The Impact of Parent Engagement on the Academic Achievement of African American Students: A Phenomenological Study from the Perspective of Parents of Middle School Students in the Northeastern Region of the United States

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The Impact of Parent Engagement on the Academic Achievement of African American Students: A Phenomenological Study from the Perspective of Parents of Middle School Students in the Northeastern Region of the United States

Abstract
The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of parent engagement on the academic achievement of African American students in an urban middle school in the northeastern region of the United States. Middle years are a transitional time for middle school students as they face more challenges academically and become more independent and socially aware of their surroundings. This phenomenological, qualitative study explored the perspectives of the African American parents/guardians and their engagement, relative to their sixth, seventh, and eighth grade children and their academic achievement in an urban school. Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 2005) ecological systems theory (EST) and Bell's (1976a, 1976b) critical race theory (CRT) were the two theoretical frameworks that informed this study. Historically, African American parents/guardians have a strong voice that has been either silenced or ignored. This study confirmed that the participants in this study, African American parents/guardians demonstrated care and concern, and actively participated as engaged parents. Additionally, these participants in the study, African American parents/guardians, utilized a system of best practices and willfully advocated for their child at home and in school.

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The Impact of Parent Engagement on the Academic Achievement of African American Students: A Phenomenological Study from the Perspective of Parents of Middle School Students in the Northeastern Region of the United States

By
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership

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Dedication

First, I must give all honor, thanks and praise to my Creator, the King of Kings, the Almighty Lord, my Savior, Jesus for allowing me to embark on this journey. Next, I am so thankful for the love and support of many family and friends, both living and deceased, as the African proverb reminds us, “It Takes a Village...” Giving thanks to all my ancestors who made a way for me to have a seat at the “table” to give voice to the silenced kings and queens of the motherland in Africa who did not survive the Middle Passage, those that survived slavery, rallied and resisted the Jim Crow laws, marched and spoke out for justice during the civil rights movement, up to this very day fighting injustice and disparity, at home and abroad.

I would be remiss if I did not give special thanks to my dear beloved mother; Mauricette E. (Upshaw) Couch who stands with me each day, my father; Bernard A. Couch, Sr. (deceased), my sister; Donna M. Lockley and family, my beloved husband and friend for over 37 years, Carl T. Jenkins, my one and only daughter; Ta’Tiana M. Jenkins and my brother; Bernard A. Couch, Jr. and family. Thank you for your enduring love and support and sacrifices you made for me.

I am equally grateful to my SJFC committee chair, Dr. Jennifer Schulman and my committee member, Dr. Debra R. Lamb who gracefully and tirelessly provided guidance, support, wisdom and dedication as I embarked on this journey. Additionally, I am grateful for my patient and knowledgeable editor, Dr. Janet Lyons and professor, Dr. Shelly Jallow, mentors (Irene B. Boykin, Dr. Al Gouier, Dr. Taren Washington, and Dr.
Andrea “Andy” Matthews), friends (Shirley Jackson, Angela Manigault, Dr. Valencia Brown-Wyatt, Leslie Solan, Dominique Bourdeau-Oscar and Dr. Liza Ortiz-Lloyd), and colleagues (James Colasacco, Marwan Sayegh, Dr. Christopher Macaluso, and Cynthia Eisner). Your love, knowledge, encouragement, support and your spirit are invaluable. Thank you for being a part of my journey.
Biographical Sketch

Tonya M. Couch-Jenkins is a tenured Assistant Principal for the Yonkers Public Schools District. She has served as a teacher for 15 years and an administrator for eight years. Currently, Ms. Couch-Jenkins is the lead administrator in the Annex which serves prekindergarten through second grade students, an early childhood environment which is one of the two buildings at her appointed school. Ms. Couch-Jenkins is the co-founder of the IMANI Cultural Academy, Incorporated (ICA) Afterschool Program located in Mount Vernon, New York for 23 years. She serves as the Executive Director of this faith-based organization, as the liaison between the local community, board members, staff, and students. Ms. Couch-Jenkins is co-founder of the IMANI All Star Program (IASP) in New City, New York. It is a community-based organization established 5 years ago with her husband, Carl Jenkins. IASP is an organization committed to equip, enrich, and empower the future leaders of tomorrow through educational, cultural, recreational, and social endeavors. This year the IASP will host its 5th Annual Breakfast with Santa event in Rockland County which is always complimentary for disadvantaged youth in the community. She attended Syracuse University (Syracuse, NY) majoring in fashion design/retailing where she earned a bachelor’s degree. Her master’s degree is from Iona College (New Rochelle, NY), majoring in Elementary Education. Her second Master’s degree in administration hails from Manhattan College (Riverdale, NY) where she earned a professional diploma, as well as certification in SAS, SDA, and SBA. Ms. Couch-Jenkins came to St. John Fisher College in the spring of 2015 and began her
doctoral quest in the Ed.D. program in Executive Leadership. She pursued her research in African American parent engagement in an urban public school under the direction of Dr. Jennifer Schulman and Dr. Debra R. Lamb and received her Ed.D. degree in December 2017.
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Historically, African American parents/guardians have a strong voice that has been either silenced or ignored. This study confirmed that the participants in this study, African American parents/guardians demonstrated care and concern, and actively participated as engaged parents. Additionally, these participants in the study, African American parents/guardians, utilized a system of best practices and willfully advocated for their child at home and in school.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

For many youth, the transition from elementary school to secondary school is sparked by a decline in academic performance and motivation, while an increase in problem behaviors along with depressive symptoms concurrently arise (Burchinal, Roberts, Zeisel, & Rowley, 2008; Eccles, 2007; Rouse & Austin, 2002; Wang & Eccles, 2012). In the United States, this transitional time is marked as a socially, emotionally, and academically difficult time for many youth (Burchinal et al., 2008; Dotterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2009; Wigfield & Eccles, 1994). Recent research has shown that students’ academic performance on standardized tests, attendance, and grades during the middle school years were a strong predictor of high school performance, and of college completion (Balfanz, 2009; Keifer, Marinell, & Stephenson, 2011; Kurlaender, Reardon, & Jackson, 2008). Unfortunately, researchers say that there is a “loss of talent” which is prevalent among ethnic minority youth and youth with at-risk backgrounds (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Clark, 1983; Cokley & Chapman, 2008; Trusty & Harris, 1999). In fact, less than 40% of all the eighth graders in the United States were currently at or above proficiency on standardized test scores in reading and mathematics (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

Parent engagement, formally referred to as parent involvement in education has been considered an equalizer to help improve academic achievement with middle school students in grades 6 through 8 as they make this transition to secondary school (Burchinal et al., 2008; Catsambis, 2001; Eccles, 2007; Howard & Reynolds, 2008, Hoover-
Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Mo & Singh 2008; Ratelle, Guay, Larose, & Senécal, 2004; Rogers, 2006). Although, according to the research, parent engagement tends to be on the decline during the middle school years, nonetheless, it is a powerful tool that equips adolescents with support, exposure to extracurricular experiences, and confidence to improve academically while narrowing achievement gaps (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006; Eccles, 2007; Rampey, Dion & Donahue, 2009; Wyner, Bridgeland & Dilulio, 2007).

Early adolescence is revered as an especially sensitive developmental period because of dramatic biological and cognitive shifts (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Inhelder & Piaget, 1958; McGill, Hughes, Alicea, & Way, 2012). While, as previously noted, parent engagement typically declines during this transitional time, it appears crucial for supporting consistent student achievement (Bali & Alvarez, 2004; Byrd & Chavous, 2009; Clark, 1983; Eccles & Harold, 1996; Mo & Singh, 2008; Vanlaar, Reardon, & Kalogrides, 2014). According to Eccles and Harold (1996), and Burchinal et al. (2008), the decline in parent engagement is customary as students’ transition from elementary to secondary schools. They contend that the decline is attributed to students becoming more independent, as well as, more socially aware. The middle schoolers were moving from activities and events that require supervised parent engagement to more social and extracurricular activities and events that may require less parent engagement (Smetana, 2000; Wang & Eccles, 2012).

Some researchers contend that racial/ethnic identity, which includes how society views their racial/ethnic group, are contributing factors to a decline in academic performance for middle schoolers. However, based on how parents/guardians respond to...
these assumptions, according to the research, also speaks to how students think about their racial/ethnic group, and how others respond to them based on their racial/ethnic identity (Byrd & Chavous, 2009; Chavous, Rivas-Drake, Smalls, Griffin, & Chogurn, 2008; Chavous et al., 2003; Cokley & Chapman, 2008; Holcomb-McCoy, 2011). This study examined the impact of parent engagement on academic achievement as measured by New York State. Additionally, the opportunities that urban African American students were exposed to by their parents/guardians enhances their adolescent development and academic achievement. In one of his speeches, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. posited that intelligence plus character was the goal of true education (King, 1963). This quote by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther, King, Jr. advances the ideology that it is the content of a person’s character which ultimately signifies intelligence rather than their race, ethnicity, gender, age, or religion. He contended that it is the opportunity to be exposed to education that is fair, just, and impartial, coupled with parent influences that make a difference in the lives of youth.

According to Lubienski and Crane (2010), Gordon, Bridglall, and Meroe (2005), and Reeves (2002, 2003), each and every child has the right to that education. This research goes on to say that regardless of educational and social injustices, African American parents/guardians were involved in parenting their children. They go on to say that this population has ideals, goals, and expectations for their children despite the statistics that have been previously noted. In order to support this study, the information from the Adverse Childhood Experiences report (ACE) from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), (2016) was used (Anda et al., 2006; CDC, 2016). This organization has shaped the parents/guardians’ perspective on education and parent
engagement (Bird, 2007; CDC, 2016; Drake & Pandey 1996; Lewin-Bizan et al., 2010; Li, Lerner, & Lerner, 2010). The impact of ACE includes short and long-term cycles of abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction which may lead to depression, drug abuse, suicide, mental illness, and other health related issues (Chapman et al., 2004; Murphy et al., 2014). Additionally, Brown-Richards’s (2011) qualitative study on parenting behaviors is discussed in Chapter 2 to further explain how parents can impact their children’s academic achievement.

This researcher focused on parent engagement from the parents’ perspective as it relates to the impact of parent participation (i.e., cultural capital transmission explained below) at home, in school, and in the community (Mo & Singh, 2008). The researcher sought to determine what strategies, activities, and traditions African American parents/guardians were utilizing to improve their child’s academic achievement. Schönpflug (2008) described cultural capital transmission as investing in your child through exposure. The exposure is through capitalizing on imparting values, morals, and goals that were translated through ongoing educational, cultural, social and emotional competencies that enrich a child’s life (Gordon et al., 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006). Gordon et al. (2005) characterized exposure as a necessary means to influence sustaining academic achievement. These researchers go on to say that exposure refers to experiences to enhance opportunities for children to learn in non-traditional ways outside of the school day, at home, and in the community. These experiences were cultural, educational, and/or recreational, and allowed children to explore areas of interest that were individualized, as well as experienced with family and friends.
Over the years, a great deal of research focused on parent engagement and its relationship to academic achievement for children in grades pre-school through grade 12 (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; Collins, 1984; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005, 2010; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2004). The complexity of parent engagement was evident in the many ways it was defined (Collins, 1984; Henderson, & Mapp, 2002; Hill, Castellino, Lansford, Nowlin, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 2004; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2005, 2010; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2004). For example, Henderson and Mapp (2002) contend that parent engagement was the link between home and school for school-aged children, while Wilson (2009) defined parent engagement as parents and guardians taking responsibility for building a relationship with school to support learning.

Research supports the vast array of definitions of parent engagement, often regulated by the perspective of the actors (i.e., federal government, state, district, administrators, teachers, parents/guardians, students, community) (Collins, 1984; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hill et al., 2004, Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2005, 2010; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2004). More often than not, researchers explored parent engagement in the school setting, from the teachers’, administrators’, and students’ perspectives (Cooper, 2010; Darenbourg & Blake, 2013; Davis-Kean & Sexton, 2009; Williams & Portman, 2014). For instance, parent engagement was traditionally well-regarded as participation in school trips, special school events, visits to the classroom to help, attending parents/teacher conferences, parents communications (i.e., phone calls, letters, etc.), and/or attending parents-teacher organizational activities and was rarely examined from the perspective of parents (Clark, 1983; Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Hoover-
Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Jacobi, Wittreich & Hogue, 2003; McGill et al., 2012; McNeal, 1999).

The researcher sought to link academic achievement for African American students with higher levels of parent engagement as measured and defined by urban middle school African American parents/guardians who expose their children to best parents’ practices that enhance academic performance, build character, and equip them with life skills for better decision-making. This was measured using New York State (NYS) proficiency levels with two focus groups; one group of African American parents/guardians of consistently performing middle schoolers in grades 6, 7, and 8, (level 3 and 4 on the NYS English Language Arts [ELA] Assessments, 2015-2016), and the other group of African American parents/guardians of students who were not consistently performing (level 1 and 2 on the NYS ELA Assessments, 2015-2016). The NYS proficiency level for ELA scores refer to four performance levels: (a) Level 1 equivalent to well below proficient level, (b) Level 2 equivalent to below proficient, (c) Level 3 equivalent to proficient, and (d) Level 4 equivalent to above proficient (New York State Department of Education, [NYSED], 2016). The NYS proficiency ELA scores for the middle schoolers were reviewed in order to gather information for current urban middle school student performance. This researcher only used the ELA scores on the NYS standards exams. Research states that academic achievement in NYS was measured through the reading and writing skills of students and therefore was an appropriate measure to use for academic achievement (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016).
In the last 16 years, under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) the federal government challenged states to include parents as stakeholders to promote academic achievement with a concerted effort to increase parent engagement (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012). This policy emerged under the presidency of George W. Bush and was originally designed to create Common Core State Standards to raise the academic bar on student achievement (NCLB, 2002; Rampey et al., 2009). Unfortunately, there is still a disconnect between government policy, federal/state funding, state/district accountability, and student achievement under the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) as it pertains to engaging parents as stakeholders (Fege & Smith, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

Under NCLB, student learning and academic achievement in New York State was annually assessed by standardized assessments for ELA and mathematics. These proficiency levels rate students from a level 4 to level 1. The performance rating is the following: level 4 equivalent to above proficient, level 3 equivalent to proficient, level 2 equivalent to below proficient, and level 1 equivalent to well below proficient level (NYSED, 2016).

Based on data collected nationwide, many Caucasian Americans and European Americans were outperforming students of color on standardized tests (NYSED, 2016). In order to level the academic gap between students in different subgroups (i.e., African Americans, Hispanics, Alaskans, students with disabilities, etc.), policymakers sought new ways to bring about educational reform with the Every Student Succeeds Act (2016). The ESSA (2016) highlighted the importance of parent engagement by insisting that it is
a key component that denotes a positive effect on student achievement (ESSA, 2016; Yeung & Pfeiffer, 2009).

According to policymakers (NYSED, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2003), the NCLB (2002) Act was designed to dispel the educational inequalities in the United States. The research indicates that there were benefits and challenges that persisted from the NCLB Act (NYSED, 2016). This act placed stakeholders (i.e., state officials, administrators, teachers, and parents) at the forefront to support efforts to ultimately lead to academic achievement for all students and not only for students in higher economic status. As a result, schools were issued an annual report which publicly rated their annual yearly progress (AYP), to demonstrate how each school performed (NYSED, 2016). Scholars and policymakers view AYP quite differently but agree that parent engagement practices may be a vital proactive way to narrow the educational gap in the 21st century (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005; Meyer, 2009; NYSED, 2016; Reeves, 2003). Despite the educational disparities and political obstacles, Meyer (2009) reported that there were eight successful charter schools in Albany, New York that made AYP and most of the students in these schools were African American/Black. This will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 2.

Under the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), this period was marked by change and uncertainty on how to implement equity for the state mandates issued by the federal government to local school districts, administrators, and teachers, on effective teaching practices of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), (NYSED, 2016). The real challenge was how and where did parents/guardians, and even the community, fit into this system on how to effectively educate all of America’s children regardless of
ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status (SES), disability, age or gender (ESSA, 2016; Fege & Smith, 2002; Reeves, 2003; U. S. Department of Education, 2003).

**Definition of parent engagement.** Parent engagement in education has been defined as parents interacting with school for the betterment of their child’s academic achievement and future aspirations (Hill et al., 2004). Educational researchers have overwhelmingly documented the case for parent engagement as a pathway to influence academic achievement (Arnold, Zeljo, Doctoroff, & Ortiz 2008; Dearing et al., 2006; Fan & Chen, 2001; Gordon, et al., 2005; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Lareau, 1987, 1989, 2002; Lareau & Shumar, 1996; Lawrence, 2013; Schneider & Coleman, 1993; Wherry, 2003; Williams & Portman, 2014; Wooden, 2010). These educational researchers describe parent engagement as an opportunity to decrease the achievement gap by bridging the connection between home and school for the betterment of the child (Byrd & Chavous, 2009; Wang, Hill, & Hofkens, 2014). Henderson and Mapp (2002) profess that parent engagement is defined as parents taking on several roles at home, in school, and in the community, such as teacher, supporter, advocate, and decision-maker.

**History of parent engagement.** As early as 1642, during the colonial era in United States history, parents had a voice in education (Cremin, 1974). According to Brenner (1970) this educational voice resulted in a Massachusetts law that guaranteed children two fundamental rights: to learn to read and to learn a trade. In the 19th century, as noted by Coleman (1968, 1975) and Hill and Taylor (2004), educating children was considered a joint venture between families and schools. This allowed families, as key stakeholders, to have a defining role as decision-makers in schooling matters. During this period, Berger argued (1991), education was a private matter rather than a public
one. Thus, families could decide if children would go to school or work to help support the family. Therefore, according to this research, school was a luxury rather than a mandated option. According to Hill and Taylor (2004), by the turn of the 20th century, a shift in the educational realm emerged. They noted that the role of the parents/family was to impart good character through morals, values, ethics, and religious instruction while the school’s role was to educate. In the 21st century, policymakers looked at states to partner with parents/families to raise the bar on the pursuit of academic excellence for all children (Donahoo, 2013; Edutopia, 2017; ESSA, 2016; LaCroix, 2014; Reeves, 2003).

According to Cremin (1974) from 1642 to 1989, the term “parent involvement” served as the politically correct term for how parents were previously involved in the education of their child. In an effort to be more inclusive of a higher/broader level of parents/family involvement the term “parent engagement” emerged in the early 1990s in part from statements made by past United States of America Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton (Clinton, 2006; Donahoo, 2013; Epstein, 2001). Engagement is described by Merriam-Webster (2016) dictionary as an arrangement to meet or to be present at a specific time and place (Pham & Avnet, 2009). Thus, the shift from parents involvement to active parent engagement includes parents/guardians having transparent, two-way access with the school community that extends beyond the limits of the rhetoric in mission and vision statements, as well as, the standard drop off/pick up of their child during the school day, with potentially one to two opportunities to meet and greet with teachers about grades or possibly attending one or two special events throughout the course of the school year (Cotton & Wiklund, 1989; Donahoo, 2013; U.S. Department

Since President Lyndon B. Johnson, the concept of educational reform is often a topic sitting presidents of the United States of America deem a priority platform (Corey, 2012). According to Johnson (1971), in 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson, initiated the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as his first national priority. This research goes on to say that Johnson believed American children should have a full educational opportunity, and that essentially, ESEA was enacted to create opportunities for equity in education for all children in America. The research also points out that since the ESEA inception, it was not only considered an educational law but a civil law, as well. The year 2016, marks the 50th anniversary of the commencement of the education law (Bailey, 1966).

Dunn (1968), only 14 years after Brown v. Board of Education (1954), raised the issue of the disproportionality of minority children being placed in special education classes, especially for the plethora of African American males (Bell, 1978, 1980a; Brown v. Board of Education, 1954). The Brown v. Board of Education (1954) decision, was based on poor academic performance of minority children influenced by institutional racism which forced the notion that separate and unequal school systems were acceptable. After many decades of the decision rejecting separate and unequal school systems, as well as, results of research by Dunn, it fostered legislative measures to close
the achievement gap with initiatives from the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 and the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) 2004. During Bush’s presidency, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was enacted in 2001 to address these long-standing discrepancies in education in hopes to decrease the achievement gap. Thus, the NCLB reauthorized the educational law, ESEA. In regard to educational reform, the NCLB Act proactively highlighted the triumphs and challenges that had been made in the name of American children, regardless of race, religion, family income, disability, native language, zip code or background. This law was scheduled for revision in 2010.

The IDEA (2004) mandates that all students identified with a disability by educators were entitled to a free and appropriate education in the least restricted environment. In an effort to be inclusive, the definition of special education included, learning disabilities, behavior disorders, and mild intellectual disabilities (referred to as mild disabilities), and were intentionally elusive (Anastasiou, Gardner, & Michail, 2011). A consequence of the intentional elusiveness of the definition of special education has repeatedly been a challenging issue for the placement of high numbers of minority students identified as special education students (Anastasiou et al., 2011). Unfortunately, after over 60 years of the Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954), educational disparities for minority students still persist (Gardner & Miranda, 2001; Skiba et al., 2011). The minority groups include African American, Latino, and Native American students who were underperforming academically in ELA and mathematics (DeValenzuela, Copeland, Qi, & Park, 2006). For example, outcomes for minority males revealed a significant disparity in results from data disaggregated by the National Center for Education Statistics (2010) that 51.3% of 12th grade African
American males performed below basic reading proficiency levels when compared to 36.1% of African American females, 24.3% of Caucasian males, and 13.1% of Caucasian females.

Needless to say, in the last 16 years since the NCLB Act, educators realized that the prescriptive requirements of NCLB were impractical and inconsistently implemented state to state (NCLB, 2002; NYSED, 2016). Thus, the administration of President Barack Obama enlisted districts, schools, educators, and parents along with community members to collaborate to create policy to equip all American children to be prepared for success in college and careers (ESSA, 2016; Mathis & Trujillo, 2016).

Notably despite the NCLB and IDEA implementation, low academic performance can be attributed to the disproportionality of special education placement of minority students, educators disregard for disadvantaged students’ stressors, increase in dropout rate, limited postsecondary prospects, low graduation rates, as well as low paying job opportunities (McLoyd & Purtell, 2008; Swanson, 2003; Swick & Williams, 2006). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2012), President Barack Obama recognized the need to for a well-educated and diverse workforce to meet the demands of a competitive world economy driven by communication and technology. Thus, President Obama established two critical initiatives; a comprehensive plan to have 60% of Americans obtain a college degree by 2020, and the “My Brother’s Keeper” program (The White House, 2014) to assure the increase in academic performance of African American and Latino males.

As a result, on December 10, 2015, former President Barack Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act to build on the essential areas of improvement made by the
significant contributions from educational actors; educators, parents, community, and students across the nation (ESSA, 2016; Mathis & Trujillo, 2016). According to Mathis and Trujillo (2016) this bipartisan effort reauthorized the 50-year old educational act, Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA), as an equalizer to create enhanced opportunities for an education that meets the needs of an ever-changing global society. As the research points out, our ever-changing global society includes equity for all ethnicities so that they can achieve at more progressive rates (ESSA, 2016; LaCroix, 2014; Mathis & Trujillo, 2016).

The enactment of ESSA highlights a few important features that link the relevance of this study: (a) it earmarks equity to support disadvantaged and high-need students, (b) requires high academic standards to be taught in America to ensure all students the opportunity to be prepared for college and careers, (c) ensures all stakeholders (i.e., educators, families, students, and communities) receive vital information about annual statewide assessments that impact teacher delivery of instruction to further impact student academic outcomes based on these high standards, (d) helps support community partnerships that create innovative ways to address local needs including evidence-based and place-based contributions by local leaders and educators, (e) sustains funding to support increased access to early childhood interventions like high-quality preschool, and (f) perpetuates the high standard of improving low performing schools with measures for accountability and action to improve the rate of academic achievement and graduation for groups of students not making the grade. Thus, this includes the research that states that a contributing factor affecting the achievement proficiency levels of African American students is the
economic and political climate which speaks to some of the inequities in education, resources, and social disparities which have led to the disenfranchisement and ongoing violence, incarceration, and racism that affect the lives of men, women, and children of African American descent (Fite, Wynn, & Pardini, 2009). Regardless, the evolution of ESEA (1966) to NCLB (2002) and then to the ESSA (2016), demonstrates the timeliness and relevance of educating all children in preparation for them to be able to compete in a diverse and global society.

As previously noted, Henderson and Mapp (2002) refer to parent engagement as a link between student learning and greater academic achievement. In order to nurture experiences that foster student learning and greater academic achievement at home, in school, and in the community, parents may do the following: (a) at home, the parents monitor the child’s academic progress by helping with homework, providing a tutor if and when needed, viewing grades on a quarterly basis; (b) at school, the parents support an open line of communication with the teachers and administration, volunteer for special events, attend PTA meetings and celebrate school milestones with the same child; and (c) in the community, the parents seek extracurricular activities to support student interests like dancing, sports, music, and or art/drama, as well as, advocates for the child’s participation in cultural events and celebrations.

History of parent engagement practices in the African American culture. Traditionally, parent engagement practices in the African American culture were passed down from one generation to the next by word of mouth (Federal Writers’ Project, n.d.; Hauser-Cram, 2009; Humes, 2016; Tobin & Snyman 2008). It is a form of knowledge sharing that utilizes oral stories which is also referred to as “legal storytelling” (Humes,
Legal storytelling or counter storytelling is a form of sharing where “oral history” is a legitimate way to pass down family history, customs, traditions, and cultural stories as referred to a folklore (Tobin & Snyman, 2008). For instance, the African proverb reminds African American people and communities that “it takes a village to raise a child” meaning everyone in the community (i.e., all stakeholders) is a part of the upbringing of a child, not just the parents (Donahoo, 2013; Gordon et al., 2005; Tobin & Snyman, 2008). In essence, as author, Schönpflug (2008), pointed out, it is the belief that one and all were to be a gatekeeper for safety, shelter, nourishment, family values, and sharing of knowledge.

Schönpflug (2008) links cultural transmission from parents to child with multiple and repeated family interaction with language, traditions, customs, and exposure. In the spirit of this African proverb, local and national organizations have been created to support this ideology (Gordon et al., 2005). Over the years, educational scholars have reinforced this mantra and challenged one another to remember the (African and African American/Black) past and preserve the present so that there will be a future with a call to action for academic achievement (Bell, 1978, 1980b, 1982, 1997; Bell & Edmonds, 1993; Bell, Delgado, & Stefancic, 2012; Berger, 1991; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

African American parents have been involved in parenting their children through parent engagement even though this topic has been unrepresented in the literature (Cotton & Widelund, 1989; Howard & Reynolds, 2008). As part of the success of national and local organizations which encourage parent engagement on a national level, Jack and Jill of America is one of many premier organizations that was founded in 1938 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Rankin & Quane, 2002; Sloan, 2001). It was founded by 20
African American mothers who had a shared expectation; children should be happy and reared to have great expectations for the future by their families (Rankin & Quane, 2002; Sloan, 2001). Under the tutelage of the late Marion Stubbs Thomas, the organization was founded to provide social, cultural, and educational opportunities for youth. Currently, this national organization has 230 chapters and represents over 40,000 African American family members (Sloan, 2001).

According to the national organization Jack and Jill of America (2016), Tammy King, the immediate past president of Jack and Jill of America from 2011-2015, spearheaded a rigorous national theme, “Power to Make a Difference.” Sloan, 2001 goes on to say that, to date, this theme continues to empower the members and their mission; to have mothers advocate to enrich the lives of children 2 to 19 years old who were dedicated to nurturing future African American leaders by strengthening children through leadership development, volunteer service, philanthropic giving, and civic duty.

Researchers like Berger (1991), Bridglall and Gordon (2002), and Lubienski and Crane (2010) professed that the parents are the first and most important teacher alongside formal education. Gordon, Bridglall, and Meroe (2005) led the way for uncovering the hidden curriculum of high achievement. In fact, Gordon et al. (2005) were globally distinguished for Supplemental Education, which in this research refers to parents/guardians and community members creating opportunities for children in the aspects of education, culture, social involvement, and recreation (Bridglall & Gordon, 2002). This research stated that the learning can take the form of cultural events, history, tutoring, field trips, music, and dance, and or any activity that would supplement the education a child receives in school. The research of Lubienski and Crane (2010)
supported the work of Bridglall and Gordon (2002) and reported on the extensive impact of SES and the number of books in the home that children were exposed to at an early age.

The research of Gordon et al. (2005) emphasized the importance of the role of the parents as supporters. For instance, the parents cannot expect everything to be taught in school and must advocate for special services (i.e., academic intervention services before, during, and after school), impart values and morals, as well as engage their children in educational, cultural, social, and civic experiences (Gordon et al., 2005; Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015). According to research by Bridglall and Gordon (2002), Naomi’s Program of Excellence (NPE) emerged in 2002 as an educational, cultural, and social enrichment program in the New York area that was developed by five African American families. According to Bourdeau-Oscar (NPE, 2017) in 2017, the program continued to thrive with its mission to uplift children (particularly of color) through parent engagement, along with family and friends. This program was founded to reinforce the belief that all children were naturally gifted and talented (Ford, 1994; Gordon et al., 2005). The life’s work of Gordon et al. (2005) reiterated the importance of beliefs and behaviors from the parents’/guardians’ perspective that impacted the exposure children have in their environment.

**Importance of parent engagement.** High levels of parent engagement make it more likely for students to attend school, do homework, and improve their language skills (Goldkind, & Farmer, 2013; Jeynes, 2005, 2010; Malcolm, 2014; Perry, 2009; Wooden, 2010). According to Howard and Reynolds (2008) and Reeves (2003) students can achieve success on standardized tests, regardless of their ethnic persuasion and social-
economic status with support from all of their stakeholders (i.e., parents, teachers, administrators, school district, and community members). These researchers agree that parent engagement promotes high expectations in academics with support, yields improved academic student performance, especially during the middle years when students tend to have other challenges like peer pressure, lack of attention for schooling and curiosity with drug experimentation (Goldkind & Farmer, 2013; Gordon et al., 2005; Malcolm, 2014; Wooden, 2010).

According to Perry (2009) what parents do outside of schools and what level of parent engagement they provide for their child were powerful indicators of academic achievement. The significance of parent engagement with their child’s school made the greatest impact on academic outcomes when you consider the critical role parents play; parents’ income, educational levels, cultural background, cultural transmission (i.e., exposure), time, drug/alcohol use, and criminal history which impacts a child’s development (Gordon et al., 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Wooden, 2010). Also, researchers contend that greater parent engagement yields more students being equipped for college and careers needed in the 21st century (Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Perry, 2009; Reeves, 2003).

Researchers and educators agree that parents/family engagement increases when willing parents/families get involved in the school community (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Wilson, 2009; Wooden, 2010). These researchers say that this translates to parents/families to ensure a link between home and school that supports students’ consistent attendance, promotes a mutually respectful relationship, reinforces educational expectations, embraces a partnership between the school and
community and fosters a collaborative trusting relationship with students, teachers, fellow parents/families, and administrators. When parents are invited into the school and made to feel welcome, it yields great benefits for the students (Malcolm, 2014; Novak & Purkey, 2001; Purkey, 1991). For example, Wilson (2009) commented that when parents accept some responsibility and do not turn all of the responsibility over to the school, they empower their children. Wilson (2009) goes on to say that when the parents become more active in the education of their children they were more likely to succeed and move on to higher education.

Research indicates that both school-based and home-based parent engagement is imperative to the youths’ academic achievement (Comer, 1995; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Malcolm, 2014). Researchers, scholars, administrators, and teachers agree that when parents deliberately engage their children in oral conversation (i.e., driving in the car, at dinner, at the park, before/during/after story time, etc.), set consistent high standards centered on learning and making sure that out-of-school activities were constructive, their children do better in school (Berger, 1991; Dearing et al., 2006). Historically, Root, (2008), Spock (2001), and Kohn (1969), challenged parents to be proactive for more than four decades in their child’s educational process and journey by laying the groundwork on the importance of parent engagement for future research.

**Benefits of parent engagement in the African American culture.** Research indicates that African American students benefit from parent engagement which results in improved academic performance, minimized adolescent transitional issues, maximized exposure to educational, cultural, and social opportunities, as well as, influenced more college and career bound experiences (Brown-Richards, 2011; Cokley & Chapman,
According to Nobel and Morton, (2013) and Epstein, (1995, 2001), parents/family participation is more predictive of academic achievement than SES. Gordon (2005) and Jeynes (2005) contended that it is imperative for parents to advocate for services, lead and guide their children’s educational journey with additional stimulating experiences that were cultural, social, emotional, as well as educational.

Researchers posit that when African American parents/guardians transmit cultural exposure, it is often based on generalized conceptions (Rowley, Burchinal, Roberts, & Zeisel, 2008). These generalizations do not account for culturally distinct parenting techniques (El Nokali, Bachman, & Votruba-Drazl, 2010; Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, & Fendrich, 1999). For instance, African American parents/guardians may intentionally employ unique behaviors that seek to promote their children’s academic outcomes. Cultural capital transmission, simply stated, is investing in your child (Schönpflug, 2008). The investment is imparting values, morals, and goals that were translated through ongoing educational, cultural, social, and emotional competencies that enrich a child’s life (Gordon et al., 2005, Watkins, 2006).

Some of the ways Schönpflug (2008) discussed the kinds of activities that translate into success were participating in visits to the theatre, museums, parks, and libraries, to name a few. This researcher examined the perspectives of African American parents/guardians to gain an understanding of how their personal experiences have impacted their child’s success through the engagement of culturally relevant activities and events.
In continuing to look at the benefits of parent engagement in African American culture, similarly, Bourdieu (1973) described cultural capital transmission as a mechanism used by society’s prosperous parents to socialize their children to develop cultural and educational competencies and successes. Howard and Reynolds (2008) agreed with Bourdieu’s (1986) cultural capital theory which propositions perceptions about the cultural codes, norms, and values of the dominant society that were commonly relative to families in a higher economic status. Therefore, parents with the means to expose their children to cultural capital experiences afford their children with added advantages to attain academic achievement.

Bourdieu (1973) described three components of this process: (a) parent possession of cultural capital, (b) parent transmission of capital, and (c) children’s absorption of cultural capital (Jaeger, 2009). This means that parent possession refers to what parents were exposed to as children themselves. Parent transmission of capital refers to what parents exposed their children to, based on their own, lived experiences. Children’s absorption of cultural capital refers to the impact of exposure that influences children, based on cultural capital transmission. Cultural capital transmission refers to investing in your child/ren. The investment is imparting values, morals, and goals that were translated through ongoing educational, cultural, social, and emotional activities that the parents were involved in with their child/ren.

Jaeger (2009) argued that existing studies did not substantiate the link between academic achievement and cultural transmission. Yet, Jaeger (2009), in his article, followed and connected Bourdieu’s (1973) premise on acquisition of cultural capital. Jaeger (2009) supported the notion that academic achievement could be enhanced with
three fundamental principles in place to transfer cultural capital from parents to child, possession of cultural capital by the parents, transfer of cultural capital from parents to child, and ultimately for the child to apply cultural capital to their own life experience. In further documenting the benefits of parent engagement in African American culture, Bourdieu (1973), continued to say that there were three types of capital a parent can possess: (a) objectified cultural capital which is a tangible artifact (i.e., something they can hold or look at), (b) institutionalized cultural capital which is educational credentials (i.e., higher education), and (c) embodied cultural capital which is an awareness and/or appreciation of cultural goods (i.e., cultural traditions, language, customs). These three types of capital will be explained in depth in Chapter 2.

