it didn't cost her anything.

My son and their [the grandchildren's mom was living in an apartment. They [both parents] had been drug addicts for years and years and years. I found out that [someone] had called Children's Services on them ...not sure what they were alleging... Then there was an incident. We did not know where the boys were for 3 days and we kept going to the apartment and going. Finally they [parents] were there like at 11:00 one morning all sleeping, cause that's what drug addicts do, up all night like kids up all night. So the kids sleep with them and it was around that time the Children's Services were being called and I got the guy's [Children's Services worker] card out of the door. He had stuck it in the door cause they wouldn't answer. I took the boys to my house and called the guy whose name was on the card and said 'if you're looking for these boys I have them.' So he came out to do an assessment on my house ...we got our lawyer. My son and

his girlfriend had gotten kicked out of their apartment and were actually living down by the Mahoning River... When the court date came I went down to the river and picked them up and took her a clean white shirt, and I took them to court, and they signed over custody. It was temporary custody and not the legal custody...we've been going back for 6 years [with] mom and dad being in the picture and then dropping out of sight, promising the kids they'd come over or [and then they]never show up....[grandparents are left] having to hold them on our laps so they could sob.

Greatest Challenges

Group 1

The grandparents were asked to describe their greatest challenge in raising their grandchildren. As each grandparent answered this question there were several nods of agreement in the room indicating they felt similar challenges. The responses ranged from dealing with the schools, *“The biggest challenge is the school system”* to dealing with the birth parents, *“Our biggest challenge is the father's a dead beat....”* to working on top of everything else. Another grandparent described the challenge of dealing with parents that do not keep their promises: *“...you take care of the kids and just love them.”*

A common response was dealing with siblings and cousins that did not live with the grandparents. For one grandmother the biggest challenge was raising a boy.

Whatever the challenge, the grandparents were ready to accept it for the love of their grandchildren. Some of those challenges are captured in the following responses.

“[He]’s got about 5 kids from different women who are all her brothers and sisters, according to her mother who lives out of state. I hear a lot of ‘why can’t I be with them?’

“I have not raised a boy – I had two girls – so the challenge is raising him – they are so different from girls – I’m a full time working grandma.”

Another hard thing is when you sit there and you are holding them on your lap because of something the parent did. You’re giving them your 100% and then here is the person [parent] who breaks promises and is never around

[I] want her to see there is a different life style. I want her to see there’s something beyond what she has to contend with on a day to day basis and show her something a little better so she has something to work toward – a goal.

Group 2

The majority of the grandparents cited problems with the parents and not the grandchildren as their biggest challenge in raising their grandchildren as one grandmother expressed, “... worrying about her coming in after all these years and taking them, that’s very nerve wracking....” Parents not showing up or not knowing when they were going to show up was a concern, as well as dealing with parents and getting them to see that they cannot raise their children. The children love their parents even though the parents either do not want them or cannot care for them. In relationship to the grandchildren, dealing with the child’s emotional issues and special needs were the most challenging. One grandparent talked about the emotional impact the situation had on her grandson, while another spoke of emotional impact on her granddaughter, “...she’s had a lot of things that happened to her that shouldn’t happen to somebody her age.” The grandparents seldom focused on their own problems, or how challenging raising their

grandchildren was on them physically and emotionally. One grandparent said it has actually “energized” her! The focus was always on the grandchildren.

“I think the hardest part is emotional issues. I had to get her [grandchild] into weekly counseling...”

[T]he broken promises and actually to the point where we cannot say ‘tomorrow we’re going to go to the park’ cause if tomorrow comes and I say ‘I have something that happened at work and I had to stay and work over...’ [grandchild says] ‘you lied to me cause you said...’ The broken promises are challenging to us as well.

His mother wouldn’t get up in the morning and get him a bottle or anything to eat or drink cause they’re still sleeping, so it took almost a complete year to break him of the crying first thing every morning. It took a couple of years to break him of when I would bring groceries in the house he would run to the bags and start getting into everything...

Rewards

Group 1

Similar to the question on the most challenging part of raising grandchildren, there were different responses when grandparents were asked about the most rewarding aspect of raising their grandchildren. Responses eliciting most agreement included watching their grandchild grow up as one grandfather (who himself is a farmer) reflected that, *“The most rewarding part is every time he says ‘Look at that field of corn. Isn’t that beautiful? I wanna be a farmer.’”* Others noted it was rewarding having their grandchild

simply express love toward them in one grandfather's case, calling him dad, as he recalled, "*I have had several of those, 'can I call you dad?' I have something hanging in my car [that says] #1 Dad .*" Still another rewarding aspect expressed was having others affirm they were doing the correct thing by raising their grandchildren and doing it well.

My rewards is school. Every conference I go to that's all I hear is what a wonderful job you're doing raising this girl. She has perfect manners, and mind you, I've asked every one of them to come home with me for at least a week to find out what she's like at home...she gets good grades without me, maybe once a week I'll ask her 'did you do your homework?' So I don't mess with it - and A's and B's without me saying a word is fine with me.

Group 2

Answers to this question were immediate. Their faces were illuminated when the question was asked. They were anxious to answer and several heads nodded as each grandparent answered. Two answers emerged: knowing their grandchild is doing well in school and getting love from their grandchild. The grandparents were very concerned with their grandchildren's success in school. They spoke of school issues and doing well as though it were a mission they were on, and when it happened, it was very gratifying to them as they joyously reported that:

"He's doing better in school, and he doesn't take the medications anymore."

"He is off his IEP."

"I think the most rewarding part is she'll come up and say 'you know grandma – I love you.'"

“The teacher had sent a note home, and the note said that he’d rather stay with you than his mother cause...he loves you...”

Session II: School Encounters

Session II focused on the interactions between the grandparents and the schools. Questions elicited experiences associated with enrolling their grandchild in school and school knowledge of their situation, the grandchild’s adjustment in school, and factors that inhibited or facilitated that adjustment. Other questions focused on school communications. A final focus of this session inquired about changes in school practices that the grandparents would recommend.

School Enrollment/Knowledge of the Situation

Group 1

Despite several probes and follow up questions by the facilitator, this question about enrollment received very little discussion. The grandparents, for the most part, had no real problems enrolling their grandchild in school and settled into a routine in which, *“We just took our custody papers right over and then the following year when she went back in August it was like a roll over.”* Each school requested custody or court papers, but the grandparents were all able to produce them without incident and get their grandchild enrolled without a problem. Given the timing of their assuming the role of grandparents raising grandchildren, the facilitator asked a follow up question regarding the schools’ knowledge of their situation as grandparents raising their grandchildren. When asked if the school knew they were raising their grandchild, there was a clear similarity in their answers. The grandparents each described how they went into the school and initiated a conversation about the situation, and always maintained a firm

demeanor: *“I told the teachers very clearly that they were to deal with me and only to talk to me.”* The schools did not initiate these discussions in most cases. By going in right away and talking to the schools and teachers, they expressed how they avoided problems with their grandchildren and with any custody questions. They also advised the teachers as to whom to address letters and papers that were sent home from school. It was important to them to let the school and teachers know who was to pick up the kids and who was not allowed to pick up the children, namely their parents. The grandparents were very vocal on the importance of going directly to the schools right away and making sure everyone was clear on the issue. It seemed natural for them to do this. It was not looked upon as a burden, but as a necessity to ensure the understanding of the situation for the safety and well being of their grandchildren. One grandmother recounted her experience, *“[W]e had to keep her away from her son for his benefit because of the alcohol and drugs. She [mother] was using and she would show up at the school [and say] ‘I’m his mother’ ...Well they turned her away.”* These grandparents are not willing to let anything interfere with the well-being of their grandchildren and are determined to take any necessary steps towards that end. The focus group further discussed their efforts to keep their grandchildren safe:

“So every time he’d switch buildings...they’d [school] ask [about custody]and there was the minor issues a few times cause my daughter went through a really rough period....”

The principal was good about it and the secretary was like a professional, great secretary there, you didn’t get past her...very attentive to the situation very on guard [as] ours wasn’t the only situation in the building.

Group 2

Despite asking several follow up questions about school enrollment, the facilitator could not discern any patterns or issues with grandparents getting their grandchildren enrolled in school. The school districts requested paperwork, but were helpful and did not have any unreasonable requests of grandparents. The protocol was as simple as, *“They just asked me for my custody papers and for social security cards which are on record.”* The type of custody, temporary or permanent, did not seem to matter to the school district. They readily accepted the papers the grandparents provided. The biggest inconvenience expressed was crossing out “parent” and writing in “grandparent” on the emergency cards and other school forms. The grandparents also felt the schools knew that they, as grandma and grandpa, were raising the children. However, this was mostly due to the grandparents making their presence known in the school and by initiating conversations with teachers. Or, as one grandparent reminded the facilitator, *“Oh I think they knew-they know I am too old to have kids that age!”*

The group verified the ease of school enrollment procedures:

“There was no problem with the school, in fact actually we haven’t had a problem with that system. They really work well with me in helping me.”

I really didn’t have any problems when I went and enrolled them, but I had temporary custody when I first enrolled [them] and they told me I had to get something from the court, an affidavit or something during the process. Then we had permanent custody so they made a copy of all the paperwork so then you don’t have any problems when you come up to enroll them.

School Adjustment and Supports

Group 1

When asked about their grandchildren's adjustment to school, the grandparents expressed a critical factor in that adjustment depended on the schools' knowledge of circumstances associated with grandparents' assumption of custody, and the grandparents' proactive communication with the schools and teachers. Schools seemed to know that the child was being raised by a grandparent in the legal sense, but the schools seemed unaware in a more personal sense that would help them understand how the situation might impact the child in school. The experiences ranged from positive to negative, but the commonality was the grandparents' going in ahead of time and explaining the details of the situation rather than school personnel being proactive and inquiring. There was a consensus among a few of the grandparents that they were disrespected or looked down upon because they were grandparents.

The same grandparents also expressed the notion that the school did not seem to fully understand the situation until parent teacher conferences or until there was a problem. When the grandparent was able to elaborate on their circumstances, the teachers expressed frustration that their school had no procedure for informing teachers from year to year of the situation as vocalized by one grandparent: "*[Grandparent to teacher] 'did the previous teacher talk to you?' She [teacher] just said 'God help you' and walked away.*" In contrast, a grandfather told of the support received from a teacher, recalling, "*Teachers were actually crying with me and trying to understand the situation.*"

This was also another opportunity for the grandparents to stress again the importance and necessity of going in and ensuring the teachers were aware of their

situation even if that meant going in year after year. Some of the grandparents were already known to teachers and staff because they had their children in school as this grandparent succinctly replied, *“I think everyone knows I am the grandparent. If they don’t they were mushrooms under a little rock.”* The group of grandparents were equally vocal about those teachers who were so supportive of them, including a step grandfather:

I’ve had 5-6 teachers crying, really, just telling them my story, and when I first brought her in there was ‘wow this is unique.’ They’d ask me about [not] seeing your wife’s name here... ‘well there is no wife’ [teachers said] ‘well this is unique’

In essence, the grandparents agreed that they sensed a lack of respect for their roles in raising grandchildren. They continued to voice their situations, as represented in the following quotes:

They don’t kinda respect the grandparents like they do the parents. We don’t get the respect. It’s like we don’t care if he [grandchild] fails or not. I think they think it’s temporary and they’re gonna be going back to the parents so we’re only gonna have to deal with you for a while. The kids will be going to another school who cares – they’re already losers.

So I try and go to the school and say ‘look this is what’s going on’ but [schools say] ‘that’s his mother and you’re raising him.’ Well, just because we’re raising him he has contact with his mother, and even though he doesn’t talk about never seeing his father, it’s got to weigh on his mind. So they [school] would say ‘that’s his mother why don’t you just keep him isolated?’ Well he’s got a mother who is

trying to get her life together who's trying to be part of his life – he's got a half-sister - you can't just isolate him, and you can't not tell him what's going on in her life cause obviously she's calling him and always is in upheaval.

Group 2

This question of school adjustment stimulated the group discussion and dialogue. There was extensive conversation back and forth as the grandparents started to open up and dialogue with each other. The answers related to a combination of adjustment in school and adjustment at home. The two cannot be separated. What is happening in the home has an impact on what is going to happen at school, and the grandparents pointed this out throughout their answers. One common thread is that the children are adjusting to school more successfully because of the grandparent influence. *“Yeah they said he's better now that he's with us than when he was with his mother.”*

The grandparents are providing desperately needed stability and structure at home. The children feel safe and loved, causing them to be better able to focus in school: *“I'm sure he also feels the safety. You know kids want boundaries. At the end of the day they want to have structure.”*

Like the responses from group one, it was also clear that when the school was well aware of the child's situation it had a great impact on the well-being of the child and their education and overall adjustment. On the other hand, when the school was not aware or sensitive to the situation it caused frustration on the part of the grandparents and even the children.

The grandparents conceded that coming from broken, dysfunctional homes are naturally going to increase the potential of the children having issues in school, as one

grandparent related, “...*cause he’s mad his mom didn’t come to town or his mom hadn’t called him on the phone, then they get a little antsy.*” These children are unique. They have someone who is stable and mature and want to provide them a better life and advocate for a good education. However, the issues going on with the birth parents, combined with this new living situation, sometimes spill over into school. One grandparent recounted an incident with the mother going to the grandchild’s school and causing a problem:

[They] just got that undying love for her-she [mother] can do no wrong – and when [name of grandchild] was at school she would walk to the school – she was on drugs -and she would be wobbling to the school – telling him to ‘go into the room and take money out of the teacher’s drawer’ and bring it to her.

The researcher asked, “How could she interact with him at school? Did you have any type of a restraining order?”

No...she [mother] was at the window and knocking at a window – so the teacher let him go to the door cause he said, ‘that’s my mom’ so she let him go out the front of the school to talk to her – and [s]he said ‘when your teacher lets you go back in the room – find me all the change you can in her drawer.’ So that’s what he did and he got caught and the principal wanted to know what happened so he called [and said] – ‘I’ll have her arrested you know.’ [Grandmother said] ‘you have to have her arrested-you can’t keep calling me – she don’t live with me – you have to have her arrested.’”

The grandparents continually stressed the importance of going into the school and not waiting for the school to come to them. Each year they go to the school and explain

their situation. In many cases the school knew them because the grandparents had their children in the same school. Invariably, their routine repeated itself with each new school year, *“At the beginning of every school year I go and meet the teachers and let them know what the situation is.”* Each grandparent reflected the identical sentiment with regards to these prevailing issues:

“Every time I go up, I’m there well every week or so, – so they know me – so they know all the situation.”

Yeah, the principal basically knew what she [grandchild] was going through and what her situation was and why I got her. There was a couple times when she would actually have a meltdown and she would go from a smile to a cripple on the floor in tears and they would just call me and tell me ‘come give her a long day’ ... They worked with me and they helped her ...

One day the principal called me and told me what had happened [grandchild was misbehaving] and I tried to explain to them, but...it’s always behavior you know... they [the school] don’t care if you really have a problem. So when I got him in another school in 5th grade I talked to the principal, and she got me a counselor for him and it was altogether different. They had that one-on-one and it was like 12 -13 kids in a class. You know you get a better understanding [of what] he’s doing.

She had so many emotional issues, and she had a hard time adjusting cause with everything that happened with [name of grandchild] she didn’t make friends real

quick. And honestly if it wasn't for the principal and the counselor I don't think she would have made it at all this year in school.

Yeah that's right and if [grandchild] had a particularly bad day because of something like [the] mom didn't come to see him or whatever – I would call the teacher or leave a message in the morning and I'll say 'look out you know – if he does have problems call me cause here's why' and if [grandson] had a conflict with his teacher I had teacher's email address so if there were issues I could do that too.

