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African American Parent Involvement:

An examination of the characteristics that determine the most successful school and parent relationships between lower socioeconomic, African American parents, and highly effective schools

by

Marcheta Ganther Williams

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

Joint Doctor of Education

with

San Jose State University
California State University, East Bay
San Francisco State University

In Educational Leadership

in

the Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge

Ingrid Seyer-Ochi, Chair
Ruth Love
Susan Stone

Spring 2011

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Abstract

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Professor Ingrid Seyer-Ochi, Chair

The literature contains extensive research that focuses on parent involvement and parent involvement programs. The past decade and a half has warranted some parent involvement programs that focused on the student populations of African American students and lower socioeconomic status students. In schools in which the African American student population is small, establishing an African American parent group can help to develop relationships between families and the school to support students. This is especially important in schools in which the African American student population represents a low percentage of the school. In this study of three elementary schools, African American families are identified and their relationships with schools within the African American parent group are examined. In a review of the literature it was determined that continued study of how social status and social capital may moderate the effects of different types of parent involvement. Teachers, principals, and parents were examined.

Using a case study format, this study focuses on three schools that have established African American parent groups. Through staff and parent interviews and observations, the study focuses on how the group develops and builds relationship between African American parents, the school, the principal and the school community.

The findings of the study show that an effective group has structures in place that support the sustainability of the group over time. Principal and parent commitment is an important factor to ensure the stability and focus of the group. Other factors, such a unity among the group, are needed in order for the group to function in an optimal way. By being united in numbers, the group will prosper and be able to gain the support necessary to be successful. The influence of effective African American parent groups in schools in which the African American parent population is proportionally small can have important implications for district policies and practices

Dedication

To my loving family who always support me and believe that I can do anything:
Allen, Meryl and Allen, II

Table of Contents

Dedication	i
Table of Contents	ii
List of Tables	iii
List of Figures	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review	3
Review of the Parental Involvement Literature	5
History of Parental Involvement and Early Parental Involvement Programs	6
Review of the Funds of Knowledge Literature	10
Review of the Social Capital Literature	12
Academic Achievement	15
Parent Involvement Programs	16
Chapter 3: Research Methods	23
Sampling	24
Theoretical Perspective	26
Research Methodology and Methods	28
Data Collection	28
Data Analysis	29
Chapter 4: School Descriptions	31
Chapter 5: Findings	42
African American Parent Group as a Community	44
School Leadership as it Impacts the African American Parent Group	48
The African American Group within the Fabric of the School	52
Chapter 6: Conclusions	56
Limitations of the Findings	56
Recommendations from the Findings	56
The Importance of a Successful African American Group	57
References	59
Appendix A: Interview Protocol	66
Appendix B: Observation Protocol	67

List of Tables

Table 1	Parent Involvement Analysis Paradigm compared to Epstein's 6 Categories
Table 2	Proportion of Parents/Guardians Who Requested a Teacher by Social Class
Table 3	School Comparisons
Table 4	Record of Interviews and Observations of School Staff and Parents
Table 5	Participants, Their Roles at the School

List of Figures

Figure 1 Relationships Between African American Parents, Leadership and School Community

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I attended a fifth grade promotion ceremony at a local elementary school. I love ceremonies. As I watched, I did what I normally do as a former music teacher and performer: I critiqued the ceremony. Perusing the room, I was pleased to see parents and other family members well dressed and accompanied by flowers and balloons. It gave me pleasure to see so many proud families and to hear the constant buzz of anticipation as we all waited for the program to begin. Once the processional of students began, and later as they were seated on stage, I made note of several aspects of the event.

As an African American, I am always aware of other African Americans, aware of their behavior, the number of participants and level of performance. I noticed several African American students seated on stage in the promotion class. The program began. There were about 90 students on stage. Twenty of those students were African American. Several students shared speaking parts in the program. I waited with anticipation for the African American students to speak, for any African American student to speak. To my surprise and disappointment the ceremony ended, and not one African American student had spoken during it, not as a soloist or in a small group. I expected to see African American student participation. I made the initial assumption that the ceremony represented all students in the fifth-grade class. To my amazement, this was not the case.

I wondered why there were no African American students prominently involved in the ceremony. I remembered the African American fifth-grade teacher who led her class into the multipurpose room where the ceremony was held. She sat with the other fifth-grade teachers at the promotion. Many puzzling questions crossed my mind. Did that teacher notice that no African American students participated in a major way? Why didn't she feel compelled to demand that African American students participate? Who was responsible for the planning of the ceremony? What could have caused this oversight? As an African American educator and parent, it disturbed me greatly that she, as an African American woman, could have let this happen, and I wondered how she sees herself in the world.