Researchers have stated that the African American parents/guardians’ perspectives were not represented in the current parent engagement literature in regard to cultural differences (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Vega, Moore, & Miranda, 2015; Watkins, 2006; Williams & Portman, 2014; Wilson, 2009). As a result, the current literature may suggest that African American parents/guardians were less involved in their children’s academic lives (Vega et al., 2012; Wooden, 2010). In light of this possibility, the purpose of this review was to shed insight into a more culturally sensitive conceptualization of parent engagement by furthering our understanding of how African American parents/guardians may seek to promote their children’s academic achievement.

**Barriers to African American parent engagement.** Hauser-Cram (2009) and Hallman (2008) both discussed the challenges that parents face in regard to parent engagement. Hauser-Cram (2009) commented on the socioeconomic status of parents that may impact the exposure parents impart on their children meaning parents may be
limited in their resources based on their past experiences. For instance, the SES of parents/guardians may be impacted by their level of education and/or Adverse Childhood Experiences (CDC, 2016). Hallman (2008) suggested that parents were to blame for not doing anything to remedy the situation of the educational lag for students of color. For example, Hallman (2008) suggested that parents of color need to focus on intrinsic motivation to demonstrate valuing an education. By this he meant to encourage parents/guardians to focus on academic achievement by focusing on high expectations, getting more involved in school matters, and supporting their students with strategies such as tutoring, more leisure reading, and other ways to expand their knowledge, so that students may intrinsically be more apt to accept the challenge of excelling (Bennett-Conroy, 2011; Fan & Williams, 2010; Swick & Williams, 2006).

Proponents like Shonkoff and Meisels (2000) and Wooden (2010) insist that parents need to spend time with their children, teaching them the importance of an education and the proper behavior that is necessary for students to succeed in school. The triggers that hinder parent engagement will be further explored in Chapter 2 with the study documented by Swick and Williams (2006).

According to Harris and Graves (2010) and Howard and Reynolds (2008), families in a higher SES have access to more opportunities like tutoring, organized sports and activities, cultural arts (i.e., the theatre, museum, zoo, library, dance lessons, music lessons, etc.). These families were more likely to engage their children in extracurricular activities and participate in local and national organizations that support their customs, traditions, expectations, and ideals. In contrast, as this research notes, families in the lower SES struggle with financial challenges and may not be able to afford
extracurricular opportunities for their children (Desimone, 1999; Dotterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2009; Harris & Graves, 2010; Tamis-LeMonda, Briggs, McCowry, & Snow, 2008). Moore and Lewis (2012) argued that education and economy were linked and yield encouraging outcomes. They contended that the level of education and the amount earned depict outcomes that result in more education yielding a higher income status. Other researchers reported that the reality of providing shelter, food, and clothing may be a struggle for families in the lower SES (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2004; Drake & Pandey, 1996; Garmezy, 1993; Yeung & Pfeiffer, 2009).

Hauser-Cram (2009) and Henderson and Mapp (2002) had a different perspective. They contended that socioeconomic status has the same effects across all races. They contended that it is the environmental factors that link to family and academic achievement; practices that parents pass on to their children, many of which were expectations that were ethnically-centered. They say that these expectations affect the students’ attitudes and success within the educational system. Other researchers agree that various factors contribute to the educational outcomes of students of color, including access to preschool and early childhood programs, quality of teachers, access to high-quality curriculum, school quality, socioeconomic status, and support systems (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Lee, 2005; Tamis-LeMonda, et al., 2008).

**Problem Statement**

The literature suggests that parent engagement is an important aspect in the educational achievement for all students (Byrd & Chavous, 2009; Daresbourg & Blake, 2013; Fan & Chen, 2001; Williams & Portman, 2014; Wooden, 2010). In regard to parent engagement, policymakers, administrators, teachers, and even students have
expressed their viewpoint in the literature, however, there is a gap in the literature on the African American parents/guardian perspective in this area (Brown-Richards, 2011; Malcolm, 2014). This study used a qualitative approach to gain insight and adds to the body of knowledge on the importance of parent engagement and academic achievement, specifically for African American middle school students in grades 6, 7, and 8.

Despite advancement in education, health, civil and social arenas, students of color lag behind their Caucasian counterparts in areas such as standardized testing, high school completion rates, academic achievement, and college attendance and completion (Fiester, 2010; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015; O’Connor, Horvat, & Lewis, 2006; Thomas, Caldwell, Faison, & Jackson, 2009; Valencia, 2000; Vega et al., 2012). Traditionally, parent engagement often decreases during the middle school years even though it is a time when middle schoolers may require more guidance and support (Eccles, 2007; Wang & Eccles, 2012). Based on the research, parent engagement has been a vital source that has impacted student academic achievement for middle schoolers who may face an adolescent wave of low motivation, participation, and behavioral challenges (Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015; Rouse & Austin, 2002).

The research indicates that parent engagement has been viewed from the perspective of administrators, teachers, and parents; yet, little to no research has given voice to the African American parents’ perspective (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Williams & Portman, 2014). Thus, parent engagement from the parents’ perspective of the African American middle school students was examined by this researcher to determine the influence parents/guardians have in regard to enhancing student achievement with
cultural transmission. Additionally, as noted by other research, all students need to be prepared for an ever-changing global society regardless of their ethnic origin, race, SES or religion, which greatly impacts the future of our country (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Donahoo, 2013; NCES, 2016; Reeves, 2003).

As previously noted in this chapter and presented here again for clarity, under the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), this period was marked by change and uncertainty on how to implement equity for the state mandates issued by the federal government to local school districts, administrators, and teachers, in teaching to Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The real challenge was how and where did parents/guardians and even the community fit into this system on how to effectively educate all of America’s children regardless of ethnicity, religion, SES, disability, age or gender (ESSA, 2016; Fege & Smith, 2002; Reeves, 2003; U. S. Department of Education, 2003).

Theoretical Rationale

The two theories that were used to guide this study were the ecological theory by Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1978, 1986, 1994, 2005, 2009; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998), and critical race theory by Bell (1976a, 1976b) and Delgado (1987). The essence of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory (see Figure 1.1) denotes the complex layers that comprise a child’s environment (Swick & Williams, 2006). Bronfenbrenner presented his ideas for the ecological systems theory (EST) in his book entitled, The Ecology of Human Development (1994). This research compared the complexity of a child’s environment with the many layers of Russian dolls embedded within one another (Bronfenbrenner, 1978). Bronfenbrenner originally identified four types of systems: (a) microsystem, (b) exosystem, (c) mesosystem, (d) macrosystem, and later added on (1986)
(e) the chronosystem. Bronfenbrenner (1978) defined these systems as the following: (a) microsystem refers to the child’s immediate environment which centers on the world in which they live, (b) exosystem includes a close relationship with families which refers to the safe-haven of family structure, (c) mesosystem connects two or more systems in which the child, parents, and family live, (d) macrosystem is the largest system which includes the family’s cultural beliefs, moral values of society and political/community views; it is the central energy link to daily living (Swick & Williams, 2006), and (e) chronosystem refers to the later developed structure of all dynamics of families’ historical context with varying systems (Swick & Williams, 2006).

Figure 1.1 Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1978).
Bronfenbrenner’s (1978) theory supports this study because, as the research notes, it allows the opportunity to understand the beliefs and behaviors children develop over time which is influenced by their environment and by their culture.

Critical race theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006) was best described by Mertens and Wilson (2012) as a conceptual framework that allows researchers to interrogate social, educational, and political issues by prioritizing the voices of participants of color and respecting the multiple roles played by scholars of color. According to the CRT, this theory denotes over 400 years of oppression experienced by people of African descent on the shores of the United States of America, Caribbean, and South America (Delgado, 1987; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; Tate, 1997). The theory goes on to say that the experiences of the ancestors that lived through the middle passage, slavery, Jim Crow laws, segregation, mass incarceration, poverty, and more, shaped the beliefs and behaviors of the people (Bell, 1980; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, 2006; National Association of Colored Women, 2002; Ogbu, 2003; Ogbu, & Simons, 1998). The theory also symbolizes the racial disparities African American parents/guardians and students have experienced both past and present (Bell, 1980; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, 2006; Ogbu, 2003; Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

In looking at CRT and its connection to the African American culture and to this study, initially, CRT was a movement that emerged in the mid-1970s on the appendages of the civil rights movement (Delgado & Stephanie, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, 2006; Solórzano, 1998). During the civil rights movement leaders like Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Thurgood Marshall, W.E.B. Du Bois, and others, politically advocated for human and social justice for African Americans/Blacks (Ogbru, 1995).
Many heroic Americans, Black and Caucasian, died in the struggle for equality from beatings, shootings and/or lynchings (Ogbu, 1995, 2003). CRT permits for the integration of counter storytelling as a methodological instrument so that parents’ voices can be a focus of the study (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Humes, 2016). Counter storytelling will be revisited in Chapter 2 in more depth.

In 1955, a young African American boy, Emmett Till, was only 14 years of age. He was allegedly flirting with a Caucasian woman and was savagely beaten and lynched for his comments (Hudson-Weems, 2006). This period fueled the onset of the CRT which centered on studying and transforming the relationship of race, racism, and power. At this time, lawyers, activists, and leaders like Bell (1980a, 1982, 1997), and Delgado (1987) shaped the CRT to focus on civil rights and ethical issues, yet, the broader social perspective included economics, history, self and group interest, context, emotions, and the unconscious themes to ponder. The CRT also challenged educational themes like controversy over school curriculum and history, equality, hierarchy, tracking, school discipline, IQ and achievement testing for Black and Brown children (Ogbu, 1995, 2003).

CRT was a vital part of the African American experience (Bell, 1980, 1982, 1997; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; Ogbu, 1995, 2003; Ogbu & Simmons, 1998). For instance, Ogbu and Simons (1998) described the experience as oppressive and racist. They went on to explain in their study, *Voluntary and Involuntary Minorities: A Cultural-Ecological Theory of School Performance with Some Implications for Education* (1998), how early settlers of America built the nation on the premise of conquering, colonizing, and enslaving involuntary (nonimmigrants) minorities so that the settler society which
Ogbu and Simmons (1998) refers to as the dominant group, Caucasian Americans (immigrants), would profit.

This research goes on to say that the Caucasian Americans profited by oppressing the involuntary minorities as they sought power over economics, political, and social status (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998). Thus, understanding the experiences and thinking of the African American parents/guardians helps connect how they decide to engage with their children at home, in schools, and in the community. According to Ogbu and Simmons (1998), after over 400 years of slavery, 100 years of Jim Crow laws, 75 years of miseducation and abuse, and 50 years of public lynchings, these cycles of oppression and injustice have impacted the beliefs and behavior of African American people then and now (Davidson, 1988; Emdin, 2016; Humes, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, 2006; National Association of Colored Women, 2002; Ogbu, 2003), especially in the area of education and parenting.

According to Ogbu (2003), CRT has affected the beliefs and behaviors and has resonated in the lives of their offspring. CRT affords an opportunity for “legal storytelling” which refers to Black and Brown people recounting their personal perspectives about experiences in their life; early childhood, adolescents, adulthood with race, racism, and unequal power that may have impacted their existence (i.e., emotions, decisions, careers, etc.). This theory allows for a deeper understanding of the parents’ and guardians’ perspectives and how CRT has shaped their beliefs and behaviors which can influence their level of parent engagement (Bennett-Conroy, 2011). Understanding the African American parents’ and guardians’ perspectives on parent engagement and how it impacts the necessity to impart cultural transmission to their child shall be an opportunity
to broaden the knowledge base of current thinking while motivating African American youth to excel (Humes, 2016; Ogbu, 1974, 1987, 2003).

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspective of African American parents on the relevance of parent engagement and meaningful cultural awareness experiences that contribute to academic achievement of African American middle school students in grades 6, 7, and 8 in an urban school setting. Researchers have documented that parent engagement is an important aspect of educational success for all students (Arnold et al., 2008; Daresbourg, & Blake, 2013; Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005, 2007; Wherry, 2003; Williams & Portman, 2014; Wooden, 2010). Parent engagement is often an outgrowth of how the parents were raised and how they respond to educational situations from prior experiences (Gordon et al., 2005; Swick & Williams, 2006).

**Research Questions**

Creswell (2012) contends that research questions were interrogative statements that narrow the statement of purpose to specific questions. (Creswell & Ollerenshaw 2002).

Research questions for this study include:

1. How do urban African American parents/guardians define and describe parent engagement?

2. What culturally relevant experiences do urban African American parents/guardians perceive as impacting the success of their child?
3. What role do urban African American parents/guardians play in their children’s schooling?

4. What can schools do to create a better partnership between home and school for African-American families?

**Potential Significance of the Study**

The African American perspective has been historically understudied, specifically in the United States educational system (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Humes, 2016). The purpose of this study was to gain insight into how parent engagement and cultural awareness/transmission fosters student academic outcomes for African American students. According to Fraser, Kirby, and Smokowski (2004), supportive adult relationships were a part of the resources needed for student resiliency. Student resiliency pertains to students succeeding against all odds regardless of SES, ethnicity, age, religion, gender, behavior, disability, and/or performance on standardized test scores (Evans-Winters, 2005; Ford, 1994; Fraser et al., 2004; Garmezy, 1993; Mummery, Schofield, & Perry, 2004; Reeves, 2003; Rogers, 2006). The significance of this study will assist in the enhancement of parent engagement practices, professional development strategies, and student growth. Furthermore, this study will be significant in helping parents identify best practices and strategies used by parents to overcome obstacles to parent engagement and perhaps, enhanced student achievement.

**Definitions of Terms**

This researcher’s working definitions were the following:
*Academic intervention services* (AIS) – refers to academic support beyond the regular, standard instructional day which may occur before, during or after school for children in an educational setting (Killeen & Sipple, 2004).

*Academic achievement* – refers to a student’s educational growth based on academic, cultural, social, and emotional needs being maintained at an appropriate grade level based on their current age.

*African American* - referred to parents/families and students of African (diaspora) descent living in America; who were born in America of African or Caribbean decent. People born in Africa living in America not of European decent. Sub-Saharan African entries were classified as Black or African American with the exception of Sudanese and Cape Verdean because of their complex, historical heritage. North African entries were classified as Caucasian, as OMB defines Caucasian as a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa (U.S. Census, 2010).

*At risk* - refers to school-aged children not achieving grade level (i.e., level 3 or level 4) scores on standardized test scores in English language arts and mathematics, as well as, not being on grade level at the age appropriate time based on the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP).

*Cultural awareness* - was referred to as information, activities, programs, and or events that were traditional, cultural or educational.

*Cultural (capital) transmission* – referred to investing in your child/ren. The investment is imparting values, morals, and goals that were translated through ongoing educational, cultural, social, and emotional activities that the parents were involved in with their child/ren.
Culturally relevant education - a teaching methodology devoted to individual and collective empowerment, which cultivates the intellectual, social, emotional, and political learning of students by using resources to teach knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes while respecting cultural differences, as well as, similarities.

General instruction – referred to the direct instruction that students receive during school time for subject areas like, ELA, mathematics, science, social studies, and extracurricular activities such as physical education, art, music, health, and language.

Measurement of academic progress – (MAP) referred to an assessment tool to measure personalized assessment experience by adapting to each student’s learning level. It precisely measures student progress and growth for each individual.

Parent engagement – the 21st century definition referred to a two-way transparent immersion of communication between parents/guardians with the school community to benefit the well-being of the developing child on multiple levels; educational, social, cultural, emotional, and recreational.

Resilience – pertains to students succeeding against all odds regardless of SES, ethnicity, age, religion, gender, behavior, disability, and or performance on standardized test scores.

Socioeconomic status (SES) - (U. S. Department of Education, 2003) referred to an economic and sociological combination to derive at a total measure of a person's work experience and of an individual's or family's economic and social position in relation to others, based on income, education, and occupation. When analyzing a family's SES, the household income, earners' education, and occupation were examined, as well as combined income, versus individual, when their own attributes were assessed. SES was
more commonly known to depict an economic difference in society as a whole.

Socioeconomic status was typically broken into three categories (high SES, middle SES, and low SES) to describe the three areas a family or an individual may fall into. When placing a family or individual into one of these categories, any or all of the three variables (income, education, and occupation) can be assessed.

*Suburban* – referred to students and families who live in residential, out-of-town, suburbia area(s).

*Supplemental education* – referred to parents/guardians and community members creating opportunities for children to learn that were educational, cultural, social, and recreational; it hones in on the cultural, social, emotional development of the child. The learning can take the form of cultural events, history, tutoring, field trips, music, dance, and/or any activity that would supplement the education a child receives in school.

*Urban* – referred to students and families who live in a city, town, inner-city, borough, and/or a metropolitan area.

**Chapter Summary**

The major topics that were discussed in Chapter 1 are further explained in Chapter 2. These major topics pertain to the definition of parent engagement, the history of parent engagement practices in the United States, the history of parent engagement in the African American culture, the importance of parent engagement, benefits of parent engagement, and the barriers to African American parent engagement. An over-arching aspect of parent engagement that emerged from the research was that parents/guardians play a vital role in imparting values, beliefs, and behaviors to their children (Arnold et al., 2008; Bridglall & Gordon, 2002; Dearing et al., 2006; Fan & Chen, 2001; Gordon et al.,
2005; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Humes, 2016; Lareau, 1987, 1989, 2002; Lareau & Shumar, 1996; Lawrence, 2013; Schneider & Coleman, 1993; Wherry, 2003; Williams & Portman, 2014; Wooden, 2010). For example, the study conducted by Lawrence (2013) demonstrated that many factors affect how parent engagement is defined especially as it pertains to cultural, educational, and SES matters with minority urban communities.

The history of parent engagement in the United States has emerged from a society that made education available if you could afford it, to a public system that deemed all children worthy to receive a free and public education (Donahoo, 2013; Edutopia, 2017; ESSA, 2016; Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childs, 2004; LaCroix, 2014; Malcolm, 2014; Reeves, 2003). Lacroix’s (2014) study demonstrated the need for continued federally funded programs like Title I reading programs to exist. These programs provided support and encouraged at-risk and/or struggling readers to be motivated to read. This study explored how policy and parents’ advocacy affect minority urban public school districts.

Culturally, the history of parent engagement in the African American culture has been an oral tradition, passed down from one generation to the next (Humes, 2016; Jennings & Hughes, 2013; Tobin & Snyman 2008). According to Humes (2016), the use of this oral history in education has viable outcomes that can be used to help children learn in a culturally relevant and responsive way. This concept will be further explored in Humes’s study which hones in on the significance of storytelling to impart values, traditions, history, and fosters an excellence for learning which respects and supports diversified learning styles, while improving student academic outcomes.
According to the U. S. Department of Education (2003), the importance of parent engagement emerged as a vital component to use to collaborate with the federal government, state, and local municipalities, school districts, and communities to assure that all children were college and/or career ready. Agreeing that all stakeholders should have a say, Malcolm’s (2014) study suggested that it was important to hear from the students in regard to their perceptions on parent engagement and programs that can help them succeed. Nonetheless, researchers overwhelmingly concur that the benefits of parent engagement outweigh the negatives by providing educational, cultural, social, emotional, and recreational support especially for middle school students transitioning from elementary school settings (Brown-Richards, 2011; Cokley, & Chapman, 2008; Eccles et al., 1983; Epstein, 2001; Fan & Chen, 2001, 2013; Hrabowski et al., 1998; LaCroix, 2014; Malcolm, 2014; Martin, 2000; Noble & Morton, 2013). As the transition to middle grades becomes more challenging, so do the academic demands in preparation for college and careers. Additionally, Brown-Richards’s (2011) study empowered adolescents to speak candidly about how parents can provide the needed support for academic achievement during the middle school years. The research from Malcolm (2014) and Brown-Richards’s (2011) both provide a strong link to the importance of parent engagement from the perceptive of the transitioning adolescent which was a strategic reason the researcher considered the perspective of the parents/guardians of middle schoolers in grades 6, 7, and 8 for further research. In Chapter 2, the researcher examined the point of view of the adolescents in detail.

Meanwhile, barriers of African American parent engagement relate to CRT which encompassed the social injustices and disparities that shape the morals, values, beliefs,
and behaviors of an underrepresented population (Delgado, 1987; Dotterer et al., 2009; Humes, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008). A study by Bennett-Conroy (2011) demonstrated a low-cost effective way for parent engagement that fosters a bidirectional communication with the teachers to support academic achievement in spite of the societal barriers.

This study focused on African American parent engagement of urban middle schoolers in grades 6, 7, and 8. The research explored the relationship between parent engagement and academic achievement, as measured through the NYS Standards test. The significance of this phenomenological qualitative study was to add to the body of knowledge and examine the experiences of African American parents/guardians of middle schoolers. This study planned to fill the gap in the literature specifically from the African American parents’/guardians’ perspectives.

This researcher used a broader lens (Bolman & Deal, 2013) to observe the participants by utilizing Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979) and critical race theory (Bell, 1976b; Delgado, 1987) as the theoretical framework for the study. In Chapter 2, this researcher explored family stressors that impact student academic achievement discussed by Swick and Williams (2006) to better understand the significant gap between African American/Black, Latino, and Caucasian students. This academic achievement gap has been well documented in public education and denotes that students of color lag behind their Caucasian counterparts in areas such as standardized testing, high school completion rates, academic achievement, and college attendance and completion (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; O’Connor et al., 2006; Thomas et al., 2009; Valencia, 2000; Vega et al., 2012). Students in the 21st century will need to be prepared
for an ever-changing global society (Donahoo, 2013; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005; Meyer, 2009; NYSED, 2016; Reeves, 2003). This researcher provided an authentic approach to understand the perspective of African American parents/guardians by creating a means to explore the actualization of CRT and its impact on parent engagement. Thus, the quest for how parent engagement for African American students can enhance academic achievement was at the forefront of this study.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature. Chapter 3 provides details on the research methodology. Chapter 4 discusses the findings of the research and Chapter 5 provides implications and recommendations for the future.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

This chapter identifies the related review of the literature surrounding parent engagement, parents’ perspective, and engagement of African American parents, as well as the developmental transitions of adolescents. Included in the literature review are the challenges of the middle school students in grades 6, 7, and 8 that are highlighted – social, emotional, physical, and academic. The scholars’ research discussed their findings pertaining to the essence of defining parent engagement including definitions from theorists Epstein (2001), Epstein and Sheldon (2002), and Henderson and Mapp, (2002). The literature review gave an historical context of parent engagement practices in the United States and in the African American culture. The literature review pertained to the importance of parent engagement and the benefits of parent engagement, especially noting the influences of parent engagement in the African American culture from the perspective of parents. Furthermore, the researcher used Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) ecological theory and critical race theory (Bell, 1976a, 1976b; Delgado, 1961, 1987) to guide the foundation for the theoretical framework. Finally, the chapter culminates with literature in regard to the barriers to African American parent engagement (Desimone, 1999; Dotterer et al., 2009; Harris & Graves, 2010; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008).

Middle school challenges. Traditionally, students in the middle grades are at the pinnacle of maturation moving from high parent dependency to more social independence (Vanneman, Hamilton, Anderson, & Rahman, 2009). Nonetheless, boys
and girls mature at different rates mentally, physically, socially, and emotionally (Harris & Graves, 2010). According to the research of Burchinal et al. (2008), adolescents were experiencing hormonal and psychological changes that affect their social, cultural, emotional, and academic needs as they embark on becoming middle school students. The demands of “making the grade” are a critical transition for middle school students preparing to enter a mindset for a middle/high school challenge (Burchinal et al., 2008; Eccles, 2007; Rouse & Austin, 2002; Wang & Eccles, 2012). Researchers contend that success in middle school is a strong indicator of high school graduation (Daggett, 2005; Mullins & Irvin, 2000; Vanneman et al., 2009).

**Theorists of parent engagement.** The framework of Epstein’s (2001) (see Figure 2.1) work sets the tone to define the interconnectedness of home, school, and community having an impact on student academic achievement by means of parent engagement. During this process parents/guardians were encouraged to engage in programs and activities in the school setting. As a result, Epstein (1991) and Epstein and Sheldon (2002), developed research with the six types of parent engagement in the elementary, middle, and secondary grades. In the 1991 study, Epstein and Dauber compared school programs and the teacher practices with parent engagement. The study involved eight elementary and middle schools in the inner city of Baltimore, Maryland with 171 teachers participating. The purpose of the study was to examine the perceptions of teachers and to compare the relationship and connections between the school programs centered on parent engagement and the practices teachers utilized to engage parents to participate. The data collection consisted of a 10-item questionnaire that was divided in sub-questions regarding parent engagement topics. The results
suggested that the teachers displayed strong attitudes on how parents needed to be involved, yet, the teachers’ practices and school programs were not in alignment to support rigorous ongoing parent engagement. The study by Epstein (1991) suggested that once parents made a choice to be engaged, specific steps were needed to keep parents engaged for the lifespan of their child’s academic career. Figure 2.1 depicts Epstein’s model (2001).

![Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence Model](image)

*Figure 2.1. Epstein’s overlapping spheres of influence model (2001).*

Henderson and Mapp (2002) supported the notion that environmental factors make a difference in the life of children and it was a strong link of parent engagement that impacted academic achievement, rather than SES. They were proponents of home, school, and community intricately connecting to foster quality schools with excellence in education that prepare all students for college and career readiness. Henderson and Mapp (2002) forged a new wave of building community schools that support families and
hold schools accountable for creating a welcoming, supportive, and informative school climate that reached out to all of its stakeholders, especially the neighbors, the community members, and leaders.

**Academic achievement in New York State.** Academic achievement was measured in NYS with the Common Core Learning Standards (Common Core State Standards [CCSS], 2010). CCSS were expectations set forth by states to prepare all students to be college and career ready by the end of grade 12 for English language arts (ELA) and literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects (CCSS, 2010). In accordance with the CCSS (2010) and under NCLB (2002), student learning and academic achievement in New York State is annually assessed by standardized assessments for English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. These performance assessments rate students from a level 4 to level 1. The performance rating is the following: level 4 equivalent to above proficient, level 3 equivalent to proficient, level 2 equivalent to below proficient, and level 1 equivalent to well below proficient level (NCLB, 2002). Unfortunately, less than 40% of the eighth graders in the United States were currently at or above proficiency on standardized test scores in reading and mathematics (NCES, 2016). Based on data collected nationwide, many Caucasian Americans/European Americans were outperforming students of color on standardized tests (Darensbourg & Blake, 2013; Dotterer et al., 2009; NYSED, 2016). In order to level the academic gap between students in different subgroups (i.e., African American, Hispanic, Alaskan, students with disabilities, etc.), policymakers sought new ways to bring about educational reform with the Every Student Succeeds Act (2016) by insisting
parent engagement be included as an important component that denotes a positive effect on academic achievement (ESSA, 2016; Fan & Williams, 2010; Yeung & Pfeiffer, 2009).

To date, in 2017, the newly elected Board of Regents Chancellor, Betty Rosa announced that progressive academic achievement in quality schools needed to involve all stakeholders (i.e., parents, students, teachers, administrators, superintendents, community leaders, etc.) in the conversation of utilizing transformative practices to benefit all students. These transformative practices demand the need for agreed upon indicators of school quality and academic achievement which justifiably hold schools accountable for academic achievement (NYSED, 2017). Under the NCLB Act (2002) NYS was still required to use proficiency rates for students in ELA and mathematics as an indicator of academic achievement along with graduation rates. In accordance with ESSA Act (2016), NYS is also now required to ensure that English language learners make progress in acquiring proficiency in English (NYSED, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Under the direction of Regents Chancellor, Betty Rosa, additional indicators must include measures for school quality or academic achievement with at least one of the following measures of student access to and completion of advanced coursework: readiness for postsecondary learning, school climate and safety is conducive to learning, student engagement is paramount and encouraged; teacher engagement is professional, consistent and effective; or any other measure that meaningfully differentiates among schools and is effective, consistent, equivalent and available for schools statewide (Taylor, 2016). Each suggested indicator must also take into account the grade level span of the school community (NYSED, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2016).
A study that supported academic achievement through parents’ behaviors was the Brown-Richards (2011) study. Brown-Richards (2011) conducted a qualitative study focused on African American adolescents’ perception of what parent behaviors foster academic achievement. The researcher’s goal was to identify parenting behaviors deemed influential by African American urban achievers and whether the identified behaviors conform to Baumrind’s parenting style taxonomy (1967, 1971). Her study was facilitated at a community recreation center on the northwest side of Lilac, NY. The participants were African American adolescents in grades 7 through 10 who attended the Flower City School District. The participants were all of African American ethnicity with six males and one female in the study. First, the parents were invited to an invitational to understand and give consent for their adolescent to participate in the study, as well as to complete a demographic questionnaire.

This taxonomy was developed to identify the parenting framework of Baumrind (1967, 1971) (See Figure 2.2). Baumrind’s theory (1967) originally prescribed that there were three parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. Researchers (Maccoby & Martin, 1983) who prescribed to Baumrind’s theory, later added on the fourth parenting style; neglectful. According to Baumrind’s theory, the first style of parenting, authoritarian (too hard), refers to a parenting style that is considered harsh, rigid, and stern. The authoritarian parents demonstrated a high demand with low response from the child. An authoritarian parent was in control and was demanding. This type of parent was not receptive to ideas or suggestions of his or her children. An authoritarian parent can be borderline abusive (e.g. verbally or physically) with the child.
The second type of parenting style, the authoritative parent, was highly demanding and highly receptive to the ideas and suggestions of his or her children. Authoritative (just right) refers to a parenting style that was high demanding with colossal responsiveness from the child. This parent was firm yet, supportive, and fair. The authoritative parent listens to the needs of the child and responds with a broader viewpoint with consideration of the child’s point of view. This parenting style was favored by Baumrind (1967, 1971).

The third type of parenting style, permissive (too soft), referred to a parenting style with low demand and high response from the child. The permissive parent does not place high demands and was highly responsive to the needs of his or her children. The permissive parents were inconsistent with expectations and allowed the child to set their own perimeters. This parenting style demonstrated a lack of parent control/involvement. Often, the child has been referred to as spoiled. Last, the neglectful parenting style, referred to low demandingness and low responsiveness. The neglectful parent was not demanding in nature and does not respond to the needs of the children. The effect of Baumrind’s three parenting (1967) styles suggest that it will influence children’s psychopathology, behavior, and education. The benefits of the authoritative parenting style spans across all racial groups. It does not matter what ethnic group the students come from. If they grew up in a house with authoritative parents, they were more likely to succeed in school and after graduation.
Brown-Richards’s (2011) study focused on parenting behaviors. She set out to uncover the perspective of adolescent achievers and she conducted 10 interviews; seven initial interviews and three follow-up interviews. Lastly, the seven adolescents’ report cards were reviewed. The study examined (a) what parenting behaviors were acknowledged as significant by adolescent African American urban achievers, and (b) whether the acknowledged behaviors conform to Baumrind’s parenting style taxonomy (1967, 1971, 1991, and 1995). As a result, two major categories were studied, known as “Student Perceptions/Opinions of their Parents’ Behaviors” and “Student Recommended Influential Parenting Strategies” and four themes emerged. The second interviews afforded the researcher to ask clarifying questions such as, (a) how do you think you were
doing in school? (b) how do your parents react to your report card? and (c) what do your parents do to help you do well in school? Ultimately, the themes emerged from discussion of specific lines of questioning.

The researcher also provided students with a sample parents behavior guide (SPBG) which included a variety of practices and behaviors compiled from various researchers who previously studied parents’ behavior. At this point in the interview, the researcher asked questions about whether there was any information missing or anything they as parents would do differently as an African American/Black. Additionally, the students were asked to assume the role of parents and share, what, if anything, they would do to help their child succeed in school. As a result, the four themes were the following: (a) use specific language with your child, (b) verbal motivation, (c) I have a routine and I have rules, and (d) parents’ involvement; I want your help and give me discipline, rewards, and consequences. The themes also were classified into two dimensions related to Baumrind’s parenting style theory: demandingness and responsiveness. The findings indicated that the student voice was a valuable component to be considered.

**Definition of parent engagement.** Over the course of many years, there are many definitions of parent engagement that have emerged (Collins, 1984; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hill & Taylor, 2004, Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2005, 2010; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2004). As we consider the topic, we must also consider the position of the perspective these definitions also reflect, whether it is from the viewpoint of a researcher, policymakers, educators, parents, or students (Cooper, 2010; Daresbourg & Blake, 2013; Davis-Kean & Sexton, 2009; Williams & Portman, 2014). Researchers like Hill et
al. (2004) define parent engagement as interacting with their children at school to promote academic achievement. Researchers, such as Henderson and Mapp (2002) and Bower and Griffin (2011) all contended that parent engagement is the link between home and school for school-aged children, while Wooden (2010) defined parent engagement as parents and guardians taking responsibility for building a relationship with school to support learning. In addition, policymakers designed the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) which gives a very descriptive account of parent engagement as “the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities” (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002, p. 1118).

Jeynes (2011) noted that the complexity of parent engagement is broader than most researchers suspected which attributes to the paradigm shift from parents involvement to parent engagement. Abdul-Adil and Framer (2006) contended that traditional definitions of parent engagement make demands on parents, yet, reciprocal demands were not made of the school to ensure all students succeed academically.

Additionally, many theorists such as Bronfenbrenner (1994), Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994), Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995), and Epstein (2001) have created parent engagement frameworks to substantiate the basic definitions regarding parent engagement researchers have suggested. As defined by these researchers, although similar, each framework has a different structural focus which includes relationships among family, school, and community. These multifaceted models begin to focus on how students were affected by parent engagement, why parents do or do not engage in their children’s education, and what role schools and teachers play in creating
opportunities for parent engagement (Bennett-Conroy, 2011; Malcolm, 2014). Figure 2.3 outlines parent engagement models.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bronfenbrenner</td>
<td>Ecological Systems Theory (EST)</td>
<td>1976b, 1977, 1979, 2005</td>
<td>5 systems; micro, exo, meso, macro, chromo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grolnick and Slowiaczek</td>
<td>Tri-dimensional Model</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>3 dimensions based parent-child interactions that affect students’ school involvement and motivation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler</td>
<td>Multi-dimensional Model</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Focus on the “why” parents get involved and five levels: parent engagement decision, choice of involvement forms, mechanisms to influence outcomes, tempering or mediating variables and child/student outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epstein</td>
<td>Epstein Model</td>
<td>2001, 2009</td>
<td>Spheres of Influence; family, school, and community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henderson and Mapp</td>
<td>Community-School Model</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Home, school, and community inter-connected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.3. Parent Engagement Models.

Review of the Literature

Theoretical framework. The theoretical work of Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979, 2005), originally described his ecological systems theory as having multiple levels of influence on the development in which home and school were in tandem to combine forces to support the growth of an individual. Bronfenbrenner hailed the family system as the most significant and proximal system in a child’s early learning (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). He was also hailed as a co-founder of the Federal Head Start program (Zigler, & Styfco, 2010).

Ryan (2001) defined the Bronfenbrenner ecological theory of development denoting the complex layers that comprise a child’s environment. Later, Bronfenbrenner
presented his ideas for the ecological theory in his book entitled, *The Ecology of Human Development* (1994). This research compared the complexity of a child’s environment with the many layers of Russian dolls embedded within one another (Bronfenbrenner, 1978, 1979, 2005). Bronfenbrenner originally identified four types of systems: (a) microsystem, (b) exosystem, (c) mesosystem, (d) macrosystem and later added on (1986), and (e) the chronosystem. Bronfenbrenner (1978) defined these systems as the following: (a) microsystem refers to the child’s immediate environment which centers on the world in which they live; (b) exosystem includes a close relationship with families which refers to the safe-haven of family structure; it is an environment in which the individual is indirectly involved and is external to his/her experience, yet may affect him/her anyway like a parents’ workplace; (c) mesosystem connects two or more (micro) systems in which the child, parents, and family live; (d) macrosystem is the largest system which includes the family’s cultural beliefs, moral values of society, and political/community views; it is the central energy link to daily living (Swick & Williams, 2006); and (e) chronosystem refers to the later developed structure of all dynamics of families’ historical context with varying systems (Swick & Williams, 2006).