Lines of Communication

Group 1

This question about communication between school and home produced the most robust response, and it also led to many follow up questions, even some by the grandparents, themselves, to each other. This question also led into and often merged with another question, “If you could request something of the school that would help you as a grandparent raising your grandchild what would it be?” A common thread in the majority of responses was that communication from year-to-year and within the school could be improved as one grandparent recounted:

[W]ell he was lucky to have a meal on his table, and this is why and she [teacher] was like, 'Oh my God we didn't know' Maybe they would [tell teachers] 'we have this child coming in who is being raised by his grandparents.' If the office knows they don't always communicate.

This, they suggested, is why they go in each and every year to make their situation known. One grandparent questioned why the principal of the school did not communicate the fact to the new grade level teachers that she was raising the child and was the custodial parent. A feeling was expressed by one of the grandparents that parents might experience better communication than grandparents. They do not want special treatment, but they need the school to be aware of the situation as one grandparent affirmed, “...it’s *not special treatment, it’s just being aware of the situation.*”

A follow up question was asked regarding communication of special events such as mom’s day or dad’s day and how this affected their grandchildren. While the grandparents did not see it as a major problem, they did share a common desire for the schools to pay more attention to children, such as their grandchildren, who were not in traditional family situations. More of their concern was how these situations made their grandchildren feel, knowing they were being raised by grandma or grandpa while the other kids had a mom and dad. A piece of advice from a grandfather successfully, summed up much of the grandparents’ collective solutions, “*Don’t have a dad or grandpa’s day...just call it Dude Day!*”

Other school sponsored programs elicited the following responses:

[I] think that well, Muffins for Mom, well you [grandchild] knows your mom’s not going... I guess I’m amazed at the idea that they would look at grandparents with these kids and look down their noses as opposed to saying thank God somebody took an interest.

I try to take the burden off of her [granddaughter] as often as I can. We’ll be out somewhere and I make a point of saying something about ‘well grandma this or...

so that' she's not embarrassed of the fact [of people mistakenly thinking] that this is my mom and dad and they're really old, but I kinda do make a point of letting people know that this is grandma and poppa... As far as the school goes I just think well we really haven't had an issue...

One grandmother shared an experience with homecoming:

I have a problem with my grandson now having homecoming-senior walk-out with parents. While he is only in 7-8 grades he has to do it. He doesn't have a problem with it, and he wants us to walk out with him as his nana and g'pa, but he's afraid that his dad is going to be there and wonders- 'what he is going to do?'

The grandparents have generally found ways to deal with the issue of Mother's Day and Father's Day cards as well as special events that are focused on parents. *"There is usually nothing for grandparents [at the shops] it is usually all stuff for mom and dad,"* a grandmother observed. Others recalled a situation with her granddaughter bringing home Mother's Day or Father's Day cards:

She makes stuff for mother's day and it goes to mom. I'll mail it for her or whatever she wants but she comes up with, you know, it's Father's Day and she'll come home and she'll [say to grandfather] 'I love you dad' and at Christmas there are little shops...she came home with a little hanging #1 Dad thing. She plays both sides so I play her a little. [I say] 'you know I'm too old [to be dad] then [she says] 'you're not old poppa.' [I say] 'you know how old I'm gonna be when you graduate?' [She says] 'I don't care, that's not old.'

He would come home and we would make something special at home for him to give to his mother cause I was trying to appreciate [their relationship] ...I said 'if you want to give that to your mother that's fine – grandma understands' but he would invariably say 'no I want you to have it grandma' and then we would make something different that he could give to his mother.

Although they would like it if more sensitivity was expressed by the schools they view it as another obstacle with which they must deal.

A follow up question was asked about how they felt the school interacted or communicated regarding PTA meetings, report cards, skating parties, and other events. Does being a grandparent make you feel you are being treated differently? Here are some of the ways grandparents feel they are treated differently because they are grandparents, or just feel differently because they are so much older than the other parents at school related activities:

[My] gynecologist, for God's sakes, used to go toilet paper houses with my daughter. [I] mean it's because you're not a contemporary with the other parents, and I'm kinda off by myself cause I'm 30 years older than these parents, and I don't have any other kids in this age group, and there isn't the communication...

Some grandparents had specific frustrations with the school not communicating regarding grades. They expressed that although they provided the school with numerous phone numbers and other contact information they still do not get timely notification of missing assignments. Typically adamant in her responses, this grandmother reminded, “... so you got my cell number, my home number and my work number and my email

address and my address-you got five ways to get a hold of me. I wanna know if there's any missing assignments." There was a common expressed feeling that, despite making every effort on their part, the school just did not respond: *"I was in communication with the teacher for awhile, but then they just quit- I mean I've gone online to try to get in there [online grading system]and there's just nothing."* Another frustrated grandmother shared the following example:

I said 'here's my email address, here's my home phone, here's my work phone' - because at that point I worked in an office and I answered the phone and my boss was cool with me getting personal calls- thought we had everything ironed out. Teachers and I started emailing each other and then they cut it back and it looked like once a week they were emailing - that's fine - I emailed them right before Easter and they said 'glad things are finally getting back on track, things are gonna be fine he's gonna pass.' [Then] I got an email back from two of them- 'well he's missing 7 assignments in math, he's missing this and that.' [I respond] 'well why didn't you notify me?' [School staff responded] 'well we couldn't get a hold of you' ... now you've got 5 ways to get a hold of me and my husband's retired. He's home all the time. There's no excuse for not getting a hold of me somewhere and they [school staff] said, 'well we just we thought we had a handle on it.' I don't think they would have blown me off like that had I been a parent.

The next question about homework resulted in a lively response from the grandparents. There was definitely a common feeling that their age and the fact that they have not been in school for many years were a bit of a handicap. Many of the

grandparents commented on how things have changed since they were in school and expressed a frustration in dealing with the lack of expectations schools have regarding schoolwork and homework:

“I think I do as much homework as [name of grandchild] does because you have to be on top of [him] –he doesn’t like to read.”

“Is it true they stopped teaching cursive? I’d heard that because of the computers- nobody writes these days.”

‘[W]hat is this crap- what does this say?’ They have spelling words they have to learn but when you write a story and everything you wrote is, and I can’t even say it’s phonetically correct, and I go ‘what is this?’ She gets an “A” on it and I go ‘how do you get an A on something that is that terrible?’ I think some of the teachers keep telling [me] ‘things have changed since your kids were at school.’ I said ‘they should have changed for the better not for the worst.’

A group member lamented, *“Grammar. Are they even taught grammar anymore? Now days they are writing the way they are texting.” “It’s chicken scratch.”*

Another obstacle grandparents expressed was the difficulty of being several generations older than other parents:

[B]ecause some of the parents are kids my daughters went to school with so we are not on the same [wavelength], so I don’t really get the support from the other parents that regular parents would get. ...My oldest daughter has a teenage daughter and she’ll be a senior this year and she’s an athlete...she knows a lot more of what goes on at the school than I do. She’s in a different clique, she’ll say

'well you need to tell [grandchild] that this is gonna happen, or that's gonna happen.' I don't know any of it.

You know what drives me crazy and it's not so much the math. Her mom will say I'm [grandfather] the one that has to do the homework [with her], and for the most part I do [it] with her, but the one that killed me, and I know she's just in grade school but now she's going into 4th grade, is when did it become ok that you don't have to know how to spell anything and you just make up your own words as you go and they say – 'oh that's nice...?'

Math terms are different- I was always good in math and I argue with her about it...she argues with me and we coming up [with] the same answer, but she says, 'Poppa that is not the way we do it.' Okay, not the way we do it. You have to go in and explain that look, this is not the way. I have a sheet this year with the math terms on it.

Group 2

The question regarding communication between school and home invigorated the grandparents' conversations. The question of specific communication was covered thoroughly in the grandparents' answers to the first question in session three.

Grandparents were instead anxious to talk about how schools have changed and the difference from when they were in school and when their children were in school. Lack of respect for authority was a common theme: "[M]y goodness, I remember one time the teacher asked me to do something and I said 'no', and before I got home he [the teacher]

was sitting there in my living room. All I said was “no.” The grandparents are offended by the lack of respect the students give and the lack of respect adults in school expect. The grandparents expect it at home, but when the schools do not, that frustrates them.

A low expectation for grades and behavior was also an issue for several of the grandparents. One grandparent shared an experience of how she dealt with disrespect when she visited her grandson’s classroom. She was appalled at her son getting an “A” for a very poor report he did, and she (grandma) knew it was poor. In one of the hallmark vignettes recounted by a grandmother, the explanation is clear:

I thought she [teacher] was crazy, and I asked her ‘was she crazy?’ I would not give those kids an “A” for getting up there with that jargon and that spiel that they had just done and it was very disrespectful. It was me and another lady who sat in the back in the class. The other lady was having a problem with her child too and they [students] didn’t care that we was back there. Then when the teacher went out of the class they were cussing and carrying on. I got up and told them to ‘sit down and shut the hell up’ and everybody sit down and shut the hell up too. She [teacher] come back in it was nice and quiet. She said ‘what happened?’ Grandma took over.

The grandparents also lamented how kids have changed, as in this message, *“One of the main things is they took prayer out of the school-they took prayer out of the school it changed everything else around and the children started being disrespectful....”* And this suggestion prompted: *“I send my grandkids to their room and there is no TV, no radio.”*

When asked about how the grandparents felt they were treated as grandparents there was consensus that the school related to them well as grandparents when they knew of the situation and most schools tried to do things to help. They were willing to give teachers a break in some way because of all the issues teachers are dealing with these days such as in this sentiment that, *“There’s no possible way that that teacher can teach all those children...”* The grandparents don’t want special treatment, but rather an understanding of their particular situation and good communication so they can help the schools help their grandchildren succeed.

There was concern expressed that teachers today are not, and cannot be, as loving and caring as teachers were when the grandparents, themselves, went to school. Similar concerns were expressed by other group grandparents:

“Grandparents have to bring down the law!”

“[T]hey could never get away with being disrespectful to the teacher. I go up there for a meeting or something and kids are running in the halls, cussing, playing music- no respect...”

I was just gonna say I think the kids today are exposed to so much like if you think back when we were kids, you know, if you were in the room when an adult was talking they were sending you out of the room. Where now these kids -they’re exposed to TV music and you look at some of these cartoons...

And so lot of these kids are going to school...taking a boat load of problems to school with them. You know that some of them are getting their first meal of the day when they get to school and lunch might be their only meal of the day. That

might be the only structure that they get all day long especially [with] parents that are drug addicts – the crazy stuff they are exposed to.

[A]lot of us sitting here, I would dare say, grew up with our parents. It would have to have been very special circumstances, maybe death, before a child growing up [would be] taken off their parents. So now you have all these children not living with their parents, and they're going to have psychological [problems]... I don't care if the grandparents' house is the best one in the world- somewhere there's going to be a problem.

School Supports Needed

Group 1

When asked to describe things the schools can do to help and support them as grandparents raising grandchildren, the definite common response to the question deferred again to the issue of communication. Some specific comments were to have the teacher post, or send home the lessons for the week, enabling them to know what was coming up academically. All of the grandparents expressed that they want to be involved and they want to be in communication with teachers regarding their child. For one grandparent it was as simple as, *“Get in touch with me...let me know if you have a problem...”* Once again the idea of having to go in every year and tell their story appeared in a follow up question of how the grandparents felt they are treated by the school and teachers. Several grandparents said it was tiring going in year after year and spilling out their life:

“[You] lay out your guts and your life story....”

“They don’t need to know that the loser dad is on count 39 in court...”

“It gets old year after year that you go in and say your...sometimes you feel like [its]none of their business. They just need to do their job and it’s very irritating.”

[Y]ou don’t need to know [that] mommy got the snot beat out of her- just that there is a situation.”

While some had specific instances of problems with certain teachers, again, they all talked about the importance of the teacher knowing the entire situation and how it might impact school: *“Yeah, but it is like golly gee- the kid-you need to know what the kid is going through,”* and adding dismay at sensitive assignments, such as, *“understand the projects like family trees are extremely difficult....we don’t have the information so he has to go to school and tell the teacher ‘I live with my grandparents, and have no contact with my father’...teacher says ‘well you have to complete the assignment so call your mother or your other grandparent.’*

These responses are more evidence that the grandparents are willing to do what is in the best interest of the child even if it is painful or embarrassing to them.

Reacting to a comment by one of the grandparents on the lack of respect for authority evident in kids today, the grandparents continued the discussion as to how school in general is different now compared to when they were in school. This lack of respect for authority was a common concern expressed and validated by all of the grandparents as they reminisced about their school days, *“...when we were kids if you got in trouble at school you got in trouble at home....you can’t even spank kids now.”* They spoke of the rules and repercussions they experienced: *“The worst things we did was chew gum and we had to stand up in front of the class with it on the end of your nose*

that's what we did – I graduated in 67....” The grandparents then closed out the session describing how they felt the schools and teachers treated them as grandparents raising their grandchildren. All of the grandparents agreed they wanted the schools to work with them and communicate with them. They felt that with so many parents not doing their part, the teachers should be grateful that a group of caretakers actually do want to be involved and partner with them in their grandchild's education. Their common mantra became, *“We want to make your job easier....help us.”* As one spokesperson verbalized and all group members affirmed, *“...you can twitter your friends around the world, but you can't tell this lady her kid is not turning in homework?”* They all expressed a desire and a sense of responsibility to be involved in their grandchild's education and to be supportive of the teachers and school at home.

Above all, the grandparents just want to be respected: *“But we're not completely senile yet and we still have learned a few things through the years...”* Persistently, communication was the greatest issue: *“They have to communicate with us and they have to not think because I'm 60 years old that they can't email me cause I can probably run circles around some of those people.”* The grandparent's comments revealed a need to be respected, to have their situation respected, and to be communicated with:

“Take advantage of the experiences [of grandparents] – even maybe to help teach them [teachers] something....”

“Take into consideration that maybe a reason his report is not done is that mom's boyfriend, who he thought was going to be in his life, is gone, and mom is creating an upheaval.”

“There is no reason communication coming home to us cannot be greater than what it is.”

“[T]ell me what you’re studying in school and in the book. You don’t have to go online or anything -just write it down or make a copy of it for me.”

“I have never missed a parent teacher conference- even if I have to take off work.”

“We want to know if she is acting up, not doing homework...”

“You can’t count on the schools to communicate with each other ...that is my experience.”

“Listen to me...”

This grandfather’s comment was met with agreement by many nods of agreement:

One of the things I hope you take back for this [research] and I hope I speak for everybody, you’ve got children in school and nothing has changed. It’s always been this way, but those parents could give a hoot and they don’t care if they did their homework or excel...whereas you have got grandparents sitting here who clearly care or we wouldn’t be doing it because I don’t want a nine year old in my house. I love her but I want my own life....you have folks out there- utilize them- why look down your nose at people who stepped up to the plate when you’ve got parents out there who don’t.

Group 2

The instantaneous answer to this question as to what schools could do to support grandparents raising grandchildren was that schools need to enhance their communication. These grandparents are ready and willing to get involved and help their grandchildren, but they sometimes do not know what to do: *“Yeah, not just to let us know*

when they do something wrong, or they missed school too much, or they talk back to the teacher. Let me know that he's failing in math..." The grandparents appealed for early detection, response, and resolution to problems, "*...when you first see it- act – and try to nip it in the bud.*"

The grandparents value education and they are trying to instill this value in their grandchildren. There is a sense of frustration when the school does not meet them halfway in this venture as they lament, "*...he ain't doing good – or he's misbehaving in school they could send you a note home and let you know where your kids are falling down or where their weak spots are....*" They do not understand why schools are not partnering with them, especially when so many other parents are not stepping up and supporting the schools. The communication they are requesting is in regards to basic things like sending notes home or signing assignment books so they can follow up at home.