I later found out that parents planned the ceremony. A daytime, school event, planned solely by parents, seemed unusual to me, especially since the principal and teachers were participants in the event. Based on the level of participation and the ethnicity of the participants, I can only assume that white parents planned the ceremony. I knew that the school had an active African American Parent Group, one that has been in existence for four years. Some of those parents were present in the audience. Several of those parents had African American students participating in the ceremony on stage. How could they let this happen? How could there have been such a lack of attention to detail on the part of the principal? Upon further investigation I was later to find that students were required to try out for the speaking parts and that no African American students wanted to audition. I decided to put aside my concerns regarding that fact that the fifth-grade teachers didn't encourage them to try out. I remained puzzled when I remembered a portion in the ceremony when there was a presentation made to the school from the fifth grade class. I asked, "Students who gave the fifth grade presentation had to audition to say that?" The principal's response was, "No. That was assigned." So much of what happened that day is the norm when parents are not intrinsically involved in the school. This not only happens with African American parents within a school but can happen with any parent who is not involved in the total fabric of the school. This is especially a problem when African American students attend a school in which the dominant race of the school is middle-class

white. As will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Two, social class influences how black and white parents negotiate their relationships with schools; but with African Americans, race plays an additional, important role independent of social class, in framing the terms of their relationship. (Diamond & Gomez, 2004). Although middle-class black families benefit from their class position, they sometimes suffer from weaker connections to schools. Because of race and their histories with schools, they face a setting that is different from the one experienced by privileged white families. (Lareau & Hovart, 1999). In order for the African American parents to have been involved in the planning of the promotion ceremony, they would have needed to develop personal relationships with the parents planning the program, or have communicated with the principal so that he could have connected them to the planning process, or the principal would have needed to have been more actively involved in the planning process, to ensure that diversity was included in the presentation. If African American students can be passed over in a formal presentation to parents, when all eyes are watching, as they were in this circumstance, how might they be overlooked in the classroom on a daily basis when eyes are not watching?

Problem statement

1. What characterizes the most successful school and parent relationships between lower socioeconomic status and African American parents and highly effective schools?
2. Within those schools, what are the qualities, factors, and organizational structures that appear to best nurture those relationships?

This is primarily a qualitative study that will discuss three schools, located in three school districts. Data was collected from each school from the following participants: site principals, teachers and parents. One site principal, two teachers and two parents were selected to participate for each site in this study. Supplemental quantitative data, such as API Scores, school and district populations, and longevity of the staff, are included in order to help describe the diversity and uniqueness of the schools. The data were collected over a period of two years. The method of collection was through interviews and observations. All interviews were conducted in person and transcribed. The interview data was recorded in the syntax of the participant. The schools were chosen because they established effective African American parents groups. This dissertation will continue with a review of current literature that discusses parent involvement and types of parent involvement programs. A methods chapter will discuss the research of three African American parent groups within three elementary school sites. The chapter that follows will include a thorough description of those schools followed by a findings chapter that discusses what was learned from the African American parent groups to support African American students. The conclusion will outline the limitations of the study and will offer suggestions for further study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Much of the literature discusses a need for more parent involvement in schools. Research suggests that parent involvement is closely connected to students excelling academically, lowering student drop out rate, and students becoming more viable members of society. Not only is the involvement recommended by state and federal law, explicit laws and policies require parent involvement in much of the decision making processes in schools. While policies clearly outline expectations for parent involvement through opportunities such as the: School Site Council (SSC); English Learner Advisory Council (ELAC); as well as others; and the specified involvement is in place in many schools, some schools still lack the type of consistent involvement throughout the school necessary to support student achievement and to close the achievement gap.

The goal of this review is to answer the following questions: What type of parental involvement affects student achievement? How can schools effectively increase the parental involvement of African American parents and parents? Can that involvement be successfully replicated?

Statement of the Problem

The enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has forced many states and schools to institute a system of accountability where by schools and school districts must monitor the progress and assessment results of all students. This bipartisan law ensures that schools receiving Title I money are held accountable for the academic progress of every child, regardless of race, ethnicity, income level, or zip code (NCLB, 2001). The law has several components within its legislation. NCLB implies the existence of the significant inequities in student learning outcomes in many schools. Data collected since its inception shows the correlation between student achievement and socioeconomic status and has examined the gains of students in schools with high numbers of low socioeconomic status learners (NCLB, California Report Card, 2003-05). Prior to NCLB, federal legislation did not hold schools and school districts accountable for the academic achievement of students. Maintaining that schools, local educational agencies, and states be responsible for improving the academic achievement of all students has substantially changed the educational system's level of accountability. The legislation is extensive, with many components intended to support the achievement of all students in schools (NCLB, 2001).