According to Swick and Williams (2006), families were enduring stressors which impact their daily living. Naturally, there were many stressors that impeded child and family development, yet, three were consistent – chemical dependency, family violence, and homelessness (Swick & Williams, 2006). These researchers offer childhood educators research based strategies to engage and support families by having a better understanding of their needs to ultimately enhance the value of the child and family. Swick and Williams (2006) constructed their research based strategies building on the
The work of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005) because the five systems were inclusive and reflected the dynamic relations of family. These strategies highlighted the insights of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2005) bioecological perspectives to help educators better understand families and improve bidirectional communication with families. The ultimate goal was to seek to understand the needs of families and to support them in caring ways while being mindful “to do no harm” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Swick and Williams (2006) offered three key insights to early childhood professionals as they interact with families stressed by chemical dependency: (a) family daily dynamics were impacted by chemical dependency, (b) family members were sensitive and protective of one another as a result of challenges of drug abuse (i.e., violence), and (c) more family support is needed due to the emotional drain of chemical dependency.

Swick (2001) encouraged early childhood educators to use key strategies to support families with the challenge of chemical dependency by doing the following: (a) encourage families to access needed education on chemical dependency while seeking counseling to address the addiction, (b) provide resources and empower families of coping with the challenges attributed to chemical dependency; and (c) engage the family members in learning healthy, safe, sustainable ways to improve family living. Some behaviors exhibited by during family violence include control, abuse, disrespect, manipulation, intimidation, isolation, and degradation. Family violence is impacted by society and violence in society is on the rise (Swick & Williams, 2006). Family violence that is chronic and repetitive creates an atmosphere of dysfunction. This dysfunction
impedes proactive parenting, parents-child relations, parent work performance, and involvement in school and community (Swick, 2005).

Three key insights to help early childhood educators focus on ways to support children and families with these situations are the following: (a) violence in families is widespread, (b) victims of family violence display a *psychology of fear*, and (c) breaking the cycle of violence is impacted by early intervention of therapy and counseling (Swick, 2005). Hallowell (2002) suggested two insights to empower families experiencing violence: (a) provide opportunities for engagement in developing and using caring behaviors, and (b) refer families to agencies and other supportive professionals who can address their issues and challenges they face.

In regard to homelessness, this stressor is generally coupled with additional challenges such as poverty, eviction from home or apartment, domestic violence, natural disasters, unemployment, etc. These challenges immeasurably impact the family dynamics in serious ways that include lack of control of daily routines, loss of privacy, loss of self-esteem, loss of resources (social and economic), limited family support, disruption of communication systems, isolation from support system, added personal stress, constant mobility, and uncertainty, as well as additional factors (Swick & Freeman, 2004. Swick and Williams (2006) reported that each homeless family is unique, yet, experience similar trauma centered on three areas: economic, social, and related problems. Four insights to support homeless families overcome these situations are the following: (a) develop empathy, (b) provide responsive support such as transportation for children to school and after school, (c) create a welcoming family
resource center at the school, and (d) empower children and families with meaningful educational programs and social events.

Swick and Williams (2006) professed that early childhood professionals need to seek an understanding of the situations families were experiencing, as well as inclusively considering cultural, social, economic, and educational dynamics which impact the five systems in Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2005) EST. These researchers emphasized three key behaviors to support personal, cultural, and social attributes of families: (a) prioritize and responsively respond to the needs the family has expressed, (b) partner with parents to model sustainable leadership skills; and (c) foster ongoing reflections of relations with parents, children, and families to build and support sustainable growth to enhance family structure. These caring behaviors foster energy and support for families under stress and help them regain confidence and dignity while attaining improved parenting skills, in meaningful ways that improve the lives of their children (Swick & Williams, 2006). These researchers symbolically link the five systems explicated by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005) in his bioecological perspective to support stressed families in need of hope and renewed purpose. They recommended that educators use these strategies and approaches; (a) support families to develop caring and loving microsystems (Swick, 2005), (b) assist families in becoming more empowered in their exosystem relations (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), (c) nurture in families ways they can use mesosystems to be equipped to better respond to the specific stressors they encounter (Heretick et al., 2003), (d) advocate for stronger family support strategies and policies in macrosystem contexts which younger families live (Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000); and (e) encourage families to learn from their personal, family, and societal, historical lives (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).
Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (EST) provided a conceptual framework to support the policies of the National Research Council (NRC) (2001), which indicated that schools need to promote partnerships to increase parent engagement (NRC, 2001; U.S. Education, 2003). This theory proposes that a child’s behaviors develops over time which is influenced by their environment and by their culture. For the purpose of this study, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory is the one of the two lead theories for this study, as it pertains to the development of the child and his or her surroundings, as it relates to parent engagement, and academic achievement. Additionally, the research based insights and strategies that Swick and Williams (2006) provide, offer a link to the importance for parent engagement with cultural awareness, as well as the impact CRT may have on families.

**Influence of critical race theory on parent engagement.** The second theory used in this study was first introduced by Bell (1976b), who is known as the patriarch of critical race theory. This theory emerged in 1970s and influenced the lawyers, activists, and leaders of that time (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Bell was the first African American tenured professor at the Harvard Law School. He, along with other scholars, activists, lawyers, and leaders such as Alan Freeman, Richard Delgado, Robert Williams, Mari Matsuda, Kimberle Crenshaw, and other legal scholars acknowledged that the gains made during the civil rights movement became stagnant (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Bell and his colleagues saw a need for new strategies and theories to shape the inequities in race, racism, and power experienced in America (Ogbu, 1995, 2003).

According to Bernstein (2011), Derrick Albert Bell, Jr. was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He was the first member of his family to go to college. Bell attended and
received his bachelor’s degree in 1952 from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. Bell served in the Air Force for 2 years and later went on to the University of Pittsburgh Law School. Bell was the only Black student and in 1957 earned his law degree. Bell fought against racism embedded in laws and legal institutions until his death, at the age of 80, in 2011 (Bernstein, 2011; Leonardo & Harris, 2013). In his 2002 memoir, Ethical Ambition, Bell reflected on his career decisions and coined it as “a life of meaning and worth” signifying he did not regret standing for justice when many times he stood alone by being alienated by associates who saw his actions as controversial and risky (Bernstein, 2011; Leonardo & Harris, 2013). For instance, Bell was in his 20s when he was working at the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Justice Department. For fear of a conflict of interest, his superiors strongly urged Bell to give up his membership in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Instead, Bell resigned from the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Justice Department and worked for the Legal Defense and Educational Fund in the Pittsburgh office. In this role, Bell was instrumental in integrating a public swimming pool and an ice skating rink before he was assigned to Mississippi where he supervised over 300 cases of school desegregation cases. Thirty years later, Bell also resigned from Harvard Law School in protest to the university’s refusal to hire Black professors (Bernstein, 2011).

In 1985, Bell resigned from the University of Oregon when an Asian woman was denied tenure. In 1986 Bell returned to Harvard Law School, and subsequently staged a 5-day sit-in protest in his office because the university failed to grant tenure to two professors whose work centered on CRT. In 1990, Bell vowed to take an unpaid leave of absence in protest of the Harvard Law School refusing to hire a Black woman for a
faculty position. As a result, the Harvard Law School refused to extend Bell’s leave 2 years later and did not hire a Black female professor until 1998. By then, Bell was teaching at New York University Law School where he continued on as a visiting professor until his death from carcinoid cancer.

The NAACP, noted as the earliest and largest civil rights organization, was founded in 1909 in New York City by a group of intellectuals both Black and White which advocate for racial justice (NAACP, 2017). Initially, the NAACP was founded to bring racial inequality to the forefront for White Caucasian Americans. The NAACP went on to attack segregation and racial strife at its core by means of the courts. In 1915, the NAACP won a Supreme Court decision against a grandfather clause used in the southern states to prohibit Blacks from voting. And in 1927, the NAACP won another victory in regard to an all-White primary. The NAACP remained at the forefront of the evils of Jim Crow laws and rallied for federal anti-lynching laws. Additionally, by 1950, the NAACP challenged the legal doctrine set in place in 1896 with the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case that declared separate but equal schools for Black and White children were constitutional. The work of the NAACP was vital to the evidence presented on the impact of segregation. As a result, five states issued five desegregation cases that sparked national attention and fueled even more racial tension. In 1954, the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) deemed it unconstitutional for public schools to be separate but equal for Black and White children.

In light of the actions of the NAACP and the Supreme Court decisions, Bell was uneasy about the stagnant progress of race relations. As a leading law professor at Harvard Law School, Bell was revered as an expert, an advocate, and scholar on
American history (Bell et al., 2005; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). According to Yosso (2006), this prominence set the stage for Bell to make his case for critical race theory in his first published article. In 1976, this article, “Racial Remediation: A Historical Perspective on Current Conditions” was a historical overview of the plight from the time of the birthing of America with George Washington up to the time of the civil rights movement with Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Bell (1976a) asserted that some Caucasian Americans supported the fight against racial and social injustices only when it benefited Caucasian Americans rather than all people.

Bell contended in his article *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the *Interest Convergence Dilemma*, (1980b) that the Supreme Court’s decision was motivated more by the nation’s concerns as an anti-Communist military global force than sincere equality for African Americans/Blacks. As a scholar and activist, Bell advocated for improving all schools and not just desegregating them. His research led him to embark on a shift in his thinking that led to a new perspective on teaching and implementing the law. This led Bell to write, *Race, Racism and the American Law Book* (1980) to address this need (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995).

Bell used his book as the premise in teaching courses at Harvard Law, and scholars of color used it as a resource to teach at other universities (Bell, 1976b). According to Bell (1980), he left Harvard to become the dean of the University of Oregon Law School. The research goes on to say that the faculty replaced his presence with two distinguished Caucasian American scholars. Furthermore, Harvard officials insisted there were no other people of color with credentials to teach the course. Finally, as a result, the students boycotted the 3-week mini-course on civil rights litigation and they,
along with other student activists, demanded a scholar of color to teach the course. Last, empathetic Harvard teachers, along with outside funders made it possible for an alternative course to be created to continue Bell’s course which would focus on American law from a critical race lens. This series of guest lectures of scholars to speak ultimately was the foundation of founding contributors of critical race theory, which included Richard Delgado, Kimberle Crenshaw, and Mari Matsuda (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Bell remained a proponent of critical race theory until his passing in October, 2011.

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), critical race theory (CRT) envisaged the social construction of race, and the connection between race, racism, and power. Furthermore, critical race theory (CRT) society to inspect ideas of racism, sexism, and power embedded in American policy and its impact on American life (Delgado & Stefancic, 2006). This theory influenced researchers like Ladson-Billings and Tate in the mid-1990s to lay the foundation for critical race theory (CRT) in education (Gay, 2010). They maintained that, (a) race is a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States, (b) U.S. society is based upon property rights, and (c) the intersection of race and poverty creates a vehicle for analysis in which social and school inequality can be examined (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Hayes, Juárez, and Cross (2012) contended that there were five basic elements in education for critical race theory (CRT): (a) centrality of race and racism – all CRT research must centralize race and acknowledge the inner connectedness of race and other forms of subordination; (b) valuing experiential knowledge – CRT recognizes the significance of students of color as appropriate and crucial to understanding, analyzing and teaching about racial subordination in the field of education; an appreciation for
storytelling; learning from the success of the past as a framework for the present; (c) challenging the dominant perspective – CRT works to challenge the stock-majoritarian stories of the dominant culture; (d) commitment to social justice – social justice must be at the forefront which includes a critique of liberalism, objectivity, colorblindness, claims of neutrality, and any modality of self-interest; and (e) being interdisciplinary – CRT crosses epistemological boundaries by borrowing from several traditions to inclusively provide a complete analysis of racism, meaning that CRT is an inclusive process that intricately looks at every perspective before concluding with an assumption (Hayes et al., 2012). Solórzano and Yosso (2001) defined CRT as a framework for educational equity to expose racism in education and propose viable solutions to the issues uncovered.

Delgado and Stefancic (2006) professed that CRT in education supported a social justice curriculum and pedagogical work that leads to the eradication of racism, sexism, and poverty, yet promoted the empowerment of underrepresented subordinate groups. CRT theorists agree that the experiential knowledge of people of color is appropriate, legitimate, and integral to understanding racial inequality and moving closer to self-actualization (Hayes et al., 2012).

Solórzano and Yosso (2001) explained the integration of CRT with critical pedagogy by a method known as counter storytelling. This technique was originally used in the social sciences, the humanities and law storytelling (Humes, 2016; Solórzano & Yosso, 2006). Counter storytelling was a way to tell stories that have not been told, as well as to analyze and challenge the majoritarian stories of the dominant society (Humes, 2016; Solórzano & Yosso, 2006). To conceptualize the relevance of counter storytelling,
it was imperative to understand the story types that drive cultural narratives in society (Bell, Roberts, Irani, & Murphy, 2008).

As early as 1992, Bell wrote books and articles which echoed his belief of what he called “the interest convergence dilemma” meaning if the situation did not affect the livelihood of White Caucasians then it was of no interest to White Caucasians to change their point of view on racial inequality (Bernstein, 2011). Bernstein (2011) explained that Bell rejected legal analysis in favor of allegorical stories. These stories coined as legal storytelling or counter storytelling permitted people such as, African Americans to recount historical and/or daily situations from their point of view which was often not depicted in media or history books. Bell would present a parable about an injustice in race relations, then debate their meaning with a fictional alter ego. This was demonstrated in one of his best known parables in his book entitled, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* (1992). Bell told a parable that envisioned wiping out national debt with enough gold; it would cleanse America of polluted skies and water, as well as provide a limitless source of safe energy as a substitute of deteriorating reserves with a wave of a magical chemical, in exchange for one thing – its Black population which would be orbited to outer space for all eternity. As a result, the White Caucasian accepts the offer without reservation. In 1994, Bell’s parable, “The Space Traders,” was made into a movie titled *Cosmic Slop*. In 1997, Bell received resistance from some of his colleagues like Richard Posner, the conservative law professor and appeals court judge, in regard to abandoning allegory in legal scholarship and transferring to more of a narrative. Proponents argued that Bell perpetuated stereotypes about the non-dominant society. Nonetheless, the narrative technique became
an acceptable mode of legal scholarship, a new way of introducing personal experiences into legal discourse (Bernstein, 2011).

In the mid-1970s, Bell hailed as the father of critical race theory. However, other critical race theory scholars also helped to shape its existence such as Matsuda, Delgado, Crenshaw, Ladson-Billings and Tate (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). The foundations of CRT were rooted in legal theory based on the notion that racism is normal in American society. CRT scholars challenged the dominant stories of a racist American society on the heels of slow racial reform incurred during the Civil Rights Movement. CRT scholars noted that Caucasian Americans were the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation in areas such as housing, employment, and education.

Bell (1976a, 1976b) aborted legal discourse and employed parables in his articles and books to express a narrative of oppression and inequity, to ultimately seek social justice. This form of expression was known as counter storytelling (Yosso, 2006). CRT challenged societal truths with a new narrative from the perspective of the African Americans who were marginalized and isolated as a population – a perspective that analyzed the historical, social, and economic constructs of American society that centered on race, racism, and power (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2010). CRT empowered legal scholars to examine laws, as well as policies and procedures that impacted the lives of African Americans (Bell, 1976a, 1976b; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2010).

As natural born citizens of America, many African Americans sought clarity on the role of education in America. Historically, the goal of education was to produce good citizens. This goal influenced CRT scholars to scrutinize educational inequities at its
infancy. Thus, CRT scholars examined the cherished civil rights victories with a new perspective, a perspective that challenged the lack of equal opportunities for people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). CRT scholars noted the complex intersectionality of citizenship and race in public education and mobilized commitment to ending oppression with social justice and action.

Thus, in 1994, CRT scholars, Ladson-Billings (1994) and Tate (1997) first linked the legal theory of CRT with the premise of CRT in education by presenting a paper for the American Educational Research Association (AERA). The presentation centered on examining the role of race and racism in education which naturally built on the work of Bell (1976a, 1976b) and discussed the intersectionality of race and property tax with the inequality in schools and schooling children of color (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

CRT in education continues to evolve to acknowledge and combat injustices in equity, resources, positionality, employment, curriculum development, and assessment; however, it is paramount that CRT in education be grounded in the CRT of legal scholarship to build and expand on its critical legal foundation established in the mid-1960s by Bell (1976a) and his colleagues (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Tate, 1997).

Nationally, CRT in education required policy makers, school districts, administrators, educators, and parents along with community members to create new ways of thinking and new ways of responding to the educational disparities plaguing children, especially Black and Brown children. Thus, Yosso (2006) subscribed to the idea of Bourdieu’s (1973) transmission of cultural capital. Yosso (2006) acknowledged the deficiency and prescribed the value of experimental knowledge and cultural assets of persons of color to counteract the breakdown in barriers to African American education.
History of parent engagement practices in the United States. Parent engagement practices have been in existence since the beginning of time (Berger, 1991; Cotton & Wikeland 1989; Gutman & McLoyd, 2000; Hauser-Cram, 2009; Humes, 2016). Even before history formally recorded parent engagement, evidence indicated the role of the parents was revered as the child’s first and foremost teacher through modeling, care giving, nurturing, and guidance (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Cooper, 2010; Cremin, 1974; Eccles & Harold, 1996; Gordon et al., 2005). Parents imparted values, traditions, customs, and skills, which were influenced by their lived experiences, the environment in which they lived, and their culture (Cook, 2000; Humes, 2016; Malcolm, 2014). Parent engagement practices in the United States have been strongly influenced by its global neighbors (Berger, 1991).

According to Berger (1991), during primitive times, oral education was conveyed by the immediate and the extended family along with the clan (i.e., cultural community). As civilization evolved, home schooling led to schooling outside the home. Berger (1991) insisted the first formal education emerged during the Egyptian middle kingdom. In the sixth century, B.C., the Greek society valued how children were reared and issued governing regulations for schools’ and parents’ responsibilities. Berger (1991) noted how Plato, Aristotle, and Locke all viewed children as impressionable beings, in need of cultivation and nurturing. Children were valued as society’s hope for the future and proper rearing was essential. After the Middle Ages, Locke, stressed the importance of modeling appropriate behaviors and actions in front of children that warranted superb parenting practices (Berger, 1991). Berger (1991) commented that Locke echoed a strong sentiment that unfit parents who did not provide an adequate environment to
afford children the right to become productive citizens should relinquish their parental rights.

Other great thinkers of the time such as, Pestalozzi (1951) and Rousseau (1979) also valued the cultivation of children. According to Pestalozzi (1951), the mother played a critical role in rearing a child since it was the mother who first nourished the child’s body, so too its mind. Rousseau (1979) pronounced the importance of cultivating plants with proper nourishment to the comparison of the cultivating of the mind with education.

In the 19th and 20th centuries in the United States, child rearing and parent engagement was noteworthy (Baumrind, 1967, 1971; Cremin, 1974; Kohn, 1969; Root, 2008). During this historical period in education, the federal government and states created programming to support families with child rearing practices, and educational organizations emerged (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Cotton & Wikelund, 1989; Cremin, 1974; Zigler & Styfco, 2011). Organizations such as the American Association of University Women (AAUW), the Congress of Parents and Teachers (PTA), and the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) took root to focus on child development and spread best parenting practices (AAUW, 2017; Encyclopedia Britannica, 2014; NACW, 2002). This led to the emergence of Head Start (Zigler & Styfco, 2010) and kindergarten programs across the nation in the early 1960s.

Berger (1991) documented that regardless of World War I and II and the Great Depression, educational reform stayed at the forefront of change especially during the 1960s with Johnson’s presidency. Berger (1991) made a strong link with family structure and systems that was relevant in the past and remains consistent today when considering
the role of the parent. Essentially, parent role modeling and caring for one’s child is a defining factor to helping the child evolve over time into a productive citizen.

In the last 16 years, under the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) the federal government challenged states to include parents as partners to engage them in the process of educating all of America’s children (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012). To raise the bar on academic achievement, this policy emerged under the presidency of George W. Bush and Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were created to provide a unified approach for excellence in education (ESSA, 2016; Rampey, Dion & Donahue, 2009). Unfortunately, implementation of the CCSS was at the core of political controversy for equal distribution of federal funding, while states and districts spent time creating task-forces to plan roll-out guidelines for schools thus, it took lawmakers three years to adopt the NCLB Act (2002). The NCLB Act (2002) encouraged the federal government to mandate states to hold stakeholders (i.e., districts, administrators, and teachers) accountable for learning. This led to the re-examination of stakeholders taking responsibility for learning (i.e., government, districts, administrators, teachers, parents, and community partners). This led to full implementation of CCSS that were originally tailored to initially cut federal spending and unify excellence in education from state to state.

To date, the federal government entrusted state and local policymaking when it pertains to education (ESSA, 2016). As a result, the federal government passed the Every Student Succeeds Act in just three months (ESSA, 2016). The federal government insists that states use innovative and creative ways to educate all of America’s children, as they strive to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) (ESSA, 2016; Yeung & Pfeiffer,
2009). ESSA, also includes that ELL students make AYP. Under the presidency of Barack Obama, the national goal is for all students to be college and career ready as they enter the global market by 2019.

In the 21st century, empirical research demonstrates that the educational field has been under scrutiny by the federal government to make education accessible, excellent, and equitable for all children (NCLB, 2002; Rampey et al., 2009). However, in the last decade, the educational field remained under fire as the federal government mandated the No Child Left Behind Act (2002). These challenging times magnified the significant academic gap between African American and Caucasian students that has been well documented in public education (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006; Lee & Bowen, 2006). Researchers contend that students in the 21st century will need to be prepared for an ever-changing global society (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005; Meyer, 2009; NYSED, 2016; Reeves, 2003).

**Parent engagement models in history.** Additionally, many theorists such as Bronfenbrenner (1994), Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994), Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995), and Epstein (2001), created parent engagement frameworks to substantiate the basic definitions regarding parent engagement researchers have suggested. Although similar, each framework has a different structural focus which includes relationships between family, school, and community. These multifaceted models begin to focus on how students were affected by parent engagement, why parents do or do not engage in their children’s education, and what role schools and teachers play in creating opportunities for parent engagement (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; Education Encyclopedia, 2014).
Grolicn and Slowiaczek (1994) hypothesized three dimensions of parent engagement. This framework is based on parents-child interactions that affect students’ school involvement and motivation. The first dimension is centered on behavioral involvement, which refers to the actions of parents in public situations. The second dimension is personal involvement. This dimension integrates parents-child interactions that communicate positive attitudes about the school to the child. Cognitive/intellectual involvement is the final dimension. This refers to the behaviors that augment the development of skills and knowledge within the child.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) created a multidimensional model of parent engagement that focuses on the “why” parents become involved in their child’s education and how this engagement has a positive effect on children’s educational outcomes. This framework has five levels which include the following: parent engagement decision, parents’ choice of involvement forms, mechanisms to influence child/student outcomes, tempering or mediating variables and child/student outcomes. Level one is the parent engagement decision which encompasses parents proactively deciding to be involved in the parenting process. The level of parent engagement is strongly influenced by the parents’ construction of the parent role, and the general opportunities and demands for parent engagement presented by the child or the school (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Level two identifies explicit direction on the parents’ choice of involvement forms. It is influenced by specific domain of parents’ skills and knowledge, the amount of time and energy parents have when balancing other family and employment demands, and the specific invitations and demands for involvement from the child and the school community (i.e., school and teachers) (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Level three
highlights mechanisms through which parents’ involvement influences child/student outcomes. This level relates to how parents will participate in parent engagement by modeling, reinforcement, and instruction via close-ended and open-ended questioning with the child (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Level four is tempering or mediating variables that coincide with parents’ involvement actions and school expectations. This includes developmentally appropriate strategies/activities to foster a collaborative support system for a child (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Level five focuses on child/student outcomes which translates to expectations. This takes into account, the parents’ skills and knowledge, and the contribution to their child’s efficacy for succeeding in school (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995).

In a quantitative study by LaCroix (2014), her study examined best practices to encourage academic achievement in an urban Title I public middle school, grades 6 through 8 in New York City. The study was located in the southeastern section of a borough in a predominantly African American community. The study included 135 of 535 grade 7 students given an adapted survey of the Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents. This survey was originally developed by Sheldon and Epstein (2007). The study addressed the extent to which student reading motivation, student perception of parent engagement, and student engagement in literacy class correlated to a student’s end of year average in literacy class. Using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), inferential statistics along with multiple regression analysis, the findings revealed three key points: (a) student reading motivation made the only significant contribution to a student’s end of year grade point average; (b) the results of the survey could be used to inform policymakers and educators of urban school districts when modifying professional
developments, current strategies, re-evaluating policies, or developing programs focused on improving reading achievement data, and (c) the results of the survey could assist with relations with key stakeholders to improve short and long term student outcomes needed for 21st century global competitiveness.

One of the three research questions pertained to parent engagement. This research question explored to what degree does a student’s perception of parent engagement, as measured by the Reading Engagement Instrument for Adolescents, correlate to a student’s end of year grade point average in literacy class? In Lacroix (2014) study, parent engagement did not contribute to student’s end of year grade point average, yet Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory may demonstrate practical significance on a student’s motivation to read. This study supported the notion of consistent parent engagement to withstand or hasten student performance in school (Sheldon & Epstein, 2007). According to Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory, children learn best through observation and modeling. Thus, educators may utilize practices aimed at promoting effective reading behaviors at home. LaCroix (2014), suggested that another practical significance can also be attributed to the obstinate stage of adolescents, the onset of puberty. During this transitional time of adolescence, children were more in tune with the opinion and approval of their peers, rather than their parents. To support children’s developmental stage, educators may consider using strategies to equip parents on managing their adolescent children’s behavior.

LaCroix’s (2014) study which examined best practices to encourage academic achievement in an urban Title I public middle school, grades 6 through 8 in New York City provided significance to the researcher’s study to support the importance of
academic achievement, as well as, the need for cultural transmission for disadvantaged urban students. This study also provided a link to support Bronfenbrenner’s EST (1979, 2005) as described in the study by Swick and Williams (2006) on stressors that impact student achievement. LaCroix (2014) implicitly suggested two guiding principles to assure academic success. The first principle – engage students in culturally relevant, meaningful, and rigorous reading activities throughout the course of the school day and beyond the classroom. The second principle – ensure that students have access to diverse text in and out of school, especially during the summer months. In order to uphold the two guiding principles, LaCroix (2014) made four recommendations: (a) develop comprehensive and cross-curricular experiences that integrate advanced literacy skills, (b) foster and promote a culture of reading, (c) implement a strategic reading period for every student in every public urban middle school, and (d) incorporate a technology based reading program as part of instruction to increase student motivation in the school setting, as well as, at home.

**History of parent engagement in the African American culture.** As previously noted, Berger (1991) documented the first formal education dated back to the Egyptian Middle Kingdom on the continent of Africa. As this researcher notes, for many centuries in Africa, parents modeled gathering food, hunting, storytelling, fishing, building shelter, and more as a part of everyday living (Davidson, 1988). Sometimes African children would also gather to hear stories told by the griot, village storyteller, during the day as they completed daily living chores (Humes, 2016).

In 1650, Africans were viciously enslaved and brought to the shores of the Caribbean, South America, Cuba, and North America during the transatlantic slave trade
(Davidson, 1988; Klein & Vinson, 2007), they were stripped of their homeland, customs, traditions, language, family, and more. As result, they were also forbidden to read or write or speak their native languages publicly. Therefore, the significance of oral narratives took even a greater importance in the form of myths, folktales, legends, fables, and songs that would tell stories of the ancestors of long ago (Maguire, 1991).

According to Davidson (1988) prior to the slave trade stories of Africans as kings and queens, great hunters and providers in the Motherland were told from one to another by word of mouth (Federal Writer’s Project, n.d.; Tobin & Snyman, 2008). During the middle passage, slavery, Jim Crow laws, segregation, civil rights movement to the present day, African American parents often used forms of oral narratives to preserve the past and present to ultimately influence the hopes of a brighter future for African American children (Caldwell, 1996; Davidson, 1988; NACW, 2002). As slaves, African Americans/Blacks were forbidden to be educated, so the practice of oral narratives took on more significance to remember and preserve the traditions, cultural beliefs, customs, and values of their ancestors (Federal Writer’s Project, n.d.).

As religion became an acceptable escape from the grips of slavery, so too the Bible was woven into the African American slave narrative (Bell, 1997; Cook, 2000; Davidson, 1988). The oral narratives were interwoven into religious stories and they sang songs called *spirits* to ease the harsh reality of life as a slave, property of the dominant group; Caucasian Americans (Bell, 1997; Cook, 2000; Negrosspirituals.com, 2017; Ogbu, 1995; Ogbu & Simmons, 1998). The spirituals spoke of times when African American/Blacks would not suffer the daily woes of slavery and other times of despair (Negrosspirituals.com, 2017). During slavery, parents kept a watchful eye on their
children for fear of them being snatched away and sold into slavery. In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln declared the Emancipation Proclamation that ended slavery in the United States and the Civil War (Maxwell, 2017).

The history of parent engagement in the African American culture is intricately woven into the fibers of the history of American parent engagement when we analyze the counter stories, meaning African Americans often raised and even nursed Caucasian children, as if their own children (Bell, 2003; Bell et al., 2008; Davidson, 1988; Humes 2016). The history of forced migration of African Americans from Africa to America document the inequalities associated with CRT and how the stories were told, written, and remembered (Anti-Racism Resource Centre, 2017; Bell, 2008; Davidson, 1988; Delgado, 1987; Ogbu, 1995, 2003). This research noted above demonstrates that parents, regardless of race, want opportunities for their children that foster educational, cultural, and social exposure, reinforce positive character, encourage intellect, and application of these skills needed in the larger community. These skills were generally transferred from the parents to the child through parent engagement and cultural transmission (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Schönpflug, 2008; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008). To understand the stories and songs, meant understanding the plight and mindset of the African American people through their lived experiences (Bell et al., 2008).

African American/Blacks endured the middle passage, the days of slavery, Jim Crow laws, segregation, and the civil rights movement. During those times, African American parents relied on family and community (i.e., the Black church) to rear their children and embed a strong sense of family, values, cultural, customs, and tradition (African American Registry, 2013; Cook, 2000; Davidson, 1988; NACW, 2002). For
example, African American children were taught to respect their elders and to be seen and not heard. By the early 1900s, any education for African American children was scarce, therefore, any and all education was regarded with esteem and the teacher was well regarded regardless whether they were taught in a mixed aged group in a single room school house. Some African American children walked many miles to and from to get educated or many others worked the land to help their families survive (NACW, 2002).

In America, formal public education and parent engagement continues to evolve in the 21st century. And, African American parents continue to impart knowledge to their children by word of mouth, teaching values, cultural traditions, and customs while caring for their children and modeling behaviors (Bell, 1997; Bridglall & Gordon, 2002; Comer, 1995; Ford, 1994; Gordon et al., 2005; Gutman & McLoyd, 2000; Humes, 2016; Jack and Jill, 2017; Jeynes, 2005; NPE, 2017). To date, African American parent engagement is defined as having a strong commitment to equip, engage, and empower African American children to compete in an ever-changing global society with compassion, respect, dignity, integrity, and equality for one and all (Gordon et al., 2005; Humes, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006).

Based on preferred parenting styles, parents were likely to demonstrate parenting behaviors that include reading to their child, visiting a library, attending school activities, and facilitating the participation of extracurricular activities to enhance the educational, cultural, social, and emotional needs of the child (Fantuzzo et al., 2004; Jeynes, 2005, Malcolm, 2014; Perry, 2009). In addition, there were other activities that can be beneficial, like home-related activities (i.e., helping, age appropriate chores), school-
based activities (i.e., special events, parents/teacher conferences), and community events/organizations/organized activities (i.e., cultural events, fairs, visiting the zoo, museum, park, vacationing, camping, theatre, music lessons, dance lessons, karate, tutoring, etc.) (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Rankin & Quane, 2002; Schönpflug, 2008).

In order to contribute to the educational institutes on perspectives of African American parents’ engagement, empirical research relates parent engagement to cultural transmission and academic achievement, which support this researcher’s study (Schönpflug, 2008, Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008). In reviewing the literature pertaining to parent engagement, many researchers discussed parent engagement from the administrator’s, teacher’s or student’s point of view (Bennett-Conroy, 2011; Brown-Richards, 2011; Humes, 2016; Malcolm, 2014; Thomas et al., 2009). However, studies tailored toward the African American parents’ perspective were limited (Bridglall & Gordon, 2002; Catsambis, 2001; Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; Smetana, 2000; Soto, Dawson-Andoh, & BeLue, 2010; Swanson, Cunningham, & Spencer, 2003; Trotman, 2001). This study provides more research where this gap exists.

Some researchers even make an argument for a shift in curriculum to include African American history in the classroom (Bell, 2003; Humes, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). A transformative phenomenological qualitative inquiry approach allowed the researcher to explore the cultural experiences and perspectives of urban African American parents/guardians and the impact of their parent engagement on the academic achievement of their middle schoolers.

Additionally, Bell (2003) conducted a study where she analyzed the stories of voluntary participants in order to determine their perception about race and racism in the
United States. The study investigated the stories of the participants specifically chosen in
the fields of education and human service institutions since they came in daily contact
with an array of diverse people. The participants included public school teachers,
administrators, college/university faculty, college/university administrators and staff,
direct care providers, clinicians, and administrators of human service agencies.
Strategically, Bell (2003) enlisted their responses since they interacted with students,
clients, and peers on an ongoing basis. As a result of the data collection, 106 interviews
transpired with 63% female and 37% males. This population consisted of 65%
Caucasian, 25% Black, 8% Latino, one Asian American, and one Native American.

The participants voluntarily interviewed from 1 to 2 hours which was audiotaped.
Later, the audiotapes were transcribed and coded to identify emerging themes. There
were also portions of dialogue that were delineated and acknowledged as stories that
included the elements of plot, a problem, determination or deduction, and were used to
demonstrate a point of view or a broader point. Bell (2003) revealed that stories told by
people of color differed from the stories told by Caucasian Americans. The themes that
emerged from people of color revealed differential treatment, vulnerability, assaults on
dignity and personal anger, as well as, despair while Caucasians told stories of the
country moving in the right direction.

Bell’s (2003) study relates to the dissertation topic essentially because it
demonstrates how the perception of historical facts is often in the eye of the beholder.
The research in this study reveals how the views of many Caucasian Americans often
differ from the views of Americans of color. Thus, the dissertation focused on giving
voice to a marginalized group impacted by inequality in societal factors, such as, SES,
education, health, civic concerns (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Burchinal et al., 2008; Cokley & Chapman, 2008). The findings from Bell (2003) suggest that complexities persist in bridging the gap between individual experiences and system social patterns.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995, 2006) discussed CRT in education, they made the claim that substantiates the relevance of acknowledging these cultural disparities and using narratives of truths from different cultural perspectives to dispel myths while motivating students of color academically, socially, and emotionally. According to Bell’s (2003) findings, the stories on race and racism told by people of color and Caucasians reflected diverse perspectives of their experiences. The stories told by people of color revealed susceptibility, differential treatment, personal vulnerability, and assaults on self-worth. There were reoccurring stories that revealed inconsistency on delineating whether the outcome of a situation was based on incompetence, callousness, inhumane acts of cruelty based on acts of conscious or unconscious bias. The respondents reported internal conflict with how to assess difficult situations and simultaneously maintain dignity when faced with life threatening scenarios. In many instances, the stories uncovered that people of color more often than not compassionately gave the Caucasian person the benefit of doubt. The narratives of the people of color demonstrated empathy in regard to their experience through mindfulness of past and unrelenting discrimination. There stories reflected history repeating the same societal ills regardless of social progress (Bell, 2003).