They also want to know when their grandchild is having behavioral problems or not completing work. These grandparents expressed that in their generation this communication was assumed and the school was fully supported. They are willing and want to do their part, but need the schools to allow them to do that by keeping the lines of communication open. While they make trips to schools to share their stories and make sure the schools know they can contact them, sometimes that does not happen when it should, and it is frustrating, but they refuse to give up and continue to call the school, write notes, and do whatever it takes.

Another common request grandparents had for schools to help them was to have someone at the school that knows and understands the situation in which these children

find themselves. *“They need someone they can talk to because sometimes kids will act out a problem they have and no one will know what the problem is so somebody [needs] to sit down and find out what’s going on.”* The school counselor was mentioned by several grandparents as possibly being that person. Having just one person the child could go to and trust would be very beneficial, and it would help with communication as well. The grandparents expressed a need to have someone to personally understand their grandchild’s situation. While the teachers are one point of contact, they expressed a desire to have someone trained who can intervene if the child is having a problem. *“The kids need someone they can trust.”* This person could also sit down with the grandparent and find out what is going on with the child. One grandparent likened it to her grandchild, who has special needs, for whom she always has communication. Her other grandchild does not have special needs and, therefore, the grandmother struggles to know what is going on.

The situations these children are coming from warrant all of them to be treated as children with special needs. When the school fully understands the situation it seems to step up and do what is needed. One grandparent suggested a good use of a school’s professional development training would be to discuss grandparents raising their grandchildren and how the school and teachers could learn about them and help them. They are very concerned with their grandchildren’s safety and having someone they can trust. This can be understood with the fragile situations from which the grandkids came. All grandparents validated this request and all the previously vocalized requests with the following sentiments:

“I’d like to know how they’re doing so I can see if they are on the right track.”

“It takes a whole village to raise a child.”

[T]hen maybe we need to be sitting down and doing more math problems at homework. If he’s failing English or reading [maybe] we need to be reading more books or getting a tutor or something to help instead of waiting until the grading period is almost at the end [and then saying] ‘well your student is failing....’

Along the same lines, notices need to get home earlier. Sometimes it’s a last minute and there’s nothing you can do. If they fail on it [test] it’s like a week before the end of the grade period we aren’t going to be able to bring the grade up.

I think that they should be more in tune to our need. [For example] if you go to them and say ‘look so and so is having this type of a problem and what can we do to help him. I’m doing this at home could you do this at school?’ [As opposed to] saying, ‘well that’s just an excuse.’

Session III: Experience Speaks

In this session grandparents were asked what advice they would give other grandparents who find themselves in the situation of raising their grandchildren. They were also asked to offer advice to school personnel from their unique perspective as grandparents raising their grandchildren. They shared the dreams they have for their grandchildren, and finally discussed the effects of their new role on their own lives and marriages.

Advice to Other Grandparents

Group 1

The common answer to this question was, “Do not give up! *“The courts drive you crazy, the lawyers suck the life out of you, and the teachers drive you nuts.”* Other advice included:

“I don’t mean to be coy, but I would say [to other grandparents] ‘thank God and thank God for all these people.’

“Get good drugs.” In response another said, *“Don’t write that down!”*

There was also agreement that knowledge of working with the courts and dealing with attorneys and custody papers was important, obvious in the following remarks:

“Laminate those custody papers and carry them around with you.”

Group 2

The overwhelming advice from this group to other grandparents raising their grandchildren was to go to the schools and make sure they know the situation, and do not stop going and making sure they are doing everything you require them to do. All of the grandparents agreed with this. As proactive veterans of the system, the grandparents advised other grandparents raising grandchildren to:

[G]o straight to the building principal ...try to work the system – the system doesn’t always work. You have to make it work for you so you have to go to the head of the building... that’s the only way you’re gonna get anything done. If you try side stepping you’re not gonna make it.

One grandmother likened this to customer service: “... *I told them, ‘I’m your customer and you need to give me the best service that you know how.’ Basically that’s what I would tell the grandparents, ‘lay it on the line.’*”

Dealing with the legal system was a salient topic for the grandparents, and the facilitator asked them to share advice concerning that aspect. Again, the strongest suggestion was to get into the school, provide them with papers, and let them know who was picking up the child and other pertinent information they need to help the grandchild’s safety and success in school. They expressed the idea of having to do whatever it takes to make sure everyone knows what is going on with their grandchild. A common piece of advice for new grandparents raising their grandchildren was to “Simply pray!” This advice was expounded on by the grandparents, also:

“Yes go in and lay it all out ...tell them what you need and what you expect out of them and you want the lines of communication open.”

[S]ay ‘this is our situation, this is my child’s need, this is what I expect in communication from you to meet his child’s needs’ and not just try to go through. Say, ‘this is what the situation is, this is what I need this is what you need to do, and how are we gonna communicate this...?’

Advice for School Personnel

Group 1

Answers to this question were expressed in previous questions and merged into their analysis.

Group 2

The compelling sentiment was that they wanted school officials to know they just want their grandchildren to have a good education and not something unreasonable. And perhaps, if that was not attainable, "... *maybe we have to go somewhere else to get that.*" They are not asking for the unattainable, just understanding and willingness to help. The grandparents do not expect the school to raise their grandchildren, but they do need the schools to do their part. There are so many things the grandparents cannot do if schools do not communicate with them or involve them. "*I ask 'if you knew that was available why you didn't tell me about it a long time ago?'*" One group member reiterated that, "*Our grandchildren are doing [things] now that our children didn't do.*"

They all concurred with the advice that follows:

I just basically want them to know that we want our children to get a good education. That's what we send them to school for, and it's up to us to provide that for them...

[School teachers need to have] the understanding because they could be put in the same predicament in life. They know that we're older, and it's been a while since we've had our children. [Our children] are all grown so now we start all over again. A lot of things we have even forgotten about and had to start all over again.

Just even using the Internet and those kind of things. We didn't have that and now the kids -that's all they want to do is play the Internet games. That was one of

the things one of the principals said to me, 'well does he have access to the Internet for educational games?' Once we went on to some of the sites there was some good stuff and good sites that make the learning kind of fun, but if you don't know they're out there [you don't know] where to look .

Dreams for Their Grandchildren

Group 1

In this final question the grandparents revealed again their unselfish desire to help their grandchildren. They do not ask for much as far as their dreams are concerned for their grandchildren. The grandparents simply want to see them succeed and do a little better than they did and better than their grandchildren's parents. This was evident in their dreams for their grandchildren:

"I want [name of grandchild] to have a chance and to grow and [do] what he wants and not that he wants the material things [but] that he wants himself."

"I just want him to graduate and do what he wants in life."

"I want her to be able to reach out and get the American dream, whatever that is for her."

"I really don't have a preference on what she does...I told her you can do whatever right now-- nursing would be a good field."

"I want her to achieve whatever she wants to achieve. I just want her to establish lofty goals for herself...I just wanna see her be better than what I did – finish school –go on to college."

[What I dream is] just for him to mature and be a responsible person and hopefully not make the same mistakes his parents did. Whatever he chooses he can fix that himself and quit listening to the people who tell him he can't do it.

I would like to see her go through college and whatever. Cause right now it's from actor to singer to guitar player to zoologist and it really doesn't matter to me -just so she does what she wants. I know for a fact [in her] real family there has not been one soul in college and she talks about it...

Group 2

When asked about the dreams they have for their grandchildren, the grandparents' answers revealed they do not need to see these children grow up to be famous or become rich. Their basic and humble desire is to see them do better than they did, overcome the situation they have experienced, and not repeat it. As one grandparent declared, *"I do not want to be raising great grandchildren!"*

"I want him to finish school, and I want him to graduate from college. I want him to get an excellent job and be able to take care of himself."

"Well, I just want them [my grandchildren] to be self-sufficient, be able to take care of themselves."

Yeah, well you know, maybe they grew up and it started out in a bad situation they was in. Maybe with their grandparents they have a better life to teach them that when they grow up [they can] make their lives better.

I think I would just want them to set a goal for themselves and work within their plans to get to be where they want to be so that they can have stability and not have to look back and say, 'can you help me again?' I want them to be strong and independent.

Effects on Grandparents

Group 1

Grandparents shared challenges associated with starting over as parents when they should be in the midst of retirement. There was discussion about how they were the “bad guys” raising the kids, working, providing for them, and the mother or father arrives for a brief visit, “... and mom comes wheeling in on a Friday night, takes her until Sunday, don't even keep her til 6:00 like she could, [then at] 2-3-4:00 she's dumping the kids off so she can go do her thing,” They [grandparents] have to be the one to explain why the parents do this, and then go back to being the caretaker: “*We are the parents and are doing all the dirty work, but everyone else gets to have fun.*” The grandparents all anticipated spoiling their grandchildren and sending them home and not sitting down every night to do homework or fighting with them to brush their teeth every night, explaining, “*This isn't what we were expecting to be doing at this age.*” *It's just the two of us, it's not that way. You're back at PTA and parent teacher conferences and homework.*”

Sympathetic and empathetic voices agreed:

“We're like the bad one cause we're the ones who have to do the homework and stuff and have to get a shower, have to go to bed – have to this – have to that....”

“We are doing a whole lot more than other parents are really doing these days, and I don’t think people understand that.”

You know I would imagine that... my own parents [as grandparents] 6 months away from retirement, my dad goes to Toys R US and buys cribs and car seats and they go from being able to vacation and leave when they want to having to find baby things.

And sometimes it puts a strain on the marriage because my husband says ‘this is not what I wanted, this is not what we signed up for.’ [We got] this temporary custody 16 years ago. I said ‘oh thank God it wasn’t permanent.’ It does change your roles cause you can’t, you almost don’t have the time, to just be husband and wife...you look forward to [the time when] the kids are gone....

Group 2

In the closing part of the session the grandparents began sharing the things they no longer can do now that they are raising their grandchildren. The tone was not a complaining one, but one of appreciation in being able to share with others in the same situation. Nonetheless, the role reversal caveats were evident:

“Now we get a babysitter. We can’t just pick up and go whenever we get ready now like we could [before]”

“Don’t drive to Vegas anymore.”

“No taking road trips-have to be home when they get home from school or you have to get a babysitter.”

“No more vacation where you are alone. They are all family vacations again.”

Law and Courts

While it was not a question posed by the facilitator there was much conversation between participants in both groups regarding the legal system and their interactions, courts, and attorneys. Repeatedly, the grandparents referred back to their experience with the courts and frustration over working with attorneys. The experiences were clearly a negative, and they were eager to share with each other their experiences and offered encouragement and advice to each other.

Group 1

Some of the grandparents in this group were actively involved in court cases seeking legal custody of their grandchildren. A frustrated grandfather reported, *“I went to court two weeks ago and they wanted him to start visiting his father for weeks at a time which I think was wrong to throw the child into the lion’s den like that....”* Court systems appeared to be thwarting the grandparent’s attempt in attaining custody as the grandmother continued, *“The next day he went to jail and I had to go get the child and right now I still don’t have any legal binding piece of paper saying that I have custody again.”* The grandmother of a young grandson was heart-broken at a judge’s reluctance in helping her secure temporary custody: *“... as I drove away with this little 12 year old kid looking like he was scared to death, which just broke my heart – I just don’t know what to do any more.”*

The experiences and frustration of these grandparents regarding the courts and legal system elicited support and advice from the other grandparents in the group. The following statements validate these experiences and frustrations:

“[Grandchild] feels like there’s no hope because the police don’t help him, the judge isn’t helping him, and then I looked at him the night they made me leave him there....”

“All three lawyers and the judge said he’s better off with us – we all know – but there’s that constitutional parental rights.”

“I just don’t know what else to do- they’re saying I have to prove the father unfit – what do you have to do?”

“It took three or four months to get the papers, meanwhile the girl has an issue with her leg, and I got no insurance, and my insurance won’t put her on mine – I don’t have papers.”

So I’m fighting for custody, in fact as of two weeks ago, they said that I gave my custody back and I did not. I withdrew my motion that is all – and that is not true [that I gave custody back] – I will not. They took him back to his father... his father went to jail last week...

I understand how frustrating it can be, and I know how costly it can be. All of my money was spent years ago and that was another matter – it wasn’t this – I think ours for this was a few thousand dollars or something, but it is – there’s a lot of backroom stuff that...I just want to rip my hair out you know.

We have custody, but I mean that’s what we have to go on, and for the first time in my whole adult life, or even teenage life, I had to hide from the police. The attorneys said ‘just don’t answer the phone, close the blinds, don’t answer the door’.

Group 2

Group two was less verbose than group one regarding the court system, but they consistently went back to the issue of custody and dealing with the courts throughout the sessions. They recounted their frustrations when they were attaining custody and fighting to keep custody away from the grandchildren's birth parents. An especially victorious grandparent remembered that, "... *the day we were given custody of him it brought the courthouse down cause that's the 1st time they'd ever awarded custody to out-of-state grandparents, so that was pretty cool.*" Conversely, other grandparents felt like victims of the court systems: "*What happened to the grandparents' rights?.... Oh those went away years ago, you find all these neat things out when you go and get in the court system.*"

"We spent a lot of money on lawyers-of course it didn't cost her anything – she did not have anything...."

"Her lawyer takes me to court and gets unsupervised visitation and we had to pay a guardian at litem \$250, and I'm saying 'there's something wrong here.'

"I honestly don't think the courts do anything to investigate or really even care to take the time to investigate to see what [is going on]. It's the parent's rights over everything else."

"Parents' rights supersede children's rights."

"We've been going through this for probably 7-8 years- it's not been easy."

I could have temporary custody until they're 18 or anytime the parents could step back in and say I want my kid back and unfortunately I know in Trumbull County, it's true, they lean toward the parent but no matter what the parent has done – or

put the kid through. Now we're in court because they are my son's children but the mother, after 5 years, wanted unsupervised visitation. We're in court now and they gave her unsupervised visitation. Just to say how the court system goes ...we ended up in court because she wasn't coming to see the kids, and the kids are really on a schedule and now the kids don't know what they're doing.

He and his second wife got into an argument one night, and the kids got involved and he got arrested for domestic cause he was trying to keep her from kicking the child. Children's Services gave her to me, and I went to court and got custody.

Identification of Pervasive Themes

Several themes emerged within and across both focus groups. These themes will be sorted into the following categories:

1. "What Happened to Retirement?"
 - a. Someone had to save the kids;
 - b. The toll on the grandparent;
 - c. Dealing with the birth parent(s);
 - d. Still, I would do it all over again.
2. "School- It Just Isn't What It Used To Be, and That Isn't Good For Children"
 - a. Bring back the 3 "Rs";
 - b. Respect matters;
 - c. Homework isn't easy for us.
3. "Communication- It Has To Be a Two-Way Street"
 - a. We are communicating- listen;

- b. Know us and our situations;
 - c. How schools can help.
4. “Taking Courts To Task”
- a. Legal language and laws;
 - b. Working the system.
5. “The Selflessness Phenomenon”
- a. Whatever it takes;
 - b. A grandparent’s promise, “I will always love you.”
6. The “Reunion”

What Happened to Retirement?