Within the law is a section for parental involvement that requires school districts to have plans and supports in place that both inform and include parents in the education of their children (NCLB, 2001). Over the last 30 years there has been extensive research documenting parental involvement and parental involvement programs. Some of this research will be discussed in this chapter. Although not controlled for socioeconomic status, (Tompkins & Deloney, 1994) parental involvement has been identified as an important predictor of student success.

Methodology of the Review

This review draws upon the fields of education and sociology. Database searches included: Dissertation Abstracts, PsycINFO, Education Index-Wilson, ERIC, Digital Dissertations, JSTOR, Extenza, RAND Education, and California Department of Education. The key words used in this search were: parental involvement, elementary, student achievement, Hispanic, African American, social capital, social class, socioeconomic status, parental advisory boards, and funds of knowledge, which is the knowledge of families and the inherent cultural resources found in communities surrounding schools.

This literature review will examine parental involvement and the effect it has on the academic achievement of African American, Latino and low socioeconomic status students in school. I will begin with a review of current trends in the field of parent involvement that include different types of parental involvement programs, many of which are the result of Title I requirements and funding. Following an overview of current trends in the field, I will examine the National Standards for Parental Involvement developed by the National Parent Teacher Association. Within this review I will define and review parental involvement, social capital, social class, and funds of knowledge literature as described by noted researchers in the field (Epstein, 1986; NCLB, 2001; National Parent Teacher Association, 1998; Horvat, Weininger & Lareau, 2003; Gonzalez & Moll, 2002; Gallimore & Goldenberg, 1993). This review discusses the history of parental involvement and explores how successful parental involvement programs use and build social capital among parents. I will also show how funds of knowledge from families are used to create successful school communities that ultimately result in successful students' academic achievement. Finally, the review will suggest areas for future research.

Overall Trends

Within the last 20 years, a great deal of research has been produced on the subject of parental involvement and its effect on academic achievement. The work of Fan & Chen (1999) reveals that parental involvement is stronger when academic achievement is represented by more global achievement indicators (e.g. school GPA), than by academic subject specific indicator (e.g., math grade). The research of Clark (1983) and African American children showed that high achieving children had parents who stressed the value of education for their futures, monitored their academic progress closely, and fostered an internal sense of control and responsibility over academic outcomes. The intuitive sense that parental involvement has a positive effect on students' academic achievement has been so great that parents (ECS Distribution Center, 1996; Dye, 1992; Lawler-Prince, Grymes, Boals, & Bonds, 1994; Schrick, 1992), teachers (Allen, 1996; Clarke & Williams, 1992; Matzye, 1995), school board administrators (Khan, 1996; Roach, 1994; Wanat, 1994) and policy makers (Prindle & Resinski, 1989; Van Meter, 1994; Wagner & Sconyers, 1996) have agreed that parental involvement is critical for the academic success of children.

Parental involvement can take on many forms, including volunteering at school, attending meetings and school events, communicating with the school about the child's progress, and monitoring homework (Bauch, 1992; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). The No Child Left Behind legislation implies that parental involvement is critical and also links student achievement to parental involvement (Fishel & Ramirez, 2005). The legislation empowers parents to ask important questions, make informed decisions about their children's education by ensuring that schools are held accountable, and parents have up-to-date information. The law requires states, districts, and schools to develop ways to get parents more involved in their children's education and the improvement of their child's school. Title I districts and schools, for example, must have written policies on parental involvement and make available this information to parents (NCLB, 2001). States and school districts are incorporating the strategies and guidelines created by researchers, legislation, and national parent organizations. These approaches are providing many schools with the means to make available equal access for all students and structures that enable parents to support student achievement (Austin Independent School District, 1977; Deford, 1996; National PTA Standards, 1997).

Review of the Parental Involvement Literature

What is meant by Parental Involvement?

In order to understand how schools can effectively increase the parental involvement of parents of African American and low socioeconomic status students, I will first define what is meant by parental involvement. There are several different ways parents can become involved in the education of their child. Some parents just carry out their roles as parents in the home. Others contribute their time and energy as volunteers at school. There are also those who participate in a leadership capacity, becoming part of a school council or parent-teacher organization that will enable them to be a part of the decision making body of the school.