The Caucasian participants, in contrast, told stories that reflected that history was moving in the right direction for social justice (Bell, 2003). The stories told by the dominant, hegemonic group, revealed the belief that they were not aware of Caucasian
privilege. Some Caucasian participants witnessed conflicts with race relations in their
daily lives, yet, voiced pressure from other Caucasians to look the other way and stay
silent, while other Caucasians were aware of the colorblindness and willingly challenged
the societal injustices associated with Caucasian privilege and racism. These Caucasians
attributed their proactive approach to interpersonal relationships formed with people of
color whom they empathized with based on personal experiences. The data suggested the
importance of learning about and constructing counter-stories by understanding race and
racism from both the people of color and Caucasians’ perspective to bring about a
realistic account of history, as well as, a greater respect for each group and those that
fought for equality regardless of ethnicity (Bell, 2003).

Researchers described counter-stories as new stories that were deliberately
constructed to challenge stock stories which were told by the dominant group (Bell et al.,
2008). The dominant group passed on majoritarian stories through historical and literary
documents, monuments, and media representations, as well as, oral history. Bell et al.
(2008) maintained that stories we tell were imbedded in a social context and were not
only individual accounts but were cultural and philosophical encounters. Both Delgado
(1987) and Bell (1976b) agreed that stories bridge individual experiences with universal
societal connections. As a result of the study, Bell (2003) explicitly demonstrated that
people of color were beneficiaries of ongoing experiences with race relations, while their
Caucasian counterparts publicized stories of colorblindness and denial associated with the
harsh realities of race and racism in the United States. Bell (2003) reveled in the notion
that these stories serve as a springboard to bring forth new knowledge, new
understanding, and new opportunities to educate, engage, and empower all communities heal, embrace diversity, and unite humanity.

In a qualitative study conducted by Humes (2016), she examined how African American storytelling, whether considered legal or counter, could be used as a vehicle to teach culturally relevant education in urban public schools. Legal or counter storytelling has deep roots in conveying the history of communities of color that utilizes oral history as a viable means of sharing stories and struggles that were often overlooked by the dominant society. It is important to note that legal or counter storytelling draws explicitly from experiential knowledge.

In Humes’ (2016) study, nationwide data was collected from six major urban cities: Manhattan, NY; Morristown, NJ; Washington, DC; Chicago, IL; Culver City, CA; and Rochester, NY. The sample size consisted of six African American storytellers who worked in these six urban cities. The qualitative study was a portraiture grounded in phenomenological research. The data collected included six in-depth, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews; three men and three women, ages 42-85 who had at least 20 years working with urban schools. Four interviews were face-to-face and audio-recorded while the other two interviews were conducted via Skype. The results of the study suggested that African American storytelling embodies a culturally relevant education by fostering respect for core values such as respect for diversity, self-esteem, and cultural pride, a culture of caring, and character education while creating opportunities for integration into the curriculum, and access to students with diversified learning styles.

Since the beginning of time, African and African American parents, as well as, other adults like a griot or teacher, have been influential in imparting culturally relevant
education through oral history. The results of the study demonstrated the importance of culturally relevant influences that inform, educate, and inspire students to positively identify with their cultural and core values needed to navigate living in a diverse community, as well compete in a competitive global society (Humes, 2016).

Another important aspect of the history of parent engagement in African American culture is known as cultural capital transmission. Cultural capital transmission simply stated is investing in your child. The investment is imparting values, morals, and goals that were translated through ongoing educational, cultural, social, and emotional competencies that enrich a child’s life (Gordon et al., 2005). Researchers (Bourdieu, 1973; Coleman, 1988; Gordon et al., 2005) agreed that the parents are the first and most important influence to impact the academic achievement of their child. Similarly, Bourdieu (1973) described cultural capital transmission as a mechanism used by society’s prosperous parents to socialize their children to develop cultural and educational competencies and successes. Bourdieu (1973) described three components of this process: (a) parent possession of cultural capital, (b) parent transmission of capital, and (c) children’s absorption of cultural capital (Jaeger, 2009). According to Bourdieu (1973), he prescribed that there were three types of capital parents can possess: (a) objectified cultural capital which is a tangible artifact, (b) institutionalized cultural capital which is educational credentials (higher education), and (c) embodied cultural capital which is an awareness and/or appreciation of cultural goods.

According to Harris and Graves (2010), their study wanted to determine the relationship between cultural capital transmission and reading achievement (ELA) within a nationally representative sample of fifth grade African American males. They wanted
to measure reading level achievement across various SES. The study examined African American males from high socioeconomic status, as well as from low socioeconomic status. The study set out to determine if SES was a factor that impacted achievement. The study implied that there were logistic regression differences based on SES, meaning SES did impact learning conditions. In addition, there was a regression analyses controlling for third grade achievement, meaning students not meeting or exceeding grade 3 reading requirements were more likely to fail. The findings from this study suggested that parents supervised artistic activities were related to positive academic development, however, artistic activities supervised by other adults did not yield the same positive academic development. Researchers reinforced the increase of parent engagement resulted in it being more beneficial to the child improving academically, socially, culturally, and emotionally (Bennett-Conroy, 2011; Brown-Richards, 2011). These researchers contended that improved parent engagement was a sure sign to potentially avoid the pitfalls of a decline in academics, bullying/teasing, suicide, drug use, incarceration, low attendance, graduation, as well as, increase measures for completion of higher education and careers (Fite et al., 2009).

Harris and Graves (2010) discussed the importance of the role of the parents to be consistent in the pursuit of excellence in education for their children. Their study also supported other research that discussed the negative pitfalls that loom in the distance for African American children and particularly for African American males: high incarceration rates, overrepresentation in special education, and lack of representation in gifted/talented programs (Donovan & Cross, 2002). One consistent factor in raising academic achievement has been parent engagement (Fan & Chen, 2001; Fan & Williams,
When parents were involved in their child’s academic journey, students had a clear understanding of expectations at home, in school, and in their community (Bennett-Conroy, 2011; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005, 2007; Malcolm, 2014; Reeves, 2003). The work of Harris and Graves (2010) strongly aligns with the researcher’s study on the impact of parent engagement on academic achievement along with the relevance of cultural transmission to benefit African American students.

**Supplemental education.** The notion of supplemental education was a direct outgrowth of the climate of the nation as it related to equality in education post slavery, Jim Crow laws and the civil rights movement (Caldwell, 1996; Davidson, 1988; NACW, 2002). Researchers, like Gordon (2002) acknowledge parents as the first and foremost influence in a child’s life from inception until adulthood, and contend that supplemental education maybe a viable solution to eradicate a hidden curriculum for high academic achievers (Hayes & Juarez, 2012; Hayes, Juárez, & Cross, 2012). Gordon et al. (2005) also agreed with Bourdieu’s (1986) theory of capital transmission and prescribed to creating comprehensive ways to have authentic and meaningful learning experiences for children that merged home, school, and community interactions. Thus, Gordon and his colleagues were instrumental in the Rockland and Westchester Head Start Programs that afforded a marginalized population access to preschool education for young children (Ziglar & Styfco, 2010). Moreover, there were not enough hours in a school day to meet the individual needs of every student, therefore, many years later, academic intervention services (AIS) were considered by legislators and advocates which essentially, meant additional forms of tutoring, in school and out of school.
In addition to AIS, Gordon et al. (2005) contended that sustainable academic achievement was also fostered by exposure to educational, cultural, social, and recreational opportunities provided by increased parent engagement (Jack and Jill, 2017; NPE, 2017). Thus, it was paramount that school settings partner with parents to create nurturing learning environments in unconventional places (Gordon et al., 2005). These researchers confirmed that exposure referred to experiences to enhance opportunities for children to learn in non-traditional ways outside of the school day, at home, and in the community (Jack and Jill, 2017; NPE, 2017). These experiences were cultural, educational, and/or recreational, and allowed children to explore areas of interest that were individualized, as well as experienced with family and friends (Gordon et al., 2005).

**Importance of parent engagement.** Parent engagement yielded positive effects on students’ academic achievement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005, 2007; Trotman, 2001; Vega et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2014; Warren et al., 2009). These researchers supported the idea that when schools engage families in ways that were linked to improving learning opportunities, students make greater gains. These educational researchers found that when schools build partnerships with families that respond to their concerns, value their input, and honor their contributions, they were successful in sustaining connections that were aimed at improving academic achievement. Jeynes (2007) contended that the more parents were engaged the more beneficial the outcomes would be for their children. For example, parents-child discussions centered on academic expectations tend to reduce problematic behavior and improve academic achievement (DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007). And when families and communities organize to hold poorly performing schools accountable,
studies suggest that school districts make positive changes in policy, practice, and resources (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Additional benefits of parent engagement include increased motivation, improved self-awareness, improved attendance, higher achievement on standardized test scores, and better student attitude (Jeynes, 2003, 2005, 2007; Malcolm, 2014; Reeves, 2003; Trotman, 2001).

According to Malcolm’s (2014) study, parent engagement practices were reinforced by creating opportunities for students’ voices to also be acknowledged in the quest to improve parent engagement programs to benefit student academic achievement. Malcolm (2014) conducted a quantitative correlational study in Jamaica, NY at a public prekindergarten through grade 8 school. In this study, 79 out of 120 seventh, and eighth graders participated by taking the Student Survey of Family and Community Involvement in the elementary and middle grades (Sheldon & Epstein, 2007). The student participants’ ages ranged from 11 to 16. The survey consisted of four sections, seven questions, with a total of 53 items administered after the instructional day in a span of a week. Types of questions on the survey consisted of such things as students’ rating of the frequency of the following: (a) I am good at my schoolwork, (b) I enjoy having my parents help me with schoolwork, (c) a parent/guardian reviews and discusses the schoolwork you bring home, (d) makes sure all of your homework is done, (e) this school is friendly to my parents/guardian, and (f) my parents talk about my school with other parents.

A multivariate form of data analysis – multiple regression data analysis – was employed to examine the strength and significance of the variables in relationship to the focus of the study. This study focused on student perceptions of parent engagement, and
how parent engagement helps students succeed academically, in regard to student outcomes with grade point average, attendance, and attitudes toward school. This study revealed that there was no statistical significance between students’ perceptions of parent engagement with students’ grade point averages and students’ attendance; however, it empowered students with a voice in the conversation on parent engagement. In the study, students strongly agreed on the following responses, (a) I like having homework that asks me to talk with someone at home, (b) my parents talk about my school with other parents, and (c) my parents meet other parents at school activities. The study was correlational in nature and applied multiple aggression analysis to analyze the data. The stronger variables in the study was the comparison of students’ perceptions of parent engagement and students’ grade point averages. The results were projected to help educational leaders create and devise parent engagement programs – programs to effectively advance student academic achievement.

The Epstein model (2001), was one of the most well-regarded and widely referenced parent engagement frameworks to date. The Epstein model contends that family, school, and community were important spheres of influence on a child, and when the spheres work in concert, the development of the child is enhanced. Epstein encouraged the overlapping of the spheres of influence as a way of impacting student outcomes in the school setting (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Epstein understood that parenting and parent engagement was not one size fits all. She recognized and described six concrete types of parent engagement/engagement behaviors: parenting, communicating, volunteering activities, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 2001).
Epstein’s model (2001) places the responsibility on the district and schools to create meaningful opportunities to facilitate activities and experiences within each of the six types of parent engagement. Parenting activities allowed schools to illustrate how they support parents in the quest to understand the developmental stages of children especially as they undergo the adolescent stage. Schools can develop programming to support parenting practices with theme-focused workshops, parent education courses, parents training, and family support services (Epstein, 2001). Communicating allowed parents and schools to be in continuous dialogue about individual student progress and school programs. Schools can develop the following practices to support communicating; conferences, availability of translators, invitations to visit special events, weekly/monthly communications, phone calls, newsletters, and updated information on school websites (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

Volunteering activities allowed parents and opportunity to share their time, talents and gifts with their children, other children, teachers, and the school community on site or in other locations. According to Epstein and Sheldon (2002) when parents volunteer they were mobilized to act in ways that were empowering to the school community. Schools can develop practices to support volunteering with a parents’ patrol during recess, and designated parents/family resource room events.

Learning at home activities equipped families with academic information which included student expectations and progress. These activities provide parents the means to help their child with school work from the comforts of home. Schools can develop practices to support learning at home that include a consistent schedule of homework –
homework that requires students to discuss and interact with families on what they were learning in class, thus strengthening the home-school connection (Epstein, 2001).

Decision-making activities empower families to participate in school related decisions that may impact their child. According to Epstein (2001), this type of parent engagement can create parent leaders and representatives who advocate for not only their child but for all children. Schools can develop practices to support decision-making. These include active parents’ organizations, advisory councils, or committees (Epstein, 2001). Collaborating with community activities encouraged parents to cooperatively get involved for the betterment of their child as they build relationships with the school, other school families, and community organizations (Epstein, 2001). Schools can foster these relationships by developing practices to collaborate with community organizations that include alumni participation at school activities, and partnering with community based organizations (CBO) for civic, counseling, cultural, health, recreation, and other activities (Epstein, 2001).

Epstein’s model (2001) was used as a theoretical springboard for current research in the field by Lawrence in 2013. Her study was conducted in order to find out why Latino parents did not engage with their children at school. In a phenomenological study, Lawrence (2013) conducted research at an early childhood community based organization in the (south) Bronx, NY. The CBO served over 35,000 diverse at-risk families with health, affordable housing, early childhood and youth programs, and comprehensive family services that includes a Head Start program (Zigler & Styfco, 2010) with 111 children from birth to age 5. The participants for the study consisted of teachers, teaching assistants, and parents. The actual percentage of parent participants in
the study consisted of the following: 84% Latino families, 11% Sub-Sahara African families, and 5% other, meaning mixed race or bi-cultural. The families at the Head Start Center came from the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Sub-Sahara Africa, as well as U.S. born African American families.

The purpose of the study was to explore why minority (Latino) parents were reluctant to engage in their child’s schooling. It investigated the barriers and challenges of parent engagement practices of early childhood minority (Latino) parents/families. This phenomenological qualitative study included two focus groups; one for teachers and one for teaching assistants along with six in-depth interviews with parents and a parents’ demographic survey. The minority (Latino) parents’ interviews consisted of two families that lived in the United States less than 3 years while the other four minority (Latino) parents lived in the United States over 5 years.

The purpose was to uncover perceptions teachers and teaching assistants had on parent engagement practices with a minority (Latino) culture. The study provided early childhood educators, administrators, and policymakers with tangible strategies for successfully engaging minority (Latino) parents/families, in hopes to better meet the needs of minority (Latino) parents and their children. The results of the study from the teaching staff focus groups suggested the following: (a) the teaching staff had strong beliefs why minority (Latino) parents did not readily get involved in schooling matters, (b) many teaching staff believed that minority (Latino) parents lack the understanding and did not know what was expected of them, (c) a few teaching staff believed some minority (Latino) parents were frustrated with the demands of parenting and needed a break, and (d) three teachers believed some minority (Latino) parents did not want to be
bothered with school matters. In regard to defining parent engagement, the results of the study from the teaching staff revealed that they perceived that the minority (Latino) parents believed the teachers were in charge (Lawrence, 2013).

As for the parents, when asked to define parent engagement, the following results surfaced. First, educated minority (Latino) parents identified parent engagement as participating in school activities such as volunteering in the classroom, going on trips, and reading to the children in the class when they were requested or when their schedule permitted. In addition, these parents stated that going to special family events, museums, parks, engaging in active parenting, as well as, doing educational activities and caring for their child’s social and emotional needs define parent engagement in developing their child’s intellectual and academic skills. Second, minority (Latino) parents with up to a high school education indicated that parent engagement was volunteering to help the teachers, or attending a workshop or meeting for the good of their child (Lawrence, 2013).

Results of the study by Lawrence (2013) indicated that the teachers and teaching staff have strong beliefs why Latino parents were uncertain about getting involved in schooling matters. The staff believed Latino parents were unsure of school expectations and did not always understand what to do for their children. Based on the Latino parents’ viewpoint they entrusted the teacher to teach in school and parents to parent at home. The study revealed that many of the Latino parents had five to seven children, and as a result, some parents viewed the school setting as a break from parenting, while teachers believed they did not want to be bothered. Some barriers and challenges that were detected were the following: (a) Latino parents were busy with multiple appointments and unable to
participate, (b) it was difficult to engage because some Latino parents were not able to balance life challenges, (c) parents had difficulty speaking English, (d) Latino parents’ had their own fears of the school setting; and (e) there were other cultural challenges such as, parents were stressed, had a lack of comfort, lack of knowledge and were impacted by cultural differences. The teaching assistants agreed with the teachers and expressed that Latino parents did not comprehend what involvement entailed. They suggested that parent expectations could be covered in the beginning of the school year at an orientation.

The various models of parent engagement by researchers, coupled with the study by Lawrence (2013) validated the importance of parent engagement (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Epstein, 2001; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Researchers agreed that there is no one size fits all when it comes to parent engagement (Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; NCLB, 2002). According to Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005), parent engagement would set the stage for the understanding of parents about the central role they have in the upbringing of their child and the teachers’ role was to support the child, as well as the strengthen the bond between home and school. It is clear through the research, that the evolution of parent engagement continues to develop in ways that bring about more parent interactions with schools which equate to more support for students to excel academically (Jeynes, 2010; Lee & Bowen, 2006; NCLB, 2016). Additionally, Lawrence’s (2013) study bridged the strong link with the researcher’s study on the impact of parent engagement on academic achievement for different populations, such as the African American, Latino, and Native American populations. Parents’ central role in the lives of their children was impacted by their own
experiences which ultimately influenced the types of experiences parents transfer to their children (CDC, 2016; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005; Bell, 1976a, 1976b). These experiences may be cultural, emotional, or social in nature. This researcher focused on the impact of cultural transmission on academic achievement of African American middle schoolers for the purpose of this study.

**Benefits of parent engagement in the African American culture.** According to researchers, African American students were academically underperforming in traditional school settings (Byrd & Chavous, 2009; Jaeger, 2009; Jeynes, 2007, 2010; NYSED, 2016). However, research notes that some African American students were excelling (Bennett-Conroy, 2011; Fan & Williams, 2010; Williams & Portman, 2014). Williams and Portman (2014) conducted a qualitative study with urban college students. The researchers noted that far too little research has focused on the individual, relational, cultural, and contextual factors necessary for nurturing and promoting academic achievement in urban African American students at risk of school failure (Clark, 1983; Cook, 2000; Evans-Winters, 2005; Ford, 1994; Garmezy, 1993; Mummery et al., 2004). This study examined responses from five college students (four women and one male) attending a Historically Black College/University (HBCU) in a focus group. The focus of the study was to understand how high achieving African American urban graduates beat the odds, graduated with high achievement, and enrolled in college. The main purpose of the study was to acknowledge the educational achievement of high school completion and entering college, as well as, finding out the source of their motivation and resilience to excel despite barriers. The college students participated in a focus group. According to Williams and Portman (2014), six themes emerged from the focus group
with the college students. The college students noted the following: a shared responsibility of educational outcomes, being a part of the solution, parent engagement by any means, natural support systems, school counselors as change agents, and community collaboration to raise a scholar. It was noted by this researcher that students’ perspectives in regard to parent engagement was of importance because parenting does not end when an adolescent graduates from high school. It remains a life-long journey that prepares the next generation for educational success.

His qualitative study honed in on whether there was a correlation between parent engagement and academic achievement. Wooden (2010) prescribed that the self-determination theory in conjunction with Baumrind’s theory (1991) of parenting styles was needed to improve parent engagement with their children. The self-determination theory explored the three types of motivation that affect students and includes intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation. Independence was the desired outcome, meaning parent engagement is vital, yet, a gradual release of trust eventually was needed for autonomy (Turner, Chandler, & Heffer, 2009). This theory was used by Turner et al. (2009), in their research in order to determine how the types of parenting styles affected the motivation of their children.

Based on Turner et al. (2009), the parenting style influences the child’s response to its environment, meaning the students raised in an authoritative household tended to be more intrinsically motivated versus being raised in an authoritarian household who tended to be more extrinsically motivated. Intrinsic students tend to outperform all students, while intrinsic and extrinsic outperform amotivated students. Family life dictates how a student will be motivated and student motivation dictates student academic
performance. (Turner et al., 2009). Wooden (2010) used an anonymous online survey with 10 students and five teachers. Wooden concluded that parents need to be involved for an elevated response to education. Open communication with all stakeholders was paramount. In addition, it was vital to extend support from home to school and school to home while continuing to build confidence and self-reliance for students.

The study by Williams and Portman (2014) provided a fervent connection to the researcher’s study demonstrating the bright spots that do exist, meaning there were African American students who were academically achieving and excelling in education (Heath & Heath, 2010). The bright spots refer to a strategy utilized by Sternin in 1990 that helped decrease malnutrition in Vietnam. Heath and Heath reported that Sternin was strategic in helping mothers in Vietnam examine a local process that was successful and then supported the mothers to systematically emulate it from village to village (Heath & Heath, 2010). In order to substantially create effective change, Sternin’s key approach was to get the mothers to transform their behavior as a vice to end malnutrition while respecting cultural traditions and customs. In 6 months’ time, 65% of the children were consistently better nourished and this native process quickly spread to over 14 villages (Heath & Heath, 2010). Ultimately, 2.2 million Vietnamese people in 265 villages were impacted by the bright spots program based on Sternin and his small team who were commissioned with a shoestring budget and given only 6 months to make a lasting difference (Heath & Heath, 2010).

Parallel to the intuition of the Vietnamese mothers, African American students and parents may have cultural customs and traditions that were vital to note as strategic also – cultural transmission. In the case of Williams and Portman (2014) excelling in
academic achievement was paramount by dispelling barriers, while empowering other students and parents to do the same or even better. These barriers may be relative to SES, parent educational status, and others like adverse childhood experiences (CDC, 2016; Swick & Williams, 2006). All in all, both Wooden (2010), as well as Williams and Portman (2014) conveyed the relevance of positive parent engagement at any level, as an asset to the resilience and motivation needed for African American children to compete, succeed, and thrive.

The star model. Douglas Reeves identified traits of 90/90/90 schools (Baeder, 2011; Reeves, 2003). These schools were populated with 90% African American and Latino students, where 90% of the students were eligible for free and reduced lunch, and where 90% of the students were achieving proficiency on standardized tests. The Star Model included a parent engagement component that encouraged parents to dialogue with their children on non-fiction topics to connect real-life experiences. In the article, “Academic Achievement of African American boys: A City-wide, Community-Based Investigation of Risk and Resilience” (Fantuzzo, LeBouef, Rouse, & Chen, 2012), the authors’ noted raising the academic bar made a notable difference in academic outcomes of African American male students in the quantitative case study.

In the quantitative study by Fantuzzo, LeBouef, Rouse et al. (2012), the study was conducted using the longitudinal KIDS Integrated Data System (Fantuzzo, Culhane, Rouse, Bloom, & Roig, 2006). This study was influenced by Bronfenbrenner (2005) and the stressors associated with Swick and Williams (2006) which was strategically situated within an intentional, community-based inquiry that involved various community partnerships amongst researchers, public educators, and public service providers in
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Philadelphia was listed as one of the poorest of the 10 largest cities in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). This investigation was guided by four primary research questions: (a) what is the achievement gap between African American males and Caucasian males who live and attend school in the same community environments? (b) what is the cumulative “risk gap” between the two groups? (c) how does the individual and cumulative risk experiences of African American males relate to their third grade academic achievement outcomes? and (d) how does academic engagement, school attendance, and task engagement the classroom relate to individual and cumulative risk experiences and academic outcomes? This study was influenced by a comprehensive theoretical model, a developmental ecological model supported by the conceptual framework of Bronfenbrenner (2005).

The sample size included the third grade cohort of students in 2005-2006 (N=14,034) from the school district of Philadelphia. In order to capture the wide-range of experiences of children from birth to grade 3, the participants had to be African American males born in the municipality (N=10,738). Additionally, the sample included the 8,889 students who demonstrated at least one valid result in reading and/or mathematics achievement in the 3rd grade. The sample population comprised of 65.9% African American, 14.6% Caucasian, 14.5% Hispanic, and 5% Asian, and/or other students. Essentially, half of these students were males (51%) and virtually 70% of the students received free or reduced lunch. Ultimately the analytic sample was comprised of two subsets; African American males (n=2,930) and Caucasian males (n=605).

To measure academic achievement, the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA), a standardized, criterion-referenced assessment was used as a
federal accountability tool under NCLB Act (NCLB, 2002). Additionally, the Terranova, a nationally norm-referenced, standardized, group administered achievement test was also used for reading and mathematics (CBT/McGraw-Hill, 2001). To ensure validity and reliability, several federal reporting agencies data were also used to compile a comprehensive investigation which included data from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, The Department of Human Services (DHS) for statistics on maltreatment, birth records from the Department of Public Health (DPH) to access level of the mother’s education at the time of the males’ birth, level of prenatal care, and the child’s birth weight, as well as, exposure to lead, the Office of Supportive Housing (OSH) and DHS provided children’s homelessness experiences. These six risk variables; child maltreatment, mother’s education, homelessness, shelter stay, prenatal care, preterm/low birth weight, and lead exposure, were combined to generate a cumulative risk score rated from zero, one, two, three or more risks. As student educational outcomes declined, the number of risks increased, according to previous research using this study sample. According to Rouse, Fantuzzo, and Leboeuf (2011), scores generally plateaued across three or more risks.

To gauge task engagement problems, the Problems in Classroom Engagement Scale (PCES) was utilized. The PCES is a behavior checklist comprised of eight items designed to identify children’s complications with engaging in routine learning experiences in their elementary school environment. The ratings were compiled by the classroom teacher annually per academic year in grade 1, grade 2, and grade 3 and recorded on the child’s report card. Furthermore, daily attendance from the school
district administrative records were used to calculate the percentage of attendance during the third grade year (days in school/total number of enrolled days).

As a result of the study, Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Rouse et al. (2012) documented a significant “risk gap” between African American males and Caucasian males (mean African American = 1.38 risks vs. mean Caucasian = 0.81 risks, $p<.001$, $d = 0.50$) in reading and mathematics. African American males evidenced increasingly higher rates, as their odds of experiencing three or more risk was 3.61 times that of Caucasian males ($p<.0001$). Duly noted the more risk factors, the greater likelihood of a disparity in educational outcomes was revealed in this study. Additionally, African American males experienced the six risks at far higher rates than the national population of children. The findings for the cumulative risk models for African American males indicated that as risk factors rise, the underachievement in reading and mathematics significantly increases. The findings for this study also validated the fewer task engagement problems and the greater school attendance attained by African American males resulted in higher achievement scores for reading and math. Accordingly, this study was the first to systematically examine a set of policy-related risk and protective factors within a large city’s public education system where one out of every three children was an African American male (Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Rouse et al., 2012). This study utilized existing a citywide, integrated data system explicitly intended to provide evidence for the improvement of policies and services for vulnerable subpopulations of children and youth.

Reeves (2003) and Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Chen, Rouse et al. (2012) contended that a quality education and improved attendance can make an academic difference regardless
of social economic status and ethnic origin. The significance of the Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Rouse et al. (2012) study demonstrated the acknowledgment of nearly 50 years of disparities in education, as well as, pinpointing adverse childhood experiences in urban cities for children of African American descent based on stressors like SES, child maltreatment, low maternal education at birth, homelessness, inadequate prenatal care, preterm/low birth weight, and lead exposure that impact student academic achievement (CDC, 2016). These adverse childhood experiences affect the entire family and ultimately impact each child’s academic achievement (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Swick & Williams, 2006).

**Barriers to African American parent engagement.** Researchers suggest that African American parent engagement can be hindered by factors in the environment, both formal and informal (Lubienski & Crane, 2010; Magnuson, Rosenbaum, & Waldfogel, 2008). These environmental factors affecting parent engagement may include, but were not limited to the following, such as parents’ lack of education, SES, past experiences whether influenced by CRT and/or ACE, as well as, unwelcoming school relations (Anda et al., 2006; CDC, 2016; Hill, 1997; Jaeger, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, 2006; Rankin & Quane, 2002). Historically, many times, the miseducation of parents about their cultural background, as well as student exposure to curriculum that lacks cultural sensitivity may as be a factor to consider (Hauser-Cram, 2009; Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015). Traditionally, components of cultural sensitive education were comprised of strong interpersonal relations, values, rituals, culture, high expectations, and purpose imparted by gatekeepers (i.e., elders, parents, and griots of the community) (Kelly, 2009). African American parents/guardians not well versed in their cultural history, whether due
to miseducation or lack of historical knowledge may perpetuate and substantiate the CRT (Bell, 1976b; Delgado & Stefancic, 2006; O’Connor et al., 2006).

**Socioeconomic status.** Wooden (2010) contended that ethnicity and race, socioeconomic status, religion, and parent involvement in education have all been deemed as factors that could potentially set students up to either achieve academic achievement, or struggle throughout their educational career. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), the four million African American children (more than one in three) living in poverty in 2009 represented an increase of more than 150,000 since 2008 and almost half a million since 2000. Families in higher social economic status give students an upper hand on educational advantages which include increased wealth and more socialization which can allow for a better understanding of the world and increased knowledge (Davis-Kean & Sexton, 2009).

Hauser-Cram (2009) and Henderson and Mapp (2002) had a different perspective. They contended that socioeconomic status has the same effects across all races. It was the environmental factors that link to family and academic achievement; practices that parents’ pass on to their children, many of which were expectations that were ethnically centered. They say that these expectations affect the students’ attitudes and success within the educational system. Moore and Lewis (2012) argued that education and economy were linked. Other researchers agree that various factors contribute to the educational outcomes of students of color, including access to preschool and early childhood programs, quality of teachers, access to high-quality curriculum, school quality, socioeconomic status, and support systems (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Lee, 2005).
An example of barriers hindering parent engagement was evidenced in Bennett-Conroy’s (2011) study. In her study, Bennett-Conroy (2011) conducted a mixed method study in a low resource, minority school district. The location was at a middle school in lower Westchester County, NY. In this study, the purpose was to develop and evaluate a low-cost intervention to increase parent engagement in their children’s education with previously unengaged parents. The researcher proposed to measure what types of low cost programs and activities would be beneficial and sustainable so parents would be engaged in their student’s academic success. There were 300 eighth grade students; 40 families were randomly chosen and 17 parents had face-to-face interviews.

Initially, in phase I, the instrument used in the data collection consisted of parent interviews which were semi-structured and organized around four theoretical concepts of role constructs, self-efficacy, invitations, and perceptions of levels of professionalism (i.e., respect and care) amongst staff members. In phase I, qualitative semi-structured parent interviews were used to assess the acceptability and feasibility of the intervention planned for phase II. In phase II, the researcher collaborated with the ELA teachers to create a tracker sheet as the instrument to be used for data collection. The tracker sheet would be used for each study class to log interactions. Included on the tracker sheet were the following: the student name, student gender, student race/ethnicity, a code for the class teacher, a code to note the specific class period, seven lines to indicate weekly participation of a TIPS (Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork) assignment and grade, an area to note if the parents had any positive interaction that week with the teacher, and if the teacher had a 5-minute or more conversation about the student’s academic achievement. Additionally, the researcher worked with staff from September to October.
to prepare log sheets for parent organization meetings and parent events. Sample questions at interviews included the following: (a) do you have difficulty with the subject matter in your children’s courses? (b) do you talk about how well you expect your child to do in school? and (c) does doing educational things at home make a difference in how well children do at school? The study described the debate concerning whether the association between parent engagement and student achievement is casual or merely correctional, meaning that parent engagement is deliberate or random.

The study demonstrated how parents overcame barriers by using interventions that did not require high knowledge level or reference materials, but just included parent/teacher conversations and school personnel to respond to parents’ self-efficacy needs. The findings of phase I revealed the difference between perceptions of the school staff and the parents. The staff was charged to provide a list of uninvolved parents to be participants. As a result of the list, the parent interviews commenced and the researcher reported that the randomly chosen families from the list in fact had some form of at-school engagement and were able to articulate their at-school engagement during the interview. Unexpectedly, the researcher uncovered parents were involved to some degree with parent engagement despite, what the teachers originally perceived to be true.

In phase II, a quantitative quasi-experimental instrument was used to record the classroom activity evaluation. Phase II worked with three eighth grade ELA teachers to plan TIPS to administer treatment over a 7-week period. TIPS is a process where parents and students work together to complete an assignment after the teacher and parents have had bidirectional communication about the assignment (Epstein, 2001). There were 192
students that participated in phase II: 61 students in three intervention classes and 131 in six control group classes.

As a result, in phase I, (a) the parent interviews demonstrated a significantly greater proportion of parents in the classes receiving the teacher outreach had a bidirectional communication with the teacher, (b) students in classes receiving the teacher outreach submitted a greater proportion of their parents/child interactive homework assignments, (c) teachers would be more effective with more parent engagement, (d) teachers need to have positive beliefs about parent engagement, and (e) teachers need to utilize the efficacy of specific parent engagement strategies. Overall, teachers recognized seemingly unengaged parents were engaged at home and in school with their children.

Additionally, in phase II, (a) there was a significant confirmed difference between the proportions of intervention class parents and control class parents who had bi-lateral conversations with teachers (i.e., 90.2% vs. 25.2%), (b) a greater proportion of intervention class parents had some type of contact with the teacher than control class parents (i.e., 95.1% vs. 45.8%), (c) there was a homework significance with the intervention class and control class (i.e., 63.7% vs. 44.7%), and (d) the intervention class had higher homework grades than the control class with both the male and female eighth grade students. Overall, the findings revealed parents did have challenges that conflicted with parent engagement, students’ consistently bringing homework home, trouble with assignment or subject matter preventing parents from homework help, lack of reference materials, transportation or scheduling conflicts for special events, poor communication about school events, lack of time and energy due to other responsibilities or events, and lack of timely information about problems that need parents attention. However, specific
strategies highlighted in the study such as increased communication with all stakeholders and increased discussions with the student, parents, and teacher greatly influence the return of assignments and projects.

Thus, the impact of intentional bidirectional communication ultimately resulted in improved student grades which confirmed the following: (a) despite whether teachers’ perceived parents to be uninvolved, when interviewed, parents were more involved in their child’s academic achievement than initially given credit for by educators, and (b) the intervention had a proactive effect on fostering more parent/teacher bidirectional communication to enhance academic achievement for middle school students when parents were systematically notified and welcomed to be a part of the learning process.

Chapter Summary

In conclusion, this chapter provided a glimpse into the competitive spirit middle school students need to embrace as they transition from an elementary learning experience to a setting that is more challenging socially, emotionally, and academically (Vanneman et al., 2009). The researchers discussed the varied nuances of parent engagement as it relates to the diverse needs of the student, especially the middle schoolers faced with physical, social, emotional, and academic encounters (Burchinal et al., 2008; Eccles, 2007; Rouse & Austin, 2002; Wang & Eccles, 2012).

In the literature review, the theoretical framework centered on the work of Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) ecological systems theory and critical race theory (Bell, 1976a, 1976b; Delgado, 1987). Bronfenbrenner (1977) identified four types of systems in the ecological systems theory which explored the complexity of the child’s environment that ultimately impacts the child’s development. The ecological systems theory honed in on
the specific needs of the child and how it responds to its environment, where as, the CRT linked the personal experiences of the parents’ exposure to culturally revelant experiences to demonstrate the impact, if any, on their child’s academic achievement. Additionally, the literature review provided a historical account of parent engagement based on leading researchers in the field such as Epstein (2001) and Henderson and Mapp (2002). The many definitions that emerged in regard to parent engagement documents the evolution from the early days when parents sent their children to school to get an education, to schools’ establishing a bidirectional partnership with parents to encourage improved communication between home and school to further impact students’ academic achievement (Berger, 1991; Epstein, 2001).