The circumstances leading to these grandparents’ custody of their grandchildren involved parental irresponsibility. This is consistent with research, including that of DeToledo & Brown, who concluded, in reality, the only reason grandparents are raising their grandchildren is because the children need someone to raise them (1995). Most cases involved drugs, alcohol, and parent neglect including parent incarceration. This, too, is consistent with previous research. Pinson-Millburn, Fabian, Schlossberg, and Pyle (1996) identified four major factors that contribute to the creation of grandparent households: (a) the inability of parents to provide care due to drug abuse problems; (b) parents who are incarcerated or imprisoned; (c) physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse by the parents or neglect; (d) parents who have died from AIDS or other illnesses. Other factors suggested in the research include increased life expectancy, maternal employment, increased divorce rates, death of natural parent(s), and increased unemployment of natural parents (Mader, 2001). Burnette (2004) reported that drug and

alcohol abuse accounted for more than 80% of grandparent-headed families. Overall, the parents' inability or unwillingness to take care of their child or children was the reason the grandparents intervened and took the children into their homes. Drug abuse on the part of one or both birth parents was the reason most cited for the grandparents attaining custody in this study.

While surveys have accurately recorded and quantified the reasons that grandparents are raising their grandchildren, this study set out to capture the lived experiences behind those reasons; to give voice to the actual feelings and emotions of grandparents faced with the need to take responsibility for their grandchildren. The voices of the grandparents strained and tears filled their eyes as they recalled, one by one, the situations they found their grandchildren experienced, compelling them as grandparents to act. Several grandparents described in detail the effects of parental drug abuse on their grandchildren. Through their stories, this focus group research provides a window into the lived realities and hardships endured by both grandparents and grandchildren, realities that mere statistics cannot adequately convey.

The effects of the dysfunction associated with having to take custody of grandchildren present a daily struggle for the grandparents. They expressed a loss of relationships with friends their own age and were honest about the toll the situation can have on a marriage. Researchers, Sands and Goldberg, 2000, deToledo and Brown, 1995, and, Glass and Honeycutt, (2000) discovered grandparents raising grandchildren face many problems and struggles (higher rates of depression, psychological and physical problems, and loss of relationships with families and friends.) While the grandparents in the current study did not cite their problems as boldly, they did express the same general

problems. Cross sectional studies such as that of Sands and Goldberg in 2000 provide a snapshot of a population at a certain time, allowing conclusions about phenomena across a wide population to be drawn. The extant research involved a much smaller number of grandparents, while affording authentic examples of the lived realities. One grandparent, for instance, lamented about not being able to *“hop on a plane and go to Vegas when we want to.”* But the conversations with these grandparents, also served to provide, in a sense, the rest of the story. Just after lamenting the loss of something, the grandparents tended to quickly point out they were not complaining, just answering the questions. They then often went on to declare their replacement trips or activities with their grandchildren were more enjoyable than what they lost.

A common problem expressed was dealing with the grandchild's parents. Many reported the parents come and go and have no responsibility. Another frustration to the grandparents was the grandchildren's desire to see their parents, despite what the parents had done to them and despite their continued broken promises to them. This puts the grandparents in a position of being the “bad guy”. They do all the “dirty work” that comes with parenting, and the parents have no such responsibility. This is a role reversal that frustrates the grandparents. Instead of spoiling them and sending them home, they have to take them home and raise them. The grandparents were not resentful of their new role, but they did express disappointment that they now were sacrificing their own “golden years” to take responsibility for their grandchildren.

Still, these grandparents, without exception, were quick to express they would do the same thing all over again. While they have struggles and frustrations, they also find it very rewarding to care for their grandchildren. This supports research by Giarrusso,

Silverstein, and Feng (2000) who reported 81% of grandparents in their research sample thought it was “extremely rewarding” to raise a grandchild. Observing the expressions on the faces of grandparents in this study, watching them share pictures with each other, and bragging about things their grandchildren are doing in school provided evidence to support findings such as that of Giarrusso, Silverstein, and Feng. This study allows readers to hear the joy and satisfaction through individual voices and stories shared by the grandparents, providing examples that may be encouraging to others confronted with the need to assume responsibility for a grandchild.

School- It Just Isn't What It Used To Be

A theme that emerged from the grandparents themselves was how much schools have changed since they were in school or their own children were in school, and how this affected parenting of their grandchildren. The grandparents talked about how academics have moved away from the basics. They do not understand or appreciate some of the new methods used for teaching. Examples of this include lack of attention to grammar, cursive handwriting, spelling, and math. Today's math is taught much more conceptually and hands on than when the grandparents were in school. This is frustrating to them as they try to help their grandchildren with homework or schoolwork. Glass and Honeycutt's research concluded that many grandparents feel they cannot help their grandchild with schoolwork (2002). This was brought to life in some very powerful and animated ways by the grandparents in this study. The frustration was apparent as the grandparents consistently stressed that they truly wanted to help their grandchildren. The grandparents were somewhat dumbfounded as to why the teachers would not take advantage of adults who want to be involved when so many do not. However, the

researcher did note many nods in agreement and many words of affirmation when one grandfather told of how he tried to help his granddaughter but was told by the granddaughter that he was doing the math “wrong.” Others laughed when another grandparent admitted to not having done math for a very long time. This tension between wanting to help, and perhaps needing some guidance from school as to how to do so effectively, is an important lesson for school personnel to appreciate.

Lack of respect for authority was an issue agreed upon by the grandparents as a major problem with schools today. They remembered how discipline was administered when they were in school, and even when their own children were in school, in contrast to current school discipline practices. A desire was expressed to bring this discipline back to improve schools. They felt this would help their grandchildren and the schools in general as structure and consequences lead to a better environment for learning: a life lesson they wanted their grandchildren to learn.

The grandparents shared a common struggle with schools in the area of homework. They expressed difficulties in helping their grandchildren because the teaching methods have changed and the way they learned is not the way teachers are teaching today. Providing tutors for children being raised by grandparents is one of the suggestions made by Glass and Honeycutt (2002). This need was reflected in the stories of the grandparents in this study. Awareness of grades and academic problems are important to the grandparents. They want to know what is going on with respect to their grandchildren’s learning and how they can help if there are problems. There is a great value on education shared by grandparents and a sense that it is, indeed, their responsibility to make sure their grandchildren receive a good education.

Communication- It Has To Be a Two-Way Street

The issue of communication, or more specifically, failed communication, was by far the most prevalent topic discussed by grandparents in relationship to schools. The grandparents reiterated how important it was to them for the schools to maintain open lines of communication. While initial enrollment in school did not pose problems, subsequent issues arose. Unlike many traditional parents, grandparents are ready, willing, and anxious to get into the schools and to work with the schools. The grandparents were not willing to wait for the schools to initiate the invitation; nearly all of them talked about how they approached the schools and initiated the conversations. They made sure the school and teachers knew the situation, knew them, and knew how to reach them if there were any problems. They expressed a common frustration and inability to understand why the schools would not want to work with them as they were trying to help. Even if the schools or teachers were not cooperative, the grandparents forged ahead.

Glass and Huneycutt (2002) offered the following recommendations for schools in dealing with grandchildren being raised by grandparents:

- Teachers and administrators need to give the family time to adjust to the new routine;
- Look for the grandchildren's strengths and build upon them;
- Place the children in the classrooms of the most stable and experienced teachers. Grandchildren being raised by their grandparents experience much instability and need the extra attention experienced teachers may be able to provide;

- Avoid singling out these children before their peers or other teachers because of their family status. Shame and the feeling of being different need to be avoided.

This study suggests that schools and school personnel may not even routinely be aware of which children are being raised by grandparents, let alone be familiar with the strategies suggested in the professional literature by authors such as Glass and Huneycutt. The grandparents' refrain clearly underscored the need for educators to involve grandparents and talk to them about their grandchildren's situation and needs if the schools are to effectively serve the students being raised by their grandparents.

A theme that emerged from the sessions was a need by the grandparents for the schools to be aware of their situation of being grandparents raising their grandchildren and then providing support for them. Children being raised by their grandparents in most cases have undergone some type of trauma in their lives. Some have been abused, others abandoned, and at the very least have been uprooted and put in a new environment. Research has found that children being raised by their grandparents are at a higher risk for developmental delays and emotional problems than children in general (Smith & Palmieri, 2007). Grandchildren often feel angry and confused because they still love their parents even though they condemn their actions (Glass & Huneycutt, 2002). It is no surprise that these children often need extra help and attention at school. The effects of the home life spill into the classroom, and the grandparents need the schools to understand this.

There was an expressed desire to have school personnel who are trained in this type of family structure and know how to help the grandchildren. The grandparents felt

the school counselors would be good candidates to fulfill this role since they deal with different family structures and are trained to work with families. Research supports this request for school personnel to have knowledge of the situation of grandchildren being raised by their grandparents. The research found that school systems have developed a number of ways to assist grandparents in dealing with school issues. These include developing school policies that support appropriate referrals to educational services, health agencies, and social services. An understanding of the needs of grandparents in the context of school involvement will help school administrators, teachers, and counselors work more effectively with them to provide the most appropriate education and chances for school success for children living in a variety of home environments. (Reynolds, Wright, & Beale, 2003). The grandparents do not want any special treatment, but do expect the school to make an effort to know how their situation might have an impact on their grandchild's academic, social skills, and behavior.

This research provides those school personnel with concrete examples from which to learn about typical home situations of grandchildren being raised by their grandparents. The grandparents' voices also provide very specific and highly practical suggestions for ways to support the grandparents and more adequately meet the needs of the grandchildren.

Communication is seen as the key to that happening. Good communication and partnerships between the school and the grandparents would allow the school to help the grandchildren in ways that research supports, including schools giving the family time to adjust, looking for grandchildren's strengths and building upon them, placing the

grandchildren with stable and experienced teachers, and avoiding the singling out of the students due to their family structure. (Glass & Honeycutt, 2002).

Taking Courts to Task

The topic of the courts was not one the researcher intended to explore. However, it emerged as one of the most discussed topics and themes of the sessions. This is consistent with research that found grandparents reporting feelings of isolation and frustration in dealing with legal, education, and welfare systems that offer little support (Pinson-Millburn et al., 1996). The grandparents expressed great frustration with the court system and the entire legal process. They simply want to raise their grandchildren and protect them from harm. The courts are seen as an obstacle to them being able to do this.

The grandparents were very grateful to share their experiences and hear other experiences. They have figured out ways to maneuver the system and make the best of the situation. They even exchanged ideas on how to deal with the multitude of papers and documents that are needed for everything from school enrollment to obtaining medical attention. It is ironic that a system set up to protect children is one of the biggest obstacles for these grandparents in helping their grandchildren. One only has to browse any of the websites created to support grandparents raising grandchildren to see the many articles and resources available to grandparents on the topic of custody and the courts including, <http://www.AARP.org>, <http://www.grandfamilies.org/>, <http://www.grandsplace.com/>, and <http://www.gu.org/>).

The grandparents in this study shared more than stories about their struggles for custody; they shared tips and pointers with each other on how to deal with the court

system, attorneys, and natural parents. One grandparent gave a specific idea on how to shrink the custody papers down so they would fit in a wallet or purse. Others shared names of attorneys and discussed courtroom strategy with those members of the group who were in the middle of custody battles. The real life situations reported in this study illuminate the need for understanding this dimension of the challenges confronting the grandparents.

The Selflessness Phenomenon

The theme that was the most overarching and evident in each group and across groups was the absolute commitment these grandparents have to doing what is best for their grandchildren. This remarkable selflessness, an unspoken theme in many ways, was apparent in their body language, and the way they passionately answered the questions. It was displayed in their interactions with each other and the sense of empathy and mutual understanding they expressed. It was displayed in their eagerness to talk before and after the sessions with each other. Sometimes it was displayed as tears came to their eyes when they spoke of their grandchildren. They are determined to do whatever it takes and make whatever sacrifice necessary to ensure their grandchildren are loved, protected, and successful in school. The unselfishness displayed by each grandparent was apparent and prevalent, and inspiring. One of the grandparents summed it up this way:

They always know that there was someone in the world that would fight for them. I think that's what she needed [to know that] that somebody's gonna be here, well you know what it's like. That somebody's going to be there no matter what they throw at you and that's what I tell her, 'it- doesn't matter what you do- I'm always going to love you' ... she makes me cry. They need that, every human

being deserves someone to say that about them, to love them and know they're going to be cared for.

“The Reunion”

The grandparents reconvened and were presented with an outline of the prevailing themes. The researcher went through each theme and asked the grandparents for feedback. The grandparents confirmed the themes were thorough and representative of the focus group conversations. Grandparents not present were mailed the outline of prevailing themes indicating an opportunity to provide feedback before publication.

During this meeting the grandparents provided an update to the group. They each shared their journeys in raising their grandchildren since the original focus group gathering. Focus group number one had six grandparents come to the meeting. Some shared significant events including GP2 who was finally awarded temporary custody when her grandson's father was sentenced to prison for three years. GP3 reported that her grandson changed schools and was now doing very well academically. GP4&5 shared that the grandfather had recently suffered a stroke and was in recovery. They acknowledged that their grandson was helping both of them as the grandfather recovers and were very grateful to their grandson. GP6&7 reported their daughter had continued a pattern of being involved in unhealthy relationships. All of the grandparents reported their grandchildren were doing well in school and at home.

Focus group two had three grandparents who attended the meeting. They also shared significant events that occurred since the last meeting. GP1 shared that her daughter moved to another city and was “beginning to get her life together.” Her daughter has since given birth to another child that she (the daughter) is raising on her

own. GP5 shared that her husband, who had been on an organ transplant list, died and she is now raising her grandson alone. The grandmother also reported that her grandson's mother received a final monetary payment and has stopped asking for money in exchange for not taking legal action to get custody of the grandchild. GP6 shared news that her son, a heroin addict, died of a heroin overdose. Like those from focus group number one, the grandparents present from focus group number two reported their grandchildren were doing well in school and adjusting well socially and at home. One of the grandparents described her grandsons as, "resilient, but normal." This was met with nods of approval and verbal affirmations.

As the evening progressed the grandparents shared frustration with today's technology and how cell phones and text messaging have made it hard to interact with their grandchildren. They talked about their own children and the fear that their grandchildren would, "turn out like their parents." There was a sense that life was moving along and these grandparents had accepted their role, embraced, it and were making the most of a situation that is not very fair. As one grandparent pointed out, though, "*life isn't fair, and we are doing what we have to do to.*"

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides a summary with respect to each research question and a discussion of implications for practice and recommendations for school personnel. It concludes with suggestions for future research.

Introduction

The role of grandparents in America is being redefined. Rather than playing the traditional role in the lives of their grandchildren, grandparents have assumed full responsibility for raising them during times of crisis (Cox, 2003; Hayslip & Patrick, 2003). Since grandparents are raising 4.9 million children in the United States, the public school system has a responsibility to work with grandparents just as they would a biological parent to ensure the success of those children. Educators such as classroom teachers and counselors must understand the specific needs and dynamics of the grandparent-headed household (Edwards & Ray, 2008). Awareness of the stressors that custodial grandparents report would be valuable for school personnel to know.

The purpose of this research was to record and analyze the perceptions, experiences, and perspectives of grandparents regarding the schools and schooling of their school-aged grandchildren. It further sought to identify the manner in which schools are responding to their needs and to the needs of their grandchildren. This research provides a greater understanding of how custodial grandparents perceive schools and what they need from schools. It is important for schools to work with both the grandparents and the grandchildren if the mission of the school, to educate the child, is to be achieved.

In order to help grandparents and their grandchildren, schools need to understand the issue of grandparents raising grandchildren and the possible impact on the children's educational experiences.

The research questions considered in this study were:

1. What is the existing knowledge base within schools regarding the issue of grandparents raising grandchildren and the impact it has on school policies and practices?
2. What school-related factors most affect the perception that grandparents have about their grandchildren's school experiences?
3. What obstacles are preventing open lines of communication between grandparents raising grandchildren and schools?
4. What needs do grandparents have, and how can schools help fulfill these needs?