The importance of parent engagement was explored and the researcher honed in on the benefits of culturally relevant contributions parents make by investing in their children (Bourdieu, 1973; Gordon et al., 2005). Benefits of parent engagement were discussed, especially from the African American perspective (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In conclusion, the barriers that may hinder parent engagement were examined to acknowledge the pitfalls that can occur, yet, with commitment, dedication, and resilience some students were academically successful (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Desimone, 1999; Dotterer et al., 2009; Harris & Graves, 2010; Lee, 2005; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008; Wooden, 2010). Chapter 3 will focus on the methodology of the study.
Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

The educational field has been under scrutiny by the federal government to make education accessible, excellent, and equitable for all children (NCLB, 2016; Rampey et al., 2009). However, in the last 10 years, the educational field remained under fire as the federal government mandated the No Child Left Behind Act (2002). These challenging times magnified the significant academic gap between African American and Caucasian students that has been well documented in public education (Dearing, 2006; Lee & Bowen, 2006). Researchers contend that students in the 21st century will need to be prepared for an ever-changing global society (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005; Meyer, 2009; NYSED, 2016; Reeves, 2003).

Initially, the NCLB Act (2002) took lawmakers 3 years to adopt due to political discord. This led to the birth of Common Core Standards that were tailored to initially cut federal spending and unify excellence in education from state to state. The NCLB Act (2002) encouraged the federal government to mandate states to hold stakeholders (i.e., districts, administrators, and teachers) accountable for all students’ learning (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012). This led to the reexamination of stakeholders taking responsibility for learning (i.e., government, districts, administrators, teachers, parents, and community partners (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; NCLB, 2002).

To date, the federal government backed out of state and local policymaking when it pertains to education (ESSA, 2016; NCLB, 2002). As a result, the federal government
passed the Every Student Succeeds Act in just 3 months (ESSA, 2016). The federal
government insisted that states use innovative and creative ways to educate all of
America’s children, as they strive to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) (ESSA, 2016;
Yeung & Pfeiffer, 2009). This research noted that the national goal is for all students to
be college and career ready as they enter the global market by 2020.

According to researchers, the majority of African American students were
academically underperforming in traditional school settings (Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Rouse
et al., 2012). However, research noted that some African American students were
excelling (Ford, 1994; Holcomb-McCoy 2011; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Hrabowski et
al., 1998). This study explored why some African American students may be achieving
academically. Thus, this study aimed to understand if there is a connection between the
impact of parent engagement as it relates to academic achievement and the cultural
awareness experiences transmitted from the perspective of African American
parents/guardians.

Traditionally, middle school students in grades 6 through 8 were at the pinnacle of
maturation; moving from high parent dependency to more social independence
(Vanneman et al., 2009). Nonetheless, boys and girls mature at different rates mentally,
physically, socially, and emotionally (Harris & Graves, 2010). The adolescents were
experiencing hormonal and psychological changes that affect their social, cultural,
emotional, and academic needs as they embark on becoming middle school students
(Harris & Graves, 2010). In order to attend the high school of choice, middle school
students find the expectations are demanding. Therefore, the demands of “making the
grade” were a critical transition for middle school students preparing to leave an
elementary school setting for a high school experience (Daggett, 2005; Mullins & Irvin, 2000; Vanneman et al., 2009). Researchers contend that success in middle school remains a strong indicator of high school graduation (Daggett, 2005; Mullins & Irvin, 2000; Vanneman et al., 2009).

The purpose of this study was to explore the relevance of parent engagement as it relates to meaningful cultural awareness experiences that contribute to academic achievement of African American middle schoolers in an urban school setting. A transformative (see below for explanation) phenomenological, qualitative inquiry approach allowed the researcher to examine the cultural experiences and perspectives of urban African American parents/guardians and the impact of their parent engagement on the academic achievement of their middle school children.

This phenomenological qualitative study adds to the body of knowledge and examines the experiences of African American parents/guardians of middle schoolers in an urban public school. According to Creswell (2013), a phenomenological study explains what and how individuals were affected by the phenomenon. Mertens and Wilson (2012), describe the phenomenon as the lived experience of the individuals. This researcher examined the lived experiences of African American parents/guardians to gain insight into the perspective of the African American middle school students in grades 6 through 8. The study focused on the impact of cultural awareness transmitted by the African American parents/guardians to their children who attend one urban public school. The data was collected by the researcher on site after school hours where the facilitator audio recorded the discussion of the two separate focus groups.
This phenomenological design was appropriate to examine the ways in which parents engage their children in cultural events and activities and whether this has an impact on their success in school. African American referred to parents/guardians, and students of African (diaspora) descent living in America, who were born in America, and who were of African or Caribbean decent. They were people who are Black and Brown. They may also be born in Africa, yet, live in America.

In the scheme of a broader perspective, a transformative paradigm primarily focuses on the viewpoints of marginalized diverse groups to give voice to the topic in hopes to bring forth mindfulness and empathy (Mertens & Wilson, 2010). A transformative paradigm speaks to the social justice branch that Mertens and Wilson (2010) discuss. The transformative paradigm referred to the four-branch tree of evaluation of process; methods (post positivist), use (pragmatic), values (constructivist), and social justice (transformative). Transformative refers to the belief that evaluation of the experiences and lives of diverse groups of people were of interest and importance in the quest to address issues of dominance and inequity.

The transformative branch of evaluation highlights the voice of a marginalized group and challenges universal power structures like racism, inequality, and social injustice (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). Mertens and Wilson (2012) describe the primary characteristics in the phenomenological designs as: (a) an exploratory phase for getting to know the participants and figuring out the next best steps for action, (b) creating limitations around the study (i.e., important criteria to consider about the study), (c) establishing a timeframe for the study, (d) doing observations (i.e., fieldwork), (e) arranging informal focus groups, (f) analyzing trends for any themes or significant
occurrences, hypotheses or verbal descriptions; and (g) highlighting theories that materialize about disability rights, critical race, sociolinguistics, feminism, gender, or other theories. A transformative paradigm, according to this research, lays the foundation to understand the environment and cultural impact that shaped the values, beliefs, and traditions of the African American Black parents/guardians and were handed down to their middle schoolers.

Researchers defined qualitative research as the reasons why something happened (Creswell, 2013; Mertens & Wilson, 2010). They say it was a natural approach to go in-depth to understand how the topic developed, and that it is focused on the interpretive reasoning and the meaning that brings people to the study. According to Mertens and Wilson (2010), studies that use the phenomenological design ask questions about the social and cultural practices of groups of people. It focuses on the awareness of differences that explains the individuals’ past experiences. The purpose of this research design was to find patterns, trends, or systematic connections about the impact of cultural awareness/transmission on academic achievement (Creswell, 2013).

The study focused on the cultural awareness/transmission from the African American parents/guardians to their children. Cultural awareness/transmission refers to parents/guardians imparting of values, morals, and goals as an investment to their children (Schönpflug, 2008). This investment was translated through their involvement in ongoing educational, cultural, social, and emotional activities with their children (Schönpflug, 2008). These cultural awareness experiences were introduced by parents/guardians to impart knowledge to their children based on their own experiences, or to provide new knowledge and new experiences (Rowley et al., 2008). The research
goes on to say that based on perceptions of parents/guardians about learning at home and in the school setting, this can govern how students respond to learning (Rowley et al., 2008).

This study sought to look through a theoretical critical race theory lens, (Bell, 1980), as well as Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory (1977, 1978, 1986, 1994, 1998, 2005, 2009). The CRT directly relates to the proposed study by examining the past experiences of the participants and how their lived experiences impact parent engagement practices (Humes, 2016; Jeynes, 2005, 2007; Novak & Purkey, 2001; Rankin & Quane, 2002; Rogers, 2006; Schönpfug, 2008; Smetana, 2000; Soto et al., 2010; Tate, 1997; Trotman, 2001). The second theory used in this study, the ecological theory, denotes the rich layers that make up the child’s environment much like the layers of a Russian doll (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1978, 1986, 1994, 1998, 2005, 2009).

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory, for example, discussed how the Russian doll appears to be one doll, yet, when it is opened, there were several little dolls inside one another (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1978, 1986, 1994, 1998, 2005, 2009). The ecological theory directly relates to the study to explain how a child is affected by their environment at home, in school, and in their community. It provides an opportunity to understand how and why a child may respond to its surroundings (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1978, 1986, 1994, 1998, 2005, 2009). According to Bronfenbrenner (2009), just as one might look inside each Russian doll, the ecological theory allowed an in-depth look inside the mindset of the child.

The critical race theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006) was best described by Mertens and Wilson (2012) as a theoretical framework that allows researchers to
investigate social, educational, and political issues by prioritizing the voices of participants of color and respecting the multiple roles played by scholars of color.

According to this research, the CRT was a movement that emerged in the mid-1970s on the appendages of the civil rights movement. During the civil rights movement, leaders like Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Thurgood Marshall, W.E.B. Du Bois, and others, politically advocated for human and social justice for African Americans/Blacks (Ogbu, 1995). This period fueled the onset of the CRT that centered on studying and transforming the relationship of race, racism, and power (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). At this time, lawyers, activists, and leaders like Bell (1980, 1982, 1997), and Delgado (1987) shaped the CRT to focus on civil rights and ethical issues, yet, the broader social perspective included economics, history, self and group interest, context, emotions, and the unconscious themes to ponder (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). Bell is credited as a founder of CRT and continued to develop this theory over time with others (1980, 1982, 1997).

The CRT also challenged educational themes like controversy over school curriculum and history, equality, hierarchy, tracking, school discipline, and IQ and achievement testing for Black and Brown children (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; Ogbu, 2003). The CRT lends an opportunity for “legal storytelling” that refers to Black and Brown people recounting their personal perspectives about experiences in their life, early childhood, adolescence, adulthood with race and racism that may have impacted their existence (i.e., emotions, decisions, careers, etc.) (Ogbu, 2003).

Research questions for this study include:
1. How do urban African American parents and guardians define and describe parent engagement?

2. What culturally relevant experiences do urban African American parents and guardians perceive as impacting the success of their child?

3. What role do urban African American parents play in their children’s schooling?

4. What can schools do to create a better partnership between home and school for African-American/Black families?

Research Context

The study took place in Westchester County, which is situated in the Northeastern part of New York. The Yonkers City Schools District (YCSD) (2017) is home to the fourth largest school district in New York State, located in the lower Hudson Valley, immediately north of New York City. The YCSD employs 1,887 teachers, 117 school administrators, 27 central office administrators and 1,548 Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA) and other staff. It remains a vibrant learning community that serves 26,489 students from 100 diverse cultures and nationalities in 39 schools; 10 prekindergarten to grade 6, 20 prekindergarten to 8, one prekindergarten to grade 1, one prekindergarten to grade 12, two grades 7 to 12, and five grades 9 to 12. Each elementary school has full-day prekindergarten and mandated full-day kindergarten in which both programs have a unique magnet theme. The five comprehensive high schools provide 24 specialized career and college readiness programs and also offer unique magnet themes. A Montessori Academy, with grades prekindergarten to grade 12 is available for those who have had this kind of training. There is also a dedicated,
academically talented school, Program for Early and Rapid Learners (PEARLS) for grades prekindergarten to grade 8, as well as an International Baccalaureate Program (IB) for grades 9 to 12. Additionally, there is a free adult education and job training program (i.e., Yonkers Pathways to Success).

The population of the school district includes 16.2% students with disabilities, 11.8% limited English proficiency, 56.4% Hispanic, 19.4% African American/Black, 17.2% Caucasian, 7% Asian/Pacific Islander, multiracial. In the district, 69% of the students received free/reduced lunch for 2015-2016. The 2016 graduation rate was at 82% with 1,475 students graduating on time. This graduation rate is higher than the statewide rate at 81% with the dropout rate down by 4%. However, YCSD has six schools that were classified as focus schools and seven struggling and one persistently struggling school (YCSD, 2017). According to NYS, focus, struggling, and persistently struggling schools refer to schools previously not making their annual yearly progress number (AYP) and in need of state and district support.

The school used in data collection was built in 1896 with two additions; the auditorium in the 1920s and the cafeteria in the 1940s. The location of the study took place at this particular school; one of the 39 urban public schools located in the northwest quadrant of Yonkers, New York. This urban school is one of 20 prekindergarten through grade 8 schools.

This urban public school has a 14-year tenured female principal and an 8-year tenured female assistant principal, who was the researcher in this study. The researcher is a tenured assistant principal in the district, yet, this is her first year at the urban school. The school is housed in two locations; the main building and the annex. Each day the
researcher is in the annex with prekindergarten through first graders along with two special education classes for grades 4 and 5.

The enrollment for 2015-2016 was approximately 719 students. This urban public school serves children from prekindergarten to grade 8 with the following demographics: 117 were enrolled in (16.3%) special education, 105 were (14.6%) English language learners (ELL), and 80% receive free/reduced lunch. The average attendance is 93.3%. Only one student (0.2%) was retained and there were only three suspensions. In 2015-2016, there were 377 Hispanic/Latino (56%), 40 Asian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (6%), 172 African American (26%), 74 Caucasian (11%), one American Indian/Alaska Native (0%), and six with two or more races (1%). This school is a schoolwide model of Title I with nearly 200 students receiving daily additional support and extended learning time which extends the school day until 4:00 p.m.

Middle school is a transitional time from childhood to adolescence (Comer, 1995; Cotton & Wikeland, 1989; Durenbourg & Blake, 2013; Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Dotterer et al., 2009; Eccles & Harold, 1996; Evans-Winters, 2005; Fan & Williams, 2010; Fite et al., 2009; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Hrabowski et al., 1998; Huston & Ripke, 2006; Keiffer et al., 2011; Kurlaender et al., 2008; Lewin-Bizan et al., 2010; Rowley et al., 2008; Vanlaar et al., 2014). Grades 6, 7, and 8 students are at the pinnacle of growth physically, emotionally, and socially (Mullins & Irvin, 2000). Generally, the students in the middle school are going from high parent dependence to more self-independence (Vanneman et al., 2009). Emotionally, middle schoolers seek their peers’ acceptance, with friendship being a major theme, as opposed to parent support or guidance (Harris & Graves, 2010). The current topic of study centered on the
perspective of the African American parents’ and guardians’ perceptions as to whether cultural awareness is a contributing factor impacting academic achievement of middle school African American students in an urban public school setting. Therefore, participants were not randomly chosen, but were selected through purposeful sampling and were invited to participate in a focus group (see Appendix A) based on the criteria of being African American and having a student in grade 6, 7, or 8 assessed in 2015-2016 with the NYS ELA examination. In 2015-2016, April 5-7 were the dates of the testing data used in this study.

Even though there has been advancement in education, health, civil, and social arenas, students of color lag behind their Caucasian counterparts in areas such as standardized testing, high school completion rates, academic achievement, and college attendance and completion (Daggett, 2005; Fiester, 2010; Gándara & Contreas, 2009; O’Connor et al., 2006; Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015; Thomas et al., 2009; Valencia, 2000; Vega et al., 2012). Nationally, it has been noted that Caucasian Americans and middle class students do well academically in the traditional school settings in the United States of America (Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Rouse, & Chen, 2012). If we hone in on the African American students, we have witnessed over 40 years of educational disparity since the first reports in 1970 were issued by National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (Magnuson et al., 2008; NAEP, 2009).

Research Participants

The participants in this study were the middle school parents/guardians who have children in grades 6, 7, or 8 at a particular urban public school. The voluntary participants self-identify as members of the African American subgroup. The selection
criteria includes the following: participants are all 2016-2017 parents of grade 6, 7, or 8 African American students who were previously administered the grade 5, 6, and 7 NYS ELA assessment in 2015-2016. The target population was two groups of African American parents/guardians of African American of grade 6, 7, 8 middle school students; one group of parents whose children have met the standards on the NYS ELA examination, as set forth by New York State (level 3 and 4), and one group of parents whose children have not met the standards on the NYS ELA (level 1 and 2). However, parents were not apprised of the criteria of their focus group to further protect confidentially.

The researcher used NYS ELA examination scores from 2015-2016 for the study since the assessment is only given annually in the spring. Each year, these spring scores were confirmed by NYS after the calendar year ends and were not made readily available until late August. Therefore, the researcher used the 2015-2016 scores available for grades 6, 7, and 8 which is a total of 195 students tested that includes 56 African American students (29%) in one urban public prekindergarten through grade 8 school.

In 2015-2016, grade 6 students were in grade 5. While in grade 5, three of them scored level 4 (3.9%), 14 scored level 3 (18.4%), 18 scored level 2 (23.7%), and 41 scored level 1 (53.9%). There were 77 grade 5 students with one opting out of testing on the NYS ELA examination. Of the 77 students in grade 5, 23 out of 77 (30%) were African American /Black, 18 out of 23 (78.2%) grade 5 students tested were African American /Black, five opted out. The African American /Black students scored the following: one scored level 4 (5.6%), four scored level 3 (22.2%), four scored level 2
(22.2%), and nine scored level 1 (50%). These students were now in grade 6 at the urban public school for 2016-2017.

In 2015-2016, grade 7 students were in grade 6. While in grade 6, three of them scored level 4 (4.7%), 15 scored level 3 (23.4%), 26 scored level 2 (40.6%), and 20 scored level 1 (31.3%). There were 64 grade 6 students tested on the NYS ELA examination. Fifteen out of 64 (23.4 %) grade 6 students were African American /Black; 13 out of 15 (90%) grade 6 students tested were African American /Black since two opted out. The African American /Black students scored the following: zero scored level 4 (0%), 1 scored level 3 (8%), 7 scored level 2, (54%), and 5 scored level 1 (38%). These students were now in grade 7 at the urban public school for 2016-2017.

In 2015-2016, grade 8 students were in grade 7. While in grade 7, seven of them scored level 4 (13%), 14 scored level 3 (25%), 21 scored level 2 (38%), and 13 scored level 1 (24%). There were 55 out of 58 (95%) grade 7 students tested on the NYS ELA examination. Seventeen out 55 (31%) grade 7 students enrolled were African American and of the 17 only 16 (94%) grade 7 students tested were African American /Black since one opted out. The African American /Black students scored the following: three scored level 4 (19%), zero scored level 3 (0%), nine scored level 2 (56%), and four scored level 1 (25%). These students were now in grade 8 at the urban public school for 2016-2017.

After the study was approved by the International Review Board (IRB) of St. John Fisher College (SJFC) (See Appendix B) and the Yonkers City School District (YCSD) (See Appendix C and Appendix D) review committee, this researcher conducted a professional discussion with an expert panel represented by the administration and middle school teachers (grades 6 through grades 8). This panel was apprised of this study.
which focused on the impact of parent engagement on academic achievement with African American middle school students as it relates to cultural awareness activities. Then the researcher elicited this expert panel (see Appendix E) to field the proposed focus group interview questions (see Appendix F). This strategy added reliability and validity to the questions and allowed for practice in fielding the most appropriate questions (i.e., field test instrument) to ask African American parents/guardians, as well as, test equipment (i.e., recorder, microphone, etc.).

Participants were recruited for the study by adhering to the selection criterion; they have an African American middle schooler who attends the urban public school and their middle schooler participated in the 2015-2016 NYS ELA examination. The researcher met with administration, eight middle school teachers, and nearly 60 African American middle schoolers to explain the study. The purpose of the meetings was to send the information home (see Appendix G) so that African American parents/guardians could volunteer to participate in the study. The teacher was given a large envelope to collect parents/guardian consent letters in them. The envelope also was used to gather returned signed informed consent forms to the researcher. Also, a hard copy of the Welcome Letter, Informed Consent Form, and Focus Group Questions were mailed twice directly to nearly 50 African American families, and a reminder call (see Appendix H) served as a reminder to all potential participants. The research assigned a code to each consent form to protect the identity of the participants. Teachers checked off receipt of the sealed document and placed them in the large envelope. All documents were secure in a locked cabinet until turned over to the researcher. All participants who participated in the two focus groups (Appendix I and Appendix J) and completed a demographic
questionnaire (Appendix K) were given a one-time distribution of a $20.00 gift card regardless of partial or full participation in the study. See Appendix L for the focus group reminder script.

**Data Collection Instruments**

To further diminish any perception of coercion, an outside facilitator was the primary source for data collection, since the researcher is the assistant principal at the school where the data was collected. Even though, the assistant principal is not in daily contact with grades 6, 7, and 8, the outside facilitator significantly reduced the risk of coercion, since parents were not familiar with the new assistant principal. Therefore, the assistant principal in the school, was not in the focus group room. To further ensure confidentiality, she did not have access to the audio recordings and all student names were redacted on the transcripts.

The researcher used two parents/guardian focus groups to collect the data. The facilitator examined the insights of African American parent engagement in regard to their children’s academic achievement based on cultural influences transmitted from home and in the community. The participants self-identified as members of the African American subgroup. They were also selected for the study if they had a child in grades 6, 7, or 8 in the urban school used in the study. The voluntary participants had to adhere to the previously stated selection criteria.

Each focus group lasted no more than one hour. Each focus group was scheduled to include at least six parents/guardians with middle schoolers in grade 6, 7, and 8 from a purposeful/convenience sample. Each focus group was audio recorded to capture the audio trail of the focus groups. Field notes were also utilized before, during, and after
the observational focus groups. The researcher used pseudonyms to code all data in order to determine specific themes that emerged.

The outside facilitator asked all of the questions during each focus group. The researcher supplied two sets of recorders to audio record each session. Each focus group was transcribed. Intra coding along with the researcher’s coding to validate the reliability of reoccurring patterns, themes, and/or trends that emerge, was completed after the transcripts were provided.

The two focus groups were used in data collection in order to gain a greater understanding of the perspective on academic achievement from African American parents/guardians. As recommended by Mertens and Wilson (2012), each focus group strived to have 6-9 participants, per group. The perspective centered on cultural awareness/transmission which referred to the exposure the African American parents/guardians experienced in their past. It also referred to the exposure that the African American parents/guardians wanted to provide for their children which included educational, cultural, social, and recreational experiences. Moreover, the researcher’s positionality provided her the necessary confidence needed for the 10 participants to disclose their perspectives on parent engagement as it relates to academic achievement influenced by cultural undertones.

Additionally, for this study, there was a demographic questionnaire given to each participant in order to gain background data of the participants. The questionnaire asked the participants such questions as the origin of their family (i.e., United States, Caribbean Island, Africa, etc.), gender, education, SES, participation in cultural traditions, organizations, and/or activities/events that children were exposed to outside of school.
This qualitative data was examined based on the African American students’ parents/guardians’ perspective of their students’ cultural events, activities, and experiences using a symbolic CRT lens (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Delgado, 1987; Ogbu, 2003). Additionally, all of the data was examined to consider the student’s overall academic achievement which refers to a student’s educational, cultural, social, and emotional needs being maintained at an appropriate grade level based on their current age (Gordon et al., 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006).

Field notes, a demographic questionnaire, two focus groups, and observational protocols provided an opportunity for African American parents/guardians to discuss the types of cultural engagement they provide their children, as well as, why African American parents/guardians opt to engage with their children on the social justice of educating African American children in America (Creswell, 2013; Mertens, 2012).

As recommended by Creswell (2013), precautions were in place to avoid field issues like reflexivity, reactivity, reciprocity, “going native,” divulging private information and deception. In accordance with SJFC best practices, hard copies of data were stored in a safe in the researcher’s home while computer data was placed in a password protected file. All information associated with the study will be shredded three years after completion of the study.

Once the consent forms were collected a list was generated to create the two focus groups. The researcher used pseudonyms to code the data in order to determine specific themes that emerge. Concurrently, the researcher collected archived data of the grades 6, 7, and 8 middle school African American students’ performance on the New York State examinations for 2015-2016 ELA scores. This archived data (i.e., 2015-2016 NYS
ELA) was also be reviewed in order to determine the two focus groups; one group of parents whose children have not met the NYS standards (level 1s and 2s), and one group of parents whose children have met the standards in NYS (level 3s and 4s).

At the beginning of the focus group, participants were once again apprised of the study and why their voluntary participation was needed, however, parents were not apprised of the criteria of their focus group; those who have not met the standard and those that have met the standard. Each participant was reminded that they may end their voluntary participation at any time without fear of retaliation or coercion before they sign a second Informed Consent Form. The researcher had the facilitator record all responses on a recorder during the focus groups. According to Creswell (2013), the best way to hear a voice was to have participants engage in a dialogue in the form of a focus group. Thus, the outside facilitator moderated the two focus groups while it was being recorded for reliability and accuracy.

Each focus group lasted no more than one hour. Each focus group included at least five parents/guardians with middle schoolers in grade 6, 7, or 8 from a purposeful/convenience sample. Each focus group was audio recorded to capture the audio trail of the focus groups. Field notes were utilized before, during, and after the observational focus groups. The researcher used pseudonyms to code all data in order to determine specific themes that emerge.

The outside facilitator asked all of the questions during each focus group. The outside facilitator did do member checking for clarification. The researcher had two sets of recorders to audio record each session. Each recorder was tested prior to each focus group for effectiveness and sound quality. Each focus group was transcribed. Intra
coding along with the researcher’s coding to validate the reliability of reoccurring patterns, themes, and or trends that emerged, were completed after the transcripts were provided.

Procedure for Data Analysis

The data collected by the qualitative method was analyzed by the researcher in order to determine emerging themes. The researcher used coding; open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to provide valid results (Saldaña, 2016). Saldaña (2016) says that these types of coding allow for interactive and emergent themes to arise, as well as, in vivo and a priori codes to emerge according to the information transcribed from the focus groups.

The results of the coding process were reported in the form of tables, as well as, excerpts from the dialogue of parents’/guardians’ responses. A narrative summary was also included of the findings from the coded transcripts to reveal any patterns, trends or themes. Decisions about the significance of the study were made based on the results of the data analysis.

The researcher reviewed the demographic questionnaires, field notes, archived student data, and the transcripts from the two focus groups. The researcher synthesized archived student data of the African American middle school students’ performance on the NYS ELA examination. This was compared to the answers provided by the African American parents/guardians and how they provide for their children with cultural events, activities, and experiences, in order to compare answers from the focus group of the parents whose children have met the standards and the answers from the focus group of
the parents whose children have not met the standard. A narrative summary was also given based on the information provided from the focus groups.

The outside facilitator did member checking to clarify any areas of uncertainty with responses to questions asked during the s to improve reliability and validity. The researcher used the archived data and verbal descriptions to triangulate what might be shared during the focus groups. Since this was a qualitative study, it will control other sources of variation such as the same group providing data from two different African American points of view; Group A and Group B.

The results of the coding process were reported in the form of tables, as well as excerpts from the dialogue of the responses from the African American parents/guardians. A narrative summary was included of the findings from the coded transcripts to reveal any patterns, trends, or themes. Decisions about the significance of the study was made based on the results of the data analysis.

This researcher reviewed the demographic questionnaires, field notes, archived student data, and the transcripts from both the two parents/guardian interviews and the two focus groups. The researcher synthesized archived student data of the African American middle school students’ performance on the NYS ELA examination. This was compared to the answers provided by the African American parents/guardians and how they provide for their children from cultural events, activities, and experiences, in order to compare answers from the interviews and focus group of the parents whose children have met the standards and the answers from the interviews and focus group of the parents whose children have not met the standard.
The researcher kept in mind culturally responsive evaluations and was mindful of trends, patterns, and emerging themes. Charts and tables were created based on the information provided in the coded transcripts. A narrative summary was given based on the information provided from the interviews and focus groups. Mertens and Wilson (2012) referred to culturally responsive evaluation as a type of evaluation in which the focus was on understanding the cultural and historical context of the programs and implementing all aspects of the evaluation to fit the needs of the community (language, tools, cultural practices, etc.).

All data (i.e., archived, parents contact information) was solely and exclusively used to identify Group A and Group B. This data was shredded after the successful completion of the dissertation. In accordance with SJFC best practices, hard copies of additional data were stored in a safe in the researcher’s home while computer data was placed in a password protected file. All information associated with the study was shredded three years after completion of the study.

**Summary of Methodology**

The dissertation study was a qualitative research design. The study examined the impact of parent engagement and cultural awareness activities, as it relates to student academic achievement. The study honed in on the phenomenological perspective of the African American parents/guardians. The ultimate goal was to seek a greater understanding from the perspective of urban African American parents/guardians on the impact of cultural awareness/transmission of capital to their middle school children.
The data collected was recorded and transcribed to reveal patterns, trends, and/or themes. The findings will be reported based on the data analysis from the archived data and actual transcribed dialogues from the two focus groups using in vivo and a priori.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of parent engagement on the academic achievement of African American students in an urban middle school in the Northeastern region of the United States. Furthermore, middle years are a transitional time for middle school students as they face more challenges academically and become more independent and socially aware of their surroundings. Historically, students of color lag behind their Caucasian peers nationally, in reading and math, despite the evolution and progress that has been made with the Common Core Learning Standards (CCSS, 2010). Bronfenbrenner’s (1977, 2005) ecological systems theory (EST) and Bell’s (1976a, 1976b) critical race theory (CRT) are the two theoretical frameworks that informed this study. Additionally, the researcher presented these major topics which were related to the study and were discussed at length in Chapter 2: definition of parent engagement, the history of parent engagement practices in the United States, the history of parent engagement in the African American culture, the importance of parent engagement, benefits of parent engagement and the barriers to African American parent engagement.

The phenomenological qualitative study examined the perspectives of the African American parents/guardians and their engagement, relative to their sixth, seventh, and eighth grade children and their academic achievement in an urban public school. This study included two focus groups and a demographic questionnaire that was completed by the parents/guardians. The focus groups created an opportunity for African American
parent/guardians to openly dialogue in a tranquil environment which allowed participants to discuss their sincere thoughts, opinions, and points of view within the context of the research questions. Prior to the focus groups, the principal of the urban public school and the district office provided clearance in support of the study at the approved location.

After SJFC IRB approval, the researcher convened an expert panel to vet the research questions and proceeded to complete the mailing of the welcome letter, consent form, and focus group questions to the purposeful/convenience sample. During the focus group, the demographic questionnaire was given to each participant in order to gain background data of the participants. The questionnaire asked the participants such questions as the origin of their family (i.e., United States, Caribbean Island, Africa, etc.), gender, education, SES, and participation in cultural traditions, organizations and/or activities/events that children were exposed to outside of school.

As previously noted, there were two focus groups conducted, one group of African American parents/guardians of students who are not consistently performing (Group A, level 1 and 2 on the NYS ELA Assessments, 2015-2016); and the other group of African American parents/guardians of consistently performing middle schoolers in grades 6, 7, or 8, (Group B, level 3 and 4 on the NYS ELA Assessments, 2015-2016). The task of interpreting the opinion conversations in both groups was key to the narrative of African American parents/guardians having a say from their perspective in regard to the education of their urban middle school children.

The findings allowed the researcher to bring forth the similarities and differences between the two groups. Key to note, is the demographic information and the process that made a difference for the African American parents/guardians of consistently
performing middle schoolers in grades 6, 7, and 8, (Group B, level 3 and 4 on the NYS ELA Assessments, 2015-2016). Thus, demographic information about each group was collected during the focus group sessions. In essence, there was a total of 10 participants, five parents/guardians in each focus group. Group A was comprised of a mother and her maternal mother (grandmother), two other mothers and one father. In this group, two additional mothers completed the consent form, however, they did not attend. Group B was comprised of one married couple and three other mothers.

To further ensure confidentiality while decreasing coercion, an outside facilitator moderated each focus group and asked the four research questions which were audio taped and later transcribed. The researcher viewed the transcribed focus groups’ responses and coded the data collected. As recommended by Saldana (2016), the researcher utilized elemental methods that included initial coding, open coding, descriptive coding, and in vivo coding during the first cycle of coding. During the second cycle of coding, patterned coding, axial coding, and focused coding was utilized to categorize coded data as an initial analytic strategy. Careful consideration of qualitative coding methods was aligned with the research questions resulting in the patterns, themes, and subthemes that emerged. Therefore, categorizing the data was utilized as an analytic goal. This analytic goal provided insight to understand the underlying phenomenon of academic achievement from the perspective of the parents/guardians. The phenomenon permitted overarching themes to develop from the data corpus which demonstrated the complicity of interconnectedness.

Research Questions

Research questions for this study included:
1. How do urban African American parents/guardians define and describe parent engagement?

2. What culturally relevant experiences do urban African American parents/guardians perceive as impacting the success of their child?

3. What role do urban African American parents/guardians play in their children’s schooling?

4. What can schools do to create a better partnership between home and school for African-American families?

Data Analysis and Findings

This section is organized into four responses from the two focus groups which included participants from both Group A and Group B who responded to the research questions which were previously listed. In reviewing the demographic information for Group A (see Table 4.1), three of the parents were born and reared in the United States; one was born in the Dominican Republic and the other in Ghana, West Africa. Three parents were in the 40-49 age range, one 50-59, and one guardian was in the 70-79 age range. There were four females and one male in this focus group. Three participants were married and two were single. The one retired guardian (maternal grandmother) had an elementary education and the unemployed father in the group had a high school
### Table 4.1

**Focus Group A: Demographic Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Participant/ Gender</th>
<th>40-49</th>
<th>50-59</th>
<th>70-79</th>
<th>Origin of Birth</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Years in USA</th>
<th>Member of Cultural Organizations</th>
<th>Child’s Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1A/F</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Associates Degree</td>
<td>Sales (Customer Service)</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sports, religion, movies, library, park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G2A/F</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>55+</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Ballet, Baseball, Basketball, Church, park, movies library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3A/F</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Bachelor of Arts High School</td>
<td>Medical Office Manager</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Videos, movies, library, theatre, museums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4A/M</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ghana, Africa</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Church, library, theatre, movies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5A/F</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bronx, NY</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Bachelor of Science</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>40+</td>
<td>Community Center</td>
<td>Basketball, church (retreat), food kitchen, sports program, tutoring</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

132
education, while one mother earned an Associate’s degree, and the other two mothers earned Bachelor’s degrees. One mother was in customer service, one in medical management and one in education. Only two families reported membership in cultural organizations. Four of five of the families reported church or religion as a major family activity. Additional activities families engaged in were the following: four families mentioned the library, three families frequented the movies, two families mentioned the park, two families frequented the theatre, and one family mentioned eating out at restaurants and using tutoring as needed. Three families reported having their child participate in sports activities such as baseball, ballet, boxing, dancing, and basketball. Cultural activities included attending family gatherings, family reunions, museums, art shows, nature walks, and sports activities.