Focus group methodology was used as a means of exploring answers to these questions. The grandparents in this study were given an opportunity to discuss their experiences and their perspectives regarding schools and the school system as part of the focus groups. The grandparent participants were identified with the assistance of school guidance counselors. Two focus groups were formed representing children in several school districts in Trumbull County, Ohio. Each group met on three occasions. During each session there were a series of questions posed by the researcher who also facilitated the sessions. The researcher also acted as the facilitator due to her personal knowledge of the topic, since her own parents have raised a grandchild. She has also worked with many grandparents raising their grandchildren in her role as a school principal and curriculum

director. This first-hand knowledge gave added credibility to working with grandparents, and allowed her to ask follow up questions that a facilitator unfamiliar with the topic might not have asked.

Schools are in an ideal position to support and help grandparents raising grandchildren. This researcher found that when grandparents and school personnel communicated and worked together, everyone benefitted. While each of the grandparent's stories were unique, they all shared the common threads of dedication, love, and a stubborn persistence to do what is right for their grandchildren. This was evident as early as the conception of the focus groups. Several grandparents wanted to participate in the study but could not due to their own health issues or that of their spouses. One grandparent had a spouse in a nursing home which prevented her from participating. Other grandparents called and wanted to share their stories even though they could not attend the focus groups. They wanted to communicate that they loved their grandchildren and would do anything for them. Some were frustrated with the school system, while others were experiencing financial distress. One grandmother was looking for a new home for herself and her grandchildren because they had experienced a fire in their apartment and had to find new housing. Another had to send her grandchild back to his natural parents out of state because he was forced to change schools and was not doing well.

The grandparents that ultimately participated in the study were equally eager to share their stories and expressed a desire to continue to be in touch after the sessions concluded. Some of the grandparents have stayed in touch, in person, since the conclusion of the sessions, and others have stayed in touch via email. Several

grandparents expressed gratitude that their voices were being heard and were hopeful their experiences would help other grandparents and also help the schools.

One aspect of the group configuration that was somewhat unexpected was the presence of grandfathers. One group included three step grandfathers who were very vocal. One was solely responsible for his step-granddaughter. This provided a unique perspective for everyone involved considering that in 2009 of the 2.7 million grandparents raising their grandchildren 1.7 million were grandmothers and 1 million were grandfathers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).

Another observation that was not expected was that most of the grandparents were proficient on the computer and actually preferred email communication, an implication for other researchers to include when working with this population and with schools serving their grandchildren. The topic of email came up as the researcher attempted to coordinate times and dates of the sessions. One of the grandparents reminded the researcher, *“We might be old, but we use the computer!”*

Findings

Research Question: What is the existing knowledge base schools possess regarding the issue of grandparents raising grandchildren and the impact it has on school practices?

The only direct perspective regarding the knowledge base schools possess about grandparents raising their grandchildren was gained from the grandparents. They perceived the schools could do more to learn about their situations. Some ancillary evidence presented itself when the researcher contacted school counselors to seek help in the identification of grandparents for this study. It was clear they had no existing list or data base of children being raised by their grandparents. Some used computer generated

lists to attempt an ad-hoc basis to identify grandparents raising their grandchildren. Others asked teachers, and still others simply relied on word-of-mouth or personal knowledge of the families since they had no list of the grandchildren being raised by their grandparents. Several counselors noted they were pleased someone was doing this research because they have noticed an increase in grandparents raising grandchildren, and were eager to learn how to help them. In her work as a curriculum director for Trumbull County Schools, the researcher worked closely with school counselors. The counselors' questions and interest in the topic are evidence they wanted to learn more and help to inspire and shape this dissertation topic. The researcher was asked to help several counselors when she was contacted for assistance in obtaining forms to give to grandparents in order to help them obtain their grandchildren's medical help or to sign papers needed for the school, such as permission to provide counseling or to attend parent teacher conferences.

Grandparents in this study reported that when schools assumed responsibility to gain knowledge of the situation and reached out to them, specifically, because of their situation, it had a great impact on the grandchild's school functioning and increased the grandparents' regard for the school. Such knowledge allowed the school to identify specific things they could do based on the child and the grandparents' circumstances.

The lack of knowledge about children being raised by grandparents is somewhat surprising since grandparents had no problems enrolling their grandchildren in school. What is not known is if this is due to the school system being thorough, or if it represents weak enforcement on behalf of school towards enrollment procedures and residency policies. The grandparents were able to enroll their grandchildren in school, but there was

no evidence that the knowledge that they were raising their grandchildren was passed along to the school or the child's teacher or school counselor.

Research Question: What school-related factors most affect the perception that grandparents have about their grandchildren's school experiences?

The school-related factor that mattered most to the grandparents is an open line of communication between the school and home. The school's procedures and general policy regarding communication are critical in the eyes of grandparents. In the few situations where there was abundant communication from the school, the grandparents reported a feeling of satisfaction. However, when the communication was lacking, the grandparents were very frustrated. This was evident when grandparents in the same district expressed common praise or common frustration underscoring the importance of organizational knowledge, policies and procedures. Individual teachers, principals, and counselors are also important factors. When these personnel made a concerted effort to know and understand the child and his or her experience, it mattered, and was noticed and appreciated by grandparents.

Another critical factor that emerged was the use of school counselors to help families. The grandparents expressed a need for someone in the school to be a single point-of-contact, and guidance counselors were the most often mentioned group to fill this role. This was further validated by counselors contacted by the researcher to help identify study participants, who themselves expressed a need for information and training regarding grandparents raising grandchildren.

No other school-related factors emerged from the focus group conversations. The size of the school, the family demographic factors, nor school's location seemed to play a

role in how the grandparents perceived the schools. Too large of class sizes was discussed, but that factor is not just a factor for grandparents raising grandchildren, but for all children. A few of the grandparents wondered out loud if the age of the teachers mattered. The response here was mixed, with some feeling younger teachers cared more, while others felt older teachers were more knowledgeable of the life situations. Again, these are factors that may influence school satisfaction generally, but are not unique to grandparents raising grandchildren.

Research Question: What are the obstacles preventing open lines of communications between grandparents raising grandchildren and schools?

The question of communication was explored and discussed throughout all three sessions of each focus group. The grandparents continued to gravitate to the subject over and over again. The research was clear regarding the role of grandparents in facilitating communication. Each grandparent told of their efforts to be proactive, going into the schools to initiate conversation about their situation, and to make sure the schools knew of their situation. Still, many of the grandparents were frustrated that there was not more communication from the teachers and the schools once they were advised of the family circumstances. For the most part, schools only knew the details that were provided to them by the grandparents coming in on their own. There was no evidence of a system in place to identify and contact grandparents raising their grandchildren in any of the schools represented in the study. What is not clear is if the perceived lack of more communication is due to the fact that the grandchildren are being raised by their grandparents, or if this is indicative of the level of communication between the schools and parents in general. There were, however, examples of several individual teachers and

principals who practiced diligent communication. Again, this was only after the grandparent went into the school and told them about their situation. This contributed to the perception of several of the grandparents that schools displayed a sense of disrespect toward them as grandparents. Again, it was difficult to discern if this sense of a lack of respect was, as they inferred, due to their being grandparents or if other parents might feel the same way about the school or teachers with whom they come into contact.

Generational differences were revealed as an obstacle to effective communication. The grandparents were all very concerned with the lack of respect for adult authority they perceived schools permitted. As they expressed it, in their generation one simply did not disrespect those in positions of authority. Another issue grandparents extensively commented on was the evolving teaching methods employed. Many of the grandparents said they required the schools to help them understand how to help their grandchildren by communicating more on topics such as lesson plans, homework expectations, and terminology.

One of the strongest conclusions that can be drawn from this research is that grandparents are definitely the ones who initiate communication with the schools, and, when asked and if able, they are ready and willing to support the schools in whatever way they can.

Research Question: What needs do grandparents have and how can schools fulfill these needs for grandparents?

What grandparents desired most from schools was communication. The consistent theme within and across the groups was communication. Although each grandparent brought different circumstances and different experiences and represented different

school districts, there was a consistency in their answers regarding communication. The message was that they wanted desperately to communicate, and they viewed open communication as essential to the success of their grandchildren. The grandparents were, in some cases, dumbfounded as to why the schools would not take advantage of this willingness to communicate in light of the fact that there are many parents who are not perceived as willing partners in their children's education. As a 17 year veteran in education as teacher, principal, and curriculum director, it is the researcher's experience that teachers and schools have always expressed frustration with parents' lack of involvement with schools. The grandparents' responses, however, suggest a starkly contrasting, universal willingness to communicate that may be unique to grandparents. Their value for education and view of schools are reflected in the sense of responsibility they take in being a partner in their grandchild's education.

Grandparents expect schools and teachers to have knowledge of their individual circumstances. The grandparents want their voices heard. The positive response to joining a focus group is evidence that grandparents need and want to talk about their situations. There is no good situation that would lead to a grandparent raising their grandchildren. These children are going to come to school with issues, both emotional and even potentially physical, due to their life circumstances. Knowledge of these circumstances will allow the school to effectively intervene and help. Grandparents need the schools to know what is happening at home as well. In many cases the child's parents are in and out of their lives and, as grandparents noted, often breaking promises to their children. These emotional factors could lead to academic and behavioral problems at school. The schools' reactions to these problems will be impacted by knowledge of these

events. To effectively help the grandchild it is equally important to be able to reach out and help the grandparents. Schools must demonstrate to grandparents how they have indeed changed drastically over the years. Grandparents want to help with homework, but may not know how teaching methods have changed, or may be reluctant to ask questions.

Also evident from the discussions with grandparents is the need for more sensitivity on the part of schools. While the grandparents have been able to compliantly adjust, it was clear that there are activities, events, and assignments that are not sensitive to this unique family structure. The grandparents were not as much concerned about how these things affected them as grandparents, but how it affected their grandchildren. Schools' policies, events, and communication methods do not reflect an understanding of the situation. Special days continue to be typically geared toward parents such as "Muffins with Mom" or "Donuts with Dad." The grandparents do not need the schools to necessarily change what they do or rename the events, just provide an alternative for those children coming from special family circumstances. While this holds true for children being raised by their grandparents, it could also apply to those being raised by siblings, aunts, uncles, and those living in foster homes.

Having a single point-of- contact for communication was something the grandparents felt would accommodate them in the schools. Having someone, such as the counselor, with knowledge of their situation would help them and their grandchildren.

There were resources that grandparents need and schools could provide. Although they did not specifically identify it as a necessity from school, resources on dealing with the legal system would help the grandparents. An example is knowledge of laws that could help the grandparents, such as Ohio House Bill 130 that allows

grandparents to obtain the legal rights needed to care for their grandchildren without obtaining legal custody. Other resources that could help grandparents include guidance on where to go for financial assistance and outside counseling. The schools would not need to know everything about these areas, but knowing where to direct grandparents would be a good start. Several of the grandparents talked about their grandchildren having special needs, with some having IEPs or 504 plans, and others on medication for ADHD. Help in understanding the policies and paperwork associated with special needs children is needed. This is especially important for grandparents since the identification of special needs and diagnosis of emotional and behavioral problems have changed tremendously since their children attended school.

Implications for Practice

Schools have a treasured resource in the dynamics of grandparents raising their grandchildren. While the children come to school with challenges and unique issues, they also come with dedicated and willing grandparents supporting them. The grandparent responses, and the researcher's own personal experience as an educator, indicate schools are not necessarily taking advantage of this resource. Grandparents are willing and want to help their grandchildren with homework, and to set structure and expectations at home to support the schools. In many cases the grandparents felt great frustration with the lack of communication to support them in this process. They were discouraged that, despite their effort, their grandchildren were struggling and the grandparents did not know until it was too late. Schools must begin to meet grandparents halfway in the communication process. Utilizing assignment books, parental assistance computer modules designed to

keep parents updated on grades and assignments, and email would be a step in the right direction.

Another common complaint from grandparents regarding schools is the lack of respect shown to them from parents of other children and even the students themselves. Grandparents are a group of caretakers who want more respect, not less, shown to adults in school and society in general. The grandparents pointed to instances where the adults in schools themselves do not demand respect from students. Grandparents value education and demand respect for authority. Schools commonly complain about negative student behavior and lack of parental support in dealing with it, but this is not evidenced by the grandparents in this study. They expect their grandchildren to behave, and want to know that when they do not behave in school so they can provide more discipline in the home to support the school.

With grandparents raising the children, schools have an opportunity to intervene and effectively help children who may be struggling. Many times educators feel overwhelmed and unable to help children because of the multitude of home issues and lack of support from parents to help. This does not have to be the case with children being raised by their grandparents. There is the opportunity to know the circumstances, understand the underlying factors affecting the students, and provide targeted intervention; all can be accomplished with the support of the home. Grandparents want to provide that support.

Recommendations for Schools

There is much that educators and schools can do to support the grandparents who are raising their grandchildren and, therefore, their grandchildren- our students. The

following recommendations are grouped into four categories: identify them, support them, include them, and finally, help them.

Identify Them

1. Develop a district-wide protocol for the identification of children being raised by grandparents and define how that will be communicated to staff.

The grandparents found it necessary to go into the schools to explain their situation year after year. The schools need a system in place to record this information and communicate it to necessary staff as this child progresses from grade to grade. This would need to start at enrollment. Paperwork should specifically be designed to identify children being raised by their grandparents, and those students would be “flagged” for follow up with the grandparents, with school teachers expected to initiate communication with the grandparent within two weeks of school enrollment. This information would then be shared from year to year. Just as students can be identified that have an IEP, so should students who are being raised by someone other than their natural parents be identified.

2. Talk to grandparents.

Once schools identify grandchildren who are being raised by their grandparents they should talk to them. As evidenced in this research, grandparents want to help. They want to help the schools understand their circumstances and they want to partner with the school staff and support their efforts in educating their grandchildren. A face to face meeting would be ideal, but a simple survey would be a good place to start. Some grandparents may be reluctant to meet in person, but they may complete a survey seeking input on their needs as a grandparent

raising their grandchild. Another way to gather input would be a phone call to let the grandparent know the school is aware they are raising the grandchild and the school's interest in supporting them in this endeavor. Still other grandparents may be willing to come to the school, sit down, and provide direct input to school administrators and staff. This research demonstrated that these grandparents are proactive and determined to have their voices heard, and that schools should take advantage of this opportunity to hear directly from the grandparents. The information gathered could provide guidance for development of policies and programs to assist other grandparents and the grandchildren.

3. Develop a system of communication between the teachers of the grandchildren. Grandparents in this study expressed frustration with having to go into the school year after year and tell their stories. This often proves painful and embarrassing. To alleviate this, schools should develop a system that allows all teachers and staff who have contact with the child to communicate with each other throughout the current year and in following years. This will ensure all staff is aware of the family structure, any special circumstances or situations that are important, including custody issues, and details of the natural parent's involvement with the child.

Support Them

1. Provide professional development for school staff on the topic of grandparents raising their grandchildren.

Just as schools provide professional development on differentiated instruction or how to effectively teach math and reading, schools would also benefit from

educating teachers on strategies to help children being raised by grandparents.

This situation affects students, and strategies such as better communication with grandparents would be helpful. This would also be a way to make all teachers aware of the students in their classrooms and the unique home circumstances.

Schools should consider using grandparents, themselves, to facilitate this training and conversation with school staff. The researcher learned that hearing the grandparent's stories and struggles directly from them was powerful. This research also provided evidence that there are many grandparents that are ready and willing to share their stories and help schools gain knowledge of their unique family circumstances and its impact on their grandchildren's school experience.