In reviewing the demographic information for Group B (see Table 4.2), all five of the parents were born and reared in the US. Four parents were African American and one female was Latin American. Three parents were born in Yonkers, N.Y., one in the Bronx, N.Y., and one in Brooklyn, N.Y. The four females’ age ranged from 30-39 while the sole male in the focus group was aged 40-49. The one married couple had both earned a high school diploma and the other three females pursued an additional two years of college, a Bachelor’s degree or post graduate studies. Of the three mothers in the focus group, two were single-parent households; one was separated with a single-family household. All five participants were employed in various careers such as accounting, customer service, or custodial services. Three out of the five families mentioned cultural membership in an organization. All families reported that the church, church events, library, and movies were activities that their family regularly participated in while dance,
Table 4.2

Focus Group B: Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Participant/Gender</th>
<th>30-39</th>
<th>40-49</th>
<th>Origin of Birth</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Years in USA</th>
<th>Member of Cultural Organizations</th>
<th>Child’s Activities</th>
<th>Cultural Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1B/F</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yonkers, NY</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Post Graduate</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Dance, church, reading, playing UNO</td>
<td>Church, church events, dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2B/F</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bronx, NY</td>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>High School with 2 years of college</td>
<td>Credentialing Coordinator</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>YMCA, Dole Center, Sports programs for baseball and basketball)</td>
<td>African Drumming, library, basketball, movies</td>
<td>African Drumming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3B/F</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Brooklyn, NY</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Bachelor of Science</td>
<td>Medical Assistant</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Movies, library, church, vacation, tutoring, sports, cooking</td>
<td>Completing school projects/events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4B/F</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yonkers, NY</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Grade 12</td>
<td>Office</td>
<td>30+</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Church, park, movies, museums, family game night</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5B/M</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yonkers, NY</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Grade 12</td>
<td>Building Custodian II</td>
<td>All my life</td>
<td>2 (YMCA and NCC)</td>
<td>Church, family retreat, movies, girls group, Sight &amp; Sound vacation, game night</td>
<td>Church, spiritual upbringing, positive reinforcement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
African drumming, family game nights, vacations, visiting museums and parks, basketball, tutoring, and reading were cultural activities that were enjoyed at times.

**Research question 1.** Research question 1 asked: How do urban African American parents/guardians define and describe parent engagement? The parents did not debate the issue of the importance of parent engagement, it was a given. The parents in attendance for both focus groups listened to one another in tandem with agreement and then added on to what was previously expressed. Table 4.3 outlines themes that arose from Group A on parent engagement.

Table 4.3

*Question One – Group A: Parent Engagement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Themes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme #1</td>
<td>Family Structure</td>
<td>Strict upbringing with guidelines and rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Faith-based experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Repeat exposure given by their parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Children need guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Grateful for the opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Plant seeds and watch them flourish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Expectations for future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #2</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Parent participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mentors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Extracurricular exposure: sports, dance, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Instill cultural beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #3</td>
<td>Influence</td>
<td>Take what was positive from the parents’ upbringing and make their child’s future better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strong family values shaped parents’ path; traditions from parent to child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Proud of African American heritage; exposed at an early age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Benefactors of African ancestry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Attend historical/educational events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ACE – (SES) parents lack of education instilled importance of education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In reviewing the data of Group A for research question 1 (see Table 4.3), three themes emerged from their interaction; the importance of family structure, commitment and influence. Three of the five parents (P1A, G2A, and P5A) agreed that the strict upbringing of their parents providing guidelines, rules, and cultural values made a difference in their lives. For example, P1A noted, “I wouldn’t be where I am if it wasn’t for it (strict upbringing).” The family structure included parents, teachers, family members, and community ensuring that the child was cared for, educated, and developed into a productive citizen. The significance of the family structure provided an opportunity for children to explore, yet, to have guidance. Each of these parents were committed to equipping and encouraging their child to be respectful, law abiding, and successful. Parent engagement was described as a life-long commitment to exposing children to the sights and sounds of their past and present, to undoubtedly impact their future. This was evident when P4A stated the following:

Yes, I think it’s key, from the moment that the child is born, that you are committed. That we all work, and some people have two and three jobs, but if you choose to have a child that you are bringing into the world, you need to be committed to that child. This is the child of the future. This child will be whatever this child chooses to be, so you do need to instill rules, regulations, faith. I'm just saying, this is a person, it's almost like a seedling. You give them the things to start with and then watch it grow.

All five parents/guardians in Group A strongly contended that their rich African ancestry was a binding factor that influenced how they developed, which in turn impacted how they engaged with their child. The parents commented on the power of taking what
was positive from their upbringing and using it to do the same or better for their children. Despite the fact that their parents’ education was limited, their parents instilled a strong commitment to value education which was passed from generation to generation. P5A was also concerned with the community members that come into contact with her child. As an example, P5A stated,

> It's also engaging in, let's say, their basketball, their dance, participating in those types of activities, as well as, in school, where you're engaging with those that may have an influence with your child. Engaging with those other factors is part of parent engagement.

This sentiment was that these community members or mentors, needed to be productive and positive role models when they interacted in educational, recreational and or historical activities and events.

In contrast, in reviewing the data of Group B for research question 1 (see Table 4.4), two different themes emerged which were best practices and parenting behaviors (Baumrind, 1967, 1971). Group B parents agreed on the following practices as being important: (a) having daily open-ended dialogue, (b) actively listening to your child, (c) having a specific set time for interaction with child, (d) establishing trust with your child, and (e) engaging in intentional questioning about social/emotional, bullying and stressors that arise.
Table 4.4

Question one – Group B: Parent Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Themes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme #1</td>
<td>Best Practices</td>
<td>Daily open-ended dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Active parent listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Carve out specific set of time each day for interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Establish trust with your child (risk-free zone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Be intentional with questioning; social/emotional, bullying, ACE (stressors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Be proactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #2</td>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td>Model positive attributes for positive outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Behaviors</td>
<td>Be consistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Be flexible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maximize time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was also noted in Group B that parents felt that to exhibit parenting behaviors they reflect the modeling of positive attributes to purposely yield positive outcomes, like improved academic achievement. Some positive attributes parent/guardians expressed included consistency, flexibility and to maximize time when engaging with their child. This was evident in P3B’s comment which included the following;

I agree with all the other parents. I would say for me consistency. Kids follow what they see. They tend to wanna do what they see in you, you being their first open role model in their lifetime, active listening, it, it, it plays a very huge part in how your child perceives things, how they embrace things, how they just take on life, period. Because if they feel like they're being ignored, they're gonna look for attention elsewhere. So, you wanna engage in active listening, like, parent number one said.
Research question 2. Research question 2 asked: What culturally relevant experiences do urban African American parents/guardians perceive as impacting the success of their child? In reviewing the data, it was evident that the role of cultural upbringing played a part in the lives of each parent to some degree whether it was relative to disparity in education, opportunity, SES, and/or additional stressors that influence decision-making. Themes from Group A are indicated in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5

**Question two – Group A: Culturally Relevant Experiences**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Themes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme #1</td>
<td>Family Structure</td>
<td>ACE – Black in America (CRT)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Single/Two parent household (SES)</td>
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<td>Traditions</td>
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<td>Birth order</td>
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<td>Strict upbringing</td>
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<td>Magnify what worked from strict upbringing</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>African ancestry</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Instill values, morals, and beliefs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme #2</td>
<td>Challenge to Excel</td>
<td>Pass on the importance of education</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Strong emphasis on academics</td>
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<td>Supersede parents path (goals) – college bound</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme #3</td>
<td>Cultural Influences</td>
<td>Attend cultural and educational events</td>
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<td>Afro-Latin traditions</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive mentors who demonstrate images of success especially men of color</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme #4</td>
<td>Creative Outlets</td>
<td>Reading, boxing, sports, hobbies/clubs, swimming, track, basketball, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strategic support systems</td>
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<td>Community based interest-based exposure</td>
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During the Group A session, P3A shared, “You have to know your past in order to see/find your future.” This reference gave participants an opportunity to reflect on their
own experiences with African ancestry, African American history and African American parenting which ultimately impacted the lives of their children.

In reviewing the data of Group A for research question 2, (see Table 4.5) four themes emerged: (a) family structure, (b) a challenge to excel, (c) cultural influences, and (d) creative outlets. Being a person of color in America was a common thread that aligned with critical race theory. This alignment was evident when P3A recalled her experience of being Black in America,

I majored in Art History, and I'm the last of seven, and we were born here, so we are Black Americans in America. My mother, she instilled, the woman was only five foot, if you get arrested, and you had better stay there because I will take you out. She didn't play.”

Not only was race an issue but SES was impacted by the shift from two-parent households to single-parent households. The breakdown of the family structure caused a ripple in how family traditions, customs, and African/African American history were told to the young. Additionally, the birth order of siblings made an impact on what messages were transferred from generation to generation. P1A described her feelings about her past and stated the following:

Yes, my upbringing was very strong, it was pretty much academic, make sure that you get good grades, you do this, you do that, and just structure. I don't want to be my parent again, cause there are some things that . . . Things happen as you were a child, and now you feel you are doing them now, but I ask myself sometimes, "Am I doing it correctly?" And hopefully I am.
The notion of excelling in school was not a debate, regardless of where you lived and how much your parents did or did not have. As evidenced from Group A, education was perceived as a way to a better life and the importance of having an education was paramount. Additionally, understanding the plight of African ancestry was duly noted when P5A shared the following:

I don't want to say burden, but I have placed (expectations) on my child, such as understanding history. This was something that my mom did. I remember my mom giving me, in seventh grade, the history of our ancestry. For a Puerto Rican to know that your ancestors were of African descent in seventh grade that was revolutionary for me as a seventh grader in the Bronx, especially growing up around Puerto Ricans that really denounced that side of their culture.

The parents expressed the importance of attending cultural and educational events that celebrate the African/Latin influence of their people. P4A shared,

You have to teach him certain things of how to, I hate to say, survive. But touching back on history, in our culture, Black America, I love history, he hates history. I am always dragging him to various events, just to say you have to know where you came from to know where you're going. It just still scares me that he's a Black male in America.

These cultural and educational events/activities are creative outlets that allow the youth to explore and grow. Some activities develop into a passion, a creative outlet to dispel the disparities of adverse childhood experiences (CDC, 2016) such as poverty, lack of education, single-parent household, depression, and more. Four of the five parents/guardians in Group A expressed having their children participate in sports like
boxing, basketball, and swimming at the local YMCA or track and field, and even hobbies or clubs. However, P4A shared, “My kids don't like sports. They just wanna read and go to college.” P5A expressed the importance of parents ensuring that community members . . . “are a person that's connecting with my son and is a man that is positive, that's going to instill those positive values so that he can be a success. He needs to see an image of success.”

In reviewing the data of Group B for research question 2 (see Table 4.6), four themes also emerged which were the following; expectations, racial identity, advocacy, and successful strategies. African American parents may have been poor, yet, they were rich in spirit. Realistically, African American parents may have worked two or three jobs to make sure that the family had food, clothes, and shelter. The African American families and communities expected that if given the opportunity to be educated, the children would do so and look back to help the next generation. These families were determined to break barriers in SES, the deterioration of family structure, gender, and even sibling rivalry due to ACE or other stressors like mental illness, drug abuse, homelessness, etc. to seek a better life for their children. P1B shared,

…definitely growing up, I would say my parents, my family instilled in me, I guess even back in Slavery, education was restricted to us. When you go to school, you, you'd better be, you'd better, you'd better do . . . You be at the top of your class. There was no settling for less. There was no C's coming home in my house. "You, you'd better not come home with no C.
### Table 4.6

**Question two – Group B: Culturally Relevant Experiences**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Themes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme #1</td>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td>ACE – slavery restrictions, SES, family structure (single-parent household…break cycle-BARRIER BREAKER) Present day goals Opportunity to excel – 3’s &amp; 4’s Progress monitoring Be well-rounded, not just academics (cultured) Balance school and extracurricular activities Rewards Parent as a guide Better life for child-instill religion, morals, values, family structure Lack of male role models Positive sibling rivalry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Theme #2         | Racial Identity | Recognize and dispel ACE – stressors – lack of intellect, color of skin Competition- sibling to sibling, parent to child Gender differences Culturally, yield to a higher authority (God) listen/obey Priorities: God, family (parents/siblings, extended), and then others…community/ friends |

| Theme #3         | Advocacy | Academic challenges Vigilant for abuse, stressors; bullying, teasing, peer pressure, depression, etc. Keep education stimulating Be engaged in the process with child Character building – self-motivated child Hone in on individual needs/wants/aspirations |

| Theme #4         | Successful Strategies | Global skills; explore language and technology Access to resources; tutoring, life experiences, counseling, technology, etc. Character building Acquisition of marketable social skills; communication, career development Engage in activities of child which are interest-based (extracurricular) One shot to do it right; focus on child’s needs Every experience is a learning opportunity Model open-ended questioning (critical thinking skills) Educational exposure; trips, oral history lessons, college bound, summer extra credit, exploration, etc. Embrace gender differences with activities Cultivate personality; love, respect, self-worth, etc. |
In the African American household children were raised to respect their elders, never to swear, talk when were spoken to and to do your best in school so when they grow up, they would be somebody, maybe even somebody great. The rules were simple; obey God, your parents, your teachers, and your elders because failure was not an option. Race played a major part in everyday life and African American people were constantly reminded that being Black in America meant something different once you were not in your own home or community. P1B shared,

I was always taught, because of the color of your skin, they already. . . created an image about you not being smart, not being determined, not being able to break through certain glass ceiling that's been in place.” So, my mom had no tolerance for mediocracy. And, I would say that kind of rolls over to my kids too, 'cause you can't come home with, you know, now to get the numbers. You want three's and four's.

Today more than ever before, African American parents/guardians exercise their constitutional rights to speak up and advocate for change. They advocate against injustices that confront their children such as a lack of school funding, limited educational resources and teachers who do not always identify with the needs of children of color by voting, engaging in the PTA and being a part of the school community. African American parents/guardians, as advocates of change, must also respond to social and emotional issues. Primarily, African American parents/guardians first recognized the need to address their own feelings and emotions (ACE) around harassment and discrimination in an educational setting for topics such as peer pressure, bullying, teasing,
and cyberbullying before they could effectively advise and support their own children. P3B shared,

Despite appearances, I was a kid in elementary who was bullied. You know, I, I wasn't a fighter. I was always the nerdy one, the bookworm. So, that was one of my other, cultural impacts that plays a great part in my daughter’s education, because I had a good mother but I feel she overlooked a lot of it (bullying). So, that's the reason, as soon as my daughter comes home, I'm on it. "What happened in school today? How did school go today? Uh, were you upset?" You know, I wanna know everything, because I don't want nothing hidden. I don't . . . You know, sometimes kids could be excellent, excel academically, but emotionally they're suffering. So, with that being said, I need to make sure that you're not being bullied. You're not being peer-pressured. You know, it, is more to achieving academically than just excelling in a classroom.

Despite the challenges of parents’ time, SES, disparities in education and access, the participants in Group B expressed that some common successful strategies utilized to help their children included equipping them with global skills in language and technology, access to more resources such as tutoring, counseling, and career development, ongoing character building, and exposure to many extracurricular activities helped to increase student success. Each participant agreed that the acquisition of marketable social skills like improved communication were vices to help their children strive for excellence in college and careers. It was paramount to hone in on their child’s individual and collective strengths and weakness to influence their personal aspirations. They expressed the significance of getting parenting right the first time by making every
experience a learning opportunity, asking open-ended questions, participating in various educational opportunities such as family trips, listening to oral history, embracing gender differences for activities and cultivating the minds of independent thinkers. P2B recounted that,

For me, the way I was raised, my mom had us well-rounded where it wasn't just academics. My son is not the bookworm. My oldest daughter, she's a junior in college. She's a great student. Girls and boys are different. She excelled. She was well-rounded. She did basketball. She did dance. She sang in church. She just does almost everything, but balances it out. I think if she did not have the activities that . . . You know, if she was just focused on her books, she would be a totally different child. I've learned that from my mom.

Research question 3. Research question 3 asked: What role do urban African American parents/guardians play in their children’s schooling? In reviewing the data of Group A for research question 3 (see Table 4.7), four themes emerged which included advocacy, encouragement, support system, and best practices. This group of parents agreed that they believed their role in their child’s schooling was best served as the liaison that linked home to school. As a liaison, it afforded parents the opportunity to oversee their child’s education by participating in progress monitoring of grades, attendance, social interactions, and behavior by partnering with teacher. P5A shared,

You have to do better than me, and I did better than my mom. You gotta do better than me." Ensuring that trajectory is always, you're getting better, you're getting better, like fine wine.
Table 4.7

*Question Three – Group A: Role of Parents in Schooling*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Themes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Theme #1 | Advocacy | Liaison from home to school  
Oversee education  
Monitor progress with teachers  
ACE- being Black in America especially a Black male; survive police brutality |
| Theme #2 | Encouragement | Motivate child to succeed  
Build confidence  
Take risks  
Decision-making (smart choices)  
Incentives for excellence  
Parental expectations  
Trajectory of progression  
Rewards, Incentives |
| Theme #3 | Support System | Entrepreneurial spirit  
Level of parent engagement has changed (more) not the expectation to excel  
Define success  
Career exploration |
| Theme #4 | Best Practices | Bi-directional communication with teachers  
Stay focused on the goal  
Remember the struggle of those that paved a way for you  
Praise child for accomplishments big/small  
Know your child  
Early intervention |

Four of the five parents/guardians from Group A expressed being comfortable encouraging their child by motivating them to succeed without additional pressure. However, one parent expressed satisfaction providing monetary incentives for academic excellence to increase student motivation. It was noted to intrinsically build confidence while encouraging their child to take risks whether academic or personal. By helping
their child see the value of making good decisions, they would be improving the trajectory of progression from one generation to the next. P4A shared,

He needs encouragement to talk, but he doesn't have the confidence. By doing this and saying no, then I wouldn't say, "Oh! That's great." I would kind of just like, "Is that the direction you're going?" When it was finished, he was like, "I did that." I was like, "Yeah, you did, and I knew you could do it." So, it's always just letting him figure it out but always being there like, I got you're back.

Parent engagement of the early 1960s has changed from sending your child to school to be educated to having more engagement by creating support system that aides the child in the school community (Berger, 1991; NCLB, 2016; Rampey et al., 2009; Zigler & Styfco, 2010). The shift supports the central role parents play in their child’s educational development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1978). Additionally, Group A discussed the importance of instilling an entrepreneurial spirit, an entrepreneurial spirit that allowed students to explore different careers while creating a collaborative definition of success. P2A commented, “So, I think when kids are well rounded, very sociable, it helps them in their daily living, and, and learning.”

Group A discussed best practices for the role of parenting in schooling as utilizing bidirectional communication with teachers and schools, reaffirming the value of education as a priority, knowing their history of the struggles of African American people to be educated, and early intervention for improved academic achievement. This group also strong believed in praising the child for big and small accomplishments, as well as, taking the time to know your child’s strengths and weakness. Table 4.8 provides the perspectives of Group B for question three.
### Table 4.8

**Question Three - Group B: Role of Parents in Schooling**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Themes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme #1</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>Link between home and school/community (value system)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Parents as a resource-collaboration for excellence for all children</td>
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<td>Transparency on ACE issues; human first then as a parent</td>
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<td>Short/long term goals</td>
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<td>Theme #2</td>
<td>Encouragement</td>
<td>Foster spirit of resilience, determination, persistence, commitment,</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Model; struggle, Google it, dictionary (learning can be fun)</td>
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<td>Consistency</td>
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<td>Reflective role model</td>
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<td>Motivator (give praise and incentives)</td>
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<td>Compete with yourself (no limits; go beyond your imagination)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Demonstrate initiative</td>
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<td>Theme #3</td>
<td>Support System</td>
<td>Resource; academic, social, cultural, emotional, physical</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Customize gender needs/wants (know your child)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Early intervention; establish good habits</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Character building; humility, stability, responsibility, honesty, decision-making, loyalty, etc.</td>
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<td>Accountable role model</td>
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<td>Trust the process (Process + Persistence = Desired Outcome)</td>
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<td>Matriculation – start to finish (Crib to Beyond College)</td>
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<td>Set realistic goals</td>
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<td>Gender issues; hair, vanity, preteens, etc.</td>
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<td>Theme #4</td>
<td>Best Practices</td>
<td>Strategic modeling; family game night</td>
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<td>Be honest about your journey, struggles, vulnerabilities, etc.</td>
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<td>Goal orientated; model excellence and transparency</td>
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<td>Make memories; be there; be engaged; be active; be flexible</td>
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<td>Give praise for participation (incentives, rewards)</td>
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<td>Be consistent; support system, homework help, project help, etc.</td>
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<td>Structured home environment (parent stability) + daily application = success</td>
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<td>Every interaction is a lesson for life</td>
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<td>Continuously challenge child to overcome ACE, stressors, obstacles, etc.</td>
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<td>Gradual release of parental control; decision-making (college and careers-find your passion)</td>
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<td>Encourage reflective inquiry and evaluation</td>
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<td>Be proactive; use your resources (advocacy, technology)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cultural influences; religion, upbringing, village, etc.</td>
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In reviewing the data of Group B for research question 3 (see Table 4.8), the same four themes emerged which included advocacy, encouragement, support system, and best practices. This was the one research question that both sets of parents were similar with their thought process. Group B, unanimously declared they were a link between home and school/community that collaboratively advocated for all children. They were a resource for whatever their child needs to excel in school. If an issue surfaced whether from home or in school, the Group B parents were willingly ready to confront the issue regardless of the origin (i.e., ACE situations). They felt transparency was a vice to support being human first and then a parent. For instance, P3B commented the following;

Because you know, me, myself, my life is an open book to her. So, I think that's important. A lot of parents try to shelter and hide stuff from their kids and it's only in my opinion, hurting and hindering her. Anything you want to know, I'm going to tell you because I'm human first before I was your mother, before I was anything, I was a human being.

The second theme of encouragement allowed the Group B parents to describe how they consistently fostered a spirit of resilience, determination, persistence, and commitment as they demonstrated parent engagement. This was evident when P3B stated the following;

I think for me, practicing humility and stability. I think that's very essential. I teach her she doesn't have to fight every battle that comes her way. Everything is not for you. You don't have to get it. If some things ain't for you to get. Everybody learns on different times in different ways. I teach her to be proud and
own everything she does. Don't do nothing that you going to be embarrassed about. If you, if you ain't ashamed to do it, don't be ashamed to own it because it's coming back to you. So, think twice before you make whatever decision that you make. Are you going to be able to stand there proudly and own that decision or you going to be embarrassed about it? So, you know, it teaches her to think versus just acting on impulse.

Additionally, P2B shared,

I congratulate him, with a high five, and I reward him. I just want him to know that does not need to compare himself to other kids. He may not be that A student, but you are great child. You are my child and you will achieve in your own way. You may not be good at this, but you'll be good at something else. But you're not going to give up on it. You know, because you have to do it (achieve).

Group B parents conveyed the importance of modeling the strategies that their child needed to be exposed to on their academic journey. P1B demonstrated this when she shared,

I would say my role as a parent to improve student success is…… pretty much I'm a resource to her. I'm a resource to my daughter. Whatever she needs, whatever she struggles with, I am going to be that link that's gonna to connect her from where she's at, to where she needs to be. So, if she's struggling with math, I'm an . . . Accountant and some of the stuff she brings home. I'm like, "Um, baby, let's Google that."
Frequently, Group B parents admitted using a modern technology strategy such as “Google it” as well as, using a dictionary to find out more information. The parents were in agreement that being a reflective role model went a long way with their child. Additionally, they professed that acting as their child’s main motivator with verbal praise along with incentives helped their students compete with their own personal goals, rather than competing with others. For instance, P4B shared that “She (her daughter) gets really upset if doesn't score high. I'm there to tell her, you did good and just next time just try a little harder, study a little harder. That's just my support with them (her three girls).” Another example, P5B shared the following about his three school aged girls:

Once again, I teach my kids, "If you're going to do something, look for it for the long haul. Don't go for the short term. You know, set goals! You know, what goals are you setting? Short term, long term goals? Do you like it? If you don't like it, don't start something you don't like. You know, and then I basically tell them, you know, in order for you to enjoy something, it is a process you have to go through. You're not gonna know if you're enjoying this if you don't go through the process. So, don't just rush to get a quick result, "Oh, you know, where is the benefits from it?" Go through the process, be persistent and then you'll, you'll see exactly what the outcome is.

The third theme which was support system allowed Group B parents to elaborate on being a resource that interfaced in different areas such as academic, social, cultural, emotional, and physical. They expressed the idea of intimately knowing the strengths and weaknesses of their child so that they could tailor needed support throughout the development stages of their child’s journey. This was evident with the following
examples; P3B shared, “This is stuff you have to start early in order for them to want to follow through with it.” P5B declared,

    You always want the best of your kid, you want them to soar high and excel, always in, in what they like and in their likes. But also, just piggybacking on what parent number one said, it's the character. You know, because I tell my daughter sometimes, you know, of course she thinks she's beautiful. I mean, she is beautiful but you know, just don't get too conceited…be smart because beauty fades away.

As a support system, Group B parents regarding imparting character building skills such as humility, stability, responsibility, honesty, decision-making, and loyalty as some of the key traits they would instill as accountable role models for their children. As previously noted, P5B stated it was important to trust the process which he described as a process plus persistence yielding the desired outcome, meaning raise your child with realistic goals, advocate for them as needed, encourage them to compete and excel while being a consistent support system, as well as, having tools to draw from so that the child would make wise decisions for their future. In essence, Group B parents related their role to schooling as a journey from the crib and beyond college as a journey worthy of their participation. P1B shared,

    I want to say as far as expectations, really, it is just about a sense of character for me. I teach my daughter about character building 'cause I feel like that's going to spill over into the academic success. I want you to be honest. Your honesty is going to make sure you're not plagiarizing your work. I want you to have integrity.
The fourth theme, best practices, were the tools each parent shared and attributed to their child’s consistent academic achievement. The Group B parents agreed that a strong family structure that modeled activities like family vacations and game nights helped impart family values and togetherness. Group B parents shared about being honest about their ACE such as struggles and or vulnerabilities which would strengthen their interconnected family relations. These complex relations are discussed in great detail from researchers, Bronfenbrenner’s (1977, 2005) ecological systems theory and Bell’s (1976a, 1976b) critical race theory in Chapter 2. They shared the importance of being goal oriented and modeling excellence as well as, transparency. This was demonstrated by making memories, being in the moment, being actively engaged in the interests of their children, yet, being flexible and sensitive to the developmental stages their child may experience. An example, was when P4B shared the following:

I think just as a parent you, you want your child to excel way beyond, right? I just think that certain things shouldn't be forced on them. I just keep on trying to see what she likes and what she dislikes.

P4B went on to say,

One of our children, we put them in piano. And I would take her every week. And she was like, "Mom, I don't want to do this." And I'm like, "I'm paying for this! You're going to do this. I'm paying for it." And you know, after a while, I realized, well, this is not what she really wants to do even though I thought it was beautiful.

She continued on,
Okay, well….She tried softball, last year. They had it in here in eighth grade and of course she did it first because her friends. Her friends did it and then she ended up loving it! And it's funny piggybacking on what parent number three said on how she just started looking out for colleges. The first thing I said when she entered as freshman was, speak to a guidance counselor….Yes. Ask her (counselor) about scholarships! Ask her, ask her…. “What requirements, what grades are needed!? Yes, you have to find out. Who's giving the scholarships, McDonald’s, somebody? . . Oh, yes!

Group B parents contended that being a consistent support system for homework help and project work was expected while providing a stable home environment with daily application was a recipe for student success. They professed that using every interaction was a lesson for life. They declared it was mandatory to challenge their child to overcome ACE, any stressor or obstacle that might impede academic achievement. More importantly, they shared that as their child developed Group B parents would gradually release parental control so that their child wisely could make decisions about their choice of college and/or careers.

Group B parents collectively encouraged reflective inquiry and evaluation of their parenting by having courageous conversations with their child and the child’s teachers. They reinforced the concept of using their resources such as advocacy and technology. Lastly, Group B parents attributed the value of cultural influences such as religious and cultural upbringing as irreplaceable components that made a difference in their lives and in the lives of their children.
Research question 4. Research question 4 asked: What can schools do to create a better partnership between home and school for African-American families? Both groups were quick to respond and shared their insights on how a better partnership would help African American students and families thrive. Table 4.9 indicates themes from Group A.

Table 4.9

**Question Four – Group A: Creating Better Partnerships Between Home and School**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Themes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme #1</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Bi-directional communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Welcome parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Let your name and face be known</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Advocate for your child’s needs</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Clarify teacher miscommunications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dare to have courageous conversations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>It takes a village…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #2</td>
<td>Authentic Parent Engagement</td>
<td>Create opportunities for effective interactions;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>workshops on new ways of CCLS, news ways to support the CCLS learning</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Model parenting behaviors</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vocalize parent expectations of school/district</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Overcome preteen challenges</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme #3</td>
<td>Supporting Future Aspirations</td>
<td>Career path: ENT doctor, lawyer, architect, engineer, business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Continue parent guidance (support system)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate from high school and be college bound</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Plan for college success</td>
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</table>

In reviewing the data of Group A for research question 4 (see Table 4.9), three themes emerged which included communication, authentic parent engagement, and supporting future aspirations. All of the participants in Group A, agreed on the importance of bidirectional communication. This form of communication created a
welcoming atmosphere for parents while allowing communication between teachers and parents that keep them abreast of academic and behavioral developments on growth. Therefore, parents/guardians can actively engage with teachers and administration to increase parent engagement as a part of the solution. For instance, P4A commented,

Every September I would come in with my son's IEP that I had received in August with how many copies . . . Several copies and say this is my son. This is what he needs, this is what I expect. They probably call me a lot of things, but my attitude was like, don't mess with me. My nickname, my husband calls me is pit bull. I was just relieved because the resource teacher in this school, which over the years, told me, "I've never had a parent come in and state pretty much what they expected!" My natural response was, “Well, I had a list of questions, I'm here, I'm gonna be here for the year with you.” I came in with my numbers for her to reach me at work, cell, home, and email. I reminded the teacher, “You have no excuse not to reach out to me. And if you don't reach out to me, you're not gonna like the other side of me.

They also agreed that it was equally important to randomly be in contact with the school, district and even policymakers. On occasion, parents/guardians may need to advocate for their child’s needs by supporting the local PTA, requesting educational resources and voting for policymakers invested in their community, as well as, clarifying teacher miscommunications in regard to fair grading and/or treatment. Ultimately, Group A parents/guardians saw a need to have ongoing courageous conversations with teachers and administration centered on the betterment of their children.
Secondly, Group A agreed that having authentic parent engagement opportunities was essential to forging partnerships between home and school. It was their belief that authentic parent engagement could be successfully achieved by create opportunities for effective interactions with parent workshops focused on new ways of supporting CCLS with homework help, and new ways to support the CCLS learning at home, as an extension of teacher instruction. P5A shared,

I was going to say that I hear what parent number one and four said, that feeling welcome, feeling that participation with the school and it shows that the school community is prepared to have conversations. I feel that a school just really needs to assess how welcoming are they to parents. How transparent are they to parents? Because there are times that certain things are taught and I may have learned it one way, you may be teaching it another way.

Additionally, Group A parents/guardians were confident that they needed to model positive parenting behaviors and be sure to actively articulate and vocalize parent expectations to the teacher, school, and district so that their child was afforded the same opportunities as they advance towards matriculation to higher education and careers. The parents in Group A, also recognized as engaged parents, they would be able to better support their child facing any challenges or obstacles during their preadolescent stage. For example, P1A said, “pre-teen, teenage years that are kind of messing me up right now, but hopefully with the right guidance we can move forward.”

Thirdly, Group A agreed that as parents it was their responsibility to support their child’s future aspirations along with the school community. So not only was the school responsible for preparing students for a global economy, but, parent engagement included
exposing their child to career pathing to support aspiring to be an ENT doctor, lawyer, architect, engineer, and or business person. This was evident when P4A said, “Graduating college either an engineer or an architect because he likes to, what it is called, doodle or not doodle, but, sketch!” They agreed that continuing parent guidance as a support system with teachers, administration, districts, and community members was a plan for more student academic success. This partnership would foster a positive atmosphere that encouraged more students to stay motivated to graduate from high school and prepares with the skills need to be college bound or ready for a career.

In reviewing the data of Group B for research question four (see Table 4.10), four themes emerged which included increase equity and inclusiveness, improve teacher preparedness, classroom innovations, and parents as partners. The parents in Group B, expressed the importance of an increase in equity and an inclusiveness to fairly implement the Every Student Succeeds Act (2016). The ESSA (2016) includes provisions that support Individual Educational Plan (IEP) students’ needs, collaboration of all stakeholders on policy-making, and valuing authentic parent engagement from its inception to completion of higher education as a viable partner in educating America’s children. PB1 shared, “Definitely, collaboration that there needs to be room for individualized plans to be made for each child although they're in the same grade, although they're in the same classroom.”
Table 4.10

*Question Four – Group B: Creating Better Partnerships Between Home and School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Themes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme #1</strong></td>
<td>Increase Equity and Inclusion</td>
<td>IEP for all students</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Collaboration of all stakeholders on policy-making</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Value authentic parent engagement (beginning to end)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>21st century learning; CCLS full implementation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Access to resources; funding, technology, materials</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Level the educational field (nationwide)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>End red tape on needed services (i.e., speech/resource services)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>District working collaboratively on community schools, sibling placement, transportation</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Theme #2</strong></td>
<td>Improve Teacher Preparedness</td>
<td>Continuous training to support the needs of students; stay engaged</td>
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<td>Communication; bidirectional (i.e., progress monitoring, career development, behavior modifications)</td>
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<td>Rigid structure from the past</td>
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<td>Teach for the time; “microwave generation” global market – technology and cooperative learning</td>
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<td>Recognize ACE and respond by linking needs with resources</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Advise parents on best practices to support CCLS; utilize technology</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Value teachers contributions; role models, special people, practice patience, recognize “bright spots”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Theme #3</strong></td>
<td>Classroom innovations</td>
<td>Students as leaders/teachers (cogens)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Movement (cooperative learning) vs. Medicine (Ritalin/Special Education)</td>
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<td>Parents valued as a resource/partner (i.e., ACE – parent was in resource)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Theme #4</strong></td>
<td>Parents as Partners</td>
<td>Role model for advancement</td>
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<td>Unconditional support system</td>
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<td>Advocate for your child; policymaking</td>
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<td>Consistently attend events; open house, parent meetings, workshops, etc.</td>
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<td>You are your child’s first teacher</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Be proactive; dispel myths/assumptions</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hold district/administration/ teachers accountable for student growth</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The parents in Group B expressed passion for all children, especially children of color, actively engaged in 21st century learning with full implementation of CCLS. The
parents in Group B demanded access to resources such as equal funding, the infusion of technology in all classrooms, and timely supplementary materials. The parents of Group B agreed that it was long overdue time to nationally, level the educational field while officially ending the hold up on needed services like speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and resource services for students in need. They even rallied for their local district to work earnestly and collaboratively on creating more community schools, acknowledging sibling placement, and increasing better solutions to transporting all children. This was evident when PB2 commented, “If I was a parent that sat back and just waited, you know, he would be behind and I don't think that's fair.”

Secondly, in reviewing the data for Group B, the parents overwhelming agreed that it was imperative to improve teacher preparedness for improved academic achievement as it pertained to children of color, especially children of African descent. They suggested having continuous training to support the needs of students which requires teachers to stay engaged in the process of teaching children. The Group B parents also agreed that communication that fostered bidirectional communication for progress monitoring, career development, behavior modifications was paramount. They supported ending past rigid academic structures that did not teach for the time. The Group B parents agreed and described the time as a “microwave generation” meaning moving instantaneously to meet the demands of a global market. Therefore, the challenges and obstacles in real life needed to be mirrored in the 21st century classroom - a classroom where technology is embraced and cooperative learning is rampant. PB1 declared,
Also, I think the school system is too structured. It's not responding to what's going on with society. For instance, we have a microwave generation and these kids are not trying to sit down in a seat for eight hours and listen to somebody talk at the chalkboard. They like to touch stuff, they are used to stuff lighting up, they used to hearing click, click and pop, pop, and stuff is happening and now you turn to page three. I think teachers needs to be more receptive to what's going on with the generation, allow them to have the room to learn because everybody does learn the same. What worked for us (past) in the classroom, pen, pencil and paper? (Presently), these kids are not responding to that. They need maybe incorporating more technology. Maybe it means allowing for them to teach. Allowing for them to be included in the lesson plans.

The Group B parents were firm in their belief that when teachers recognize ACE and other stressors it was incumbent upon educators to respond appropriately. This would mean supporting and linking students and families in need with resources such as support agencies (i.e., Children Protective Services) and staff like a guidance counselor, a social worker, and or a psychologist for follow-up care. While advising parents on best practices to support CCLS at home, as well as, proactively valuing teachers’ individual and collective contributions as role models, special people who practice patience and recognize “bright spots” within the school community. PB3 shared,

When you're dealing with children, their minds are still developing. You're dealing with a bunch of little people that are still growing so on top of being a teacher, you're also a role model to them. You are someone significant in their life. I'm where I'm at today because I had teachers that's like…. "Ms. ____ who
said, “Listen, I'm recommending you for this extra school activity and I'm sending you over to see Ms. ____!” I had those teachers that stayed engaged. We need more of that.

Thirdly, classroom innovation emerged as a theme for Group B parents which was shared as strategies to support the instructional leader. They suggested using viable new teaching techniques where students were teacher leaders. They suggested infusing movement (cooperative learning) in the classroom rather than static traditional forms of teaching that required teacher lead instruction and at least 5 to 6 hours daily of seated student listening, as opposed to critical thinking experiences. PB1 was adamant about movement during class instruction rather than numerous referrals to special education or Intense Day Treatment (IDT); especially, since a referral would likely result in a referral for a child to take medicine to control behavioral situations. PB3 shared her experience as a former resource student and the benefits it provided. Thus, this parent advocated for being valued as a resourceful partner to support her own child’s needs (i.e., ACE).

Fourthly, the final theme that emerged for Group B was parents as partners. The participants in this group valued being their child’s first and foremost teacher (Bridglall & Gordon, 2002; Fan & Chen, 2001; Gordon et al., 2005; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Wherry, 2003; Williams & Portman, 2014; Wooden, 2010). They demonstrated role modeling by being living examples that have advanced academically, professionally, and personally. PB1 stated,

Allowing your children to see you in your vulnerable state, whether you're studying, whether you're looking for a job, just keeping them informed as to what you're dealing with so they can relate it to what they're going through. I just think

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allowing, having, letting your children see I'm on the same journey even though I have a degree, I'm still trying to make some more money, I'm still trying to get a degree. It’s endless. This is life. You're always going to have a goal.

PB4 shared, “As far as talking about the teachers, sometimes I feel parents think it's the teachers who just have to teach them. And some parents do not have any type of involvement.” They professed to provide unconditional support, guidance, and love for their children. As advocates for their children, they vowed to engage policymakers to hold them accountable for education that was equitable and inclusive. The Group B parents advised that it was necessary to consistently attend events such as open house, parent meetings, workshops, and special events. It was their belief that to be proactive as a parent they had to dispel myths and or assumptions by teachers, administrators, schools, and districts that did not describe parent engagement from the African American perspective. PB2 shared, “So I would just say just being there as much as you can, as an active parent can help your child strive for success. Lastly, Group B parents expressed the importance of holding teachers, administrators, and district school leaders accountable for consistent student and school growth.

Summary of Results

Overall, four major themes emerged that connected both focus groups (See Table 4.11). These emerging themes were the following: (a) care and concern, (b) positive parent expectations, (c) system of best practices, and (d) advocacy for their child/children.
Table 4.11

Overarching Shared Themes in Group A and in Group B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Themes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme #1</td>
<td>Care and Concern</td>
<td>Demonstrated love, affection and well-being for all of their children</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Expressed wanting a better life for their children</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Exposed children to culture, customs, religion, values, traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #2</td>
<td>Positive Parent</td>
<td>Do better than parents: no limitations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #3</td>
<td>System of Best</td>
<td>Graduate high school and seek college and or a career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Practices</td>
<td>Willing to collaborate with teachers and school to seek academic support</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bi-directional communication</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Benefited from hearing each other’s’ experiences</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Varying degrees of motivation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme #4</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>Vocal for academic support (i.e., parent meetings, special events, IEP,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Willing to speak up for their child’s needs and others</td>
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</table>

This study confirmed what the experts stated in the literature review, that an overarching aspect of parent engagement was that parents/guardians play a vital role in imparting values, beliefs and behaviors to their children (Arnold et al., 2008; Bridglall & Gordon, 2002; Dearing et al., 2006; Fan & Chen, 2001; Gordon et al., 2005; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Humes, 2016; Lareau, 1987, 1989, 2002; Lareau & Shumar, 1996; Lawrence, 2013; Schneider & Coleman, 1993; Wherry, 2003; Williams & Portman, 2014; Wooden, 2010). This was evident when the African American parents/guardians dialogued about their personal experiences that influenced their interactions and decisions that impacted their child’s academic and cultural exposure. Many times the essence of the responses of the African American parents/guardians overlapped into several areas.
further demonstrating the interconnectedness of the research questions with the topic of parent engagement. Each of the 10 parents/guardians showed genuine care and concern for their children. They articulated love, affection and well-being for their children by providing for basic needs such as shelter, clothes, food, and schooling. Each parent in their own way, expressed wanting a better life for their children. Here are a few of their comments listed below. PB3 commented,

You know, it says a lot to your kid when you show them that you're involved in what's going on with them versus you know, like I said, like participant one said, we sit, we do homework together. We sit, we study together. Where you don't feel like it's just you because you know, like she said earlier, I grew up in a household, there was no going outside during school week. There was no TV, you came home, you changed out of your school clothes, you put on house clothes, you study, you did your homework, and then maybe at 7:00, you might go watch TV till about 7:30 and you’re in bed by 8. So, it was very structured in my house and I keep it that in, in, in my home, now because it shows her that in order to succeed at something you have to practice it daily.

PB4 shared,

taking the time to listen to them as well as, see what they have to say, see what, what their view is, on certain issues or certain problems, I mean, and being able to talk to them and have any open conversations with them.

Schonpflug (2008) referred to the acquisition of cultural transmission being imparted by parents/guardians by sharing values, beliefs, customs, and traditions through multiple cultural experiences. Furthermore, this was evidenced when all of the
participants in both focus groups showed care and concern by reporting on the
questionnaire, an array of the cultural activities they participated in individually or as a
family, such as attending church and church related events, going to the theatre, park,
museums, having family night, going on family vacations, cooking, art shows, special
events, and attending family gatherings like a family reunion. The extracurricular
activities they exposed their children to included leisure reading, tutoring, boxing,
African drumming, dance, karate, baseball, basketball, going to the library, movies,
taking nature walks, videos, and singing. According to Jaeger (2009) and Bourdieu
(1973), these types of cultural interactions enrich the lives of children. PB2 shared, “For
me, the way I was raised, um, my mom had us well rounded where it wasn't just
academics.” P5B shared,

So, and once again, we, you, culturally, you know, we have a church-based,
spiritual, spiritual-based – as I firmly believe that, if you tell God, you know, tell
children what God expects as opposed to what parents expect, then there's a
higher authority that they have to listen to, that they have to obey to. So, it, it
does something that I reinforce in my kids, all the time, you know. They, they
have to understand the process. God, parents, and then friends. So, and basically,
it really, um, it really gives them the, that, that, that drive and that desire that will
to, to do more, to excel.

In regard to positive parent expectations all of the African American
parents/guardians insisted that their children would do better than them
(parents/grandparents, ancestors) as they pursued in careers, in education, in life. The
difference for their children was that there were no limitations on what their children
could do despite their age, gender, race, and SES. They all expected that their child
would graduate from high school and seek college and or a career, despite the fact that
some of the parents/guardians did not complete high school or seek higher education.
Here are some of the comments African American parents shared. PB1 stated, “Like, we
only have one chance to raise them, so we must try to do it right the first time.” PB3
shared, “That's just your one goal that you accomplish. Okay, so now that you
accomplish that, what's your next goal? What's your next obstacle? What are you going to
do after that?” PB5 shared,

But how it translated it to my kids was….. I eventually told them that there was a
cycle that needed to break, hat my parent wasn't there for me and, and I wasn't the
best student that I should have been. So, the cycle had to be broken.

PB5 also stated, “I firmly believe that if you tell God, you know, tell children what God
expects as opposed to what parents expect, then there's a higher authority that they have
to listen to, that they have to obey.”

In regard to best practices, each participant was willing to collaborate with
teachers and schools to increase student academic support, welcomed bidirectional
communication to support enhanced student academic progress, willing to resort to
outside services like tutoring, benefited from hearing each other’s experiences and
vocalized varying degrees of motivation they imparted to their child. The African
American parents/guardians reported the importance of “showing their face” to
demonstrate a presence of parent engagement. They discussed the significance of being
welcomed into the school environment. This welcoming environment would then foster
a bidirectional opportunity to build a relationship for the betterment of the child. The
participants were willing to elicit additional services to support academic achievement as
the child transitioned for middle school to high school. There was verbal agreement,
laughs, nods and more that affirmed situations and experiences shared at each focus
group. Lastly, the African American parents/guardians commented on the ways they kept
their child motivated. Here are a few of their comments. PB1 shared,

Um, as for, us, what we're doing now, just like other parents said, incorporating
learning experiences in pretty much everything we do. Even if it's not academic,
you can learn how to socialize. You can learn how to, um, be sympathetic. You,
you can learn different things, not always academic-based.

PB3 shared,

It costs a lot of money for a reading tutor. If I can't afford to do that. What books
can I use to help him read better, you know. What can I do? I have now
implemented, when we do our 20 minute read-it, I read one page, he does the
other page and then we go from there. And you know, we talk about the book
after.

In regard to advocacy, the African American parents/guardians voiced their
concern to address topics centered on academic support (i.e., parent meetings, resource,
speech, special education, IEP, etc.). During the focused groups two participants
willingly spoke about how they advocate for their child’s needs. They conveyed a
determination and resiliency in regard for equity and inclusiveness. Here are a few of
their comments to support their perspective. PB1 stated,
Try to just make it all come together – tutoring, mentor programs, and everything like counseling, every resource that is available to her that will assist her in being a better woman, a better leader, a better student, she will be enrolled. PB3 declared,

You know, sometimes kids could be excellent, excel academically, but emotionally they're suffering. So, with that being said, I need to make sure that you're not being bullied. You're not being peer-pressured or, you know, it, is more to achieving academically than just excelling in a classroom.

Differences between the groups emerged and are indicated in Table 4.12.

Table 4.12

*Overarching Different Themes in Group A and in Group B*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Themes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme #1</td>
<td>Socio-economic-status SES</td>
<td>Age- Group A: ranged from 40-79 (older) and Group B: ranged from 30-49 (younger)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Origin of birth – Group A: 2 participants were born outside of USA and Group B: all were citizens of the USA</td>
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<td>Marital status - Group A: 2 single and 3 married and Group B: 1 separated, 2 single and 1 married couple</td>
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<td>Education – Group A: grade school to 4 year degree and Group B: Grade 12 to Post Graduate</td>
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<td>Employment - Group A: one retired, one unemployed and three employed in areas of sales, office management and education and Group B: all are employed in accounting, coordinator, medical assistant, office management, or custodial service management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #2</td>
<td>Membership in cultural organizations</td>
<td>Group A: only two families and Group B: 3 families are enrolled in cultural organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #3</td>
<td>Cultural activity and exposure</td>
<td>Group A: interest-based activities and Group B: interest-based and family-based activities with multiple activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #4</td>
<td>Academic goal setting</td>
<td>Group A: Needs more information about NYS levels of proficiency and Group B: Aware of NYS levels of proficiency; specific implementing a plan for success (high school, scholarships, college/career)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall, four major themes emerged that demonstrated the differences between both focus groups (See Table 4.12). These emerging themes were the following: (a) socioeconomic-status (SES), (b) membership in cultural organizations, (c) cultural activity and exposure, and (d) academic goal setting. In regard to Group A, the participants were older, ranging from 40-79 years of age. Two of the participants were not born in the United States although they self-identified as African American. These two participants completed grade school and high school while the eldest was single and retired and the other was married with five children and unemployed. The remaining participants, three of the five (60%) completed up to 4-years of college and were gainfully employed in areas such as sales, office management, and the field of education. One participant was single and the other two participants were married. In contrast, Group B participants were all younger in the 30-49 age range with one separated, two single-parent households, and one married couple. Each participant in Group B was born in the United States. The married couple both completed Grade 12 and started their career and family after high school. The three remaining participants completed a 4-year degree program with one pursuing a post-degree. All five participants were gainfully employed in areas such as accounting, as a coordinator, medical assistant, office management, and custodial service management. Group B participants modeled the significance of higher education and enforced it as evidenced by their comments and perspectives previously shared.

For the second theme, only one family in Group A participated in having a membership in a cultural organization, while three participants from Group B reported having one or more memberships in cultural organizations. For the third theme, cultural
activity and exposure Group A participants had their child enrolled in interest-based activities more often than not. In contrast, Group B participants not only enrolled their child in interest-based activities but strongly included family time with multiple opportunities for family interactions to reinforce norms, expectations, traditions, customs, and cultural exposure.

Lastly, the fourth theme, academic goal setting was evidenced by the participants’ dialogue centered on the research questions and questionnaire. Group A participants demonstrated a lack of understanding in regard to how students were actually measured as proficient, whereas, Group B participants were very aware of the NYS levels of proficiency which P1B shared about in her comments previously stated. The Group B participants dialogued about how they helped their child set academic goals for success and planned for college as soon as possible by monitoring their academic progress with teachers in hopes for sustaining honor roll status and acceptance for college scholarships and admission. The Group B participants clearly were focused on academic excellence and voiced how they would be resourceful, cooperative, compliant, and consistent advocates for their children. Additionally, they articulated the significance of schools, districts, and policymakers creating streams of consistent funding to infuse technology and professional development to culturally literate educational professionals that prepare their children to compete in an ever-changing global society. This was previously evidenced in comments by P1B, P3B, and P5B. Participants in Group B were very direct and clear that their child would successfully graduate from high school with good grades and half of them getting high honors, as well as, attaining scholarships for college.
They anticipated their child and successfully completing college with a budding career to follow.

Thus, Group B participants SES status demonstrated that this group was younger and more savvy with the business world, they were comfortable with the educational expectations needed to succeed, they were more knowledgeable about the importance of technology in careers of the future, they challenged their child to achieve and considered themselves as a role model to support the continued growth their child needed to continue to excel. This group was heavily influenced by technology and articulated the value of an education infused with technology support. Additionally, Group B participants went the extra mile willingly to get involved in various cultural organizations such as the YMCA, community centers, sports programs, and actively engaged their child in various extracurricular activities like tutoring, African drumming, cooking, visiting museums, to name a few, which made an impact on student academic achievement.

It is significant to mention that Group B participants made a sincere effort to not only engage their children in interest-based extracurricular but also spent a lot of time with family-related activities that reinforced cultural beliefs, norms, expectations, customs and traditions such as attending church regularly, participating in church events, hosting monthly family nights, and enjoying family time at theme-parks, and going on vacations. These pronounced nuisances propelled Group B participants to be more forward thinking which was evidenced by their perspective on educating urban middle school students in grades 6, 7, and 8 in regard to preparing their child for sustainable academic success. Chapter 5 outlines implications and recommendations for the future.
Chapter 5: Findings

Introduction

This research study examined the impact of parent engagement on academic achievement from the perspectives of nine parents and one guardian of African descent who had middle school students in grades 6, 7, or 8 in an urban public school in the northeastern region of the United States. The phenomenological, qualitative study allowed the researcher to capture the perspectives of African American parents/guardians in regard to their feelings, beliefs, expectations, best practices, and cultural connections for their middle schoolers. Historically, middle years are a transitional time for middle school students as they face more challenges academically and become more independent and socially aware of their surroundings (Burchinal et al., 2008; Dotterer et al., 2009; Wigfield & Eccles, 1994). The results of the study countersigns and adds to the existing literature on the educational disparities with students of color while giving voice to a marginalized population to demonstrate fundamental expectations and resilience needed to combat the lack of equity, resources, and inclusiveness, as well as, the significance of cultural connections.

In addition, researchers have attributed parent engagement as a viable means to foster a link with improved academic achievement (Arnold et al., 2008; Bridglall & Gordon, 2002; Dearing et al., 2006; Fan & Chen, 2001; Gordon et al., 2005; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Humes, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; Lareau, 1987, 1989, 2002; Lareau & Shumar, 1996; Lawrence, 2013; Schneider & Coleman, 1993; Wherry, 2003;
Williams & Portman, 2014; Wooden, 2010). The parents/guardians are situated as playing a vital role in the development of the whole child (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 2005). Parent engagement that is deliberate and consistent provides children with a support system that is resourceful and advocates for their needs. Actively engaged participants guide their child from infancy to adulthood to excel in areas like academics, extra-curricular activities, and social settings whether they were at home, in school, or in the community (Gordon et al., 2005; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). The role of the parents/guardians evolves to meet the needs of the child (Swick & Williams, 2006). Furthermore, parent engagement that exposes African American children to their educational, cultural, emotional, recreational, and social needs equip and empower students to be more engaged, motivated, and knowledgeable about their own learning (Gordon et al., 2005).

This process commenced to give a marginalized diverse group an opportunity to express how their African American culture was transmitted during their youth, as well as, how they impart the same or different information to their children. In addition, it provided a platform for African American parents/guardians to demonstrate whether or not cultural awareness/transmission does impact their children’ academic achievement, based on how well their child performed on the ELA NYS standards exam (levels 3 and 4 and levels 1 and 2). It was the hope of this researcher that the results of this study can be used to support present initiatives in the Yonkers Public School District related to parent engagement and academic achievement of African American students related to the cultural activities in which they were exposed to, by their parents. Participation in a sharing of results within the district at a public meeting would be available, as well as,
support for a study group to respond to the results with a plan for increased success. It can positively give parents a voice to share best practices for 21st century parent engagement. The impact of the study can potentially positively support parents as an informed advocate to share best practices for 21st century parent engagement.

The passion that fueled this researcher to embark upon this topic of inquiry was attributed to her positionality as an insider. The researcher is a 23-year educator of African American descent, first as a teacher, and then as an administrator, the researcher has firsthand experience with the urban population in the study. Additionally, the researcher was born and raised in the northeastern region of the United States where the importance of family, religion, education, culture, and tradition was conveyed. She lived in the southwest quadrant of the urban area, Yonkers, New York, for 18 years and attended one of the first Head Start programs as a preschooler at the age of three at a faith-based community organization. She lived in a multi-family dwelling that was across the street from a large city park. Many days, she spent most of her early out-of-school time in this park playing and making friends. In the winter time, she would go sled riding with her siblings in this park.

The researcher is the youngest of three children of her parents who separated when she was 12 years old and divorced during her high school years. She attended public school from Kindergarten through grade 4 and a local Catholic school for grades 5, 6, 7, and 8. During the middle years, the researcher spent out-of-school time visiting the library, as well as participating in classes for drama, African dance and ballet at a free afterschool program. Occasionally, she went swimming, ice skating, roller skating, to the circus, to street fairs, and to the movies with her family and friends.
The researcher completed graduation at a Blue Ribbon public high school focused on trades and technology. She majored in fashion design as a trade and ranked at the head of her graduating class for trade. She gave her first public speech as the salutatorian for her graduating class. During her high school days, the researcher participated in cheerleading, track, and student government while maintaining her academic goals and working first as a cashier in a supermarket. She was promoted to the assistant bookkeeper of the supermarket. The researcher was voted “Ms. Saunders” by her graduating Saunders Trade and Technical High School class, meaning she was destined to succeed as an adult.

After 4 years of college, the researcher earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Syracuse University which was funded by federal grants based on a single-parent income and scholastic achievement in high school. During her sophomore year, the researcher became a proud life member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated. For the first semester of her senior year, she studied abroad in England and attended the Saint Parsons School of Fashion Design. She also traveled to Amsterdam, France, and Italy while living abroad. The researcher pursued a career in retailing after a successful junior year as a Black Retail Action Group (BRAG) summer intern and went to work two weeks after her college graduation as an assistant manager. Before transitioning to the field of education, she was a store manager for a major women’s retail company.

The researcher later married her high school/college sweetheart and currently is the mother of one daughter, a junior at the University of Hartford. Her only child had the good fortune of being raised in a house, in a two-parent household along with a maternal grandmother who co-raised her for 14 years. The researcher’s daughter went to both
public and private schools, participated in Girl Scouts, and many other local
organizations such as Naomi’s Program of Excellence and the Rockland/Orange County
Jack and Jill of America, Incorporated, as well as, earning a second degree black belt in
Tae Kwon Do. The researcher’s daughter consistently participated in attending church,
academic tutoring, sports (baseball, basketball, soccer, ballet, and dance), girl scouting
and volunteering in the community in her formative years while consistently performing
proficiency at level 3 and level 4 academically in school. Additionally, the researcher’s
daughter frequently attended theme-based parties, museums, parks, the theatre, movies
and other special events. In high school, her daughter traveled to Amsterdam, Belgium,
and France. In college, her daughter traveled to Hungary and Italy. Currently, her
daughter has earned admission in the National Honor Society, a nationwide organization
for college students in the United States and outlying territories. Thus, the story of this
researcher’s journey to her present career provides a positive connection to this study and
the importance of parent engagement and cultural influences in achieving academic
success, as was possible for her and for her daughter. According to Ogbu (2003), CRT is
a strong link that connected the researcher’s personal lived experiences that influenced
the opportunities, exposure and experiences of the researcher’s daughter. Thus, living in
an affluent suburban community did have a positive impact that was evident in the
researcher’s daughter’s personal experiences. Moreover, the researcher’s positionality
afforded her the necessary trust needed for the 10 participants to divulge their
perspectives on parent engagement as it relates to academic achievement influenced by
cultural undertones.
Chapter 5 conceptualizes the findings of the study in connection with the implications of the existing literature and the field at large. Additionally, the chapter discusses the limitations of the study and provides recommendations for best practices to replicate results to increase the number of African American students academically achieving by consistently performing in grades 6, 7, and 8, level 3 and level 4 on the NYS ELA Assessments. The NYS proficiency for ELA scores referred to four performance levels: (a) level 1 equivalent to well below proficient level, (b) level 2 equivalent to below proficient, (c) level 3 equivalent to proficient, and (d) level 4 equivalent to above proficient (NCLB, 2016).

Implications of Findings

First, the implication of the findings conclude that there were only 9 out of 47 (19%) African American middle school students in grades 6, 7, and 8 who scored a level 3 or a level 4 on their NYS ELA assessment in 2015-2016. Only five students in grade 6 and 7 scored a level 3, one grade 6 student scored a level 4, and three students scored a level 4 in grade 8. In fact, on a national level, less than 40% of all the eighth graders in the United States were currently at or above proficiency on standardized test scores in reading and mathematics (NCES, 2016). Thus, as the face of America increases with Black and Brown children, it is imperative to address the gap in education with haste to ultimately meet the needs of a global workforce. Therefore, the number of African American middle school students achieving proficiency in this study was significantly low as previously echoed by researchers that indicated an apparent educational gap between children of color and their Caucasian peers (Daggett, 2005; Fiester, 2010; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015; O’Connor et al., 2006;
Thomas et al., 2009; Valencia, 2000; Vega et al., 2012). Nonetheless, this small group of students that did meet the NYS proficiency standard were proactively supported by their African American parents/guardians at home, in school, and in the community.

Next, this study also validated that even though there was a small group of African American middle school students achieving academic success, it was necessary to examine the impact of parent engagement these bright spots experienced (Heath & Heath, 2010). The phenomenon of hearing how African American parents/guardians define parent engagement, share best practices, and justify the importance of measures of cultural capital transmission, if any, was significant. The study clearly demonstrated the significance of parent engagement for African American children as evidenced by the two focus group sessions. However, it is noteworthy to acknowledge the impact of a higher level of parent engagement from Focus Group B than Focus Group A participants during the focus group sessions.

The range stipulates the actual number of participants in the study in relation to the total number of participants that had an opportunity to participate in this study. Therefore, Focus Group A participants ranged 5 out of 47 (11%) whereas, Focus Group B participants ranged 5 out of 9 (56%). The Focus Group B participants reported the significance of infusing technology into the classroom setting to influence global leaders to be technically advanced and ready for college and careers of the future. They wholeheartedly advocated for consistent parent engagement from infancy to adulthood, as well as expecting their child to consistently excel in school, at home, and in the community. Academics was a primary goal, yet, the Focus Group B parents were committed to exposing their children to other opportunities to enhance their child’s
cultural, emotional, social, and recreational needs. For example, Focus Group B parents listed a wide-range of cultural, extracurricular, and recreational activities their child participated in individually, and/or with their peers or even with family and friends.

Last, it was significant to note what this small group of African American parents/guardians were doing that impacted their child’s academic growth; then to decide what best practices, if any, Focus Group B subscribed to, and how it could be replicated to ultimately affect more African American middle school students in grades 6, 7, and 8 rapidly to make a difference in their academic performance on standardized assessments, as noted below. The African American parents/guardians in Focus Group B enjoyed participating in courageous conversations, which represented a concerted effort on the essence of defining what active parent engagement resembled. They also articulated short and long term goals that were sustainable. They were aware of the significance of the NYS proficiency standards and were empowered to lobby schools, districts, and policymakers for equality in education in areas such as curriculum instruction, ongoing training in diversity and curriculum development, and infusing technology in the curriculum. The African American parents/guardians in Focus Group B wanted to see equity in funding, resources, and materials for their children and others.

Focus Group A, on the other hand, comprised of a few of the African American parents/guardians who were genuinely reluctant to elaborate on the research questions. The African American parents/guardians in this group were well meaning, yet, often times, did not take full advantage of resources, people, places, and/or experiences to which they could expose their children for educational, cultural, social, and recreational value. PA4 declared that his five children only wanted to read and not take part in
extracurricular activities. PA1 emphasized that her daughter was bright, yet did not take full advantage of showing it. However, PA3 and PA5 spoke about creating solutions that would support their male child to survive the ills of CRT. They spoke about equipping their sons with skills to protect themselves from police brutality. PA3 and PA5 stated the importance of having positive male role models for their sons. Consequently, they were acutely aware of the NYS guidelines used to measure success through proficiency on standardized assessments.

**Emerging themes.** The first finding of this study included the emerging themes which occurred from the data collection. The results of this study noted that active parent engagement is the new wave of influence that is needed to impact student achievement (Epstein, 2001; ESSA, 2016; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Parent engagement that is consistent, specific, and resilient is paramount (Arnold et al., 2008; Bridglall & Gordon, 2002; Dearing et al., 2006; Fan & Chen, 2001; Gordon et al., 2005; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Humes, 2016; Lareau, 1987, 1989, 2002; Lareau & Shumar, 1996; Lawrence, 2013; Schneider & Coleman, 1993; Wherry, 2003; Williams & Portman, 2014; Wooden, 2010). As noted by the data collection, parent engagement is no longer just homework help or annually visiting the classroom in the beginning of the school year to meet the teacher. Parents were needed to actively participate in (a) bidirectional communication from home to school and school to home, (b) open house, school fairs, and parents’ conferences, as well as, (c) special events like concerts, field days, and other events that highlight the learning that is happening each year. Active parent engagement is an endless position yielding beneficial returns as children develop and flourish as productive citizens.
The data collected noted that parents were needed to be involved and to stay engaged in the process of educating their children, meaning reading to and with their child, learning new ways to problem solve in mathematics, using technology to inform their knowledge, enrolling their children in tutoring if needed, as well as extracurricular activities. Parents were needed in the process of educating their children as partners and can no longer just send their child to school in the morning and pick them up in the afternoon. They were the resource and support that their child needs them to be for example, African American parents/guardians may need to attend field trips, volunteer in the classroom, show up and share for career day, visit the class for literacy celebrations, be a helper or even the coach on a sports team and even advocate for students’ rights by aligning with the parents teacher association (PTA). Parents were needed as partners who emulate the change they want to see in education for their children.

**Expectations.** The second finding of the study related to expectations. Despite being rarely asked, African American parents/guardians have sincere expectations for what they expect from schools and school districts which is to prepare their children for college and careers. African American parents/guardians in the focus groups expressed wanting the best for their children. They expect teachers, administrators, schools, and the school district to create an educational environment that is conducive to promoting a safe, nurturing and productive learning environment where all children regardless of ethnicity, race, gender, religion, age, or SES can thrive. If children were expected to do well in school and more importantly, do well in life, then it is a “village” effort meaning, home, school, and the community need to take ownership of the process and support processes and policies that align with educating all of America’s children.
**Cultural capital transmission.** The third finding of the study related to cultural capital transmission, meaning investing in your child would yield benefits to last a lifetime. As evidenced by Focus Group B, there was more cultural capital transmission from the African American parents/guardians to the African American children, which would account for the higher achievement with proficiency levels in schools. These parents expressed the importance of balancing academics with activities that were not only educational but were fortified with multiple opportunities that were cultural, extracurricular, social, and/or recreational. The focus on cultural awareness grounds a child to help them navigate through the world they live in while providing a sense of pride for their ancestors (Gordon et al., 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Mo & Singh, 2008; Schönpflug, 2008).

Vast opportunities to experience cultural awareness from their parents/guardians afford children the ability to take ownership of what they like and dislike and why. The exposure to different cultural experiences about their own culture gives them encouragement and confidence to take risks in their environment while building self-pride, sensitivity for others, and appreciation for diversity. It also helps them build character to withstand the many challenges that arise such as homelessness, loss of a loved one, drug abuse, drug addiction, depression, lack of employment, to name a few. The key element is that the transmission of cultural awareness is initiated and supervised by the parents/guardian. These cultural experiences shape the mindset of the child and clearly reinforce family norms, expectations, traditions, and customs. Schönpflug (2008) referred to cultural capital transmission as investing in your child and imparting traditions, customs, beliefs, and morals to equip, enrich, and enlighten.
For Focus Group A, the participants completed a questionnaire and reported exposing their children to the library, movies, the park, church, the theatre, and involving them in sports like boxing and basketball. During the Focus Group A, P1A shared that her older son enjoyed boxing as an outlet while P3A mentioned having her son involved in track and swimming, as well as nature walks and visits to art shows. Additionally, an African American seventh grade female enjoyed singing as reported by her mother, while a male eighth grader occasionally volunteered in a soup kitchen. There were two families that reported using a cultural organization like a local YMCA or neighborhood community center.

For Focus Group B, the participants they also completed a questionnaire and reported exposing their children to dance, church, leisure reading, playing card games, African drumming, the library, the movies, going on vacation, tutoring, cooking, museums, hosting family game nights, church retreats, girl groups like Girl Scouts, other special events, completing school projects, and sports such as basketball. Three families reported using cultural organizations like the YMCA, the Dole Center, the Nepperhan Community Center, and other formal sports programs to enhance their child’s cultural and extracurricular experiences.

During Focus Group B, P4B, and P5B also mentioned taking their children to theme parks and to the movies for educational and historical value and not just for entertainment. Although both groups reported cultural, educational, social, and recreational activities, the Group B participants’ responses were more diverse in variety, benefits, and exposure, which is attributed to a broader scope of exposure. According to Schönpflug (2008), the acquisition of cultural transmission being imparted by
parents/guardians by sharing values, beliefs, customs, and traditions through multiple cultural experiences helps children be more well-rounded and well-versed as they experience, learn, and apply their new knowledge with others.

**Measuring for success.** The fourth finding of the study related to NYS measuring for success. NYS measures proficiency for ELA scores with four levels: (a) level 1 equivalent to well below proficient level, (b) level 2 equivalent to below proficient, (c) level 3 equivalent to proficient, and (d) level 4 equivalent to above proficient (NCLB, 2016). Hence, NYS measured academic achievement by students achieving a level 3 or level 4 on standardized assessments. Notably so, research is clear that children of color were lagging behind their Caucasian peers in both reading and mathematics, meaning that it is critical to address the issue by providing solutions rather than excuses (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; O’Connor et al., 2006; Thomas et al., 2009; Valencia, 2000; Vega et al., 2012). The claim to reverse educational disparities in education with rapid viable solutions, ignited the federal government to issue the ESSA (2016), deeming parent engagement an important component to combat the nation’s academic dilemma (ESSA, 2016). Thus, the federal government recognized ESSA (2016) as a force to provide intentional programming and funding to activate more student and parent engagement, especially in marginalized populations with needed resources for ongoing professional development for teachers, curriculum development and implementation for schools, before and after school programs for families, as well as, mentoring and technology for students.

Therefore, in this study, the researcher examined the impact of parent engagement on academic achievement with cultural capital transmission of African American middle
school students in grades 6, 7, and 8 in an urban public school setting. During the focus group sessions African American parents/guardians declared that active parent engagement was an ongoing process from birth to adulthood. One after the other, each African American parent/guardian proclaimed the significance of being a resource, a guide, a caretaker, a supporter, and so much more (Ogbu, 1974, 1987, 2003). They articulated that every child was unique with their own thoughts, ideas, and needs and it was up the parent to equip, engage, and encourage their child first and then expect the school and community to partner with African American parents/guardians to ensure that the African American child was nurtured, educated, and inspired to become productive citizen.

During Focus Group B, P5B described active parent engagement as a process that if done right, and coupled with persistence, yielded a positive outcome. Overall, Focus Group B parents/guardians verbalized a few solutions to help educators make educating Black and Brown children equitable. For example, P1B shared, that teachers cannot teach the way they used to and need to infuse technology along with soft skills throughout their lesson planning to model what is needed in the workforce. The soft skills include good character building of elements like respect, responsibility, integrity, kindness, and determination with a collaborative team spirit and lots of movement imbedded in the day. Some additional suggestions included providing federal and state funding and opportunities for teachers to participate in ongoing professional development. Teachers can benefit from professional development that encourages innovative ways to not only deliver curriculum but to also receive diversity training, as
well as, utilize effective teaching practices to mirror skills needed in the ever-changing global workforce.

They continued to say that educators must be willing to prepare all of our future leaders for jobs and careers that have not yet been created. For instance, the impact of technology with hand-held devices has revolutionized the way we all receive information, apply it for daily use, and it has had major impact on the economy. Certainly, many jobs of the past are obsolete and now fewer people are needed to do what computers can do, as in the removal of all toll booths and toll booth attendees with the influx of EZ-Pass. This safety innovation which was designed to decrease accidents while increasing safety and traffic flow ultimately impacted the workforce.

The ESSA (2016) highlighted the importance of parent engagement by insisting that it is a key component that denotes a positive effect on student achievement (ESSA, 2016; Yeung & Pfeiffer, 2009). In essence, parent engagement is the bridge to rapidly impact student academic achievement. Educators, schools, and districts cannot achieve the results they want, which is better schools for all children, without factoring in the importance of the role of the parents. Therefore, active parent engagement demands that African American parents/guardians serve as role models and use their resources to help their children grow academically, emotionally, physically, and socially.

**Educational disparities.** The fifth finding of the study related to the review of the literature which informed us that clearly disparities in education exist. In fact, less than 40% of all the eighth graders in the United States were currently at or above proficiency on standardized test scores in reading and mathematics (NCES, 2016). These disparities may be influenced by the parents/guardians educational background or SES, or
possibly reasons related to what Bell (1976a, 1976b) explained as CRT. Thus, the Focus Group B parents/guardians expected their students to consistently excel and orchestrated a means despite any educational barriers such as SES, their own level of education, race, ethnicity, sex, religion, age, or gender to hinder their academic achievement. They were informed, resilient, and determined to break barriers, while not only ensuring their children were collegiate but good citizens.

During Focus Group B, P5B described active parent engagement as a process that if done right, and coupled with persistence, yielded a positive outcome. Today more than ever, educators and parents alike cannot be bystanders. We were challenged with the task of researching and understanding what successful African American parents/guardians were doing to support their children who were achieving. These were the bright spots that we need to focus on to achieve more academic achievement, for more children, more of the time (Heath & Heath, 2010).