2. Appoint someone on staff to become the "expert" on grandparents raising grandchildren.

Every staff should have someone who is a point-of- contact for the grandparent and the staff. This person would be responsible for making staff aware of students being raised by their grandparents and any special circumstances such as custody issues or special needs of the grandchildren. This staff member would also be educated on the special circumstances of grandchildren being raised by their grandparents and would provide professional development for staff on the topic.

As a point-of- contact for the grandparents, they would be aware of resources that could be shared with grandparents such as financial help, legal help, and counseling services that may be available to the entire family. Some school districts, for example, employ family liaisons whose function is to work with families needing help and connect them to community agencies that could provide

the help. This liaison would be the ideal person to help grandparents. The school counselor would be a logical person to work with grandparents and their grandchildren. As a counselor, this person has skills to help grandparents and grandchildren with difficult issues such as adjustment to school, and anxiety associated with living in a different household, or dealing with parents that are not consistent in their visitations. It will take a team approach on behalf of the school to address the many needs of these non-traditional families.

Include Them

1. Be sensitive when planning special events that involve parents.

Although well intentioned, some special events planned by schools often make for awkward, embarrassing, and even hurtful situations for grandchildren being raised by their grandparents. Schools and teachers should be more general and inclusive in their definition of parent. Instead of “Mom’s Day” they could have “Special Person Day.” The schools should take all family situations into consideration, and when possible, offer alternatives. If this is not possible, communicate with the grandparents ahead of time so they can decide how to handle the situation with their grandchild. School administrators should be aware of projects, such as family trees and life timelines, as well as events such as parent nights that might present problems for students being raised by their grandparent. School administrators need to intervene and ensure sensitivity toward such families.

2. Be sure parent organizations are inviting to grandparents.

Schools that have Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) should keep grandparents in mind when forming their organization and recruiting members. This research

suggests that grandparents are a group of caregivers ready and willing to be involved in their grandchild's education. In fact, they make sure they are involved in that education. PTAs would benefit by having a grandparent on their organizational team. The grandparents could provide valuable input on getting the many other grandparents raising their grandchildren involved with the organization. Grandparents can also help plan events that are sensitive to the grandchildren of other grandparents.

3. Get grandparents in the schools as volunteers.

Schools are always asking for volunteers, but this research did not provide evidence that grandparents are specifically targeted as volunteers. While many grandparents work full time just as other parents, many do not and would welcome being invited into the school to volunteer. As grandparent volunteers, they could provide life experiences and life stories and perspectives that other volunteers representing a different generation could not. In the researcher's experience as a school principal, she found that grandparent volunteers were more reliable and dependable than other volunteers. She further experienced that grandparent volunteers expected and received respect and were particularly well liked by children and staff. Naturally they would be subject to the same screening and placement according to district policies and procedures as other volunteers.

Help Them

1. Provide students stability and a sense of safety and belonging.

Students being raised by their grandparents have already most likely experienced some type of dysfunction and instability in their lives. This makes a stable school

environment especially important. Schools should, to the extent possible, provide a stable environment for these children. Attempting to keep them in the same school with the same teachers will help with this. Constantly changing classes, and experiencing different expectations, rules, and teaching styles may not be helpful for the children or the grandparents, at least after the children have taken up residency with the grandparents. Teachers for these students should have a demonstrated record of success in parental communication and in running a structured classroom. This will provide a comforting environment for students, causing them to feel confident that school is not going to change, and that they are safe to make friends and build relationships.

2. Assign an IAT (Intervention Assistance Team) to develop a support plan.

Students do not need to be experiencing academic trouble to warrant convening an intervention team at the school. The special and often troubling home situations these students have experienced, or are still experiencing, mean they and their grandparents need help. The team would reach out to the grandparent and establish an understanding of any factors that need to be addressed at school. The team, which would include the grandparents, teachers, counselors, and principal, would convene as soon as the student enters the school. The grandparent would have an opportunity to discuss custody issues, the extent of parental involvement, and other information pertinent to the student. The school would have an opportunity to reach out and help the grandparent and address any concerns and questions they may have. If needed, this team would also address

academic and behavioral issues. Grandparents need to be heard, and this structure would provide a vehicle for the voices of the grandparents to be heard.

3. Form a grandparent support group.

The grandparents' willingness and eagerness to participate in this research, and their desire to be involved in their grandchild's education, are indications they may benefit from a support group. It will take an intentional effort to form these support groups. Utilizing grandparents themselves to form the groups is vital. The school will need to identify grandparents who have demonstrated a willingness to share their stories. The school would act as agent in initiating the group, providing a location to meet, and providing a liaison from the school to attend meetings and help organize presentations. The grandparent leaders would recruit other grandparents and plan the meetings. Grandparents raising their grandchildren have much in common and trust each other, sometimes more than they trust school officials. Topics might include how to help with homework, navigating the legal system, working with computers, and understanding educational jargon and standards, to name a few. The high school service club could provide childcare to make it possible for grandparents to attend. The grandparents in the group would choose the topics, ensuring they are applicable to their grandparents. Eventually the group, after forming trust and friendships, may begin planning social events together. Eventually, the school's role would be to have a liaison at the formal meetings to answer questions and gather feedback to share with school personnel.

Suggestions for Future Research

This research succeeded in identifying the perceptions, experiences, and perspectives that grandparents have toward schools. While the sample sizes are not large enough to extrapolate to all grandparents, the grandparents in this study were consistent in their themes and messages about schools and what they need from schools. Some areas surfaced that would be interesting for further research. One area is the impact being raised by a grandparent has on a child's academic achievement and the correlation between this and being identified with a disability or being on an IEP. Several of the grandchildren in this study were identified as having IEPs but this area was not explored. Do the factors leading to children being raised by their grandparent lead to children being prematurely labeled as special needs or in need of medications to control behavior? Another question worthy of research is the impact that being raised by a grandparent, as opposed to a parent, has on school adjustment. Do grandparents' values and maturity provide a richer environment leading to better performance? Another area to explore on this topic is the effect grandfathers have on the grandchildren they are raising. Several grandfathers participated in this study, including step grandfathers and one step grandfather solely responsible for caring for his ex-wife's grandchild. The prevalence of such a demographic prompts a possible suggestion for more research.

The grandparents, themselves, and not necessarily the result of facilitator questioning, identified dealing with the courts and the legal system as a very large part of their struggle, and by impacting the grandparents, subsequently impacts schools. Research into how grandparents have maneuvered the legal system would be enlightening.

A study of how birth parents and their presence or absence in the life of children impacts their educational experience would add to the conversation regarding grandparents raising their grandchildren and the related educational implications. The grandparents in this study often spoke of the birth parents and how their involvement played a role in the child's life, the grandparents' lives, and therefore, potentially the child's school experience.

An area not covered by this research, and a question left unanswered, involves the level of knowledge schools have on the topic. This question could be answered in a number of ways from focus groups, to interviews, to surveys of educators. As part of the follow up for this research, the researcher will share with educators across Trumbull County, Ohio lessons learned and suggested strategies for working with grandparents raising grandchildren.

Conclusion

It was an honor to listen to and learn from these brave grandparents. Their experiences and perspectives are consistent with research on grandparents raising their grandchildren but much was learned from all of their individual stories and voices. Many aspects of the research questions were answered and many yet remain unanswered. There were several conclusions and enduring lessons learned that can lead to a more effective relationship between grandparents raising their grandchildren and the schools they attend. Follow up to this research by the researcher will include discussions with schools and, also, more discussion with grandparents. These discussions will focus on these enduring lessons learned:

1. Grandparents are desperately knocking on school doors and wanting to be involved. Schools have a responsibility to react and will be the beneficiaries if they do;
2. In order to help grandchildren, schools have to know and understand the home situations. The most effective help will occur when the grandparent is helped along with the grandchild;
3. Schools have to reach out to grandparents. Grandparents want to help, and they want to support the schools. Communication has to be both ways;
4. Be sensitive to the grandchildren and the grandparents. These families are already experiencing trauma in many cases and the schools can either help or hurt the situation.

Let's help them!

Grandparents want their voices heard. This message, iterated across the pages of this research, encapsulates the love, dedication, and unselfish commitment these heroes are providing for their grandchildren-our students. The researcher was especially moved after the final session with the grandparents when the prevailing themes were shared with the group. One by one they arrived with smiles on their faces. Some smiles were a little weary; evidence of the daily challenges they experience. One grandparent lost her son to a heroin overdose; another lost her husband and was now raising her grandson by herself. Still another grandfather entered on a walker having just been released from rehabilitation and recovering from a stroke. One by one they updated the group as to their situations. All still had their grandchildren, and all still lit up when talking about them. Tears filled their eyes and even flowed freely when sharing with the group. They told of their own

children's struggles to get their lives together- some were doing better, while others were still mired in dysfunction. True to form, the complaining was kept to a minimum, and joy spread across their faces and all around the table as they talked of their precious grandchildren. The researcher noted and shared with them a final prevailing theme; all of the grandchildren were reported to be healthy and well adjusted. Because of the love and unselfish dedication of their grandparents- these children will make it. The reason is perhaps best summed up by one of the grandparents, "*No matter what society calls them – we're the ones shaping and rearing and tucking them in, patting (them) on the head , kicking [them] in the butt sometimes – they're our kids.*" These grandparents are up for the challenge. Are schools up to the challenge of meeting them halfway?

References

- AECT (The Association for Educational Communications and Technology). *Introduction to qualitative research*. Retrieved January 28, 2011, from <http://www.aect.org/edtech/ed1/40/40-01.html>
- American Association of Retired Persons. (2004). *Facts about grandparents raising grandchildren*. Retrieved March 16, 2004, from <http://www.aarp.org/confacts/grandparents/grandfacts/html>
- Bell, S. A., & Johnson, B. (2006). *Parenting a generation later: Grandparents raising grandchildren*. Retrieved September 13, 2008, from <http://bpdupdateonline.org/spring2006/id113.html>
- Berg, B. L. (2007). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (6th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education.
- Brintnall-Peterson, M., & Targ, D. B. (2005). *Current trends, issues and concerns of grandparents raising grandchildren* [Paper]. Retrieved November 2, 2006, from Annual Family Life Electronic Seminar on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: <http://hec.oso.edu/grg>
- Burnette, D. (2004). *Grandparents as family caregivers*. Retrieved July 3, 2006, from New York State Office for the Aging Web site: [1-4http://aging.state.ny.us/explore/project2015/artgrandparents.htm](http://aging.state.ny.us/explore/project2015/artgrandparents.htm)

- Casper, L. M., & Bryson, K. R. (1998, March). Co-resident grandparents raising their grandchildren: *Grandparent maintained families* [Electronic Version]. Population Division Working Paper No. 26. Washington, DC: U.S. Bureau of the Census.
- Goodman, C., & Hayslip, Jr., B. (1998). Mentally healthy grandparents and their impact on their grandchildren's behavior. In B. Hayslip, Jr., & P. Kaminsk (Eds.), *Parenting the custodial grandchild: Implications for clinical practice*. (pp. 553-55). New York, NY: Springer Publishing.
- Creswell, J. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Cox, C. B. (2002, January). Empowering African American custodial grandparents. *Social Work, 47*(1), 45-54.
- Cox, C. B. (2003). Designing interventions for grandparent caregivers: The need for an ecological perspective for practice. *Families in society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services, 84*(1), 127-134.
- Cox, R. J. S. (n.d.). *Grandparents raising grandchildren*. Retrieved April 25, 2009, from http://www.foreverfamilies.net/xml/articles/grandparents_raising_grandchildren.aspx
- Custodian (n.d.). Ohio Revised Code 2151.03 A (13).
- Dannison, L. L., & Smith, A. B. (2003, April). Custodial grandparents community support program: Lessons learned. *Children & Schools, 25*(2), 87-95.

- deToledo, S., & Brown, D. E. (1995). *Grandparents as parents: A survival guide for raising a second family*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Dolbin-MacNab, M. L., & Targ, D. B. (2003). Grandparents raising grandchildren: Guidelines for family life educators and other family professionals. In B. Hayslip, Jr., & J. H. Patrick (Eds.), *Working with custodial grandparents* (pp. 213-228). New York, NY: Springer Publishing.
- Edwards, O. W. (1998). Helping grandkin - Grandchildren raised by grandparents: Expanding psychology in the schools. *Psychology in the Schools*, 35(2), 173-181.
- Edwards, O., & Ray, S. (2008). An attachment and school satisfaction framework for helping children raised by grandparents. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 23(1), 125-138.
- Fields, J. (2003, June). *Children's living arrangements and characteristics: March 2002* [Electronic version]. Current Population Reports, P20-547. Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.
- Fuller-Thomson, E., Hayslip, Jr., B., & Patrick, J. H. (2005). Introduction to the special issue: Diversity among grandparent caregivers. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 60(4), 269-272.
- Fuller-Thomson, E., & Minkler, M. (2000a). African American grandparents raising grandchildren: A national profile of demographic and health characteristics. *Health & Social Work*, 25(2), 109-118.

- Fuller-Thomson, E., & Minkler, M. (2000b). America's grandparent caregivers: Who are they? In B. Hayslip, Jr., & R. Goldberg-Glen (Eds.), *Grandparents raising grandchildren: Theoretical, empirical, and clinical perspectives* (pp. 3-22). New York, NY: Springer Publishing.
- Fuller-Thomson, E., Minkler, M., & Driver, D. (1997). A profile of grandparents raising grandchildren in the United States. *The Gerontologist*, 25, 406-411.
- Gabel, K., & Johnston, D. (1995). *Children of incarcerated parents*. New York, NY: Lexington Books.
- Giarrusso, R., Silverstein, M., & Feng, D. (2000). Psychological costs and benefits of raising grandchildren: Evidence from a national survey of grandparents. In C. B. Cox (Ed.), *To grandmother's house we go and stay: Perspectives on custodial grandparents* (pp. 71- 90). Springer series on lifestyles and issues in aging. New York, NY: Springer Publishing.
- Glass, Jr., J. C., & Huneycutt, T. L. (2002a). Grandparents parenting grandchildren: Extent of situation, issues involved, and educational implications. *Educational Gerontology*, 28, 139-161.
- Glass, Jr., J. C., & Huneycutt, T. L. (2002b). Grandparents raising grandchildren: The courts, custody, and educational implications. *Educational Gerontology*, 28, 237-251.
- Glesne, C. (2006). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education.

Grinstead, L. N., Leder, S., Jensen, S., & Bond, L. (2003). Review of research on the health of caregiving grandparents. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 44(3), 318-326.

Guardian (n.d.). Ohio Revised Code 2151.03 A (13).

Hamel, J. (2001). The focus group method and contemporary French sociology. *Journal of Sociology* 37(4), 341-354.

Hayslip, Jr., B., & Patrick, J. H. (2003). Custodial grand parenting viewed from within a life-span perspective. In B. Hayslip, Jr., & J. H. Patrick (Eds.), *Working with custodial grandparents* (pp. 3-12). New York, NY: Springer Publishing.

Heller, T., & Ganguly, R. (n.d.). *Grandparents raising grandchildren with developmental disabilities* [Electronic version]. National Family Caregiver Support Program Issue Brief.

Joslin, D. (2000). Grandparents raising grandchildren orphaned and affected by HIV/AIDS. In C. B. Cox (Ed.), *To grandmother's house we go and stay: Perspectives on custodial grandparents* (pp. 167-183). Springer series on lifestyles and issues in aging. New York, NY: Springer Publishing.

Kelley, S. J., & Whitley, D. M. (2003). Psychological distress and physical health problems in grandparents raising grandchildren: Development of an empirically based intervention model. In B. Hayslip, Jr., & J. H. Patrick (Eds.), *Working with custodial grandparents* (pp. 127-144). New York, NY: Springer Publishing.

- Kelly, S. J., Yorker, B. C., Whitley, D. M., & Sipe, T. A. (2001, January/February). A multimodal intervention for grandparents raising grandchildren: Results of an exploratory study. *Child Welfare* 80(1), 27-50.
- Kropf, N. P., & Burnette, D. (2003). Grandparents as family caregivers: Lessons for intergenerational education. *Educational Gerontology*, 29, 361-372.
- Krueger, R. (1994). *Focus Groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Krueger, R. (1998). *Analyzing and reporting focus groups results*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Landry-Meyer, L., & Newman, B. M. (2004, November). An exploration of the grandparent caregiver role. *Journal of Family Issues*, 25(4), 1005-1025.
- Legal Custody (n.d.). Ohio Revised Code 2151.03 A (53).
- Lugaila, T., & Overturf, J. (2004, February). *Children and the households they live in: 2000* [Electronic version]. Census 2000 Special Reports, CENSR-14. Washington, DC: US Census Bureau.
- Mader, S. L. (2001). Grandparents raising grandchildren. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 68(1), 33-35.
- Marx, J., & Solomon, J. C. (2000). Physical health of custodial grandparents. In C. B. Cox (Ed.), *To grandmother's house we go and stay: Perspectives on custodial grandparents* (pp. 37- 55). Springer series on lifestyles and issues in aging. New York, NY: Springer Publishing.

- McCallion, P., Janicki, M. P., & Kolomer, S. R. (2004). Controlled evaluation of support groups for grandparent caregivers of children with developmental disabilities and delays. *American Journal on Mental Retardation*, 109(5), 352-361.
- Merton, R. K. (1987). The focused interview and focus groups. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 51. 550-556.
- Miles, H. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook of new methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Morgan, D. L. (1988). *Focus groups as qualitative research* (2nd ed., Vol. 16). Qualitative research methods series. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Mullen, F., & Einhorn, M. (2000, October). *In brief: The effect of state TANF choices on grandparent-headed households*. Retrieved February 6, 2009, from American Association of Retired Persons Web site: <http://www.aarp.org/research/family/grandparenting/aresearch-import-22-INB25.html>
- Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, 1996, P.L. 104-193, 110 Stat. 2105.
- Porterfield, J., Dressel, P., & Barnhill, S. (2000). Special situation of incarcerated parents. In C. B. Cox (Ed.), *To grandmother's house we go and stay: Perspectives on custodial grandparents* (pp. 184-202). Springer series on lifestyles and issues in aging. New York, NY: Springer Publishing.

- Pinson-Millburn, N. M., Fabian, E. S., Schlossberg, N. K., & Pyle, M. (1996, July/August). Grandparents raising grandchildren. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 74*, 548-554.
- Qualitative Research. (n.d.). WordIQ.com. Retrieved January 27, 2011, from http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Qualitative_research
- Reynolds, P., Wright, J., & Beale, B. (2003). The roles of grandparents educating today's children. *Journal of Institutional Psychology, (30)4*, 316-325.
- Roe, K. M., & Minkler, M. (1998/1999). Grandparents raising grandchildren: Challenges and responses. *Generations, 22(4)*, 25-33.
- Ruiz, D. S. (2002, September). The increase in incarcerations among women and its impact on the grandmother caregiver: Some racial considerations. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare, 29(3)*, 179-197.
- Sands, R. G., & Goldberg-Glen, R. S. (2000). Factors associated with stress among grandparents raising their grandchildren. *Family Relations, 49(1)*, 97-105.
- Scarcella, C. A., Macomber, J. E., & Geen, R. (2003, August 31). *Identifying and addressing the needs of children in grandparent care*. Retrieved July 3, 2006, from the Urban Institute Web site:
http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/310842_B-55.pdf
- Silverstein, N. M., & Vehvilainen, L. (2000). Grandparents and schools: Issues and potential challenges. In C. B. Cox (Ed.), *To grandmother's house we go and stay:*

Perspectives on custodial grandparents (pp. 268-282). Springer series on lifestyles and issues in aging. New York, NY: Springer Publishing.

Simmons, T., & Dye, J. L. (2003, October). *Grandparents living with grandchildren: 2000*. [Electronic version]. Census 2000 Brief, C2KBR-31. Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.

Smith, A., Dannison, L., & Vach-Hasse, T. (1998). When “grandma” is “mom”: What today’s teachers need to know. *Childhood Education, (75)1*, 12-16.

Smith, G. C., & Palmieri, P. A. (2007, October). Risk of psychological difficulties among children raised by custodial grandparents [Electronic version]. *Psychiatric Services, 58(10)*, 1303-1310.

Smith, G. C., Savage-Stevens, S. E., & Fabian, E. S. (2002). How care giving grandparents view support groups for grandchildren in their care. *Family Relations, 51(3)*, 274-281.

State of Ohio, 129th General Assembly. Substitute H.B. 130.

Strom, R. D., & Strom, S. K. (1993). Grandparents raising grandchildren: Goals and support groups. *Educational Gerontology, 19*, 705-712.

Targ, D., & Britnall-Peterson, M. (2001). Grandparents raising grandchildren. *Journal of Family Issues, 22(5)*, 579-593.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. Washington, DC: Author.

Temporary Custody (n.d.). Ohio Revised Code 2151.011 A(53).

Thomas, J. L., Sperry, L., & Yarbrough, M. S. (2000). Grandparents as parents: Research findings and policy recommendations. *Child Psychiatry and Human Development, 31*(1), 3-12.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2000a). *DP-2 Profile of selected social characteristics: 2000-Ohio*. Retrieved July 7, 2006, from American Fact Finder database.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2000b). *DP-2 Profile of selected social characteristics: 2000-Trumbull County, Ohio*. Retrieved July 7, 2006, from American Fact Finder database.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2000c). *DP-2 Profile of selected social characteristics: 2000-United States*. Retrieved July 7, 2006, from American Fact Finder database.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2000d). *P28 Relationship by household type for the population under 18 years*. Retrieved July 7, 2006, from American Fact Finder database.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2000e). *QT-P18 Marital status by sex, unmarried-partner households, and grandparents as caregivers: 2000 - United States*. Retrieved July 14, 2006, from American Fact Finder database.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2010). Retrieved June 20, 2012 from Family and Living Arrangements 2010: <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2010.html> table 4.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2009). Retrieved November 14, 2012 from American Community Survey: <http://factfinder.census.gov/Table B10056>.

Appendix A

House Bill 130

**As Passed by the Senate
125th General Assembly
Regular Session Sub. H. B. No. 130
2003-2004**

**Representatives Reidelbach, Hagan, McGregor, Kearns, Faber, Otterman,
Grendell, Williams, S. Patton, Cirelli, Allen, Clancy, Hollister, Gilb,
Willamowski, Bocchieri, Buehrer, Carano, Carmichael, Cates, Collier,
Daniels,
DeBose, Distel, Domenick, C. Evans, Fessler, Flowers, Gibbs, Hughes,
Jolivette, Key, Martin, Niehaus, Oلمان, T. Patton, Price, Schaffer, Setzer,
G. Smith, J. Stewart, Taylor, Wagner, Widener, Wolpert, Young
Senators Goodman, Stivers, Hottinger, Dann, White, Brady, Carey, Roberts,
Schuler, Schuring, Robert Gardner**

A B I L L

To amend sections 3313.64, 3313.66, and 3313.672 and to enact sections 3109.51 to 3109.62, 3109.65 to 3109.80, and 3313.649 of the Revised Code to permit the execution of a power of attorney or caretaker authorization affidavit permitting a grandparent with whom a child resides authority over the care, custody, and control of the child including the authority to make decisions regarding school matters and to consent to the medical, psychological, and dental care for the child, to require the power of attorney or

caretaker authorization affidavit be filed with
the juvenile court or any other court that may
have jurisdiction, to require the grandparent to
provide certain specified information to the court
with the power of attorney of caretaker
authorization affidavit, and to allow the court to

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17

report that information to a public children
services agency for the purpose of investigating
the grandparent.

Appendix B

Letter to Superintendents

MELISSA WATSON

345 PINEVIEW DRIVE
WARREN, OHIO 44484
(330) 979-6307 (cell phone)
melissa.watson@neomin.org

November 30, 2009

Dear

I am doing a project on grandparents raising grandchildren as part of my requirements for my doctorate in educational administration at YSU. My final work is conducting focus groups of grandparents raising their children. I would like permission from you to work with the counselors in your district to identify grandparents raising their grandchildren who attend your schools.

In my work with counselors at our county meetings they have acknowledged the growing number of students being raised by grandparents and expressed a desire to connect with these grandparents. The purpose of my research is to gather and analyze the perceptions, experiences, and perspectives of grandparents raising grandchildren in regard to the education system. I will use the results of my research to work with counselors and teachers in working with grandparents and ultimately helping students succeed.

With your permission, as indicated on the attached form, I will contact your guidance counselors and ask for their assistance by doing the following:

- Obtain the names and addresses of grandparents who are known to be raising grandchildren attending your school district (via EMIS and personal knowledge).
- Address envelopes containing a letter from me to the grandparents.
- Drop the letters in the mail- they will be pre-stamped.

Grandparents who wish to participate will return the letters to Mary Olesh who is assisting me. She is a grandparent raising her grandchild and an employee at the Solace Center. I will then contact the grandparents regarding participation in the focus groups.

If you agree to allow me to move forward and contact our guidance counselors, please return the enclosed letter of permission. Please call me or email if you have any questions. You may also contact my dissertation chair at YSU, Dr. Richard Baringer, at (330) 941-1437 or email rcbaringer@ysu.edu.

I will also answer any questions when I see you at the December TCSA meeting.

Sincerely,

Melissa Watson

Enc: Permission to contact guidance counselors

Letter to counselors

Letter to grandparents

Appendix C

Permission to Contact Counselors

Superintendent Name:

District:

I give my permission for Melissa Watson to contact guidance counselors in my school district to assist in identifying grandparents who are raising students in the school district.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D

Letters to Counselors/Introduction

MELISSA WATSON
345 PINEVIEW DRIVE
WARREN, OHIO 44484
(330) 979-6307 (cell phone)
melissa.watson@neomin.org

April 12, 2010

Dear Counselor:

I am doing a project on grandparents raising grandchildren as part of my requirements for my doctorate in educational administration at YSU. My final work is conducting focus of grandparents raising their children. I have received permission from your superintendent to seek your assistance in contacting grandparents raising their grandchildren who attend your school/s.

In my work with counselors at our county meetings the group has acknowledged the growing number of students being raised by grandparents and expressed a desire to connect with these grandparents. The purpose of my research is to gather and analyze the perceptions, experiences, and perspectives of grandparents raising grandchildren in regard to the education system. I will use the results of my research to work with counselors and teachers in working with grandparents and ultimately helping students succeed.

I need your help by doing the following:

- Obtain the names and addresses of grandparents who are known to be raising grandchildren attending your school/s through EMIS and personal knowledge.

- Address provided envelopes containing a letter from me to a designated number of the grandparents.
- Drop the letters in the mail- they will be pre-stamped.

Grandparents who wish to participate will return the letters to Mary Olesh who is assisting me. She is a grandparent raising her grandchild and an employee at the Solace Center. I will then contact the grandparents regarding participation in the focus groups.

Your help on this will be GREATLY appreciated. I have enclosed the letter that would be sent to grandparents. Please let me know via email or phone if you would be willing to give me some of your time and assistance as outlined above on this project. I will then be back in touch with more specific directions and a plan to move forward.

Sincerely,

Melissa Watson

Enc: Letter to Grandparents

Appendix E

Letters to Counselors/Selecting Names

MELISSA WATSON

melissa.watson@neomin.org

May 3, 2010 Dear Counselor:

I cannot thank you enough for your willingness to help with my project. It is so greatly appreciated!! I have enclosed the letters I need you to address and mail to the grandparents on your list. The number enclosed is the number of names you indicated you collected of grandparents raising their grandchildren in your school or district.

My methodology chapters call for each of you to mail 6 letters in the first round according to the following selection method:

- From your list please choose EVERY THIRD name until you reach 6.
- If you do not have 6 names then you will end up mailing to everyone on the list.

Mary Jones

~~Tom Smith~~ — mail — 5th

~~Deb Miller~~ — mail — 1st

Ian Grant

Melissa Barth

~~Tim Gooden~~ — mail — 2nd

~~Tyler James~~ — mail — 6th

Lebron Fin

~~Jason Davis~~ — mail — 3rd

Tanya Reed

Travis Pitt

~~Amanda Givens mail~~—4th

Greg Ship

(Go back to the top of the list)

- Continue crossing off names and looping back to the top until you get to 6.
- In the above example the names bolded and crossed through are mailed.

I would appreciate it if you could drop the letters in the mail by Friday, May 7th.

The grandparents are asked to respond by May 17th.

If I do not have enough commitments on May 17th I will contact you and ask you to mail another round of letters (for those that have more than 6 on the list).

Hopefully I will have enough grandparents after one or two rounds of mailings- I have provided envelopes for your entire list. I will be in touch just before May 17th if I need you to mail additional letters.

Again, thank you so much! I truly appreciate it.

Melissa Watson

Appendix F

Letter to Grandparents

MELISSA WATSON

345 PINEVIEW DRIVE
WARREN, OHIO 44484
(330) 856-3170-home
(330) 979-6307-cell

May 24, 2010

Dear Grandparent:

My name is Melissa Watson and I am doing a project on grandparents raising grandchildren as part of my requirements for my doctorate in educational administration at YSU.

A counselor in your grandchild's school district assisted me by mailing this letter to you. I assure you that your name, address, nor any other information was provided to me. The school counselor simply addressed the envelope and sent it on my behalf.

The purpose of my research is to gather and analyze the perceptions, experiences, and perspectives of grandparents raising grandchildren in regard to the education system.

I am conducting focus groups sessions (small groups of 6-8 grandparents) and would appreciate your help and participation. My hope is that this research will identify barriers that may exist between grandparents raising grandchildren and the schools. We plan to develop remedies for barriers that may be identified. The focus is on the perceptions, experiences, and perspectives of grandparents who have assumed responsibility for the care of their grandchild or grandchildren and whose grandchild or grandchildren have been enrolled in a Trumbull County school for six months or longer.

Your voice and input are needed and wanted! Participation would involve meeting with other grandparents raising grandchildren on three different occasions for approximately 1-1/2 hours each session. Childcare will be provided for your grandchildren if needed.

I sincerely hope you decide to participate. I would greatly appreciate your response by returning the attached response letter in the provided self-addressed stamped envelope to Mary Olesh by June 5, 2010. Mary is a grandparent who is raising her grandchild, and she is working with me on this project.

Please call me at (330) 856-3170 if you have any questions or you can email me at mwatson19@neo.rr.com. You may also contact Dr. Richard Baringer, principal investigator, at (330) 941-1437 or email rcbaringer@ysu.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Melissa Watson

Appendix G

Focus Group Questions

Melissa Watson

Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Session #1

1. Tell us about grandchild or grandchildren:
 - Names, ages, a little about them

2. Talk about the circumstances that led you to take custody of your grandchildren?

3. Are there any issues with your OTHER grandchildren that you are not raising?

4. What has been the most rewarding part of being a grandparent raising your grandchild?

5. What has been your biggest challenge or struggle in raising your grandchild?

(Expand with types such as physical, emotional, financial)

Focus Group Session #2

1. Describe the process you experienced when enrolling your grandchild in school.

2. Do you think your grandchild's/grandchildren's teacher/s know you are raising them?
3. How do you feel about your grandchild's adjustment to his or her school?
4. Talk about the communication the school and teacher offer to you.
5. What is something positive the school has done that helped you as a grandparent raising your grandchild?
6. Discuss how your grandchild's teacher relates to you and your grandchild.
(Expand with specifics, such as types of communication, troubleshooting, dealing with special issues (behavior problems, learning problems)).