Based on the results of the findings, Focus Group B participants had a consistent impact on their child’s academic achievement by having high expectations for their child to excel in school, at home, and in the community. These African American parents/guardians cited ways they influenced their child to excel by means of participation in extracurricular activities, immersion in their cultural life with rewards of positive praise, and acts of kindness based on future success. By acknowledging and magnifying, as well as recognizing what five out of nine (56%) African American parents/guardians are doing right then we can possibly move the pendulum of progress in the right direction for the five out of 47 (11%) African American parents/guardians.
The findings of the research of this study conclude that active parent engagement is ongoing, reflective, and spirited. The parent engagement expressed in Focus Group B demonstrates the power of assertiveness and its impact on their child’s academic achievement. The African American participants’ assertiveness was expressed in their actions to have high educational expectations for themselves and their children, cooperatively working with teachers, administrators in schools and their school district, sharing their best practices, and ultimately advocating for equity and inclusiveness with resources and funding, while persistently and intentionally being active in parenting their middle schoolers.

Impact of unanticipated results. African American parents/guardians have power. In isolation, the parents/guardians voice was just one voice. In congruence with other like-minded African American parents/guardians, there was unity and power in their voices. The focus groups allowed African American parents/guardians to meet, agree, and realize solutions in regard to a central theme: parent engagement. The African American parents/guardians did not want to stop sharing in Focus Group B and welcomed more questions and sharing. Each focus group had its own nuances based on the lived experiences of the participants. However, each group strongly demonstrated care and concern, expectations, best practices, and advocacy for the best interest of their children.

The African American parents/guardians realized that their perspective on educating their children taking in account their cultural experiences was connected to how home, school, and community needed to support the complete needs of every child regardless of ethnicity, race, gender, age, religion, or SES. The perspectives of these
African American parents/guardians reflected concepts that support Bronfenbrenner’s (1977, 2005) ecological systems theory (EST) and Bell’s (1976a, 1976b) critical race theory (CRT) which were the two theoretical frameworks that informed this study.

**Limitations**

One limitation of this study was the low parent participation from Focus Group A parents/guardians. The researcher reached out to 38 African American families from the purposeful/convenient sample with only seven families responding and five families actually participating in the focus group. A larger sample size would give more credibility to the generalizability of the findings for Focus Group A parents/guardians which was 56% of the purposeful/convenience sample.

A second limitation to this study was time. Nearly 50 families were contacted to participate in the study. Based on past responses, parent participation is influenced by other factors like timespan of sharing of information, being able to schedule the event, and the motivation centered on the purpose of the event. The African American parents/guardians that participated in the focus sessions willingly wanted to have their perspective shared in a public forum. With respect to time, Focus Group A participants agreed with one another, yet, did not always respond to the research questions. This is in contrast to the Focus Group B participants who willingly each answered every question and wanted to have more questions, in hopes to continue to dialogue. The participants in Focus Group B were in concert with their expectations, values, beliefs, and best practices that influenced their children to excel academically.

Lastly, a final limitation of this study was the facilitation of the focus groups. The facilitator was a 40-year veteran elementary school teacher who retired from service in
2010. Even though the facilitator was prompted and rehearsed, it was a challenge with the first group for the facilitator to let the participants’ just respond without giving feedback, especially since the parents/guardians were very reserved. Consequently, the researcher was not allowed to be in the focus group sessions, to further provide confidentially and to avoid coercion. However, if the researcher would have facilitated the two focus groups, research question two may have been highlighted with more in-depth responses by the participants in reference to their adult childhood experiences (ACE) and stressors. Focus Group A participants comprised of 5 out of 47 African American parents/guardians which was 11% of the purposeful/convenience sample. While Focus Group B participants comprised of 5 out of 9 African American parents/guardians which was 56% of the purposeful/convenience sample.

My passion for conducting the research is simple. The researcher is a product of her own environment. She never let her humble beginnings define her destiny. Her early childhood experiences along with ACE and additional stressors shaped and molded her future. It was necessary to add to the body of literature from the African American parent perspective while infusing what Bell (2003, 2008) coined as legal storytelling to the evolution of active parent engagement. African American parents’ power was eloquently stated by P5B which reminded the researcher that their power is intricately and richly rooted in our spiritual upbringing, our culture. This perspective reminded the researcher of two particular scriptures that may help conceptualize the framework of African American parent engagement. “Train up a child in the way that they should go, and when they are old, they will not depart from it” (Proverbs, 22:6; Bible).
“If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible for you.” (Matthew 17:20; Bible).

**Recommendations**

As a result of the findings, the following recommendations emerged.

**Recommendation 1: Active Parent Engagement** – High parent engagement that was both intentional and consistent was effective. Being present and focused on the transitional stage of middle school students was needed for education, social, and emotional growth, as well as, cultural and recreational experiences. This focus was paramount for academic success and consistent growth as demonstrated by focus group B participants. However, during both focus groups, each group clearly articulated care and concern for their children. Their care and concern was demonstrated by participating in positive parent engagement at home, in school, and in the community. Systematically, the African American parents articulated their best practices that worked for their family structure based on their values, beliefs, customs, and traditions. Furthermore, the African American parents/guardians realized the power of their unified advocacy. They felt validated and supported as they discussed the research questions leaving with a renewed obligation to speak up and out for their child, as well as others.

**Recommendation 2: Parent Expectations** – Parents need to know what is expected to excel and proactively plan for success (i.e., college and career readiness). Active parents intend to partner with schools and the community to propel student success by engaging in open dialogue, annually attending open house, special events, and
workshops, utilizing a tutor as needed, attending and participating in college/careers fairs and/or school fairs, as well as, allowing for peer and adult mentoring.

Both parents/guardians and children alike must understand the CCSS (2010) and consistently be vested in raising the academic bar of excellence. Additional ways to consider raising the bar of excellence would be to expose children to cultural/social heritage to build confidence and pride, attend school-based workshops focused on new trends in curriculum, technology, understanding state guidelines, and goal setting, as well as assuring bidirectional communication with the school and teachers, and attending various school events each year.

Recommendation 3: Cultural Capital Transmission – Parents impart and engage their children in enriching activities that emphasize the importance of college and careers in science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (S.T.E.A.M.) Exposure. It is equally important for African American parents to strive for balance of academics, and cultural, social, and physical exposure to cultivate intelligent, caring productive citizens. Therefore, African American parents need to align, vote, and elect state and local officials who advocate for consistent streams of funding for cultural sensitivity awareness, educational programs and mentoring initiatives to support the needs of all students.

As evidenced by Focus Group B, it is imperative for children to have balanced exposure to academic, cultural, social, and recreational opportunities that afford children to learn, develop, and attain a chance for a brighter future. For the students in Focus Group B, identified as consistently performing students on ELA with a level 3 or level 4, in accordance with NYS guidelines, the more involvement with parent engagement, as
well as in extracurricular membership with cultural organizations and cultural activity and exposure, the better. This allowed African-American students to be well-rounded emotionally, socially, and physically to ultimately impact their academics, as well as their future.

Recommendation 4: Measuring for Success – Parent as Partners. Low performing students and their parents need to understand NYS guidelines and partner with the school community to achieve academic proficiency. All stakeholders need to acknowledge academic barriers and then plan for success with ongoing bidirectional communication between home and school, creating relevant workshops focused on infusing technology in the classroom, improving curriculum development and instruction, as well as improved student and teacher attendance, using data from NYS assessments to support the learning and celebrating milestones.

As articulated by African American Focus Group B parents, advocacy for change in organizational procedures, professional practice, and academic concepts is desperately needed. As a unified voice, these parents willingly will advocate for all children so that schools and school districts divert consistent, adequate funding to enhance academic, physical, and emotional development while holding teachers accountable to become invested in the communities they serve. According to African American Focus Group B parents, teachers can successfully demonstrate this by participating in ongoing professional development centered on diversity, differentiated instruction, CCSS (2010) and by adopting teaching techniques that prepare students for college and careers. Multiethnic, gender neutral teachers who can teach multifaceted historical points of view, respect the diverse needs of the multiethnic students they teach, and nurture each and
every student to discover their bright spot are needed while maintaining a bidirectional relationship with the parent. Furthermore, African American parents can further benefit from annual or biannual opportunities to discuss and understand NYS assessment guidelines and expectations, as well as attend ongoing workshops focused on infusing technology in the classroom and beyond, and learning more about CCSS (2010) for subject areas like ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies.

Recommendation 5: Educational Disparities - Future research would afford a marginalized group an opportunity to participate in a qualitative longitudinal study focused on an urban African American population from prekindergarten to 4 years after high school completion. It would strategically tell a broader story of academic achievement based on the influence of parent engagement with cultural capital transmission, naturally, keeping in mind the impact of ACE with stressors and CRT would have on this study. Since there is not one narrative, this is an area untapped, however, it is important to cautiously note to respect the various narratives and not just one story when we examine the participation of perspectives of African American parents/guardians with active parent engagement. Additionally, African American parents are needed to advocate for advancement in curriculum for cultural competence, preparedness and implementation, use of technology, and support for related academic instruction services (AIS) and targeted instruction (TI).

As we reflect on barriers to academic achievement for urban African American middle school students, we must equally consider the ACE and stressors such as SES on parents/guardians and their level of education which made a difference in the responses from the two focus groups. Consequently, parent engagement for any child to effectively
transition during the transitional middle years requires parents to be active, persistent, consistent, and resilient. Modeling these behaviors helped to keep the African American middle schoolers grounded and focused on academic goal setting, rather than depression, drugs, bullying, peer pressure, violence, or even dropping out of school. For the students in Focus Group A, identified as below or not making progress on ELA with a level 2 and/or a level 1, in accordance with NYS guidelines, their parents/guardians are encouraged to partner with schools, teachers and parents/guardians of succeeding students, as well as seek outside support for literacy building skills, strategies, and techniques to help student achieve ongoing sustainable academic growth.

Conclusion

As a result of the findings, African American Focus Group B participants’ children were academically on target according to NYS guidelines and were simultaneously active in their community in greater numbers that students in Group A. The students in Group B were grounded in family values, customs, and traditions while cultural and extracurricular activities were introduced to stimulate critical thinking skills, enhance decision-making and enrich their lives. The Group B participants were aware, focused, and resilient in facing academic barriers in education and recognized the importance of cultural capital transmission and cultural competency that influenced their children to stay motivated and engaged in their own learning and goal setting. Creating opportunities for Focus Group A participants to gain more knowledge and wisdom directly from Focus Group B participants in the areas of the benefits of cultural capital transmission, as well as teachers and administrators in the area of academic goal setting, is a realistic way to affect more students with more learning opportunities in the shortest
time period. In the 21st century, parents/guardians are needed as allies and full participants in the process of helping children grow into adulthood with success.

As the researcher, this study impacted my professional and personal ideology with trends in education and ignited my passion to be a new CRT scholar. African American parents/guardians have a strong voice that has been historically either silenced or ignored. This study confirmed that the African American parents/guardians demonstrate care and concern, and actively participate as engaged parents. Additionally, African American parents/guardians utilize a system of best practices and willfully advocate for their child. As a new CRT scholar, the researcher will disseminate information by planning to write educational articles, create a potential parent engagement blog, write grants to support S.T.E.A.M. Exposure initiatives for public and not-for-profit after school organizations, and officiate book chats and/or workshops for students, parents and colleagues.

Education proved to be an important vice to gain more knowledge and power to make a difference in the lives of children and families. Bronfenbrenner’s (1977, 2005) ecological systems theory (EST) and Bell’s (1976a, 1976b) critical race theory (CRT) are the two theoretical frameworks that informed this study. Bronfenbrenner’s (1977, 2005) ecological systems theory (EST) reminds us to first see the child, yet, not judge the child based on ACE and stressors that influence the child’s daily life. Every child deserves the opportunity to be loved, nurtured, supported, and encouraged regardless of their gender, ethnicity, race, disability, or age.

Bell’s (1976a, 1976b) critical race theory (CRT) reminds us to envision new ways that are culturally respectful, sensitive, and empowering as policymakers create laws and school districts enforce new policy and procedures. Administrators must hold teachers
accountable for delivering CCSS (2010) that reflect academic and culturally diverse techniques to enhance learning opportunities that embrace innovative technological practices. Teachers must teach new lessons that foster student engagement, collaboration, and critical thinking while mindfully creating welcoming ways that African American parents/guardians can serve as partners.

By learning from the African American parents/guardians who proactively participate in active cultural capital transmission with parent engagement that is centered around developing a child to be emotionally, socially, physically, and academically equipped to be a future change agent, this will increase the frequency of academic success for African American students. In essence, according to the African American Focus Group B parents, the following scripture relates to the impact of parent engagement with cultural capital transmission on the academic achievement of African American students in grades 6, 7, and 8 in an urban setting, “Train up a child in the way they should go and when they are old, they will not depart from it” (Proverbs, 22:6, Bible).
References


Cook, K. V. (2000). "You have to have somebody watching your back, and if that's God, then that's mighty big": The church's role in the resilience of inner-city youth. *Adolescence, 35*(140), 717-730.


the education of Black Americans (Doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University).


Malcolm, G. (2014). *Parents link: A correlational analysis of students' perceptions of
parent engagement and student grade point average, attendance, and attitudes toward school. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education_etd/205/


Appendix A

Welcome letter 

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I am a doctoral student at St. John Fisher College in a program located at the campus of Iona College. As part of my responsibilities as a doctoral student, I am conducting a study on The Impact of Parent engagement on Academic Achievement of African American Students: A Phenomenological Study from the Perspectives of Parents of Middle School Students (Grades 6, 7, 8) in the Northeastern Region of the United States.

The purpose of the study is to explore the relevance of parent engagement and meaningful cultural awareness experiences that contribute to academic achievement of African American middle school students in grades 6, 7 and 8 in an urban school setting. In order to complete my research, I need your help. Therefore, I would like to invite you to participate in this research study via a focus group with parents. Your participation is voluntary and strictly confidential.

The purpose of the focus group will seek to link academic achievement for African American students, as measured by the English Language Arts Test in New York State and defined and enhanced by urban middle school African American parents/guardians who expose their children to best parent practices and cultural activities.

Each focus group will be audio recorded to capture the audio trail of the focus group. The focus group will take no more than 60 minutes. Participants will answer approximately eight questions related to their perceptions of parent engagement and complete an individual questionnaire.

All names will not appear on any documents and a coding system will be used to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. All participation is voluntary and there will be no positive or negative outcomes for students based on parents' participation. If you decide to participate you will receive a one-time distribution of a $20.00 gift card in appreciation for your time and valuable input.

I anticipate that the focus group (data collection) will take place in the summer of 2017 at 6:00 p.m., which will need to be coordinated once approval has been received. Please return the consent form via email to tmc03484@sjfc.edu by September 8, 2017. Thank you in advance for your kind consideration and I look forward to your participation.

Sincerely,
Tonya Couch-Jenkins,
SJFC Doctoral Student
Email: Tmc03484@sjfc.edu   Cell #: 

Cut here and return via email to tmc03484@sjfc.edu by 9/8/17.

Child’s Name: ___________________________ Grade/Class: ___________________________
Parents’ Name: ___________________________ Cell #: ___________________________
I, ___________________________ plan to attend the focus group on

_____________, 2017 at 6:00 p.m. in the Main Building at 759 North Broadway.

X ___________________________________________________________ Parents/Guardian Signature
Appendix B

Saint John Fisher College Letter

Appendix C

St. John Fisher College
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: The Impact of Parent Engagement on the Academic Success of African American/Black Students: A Phenomenological Study of the Perspectives of Parents of Urban Middle School Students (Grades 6, 7 and 8) in the Northeastern United States

Name of Researcher: Tonya Couch-Jenkins
Cell: (914) 329-0968

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Jennifer Schalman
Phone for further information: (914) 330-4840

Purpose of the study: The purpose of the study is to explore the relevance of parent engagement and meaningful cultural awareness experiences that contribute to academic success of African American/Black middle school students in grades 6, 7 and 8 in an urban school setting.

Place of the study: School 16, 759 North Broadway (MB) or 750 North Broadway (Annex), Yonkers, NY 10701

Length of Participation: 60 minutes

Risks and benefits: The expected risks and benefits of participation in this study are explained below:

Risks:
1. Participants must be 18 years or older to take part in a focus group.
2. Voluntary participation will be explained in the Welcome Letter, Letter of Consent and at the time of the focus group.
3. Information will be provided for participants experiencing discomfort due to participation. In-school and out-of-school counseling (i.e., social worker and psychologist) will be provided at the time of the focus group sessions.
4. The researcher will continue to minimize risk by assigning pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants at the focus group and during transcript coding.

Benefits:
1. This process will afford a diverse group an opportunity to express how their African American/Black culture was transmitted during their youth, as well as, how they impart the same or different information to their children.
2. It will provide a platform for African American/Black parents/guardians to demonstrate whether or not cultural awareness/transmission does impact their children’ academic success.
Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy: Once the consent forms have been collected a list will be generated to create the focus groups, the researcher will use pseudonyms to code the data in order to determine specific themes that emerge from the questionnaire and focus groups. The researcher will continue to minimize risk and protect confidentiality/privacy by assigning pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants at the focus group and during transcript coding.

Method of compensation: Each participant will receive a one-time distribution of a $20.00 gift card regardless of whether you complete the study, in appreciation for your time and valuable input. However, participants must attend on the designated date of the focus group to be eligible.

Your rights: As a research participant, you have the right to:
1. Have the purpose of the study, and the risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer any question without penalty.
4. Be informed of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that might be advantageous to you.
5. Be informed of the results of the study.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above-named study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Print Name (Participant)</th>
<th>Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Print Name (Investigator)</th>
<th>Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

If you have any further questions in regard to this study, please contact the researcher listed above. If you experience emotional or physical discomfort due to the participation in this study, please contact the facilitator for a list of support services for appropriate referrals.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of St. John Fisher College has reviewed this project. For any concerns regarding this study and/or if you experience any physical or emotional discomfort, you can contact Jill Rathbun by phone at (585) 385-8012 or by email at irb@sjfc.edu.
Appendix C

Principal Letter

Friday, March 31, 2017

Dear SJFC International Review Board,

As the educational leader of School 16, our school community agrees to support Tonya Couch-Jenkins, a doctoral student at Saint John Fisher College (SJFC) at the campus of College of New Rochelle (CNR) with her doctoral research. Ms. Couch-Jenkins has stated her research study is on “The Impact of Parent Engagement on Student Success of African American/Black Students: A Phenomenological Study of the Perspectives of Parents of Urban, Middle School Students (Grades 6, 7, 8) in the Northeast.”

Please feel free to contact me if additional information is needed. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Eisner
Principal

Cc: Dr. E. Quezada, Dr. A. Coddet, C. Moreau, S. Halperis

yorkerspublicschools.org
Appendix D

Yonkers Public School District Letter

TO: Ms. Tonya Couch-Jenkins

FROM: Shant Haperin

DATE: June 26, 2017

RE: Approval of your research proposal titled, “The impact of Parent Engagement on Academic Success of African American/Black Students: A Phenomenological Study in the Perspectives of Parents of Urban Middle School Students”

Please accept this letter as approval of the above titled research proposal. The following are some of the terms and conditions we agreed upon:

- Parents of African American/Black Students in School 16 in grades 6-8 are invited to participate in the study.
- Focus group and survey activities will take place during the summer of 2017.
- Participants will be split into two groups based on student performance. Each group will participate in a 1-hour focus group and complete a demographic questionnaire.
- The researcher will use 2015-16 NYS ELA student performance data to determine the composition of each parent focus group (low performing/high performing students)
- An outside facilitator will conduct the focus groups and be the primary source for data collection.
- Participants will receive a $20 gift card.
- Unless otherwise noted by the District, the District and participating school shall remain unnamed in all reports of findings.
- Any changes to the study design must be resubmitted for approval.

cc: E. Quezada, C. Collins, C. Eisner
Appendix E

Expert Panel Informed Consent Form

St. John Fisher College

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: The Impact of Parent engagement on Academic Achievement of African American Students: A Phenomenological Study from the Perspectives of Parents of Middle School Students (Grades 6, 7, 8) in the Northeastern Region of the United States.

Name of Researcher: Tonya Couch-Jenkins  Cell: (914) 329-0968

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Jennifer Schulman  Phone for further information: (914) 330-4840

Purpose of the study: The purpose of the study is to explore the relevance of parent engagement and meaningful cultural awareness experiences that contribute to academic achievement of African American middle school students in grades 6, 7, and 8 in an urban school setting.

Place of the study: School 16, 759 North Broadway (MB) or 750 North Broadway (Annex), Yonkers, NY 10701

Length of Participation: 30 minutes

Risks and benefits: The expected risks and benefits of participation in this study were explained below:

Risks:

1. Participants must be 18 years or older to take part in the expert panel and be certified in education.

2. Voluntary participation will be explained in the Welcome Letter, Letter of Consent and at the time of the expert panel review.

Benefits:

1. This process will afford a diverse group an opportunity to express how their African American culture was transmitted during their youth, as well as, how they impart the same or different information to their children.

2. It will provide an opportunity for stakeholders (i.e., teachers, administrators) to review the questions to field for reliability and validity before the study.
Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy: The researcher will continue to minimize risk and protect confidentiality/privacy by assigning pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants at the expert panel.

Your rights: As a research participant, you have the right to:
1. Have the purpose of the study, and the risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer any question without penalty.
4. Be informed of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that might be advantageous to you.
5. Be informed of the results of the study.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above-named study.

_________________________  _________________________  ____________
Print Name (Participant)                       Signature             Date

_________________________  _________________________  ____________
Print Name (Investigator)                      Signature             Date

If you have any further questions regard this study, please contact the researcher listed above. If you experience emotional or physical discomfort due to the participation in this study, please contact the facilitator for a list of support services for appropriate referrals.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of St. John Fisher College has reviewed this project. For any concerns regarding this study and/or if you experience any physical or emotional discomfort, you can contact Jill Rathbun by phone at (585) 385 – 8012 or by email at irb@sjfc.edu.
## Appendix F

### Questions: Focus Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Focus Group Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do urban African American parents and guardians define and describe parent engagement?</td>
<td>How would you describe parent engagement (involvement)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What culturally relevant experiences do urban African American parents and guardians perceive as impacting the success of their child?</td>
<td>Describe what role your cultural upbringing played in your child’s educational journey? Share what strategies or activities you plan to consider in the future to help your child be successful in school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What role do urban African American parents play in their children’s schooling?</td>
<td>What do you perceive your role as a parent is to improve student success? What expectations do you have for your child to excel? Share some of your best practices for student success?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What can schools do to create a better partnership between home and school for African American families?</td>
<td>How can schools create more opportunities for parents and educators to enhance the educational journey for more learning for more African American children? Where do you see your child in 5-7 years? How will that happen?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G

St. John Fisher College
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: The Impact of Parent engagement on Academic Achievement of African American Students: A Phenomenological Study from the Perspectives of Parents of Middle School Students (Grades 6, 7, 8) in the Northeastern Region of the United States.

Name of Researcher: Tonya Couch-Jenkins Cell: (914) 329-0968

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Jennifer Schulman Phone for further information: (914) 330-4840

Purpose of the study: The purpose of the study is to explore the relevance of parent engagement and meaningful cultural awareness experiences that contribute to academic achievement of African American middle school students in grades 6, 7 and 8 in an urban school setting.

Place of the study: School 16, 759 North Broadway (MB) or 750 North Broadway (Annex), Yonkers, NY 10701

Length of Participation: 60 minutes

Risks and benefits: The expected risks and benefits of participation in this study were explained below:

Risks:
1. Participants must be 18 years or older to take part in a focus group.
2. Voluntary participation will be explained in the Welcome Letter, Letter of Consent and at the time of the focus group.
3. Information will be provided for participants experiencing discomfort due to participation. In-school and out-of-school counseling (i.e., social worker and psychologist) will be provided at the time of the focus group sessions.
4. The researcher will continue to minimize risk by assigning pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants at the focus group and during transcript coding.

Benefits:
1. This process will afford a diverse group an opportunity to express how their African American culture was transmitted during their youth, as well as, how they impart the same or different information to their children.
2. It will provide a platform for African American parents/guardians to demonstrate whether or not cultural awareness/transmission does impact their children’ academic achievement.
Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy: Once the consent forms have been collected a list will be generated to create the focus groups, the researcher will use pseudonyms to code the data in order to determine specific themes that emerge from the questionnaire and focus groups. The researcher will continue to minimize risk and protect confidentiality/privacy by assigning pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants at the focus group and during transcript coding.

Method of compensation: Each participant will receive a one-time distribution of a $20.00 gift card regardless of whether you complete the study, in appreciation for your time and valuable input. However, participants must attend on the designated date of focus group to be eligible.

Your rights: As a research participant, you have the right to:
1. Have the purpose of the study, and the risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer any question without penalty.
4. Be informed of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that might be advantageous to you.
5. Be informed of the results of the study.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above-named study.

________________________________  _________________________  ____________
Print Name (Participant)                       Signature             Date

________________________________  _________________________  ____________
Print Name (Investigator)                      Signature             Date

If you have any further questions in regard to this study, please contact the researcher listed above. If you experience emotional or physical discomfort due to the participation in this study, please contact the facilitator for a list of support services for appropriate referrals.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of St. John Fisher College has reviewed this project. For any concerns regarding this study and/or if you experience any physical or emotional discomfort, you can contact Jill Rathbun by phone at (585) 385 – 8012 or by email at irb@sjfc.edu.
Appendix H

Reminder Phone Script for Consent

Good evening, Parents! This is Mrs. Jenkins. I am a doctoral student at St. John Fisher College in a program located at the campus of Iona College. As part of my responsibilities as a doctoral student, I am conducting a study on The Impact of Parent engagement on Academic Achievement of African American Students: A Phenomenological Study from the Perspectives of Parents of Middle School Students (Grades 6, 7, 8) in the Northeastern Region of the United States.

The purpose of the study is to explore the relevance of parent engagement and meaningful cultural awareness experiences that contribute to academic achievement of African American middle school students in grades 6, 7, and 8 in an urban school setting. In order to complete my research, I need your help. Therefore, I would like to invite you to participate in this research study via a focus group with parents. Your participation is voluntary and strictly confidential.

The purpose of the focus group will seek to link academic achievement for African American students, as measured by the English Language Arts Test in New York State and defined and enhanced by urban middle school African American parents/guardians who expose their children to best parent practices and cultural activities.

Each focus group will be audio recorded. Focus group will take no more than 60 minutes. Participants will answer eight questions related to their perceptions of parent engagement and complete an individual questionnaire.

All names will not appear on any documents and a coding system will be used to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. All participation is voluntary and there will be no positive or negative outcomes for students based on parents' participation. If you decide to participate, each participant will receive a one-time distribution of a $20.00 gift card regardless of whether you complete the study, in appreciation for your time and valuable input. However, participants must attend on the designated date of focus group to be eligible.

I anticipate that the (focus group) data collection will take place in the summer of 2017 at 6:00 p.m., which will need to be coordinated once approval has been received.

Please return the consent form via email to tmc03484@sjfc.edu or to the classroom teacher by September 8, 2017. In closing, thank you in advance for your kind consideration and I look forward to your participation!

Timed: 2 minute message
Appendix I

Invitation to Participate in Focus Group A

Dear Parents/Guardian,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my research study. As previously stated, I am a doctoral student at St. John Fisher College in a program located at the campus of Iona College. As part of my responsibilities as a doctoral student, I am conducting a study on The Impact of Parent engagement on Academic Achievement of African American Students: A Phenomenological Study from the Perspectives of Parents of Middle School Students (Grades 6, 7, 8) in the Northeastern Region of the United States.

The purpose of the study is to explore the relevance of parent engagement and meaningful cultural awareness experiences that contribute to academic achievement of African American middle school students in grades 6, 7 and 8 in an urban school setting. In order to complete my research, I need your help. Therefore, I would like to invite you to participate in this research study via a focus group with parents. Your participation is voluntary and strictly confidential.

The purpose of the focus group will seek to link academic achievement for African American students, as measured by the English Language Arts Test in New York State and defined and enhanced by urban middle school African American parents/guardians who expose their children to best parent practices and cultural activities.

Each focus group will be audio recorded to capture the audio trail of the focus group. The focus group will take no more than 60 minutes. Participants will answer approximately eight questions related to their perceptions of parent engagement and complete an individual questionnaire. Light refreshments will be served.

All names will not appear on any documents and a coding system will be used to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. All participation is voluntary and there will be no positive or negative outcomes for students based on parents’ participation. Each participant will receive a one-time distribution of a $20.00 gift card regardless of whether you complete the study, in appreciation for your time and valuable input. However, participants must attend on the designated date of focus group to be eligible.

The focus group (data collection) will take place on Tuesday, September 12, 2017 at 6:00 p.m. in the Main Building at 759 North Broadway. Please return the consent form via email to tmc03484@sjfc.edu or to the classroom teacher by September 8, 2017. Thank you in advance for your kind consideration and I look forward to your participation.

Sincerely,

Tonya Couch-Jenkins,
SJFC Doctoral Student
Email: Tmc03484@sjfc.edu Cell #: 914-329-0968

Cut here and return the consent form to classroom teacher or via email to tmc03484@sjfc.edu by 9/8/17.

Child’s Name: ___________________________ Grade/Class: _______________________
Parents’ Name: _________________________ Cell #: ___________________________

I, _______________________________ plan to attend the focus group on Tuesday, September 12, 2017 at 6:00 p.m. in the Main Building at 759 North Broadway.

X _________________________________ Parents/Guardian Signature
Appendix J

Invitation to Participate in Focus Group B

Dear Parents/Guardian,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my research study. As previously stated, I am a doctoral student at St. John Fisher College in a program located at the campus of Iona College. As part of my responsibilities as a doctoral student, I am conducting a study on The Impact of Parent engagement on Academic Achievement of African American Students: A Phenomenological Study from the Perspectives of Parents of Middle School Students (Grades 6, 7, 8) in the Northeastern Region of the United States.

The purpose of the study is to explore the relevance of parent engagement and meaningful cultural awareness experiences that contribute to academic achievement of African American middle school students in grades 6, 7 and 8 in an urban school setting. In order to complete my research, I need your help. Therefore, I would like to invite you to participate in this research study via a focus group with parents. Your participation is voluntary and strictly confidential.

The purpose of the focus group will seek to link academic achievement for African American students, as measured by the English Language Arts Test in New York State and defined and enhanced by urban middle school African American parents/guardians who expose their children to best parent practices and cultural activities.

Each focus group will be audio recorded to capture the audio trail of the focus group. The focus group will take no more than 60 minutes. Participants will answer approximately eight questions related to their perceptions of parent engagement and complete an individual questionnaire. Light refreshments will be served.

All names will not appear on any documents and a coding system will be used to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. All participation is voluntary and there will be no positive or negative outcomes for students based on parents’ participation. Each participant will receive a one-time distribution of a $20.00 gift card regardless of whether you complete the study, in appreciation for your time and valuable input. However, participants must attend on the designated date of focus group to be eligible.

The focus group (data collection) will take place on Wednesday, September 13, 2017 at 6:00 p.m. in the main building at 759 North Broadway. Please return the consent form via email to tmc03484@sjfc.edu by September 8, 2017. Thank you in advance for your kind consideration and I look forward to your participation.

Sincerely,

Tonya Couch-Jenkins,
SJFC Doctoral Student
Email: Tmc03484@sjfc.edu Cell #: [redacted]

Cut here and return the consent form to classroom teacher or via email to tmc03484@sjfc.edu by 9/8/17.

Child’s Name: _____________________________ Grade/Class: ___________________
Parents’ Name: ___________________________ Cell #: ___________________________

I, ___________________________ plan to attend the focus group on Wednesday, September 13, 2017 at 6:00 p.m. in the Main Building at 759 North Broadway.

X ___________________________________________________________________
Parents/Guardian Signature
Appendix K

Demographic Questionnaire

The Impact of Parent engagement on Academic Achievement of African American Students

Demographic Fact Sheet

Directions: Check, circle or list the response that best answers the question. Thank you.

1. Participant Code (optional): ________________________________________________________________

2. What is your gender? _____ male  _____ female

   _____50-59  _____60-69  _____70-79  _____80 and older

4. Where were you born? ____________________________________________________

5. Where was your child born? ________________________________________________

6. What is your marital status? Circle one.
   Married  Single  Separated  Divorced

7. What is your highest level of education? Check one.
   _____ graduate of elementary school (grade 6); _____ graduate of middle school (grade 8);
   _____ graduate of high school (grade 12 _____some college with _____ number of years);
   _____ graduate of 2 year college (Associates Degree); _____ graduate of 4 year college (Bachelor of Science/Arts of
   Science Degree); _____ post graduate; _____ other (military)

8. Were you employed? Yes  No  Profession:__________________________

9. Number of years family has lived in United States? ______________________________

10. List the cultural organizations you/family were a member of in your community (i.e., NAACP, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts,
    community center, etc.);

   __________________________________________________________________________

11. List the cultural activities your child does daily/weekly/monthly/annually (i.e., museum, cultural fair, special event(s) –
    name them, church, music lessons, dance class, etc.);
    Daily:____________________________________________________________________
    Weekly:___________________________________________________________________
    Monthly:_________________________________________________________________
    Annually:_________________________________________________________________

12. List the activities your child does daily/weekly/monthly/annually (i.e., park, movies, theatre, library, circus, parades,
    tutoring, sports programs, music lessons, etc.);
    Daily:____________________________________________________________________
    Weekly:___________________________________________________________________
    Monthly:_________________________________________________________________
    Annually:_________________________________________________________________

13. What cultural activities helped improve your child’s success at home, in school and in the community? Briefly explain.
    _________________________________________________________________________

14. What is your child’s favorite activity? Why? _________________________________

15. What is your child’s favorite family activity? Why? _____________________________

Thank you for your comments and participation.
Appendix L

Focus Group Reminder Script

Good evening, Parents! This is Mrs. Jenkins. I am a doctoral student at St. John Fisher College in a program located at the campus of Iona College. As part of my responsibilities as a doctoral student, I am conducting a study on The Impact of Parent engagement on Academic Achievement of African American Students: A Phenomenological Study from the Perspectives of Parents of Middle School Students (Grades 6, 7, 8) in the Northeastern Region of the United States.

The purpose of the study is to explore the relevance of parent engagement and meaningful cultural awareness experiences that contribute to academic achievement of African American middle school students in grades 6, 7 and 8 in an urban school setting. In order to complete my research, I need your help. Therefore, I would like to invite you to participate in this research study via a focus group with parents. Your participation is voluntary and strictly confidential.

The purpose of the focus group will seek to link academic achievement for African American students, as measured by the English Language Arts Test in New York State and defined and enhanced by urban middle school African American parents/guardians who expose their children to best parent practices and cultural activities.

Each focus group will be audio recorded. The focus group will take no more than 60 minutes. Participants will answer about eight questions related to their perceptions of parent engagement and complete an individual questionnaire.

All names will not appear on any documents and a coding system will be used to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. All participation is voluntary. Thank you for your willingness to participate. Each participant will receive a one-time distribution of a $20.00 gift card regardless of whether you complete the study, in appreciation for your time and valuable input. However, participants must attend on the designated date of focus group to be eligible.

The focus group (data collection) will take place on ______________, 2017 at 6:00 p.m. sharp in the Main Building at 759 North Broadway. Free parking is available and light refreshments will be served.

Please return the consent form via email to tmc03484@sjfc.edu or to the classroom teacher by 9/8/17. In closing, thank you in advance for your kind consideration and I look forward to your participation on this (day)!

Timed: 2 minute message