Focus Group Session #3

1. Is there something in particular the school could do to help you?
2. What advice would you give another grandparent whom may just be getting custody of their grandchild about their grandchild's school and school experience?
3. If you could give your child's teacher/principal/superintendent one piece of advice about dealing with grandparents raising their grandchildren what would it be?
4. What is your dream for your grandchild?

Informed Consent

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Dear Grandparent:

I am conducting a study to determine the perceptions, experiences, and perspectives of grandparents raising grandchildren in regards to the educational system. In this study you will be asked to participate in three focus group sessions. Your participation should take about 6 hours. The purpose of this research is to build stronger bridges of communication between grandparents raising grandchildren and the school systems.

There are no risks to you as a participant.

All information will be handled in a strictly confidential manner, so that no one will be able to identify you or your grandchild when the results are recorded. To insure accuracy, and to allow for your review if requested, all sessions will be videotaped and audio taped.

Your participation in this study is totally voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without negative consequences. If you wish to

withdraw at any time please call Melissa Watson (330-856-3170) and express your desire to withdraw.

Please feel free to contact Melissa Watson, student researcher, at (330) 856-3170 or Dr. Charles Vergon, principal investigator, at (330) 941-1574 if you have any questions. You may also contact the Director of Sponsored Programs at YSU (330-941-2377).

I understand the study described above and have been given a copy of the description outlined above. I am 18 years or older and I agree to participate.

Signature

Date

Appendix I

Confidentiality Agreement

Grandparent Discussion Group

Confidentiality Agreement

Dear Grandparent:

As part of this 3-part discussion group you may be exposed to sensitive and personal information from other grandparents. By signing this agreement you are agreeing to keep any personal or identifiable information confidential.

I agree to keep any personal or identifiable information discussed in the focus groups confidential.

Name _____

Signature

Date

Appendix J

PEER REVIEWER LETTER

In June and July, 2011, I had the privilege of transcribing several hours of focus group meetings for doctoral candidate, Melissa Watson. The topic of the dissertation, *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren*, certainly captured my attention as I have been actively assisting my daughter in raising twin girls.

As I listened to the group dialogue, inflections of voices, emotional diatribes, and humor of the courageous grandparents, I realized I must diligently capture each word in these rich, vernacular-laden conversations. For six weeks, that is what I did. Many times, I reversed the machine as I thought my ears were deceiving me. Their stories were compelling and nearly beyond belief.

Recently, I had the added privilege of reading those words in their true context of the dissertation. I relived the emotions, dynamics, and inflections as if I were hearing the voices again. The written word was a genuine manifestation of the audio tapes. The written words were affirmations of the words spoken on the audio tapes. Each grandparent was precisely represented.

Appendix K

Identification of Themes

Several themes emerged within and across both focus groups. These themes were sorted into five categories:

1. “What Happened to Retirement?”
 - a. Someone had to save the kids;
 - b. The toll on the grandparent;
 - c. Dealing with the birth parent(s);
 - d. Still, I would do it all over again.
2. “School- It Just Isn’t What It Used To Be, and That Isn’t Good For Children”
 - a. Bring back the 3 “Rs”;
 - b. Respect matters;
 - c. Homework isn’t easy for us.
3. “Communication- It Has To Be a Two-Way Street”
 - a. We are communicating- listen;
 - b. Know us and our situations;
 - c. How schools can help.
4. “Taking Courts To Task”
 - a. Legal language and laws;
 - b. Working the system.
5. “The Selflessness Phenomenon”
 - a. Whatever it takes;
 - b. A grandparent’s promise, “I will always love you.”

What Happened to Retirement?

The circumstances leading to these grandparents custody of their grandchildren involved parental irresponsibility. Most cases involved drugs, alcohol, and parent neglect including parent incarceration. Overall, the parents' inability or unwillingness to take care of their child or children was the reason the grandparents intervened and took the children into their homes. Drug abuse on the part of one or both birth parents was the reason most cited for the grandparents attaining custody in this study.

The effects of the dysfunction associated with having to take custody of grandchildren present a daily struggle for the grandparents. They expressed a loss of relationships with friends their own age and were honest about the toll the situation can have on a marriage. While the grandparents in the current study did not cite their problems as boldly, what they did express were the same general problems.

A common problem expressed was dealing with the grandchild's parents. Many reported the parents come and go and have no responsibility. Another frustration to the grandparents was the grandchildren's desire to see their parents, despite what the parents have done to them and despite their continued broken promises to them. This puts the grandparents in a position of being the "bad guy". They do all the "dirty work" that comes with parenting, and the parents have no such responsibility. Still, these grandparents, without exception, were quick to express they would do the same thing all over again. While they have struggles and frustrations, they also find it very rewarding to care for their grandchildren.

School- It Just Isn't What It Used To Be

A theme that emerged from the grandparents themselves was how much schools have changed since they were in school or their own children were in school, and how this affected parenting of their grandchildren. The grandparents talked about how academics have gotten away from the basics. They do not understand or appreciate some of the new methods used for teaching. Examples of this include lack of attention to grammar, cursive handwriting, spelling, and math. Today's math is taught much more conceptually and hands on than when the grandparents were in school. This is frustrating to them as they try to help their grandchildren with homework or schoolwork.

Lack of respect for authority was an issue agreed upon by the grandparents as a major problem with schools today. They remembered how discipline was administered when they were in school, and even when their own children were in school, in comparison current schools' administration of discipline.

Grades, and being aware of any academic problems, are important to the grandparents. They want to know what is going on with respect to their grandchildren's learning and how they can help if there are problems. There is a great value on education shared by grandparents and a sense that it is, indeed, their responsibility to make sure their grandchildren receive a good education.

Communication- It Has To Be a Two-Way Street

The issue of communication, or more specifically, failed communication, was by far the most prevalent topic discussed by grandparents in relationship to schools. The grandparents said over and over how important it was to them for the schools to maintain open lines of communication. While initial enrollment in school did not pose problems,

subsequent issues arose. Unlike many traditional parents, grandparents are ready, willing, and anxious to get into the schools and to work with the schools. The grandparents were not willing to wait for the schools to initiate the invitation; nearly all of them talked about how they went to the schools and initiated the conversations. They made sure the school and teachers knew the situation, knew them, and knew how to reach them if there were any problems.

A theme that emerged from the sessions is a need by the grandparents for the schools to be aware of their situation of being grandparents raising their grandchildren and then providing support for them. The effects of the home life spill into the classroom, and the grandparents need the schools to understand this. There was an expressed desire to have school personnel who are trained in this type of family structure and know how to help the grandchildren. The grandparents felt the school counselors would be good candidates to fulfill this role since they deal with different family structures and are trained to work with families.

Custody and Courts

The topic of the courts was not one intended to be explored by the researcher. However, it emerged as one of the most discussed topics and themes of the sessions. The grandparents expressed great frustration with the court system and the entire legal process. They simply want to raise their grandchildren and protect them from harm. The courts are seen as an obstacle to them being able to do this.

The grandparents were very grateful to share their experiences and hear other experiences. They have figured out ways to maneuver the system and make the best of

the situation. They even exchanged ideas on how to deal with the multitude of papers and documents that are needed for everything from school enrollment to obtaining medical attention.

The Selflessness Phenomenon

The theme that was the most overarching and evident in each group and across groups is the absolute commitment these grandparents have to doing what is best for their grandchildren. This remarkable selflessness was an unspoken theme in many ways was apparent in their body language, and the way they passionately answered the questions. It was displayed in their interactions with each other and the sense of empathy and mutual understanding they expressed. It was displayed in their eagerness to talk before and after the sessions with each other. Sometimes it was displayed as tears came to their eyes when they spoke of their grandchildren. They are determined to do whatever it takes and make whatever sacrifice necessary to ensure their grandchildren are loved, protected, and successful in school. The unselfishness displayed by each grandparent was apparent and prevalent...and inspiring. One of the grandparents summed it up this way:

“They always know that there was someone in the world that would ...fight for them...I think that’s what she needed – that somebody’s gonna be here, well you know what it’s like. That somebody’s going to be there no matter what they throw at you and that’s what I tell her it- doesn’t matter what you do I’m always going to love you and she makes me cry. They need that – every human being deserves someone to say that about them...to love them and know they’re going to be cared for.

The grandchildren represented by the grandparents in this research and the millions more across our country are fortunate to have found those people in their grandparents.

Appendix L

Melissa D. Watson
345 Pineview Drive
Warren, OH 44484
(330) 970-6307
Mwatson19@neo.rr.com

Dear Grandparent(s),

I am sorry you were unable to attend the grandparent project “reunion” last week

However, I do want to give you an opportunity to review the themes that I gathered from our time together and reported in my paper. I have attached a summary of the major things I heard you, as grandparents, report. Not every theme was true for every grandparent, but I attempted to capture the ones that were representative of most of you.

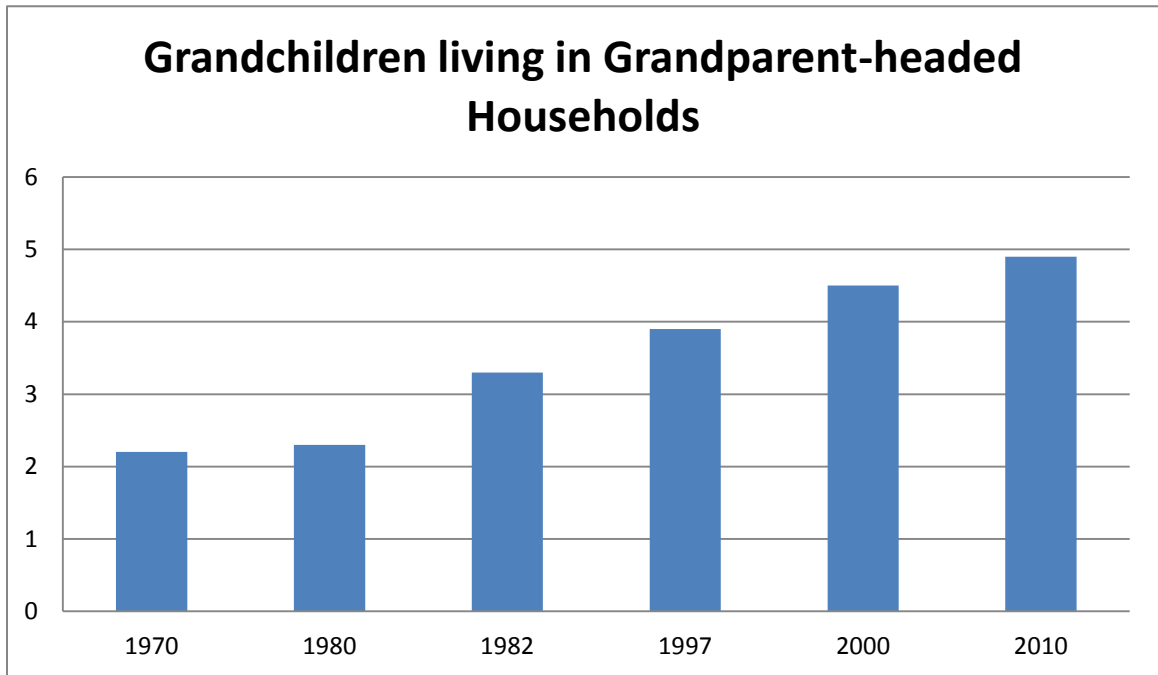
Should you have any questions, or want to talk with me about the project, please give me a call.

Thank you again for your participation in this project. Your voice was heard, and I plan to use what I learned from all of you to help schools and other grandparents raising their grandchildren.

Sincerely,

Melissa D. Watson

Appendix M



Graph numbers represent millions. Graph reflects the thirty-year exponential growth of households in which grandparents are raising grandchildren.

Appendix N

2000 U.S. Census Bureau Questionnaire for Caregiver Grandparents

19a. **Does this person have any of his/her own grandchildren under age 18 living in this house or apartment?**

Yes

No – skip to 20a

b. **Is this grandparent currently responsible for the basic needs of any grandchild(ren) under the age of 18 who live(s) in this house?**

Yes

No- skip to 20a

c. **How long has this grandparent been responsible for the(se) grandchildren?** *If grandparent is financially responsible for more than one grandchild, answer the question for the grandchild for whom the grandparent has been responsible for the longest period of time.*

- Less than 6 months

- 6 to 11 months

- 1 or 2 years

- 3 or 4 years

- 5 years or more

Appendix O

Table indicates stress factors in grandparent headed households

<u>Table 1. Stress Factors That Precipitated the Formation of Grandparent-Headed Households</u>	
<u>Situation</u>	<u>% Mentioned</u>
Substance abuse	<u>70</u>
Parent unable to care for child	<u>60</u>
Child neglect	<u>59</u>
Psychological problem	<u>55</u>
Financial problem	<u>53</u>
Abandoned child	<u>44</u>

Housing problems	<u>37</u>
Family violence	<u>29</u>
Child abuse	<u>28</u>
Prison	<u>26</u>
Child removed by child welfare	<u>24</u>
Divorce/separation	<u>19</u>
Abuse of grandparent	<u>17</u>
Death of grandchild's parent	<u>15</u>

Health problem 11

Suicide attempt 9

Physical disability 6

Appendix P

Internal Review Board Documentation

December 5, 2008

Dr. Richard Baringer, Principal Investigator
Ms. Melissa Watson, Co-investigator
Department of Educational Foundations, Research, Technology, and Leadership
UNIVERSITY

RE: HSRC PROTOCOL NUMBER: 60-2009
TITLE: Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: History, Causes, and Educational
Implications

Dear Dr. Baringer and Ms. Watson:

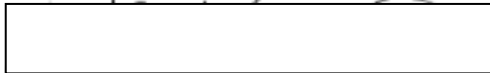
The Human Subjects Research Committee of Youngstown State University has reviewed your response to their concerns regarding the above mentioned protocol and determined that your protocol now meets YSU Human Subjects Research Guidelines. Therefore, I am pleased to inform you that your project has been fully approved.

Please note that your project is approved for one year. If your project extends beyond one year, you must submit a project Update form at that time.

Any changes in your research activity should be promptly reported to the Human Subjects Research Committee and may not be initiated without HSRC approval except where necessary to eliminate hazard to human subjects. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects should also be promptly reported to the Human Subjects Research Committee.

We wish you well in your study.

Sincerely,


Peter J. Kasvinsky
Associate Provost for Research
Research Compliance Officer



July 14, 2010

Dr. Charles Vergon, Principal Investigator
Ms. Melissa Watson, Co-investigator
Department of Educational Foundations, Research, Technology & Leadership
UNIVERSITY

RE: HSRC Protocol Number: 60-09
Title: Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: History, Causes and Educational
Implications

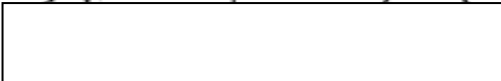
Dear Dr. Vergon and Ms. Watson:

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed the abovementioned protocol and determined that it remains exempt from full committee review based on a DHHS Category 2 exemption as long as the Investigator adheres to the originally proposed focus, methods and instrumentation described in the initial protocol. We have also recorded the change of advisor to Dr. Charles Vergon.

Any changes in your research activity should be promptly reported to the Institutional Review Board and may not be initiated without IRB approval except where necessary to eliminate hazard to human subjects. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects should also be promptly reported to the IRB.

The IRB would like to extend its best wishes to you in the conduct of this study.

Sincerely,



Peter J. Kasvinsky
Dean, School of Graduate Studies and Research
Research Compliance Officer

PJK/oc

cc: Dr. Richard McEwing
Department of Educational Foundation, Research, Technology & Leadership