Parental involvement, most commonly defined, is based on the typology of Joyce Epstein (Epstein, 1987). Epstein's six categories of parental involvement include: (1) parenting- parents' responsibility to provide for children's basic needs of food, shelter, emotional support, throughout their developmental years; (2) communication- parents and schools staying in contact; (3) learning at home- practices occurring at home in which parents interact, monitor, or assist their children in educational-related activities; (4) volunteering and/or attending all activities in which the parents come to the school setting to either help or support; (5) decision making- parents participating in parent-teacher organizations and school advisory or governance; (6) community connections- parents collaborating with the community and other outside agencies to facilitate students' education. Parental involvement, as defined by the California Department of Education, refers to the efforts of any caregiver who assumes responsibility for nurturing and caring for children, including parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, foster parents, step parents (CDE, 1994). For the purpose of this review, parental involvement will be defined as the involvement parents and caregivers have in the lives of their children that directly affect their achievement in school. That type of involvement includes: homework support, volunteer time at school-classroom and school meetings, school selection, and community connections.

There are many different concepts around parental involvement. The researcher Olivos (2006) describes parental involvement in a series of levels. In Level I, parents are involved at home with their child's education. This would compare to Epstein's first category from her typology of basic needs. This type of involvement is superficial and is as the author states "the status quo." At Level II, the parental involvement is more collaborative with the school. Like Epstein's categories two, three and four, parents are more in harmony with the school and assimilate in school practices and behaviors, learning that occurs at home, assistance with homework and ongoing interaction with teachers and volunteering at school. At Level III, parents are involved in the decision- making process where issues of equity and choice can be addressed through parental bodies like school site councils, English Language Learners councils and Parent-Teacher Associations. This paradigm is inclusive of Epstein's category five. Finally, in Level IV, parents are action researchers. They act as agents of transformation in the school and community. Like Epstein's category six, parents are collaborating with community and other outside agencies to facilitate the education of students. The following table illustrates Olivos' Parent Involvement Analysis Paradigm as compared to Epstein's Six Categories.

Table 1
Parent Involvement Analysis Paradigm compared to Epstein's 6 Categories

L	Theoretical/ Social Focus	Parent Involvement Models	Perception of Parents as Contributors to Schools	Epstein's 6 Categories
1	Functionality (Conformity)	Family influence: Change bicultural parents---"improve" home condition for participants to acquire preferred behaviors and values	Superficially connecting parents to school culture	1- Parenting- parents' responsibility to provide for children's basic needs of food, shelter, emotional support, etc., throughout their developmental years
2	Structural functionalist (Social control and harmony)	Cooperative systems: parents participate within the school culture to assimilate to school practices and behaviors	Parents as collaborators of school culture	2- Communicating- parents and school staying in contact, 3- Learning at home- practices occurring at home in which parents interact, monitor, or assist their children in educationally related activities, 4- Volunteering and/or attending (all activities in which the parents come to the school setting to either help or support
3	Conflict theory (Equity and power)	Alternative school reform: Parents challenge schools to be more responsive, inclusive and equitable	Parents as co- participants in the decision-making process	5- Decision making- parents participating in parent-teacher organizations and school advisory or governance
4	Conflict theory, social constructionist/interpret- transform change towards cultural and economic democracy	Transforms Education: Problem posing that seeks solutions enabling inclusion, voice & representation in decision making	Cultural democracy, parents as action researchers, agents of transformative change in the school and community	6- Community connections -parents collaborating with community and other outside agencies to facilitate students' education

Involving low socioeconomic status parents in the education of their child has been implemented in several programs over the years. Fishel & Ramirez (2005) reviewed 24 studies of parental involvement for school-aged children conducted between 1980 and 2002 and evaluated them according to the criteria developed by the Task Force on Evidence-Based Interventions in School Psychology. All of the studies had parents helping children learn at home, with most of them targeting a change in reading, math skills, spelling, and homework completion. The strongest evidence for parental involvement was provided by programs that implemented parental tutoring in the home and worked on a single academic problem of the elementary school-aged child, primarily reading and mathematics skills. Researchers agree that increased parental involvement is necessary if low-socio economic status underrepresented student populations are to overcome a history of reading deficiencies (Battle-Baliley, 2004).

History of Parental Involvement and Early Parental Involvement Programs

Parental involvement did not originate with researchers Epstein and Olivos. The work of Zigler & Muenchow (1992) discusses how the importance of involving parents in their child's education is not a new notion or recent discovery. "Parents have been their child's first teachers since prehistoric times." (Zigler & Muenchow 1992) Before history was recorded, evidence

indicates that parents were nurturers and educators of their children through modeling, care giving, and guidance. They imparted skills, morals, and values of the time, influenced by their life experiences, the environment in which they lived, and their culture (Berger, 1995).

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the decades between the 1870's and the 1890's saw a great increase in the kindergarten movement and in parental education (Froebel, 1887). Froebel felt that parents were an integral component of early education and his kindergarten movement carried the tradition of involving parents. The Child Study Association of America, founded in 1888, committed itself solely to the study of children and the spreading of good parental practices (Berger, 1995). In the decades that followed, more and more women's groups and organizations such as the American Association of University Women or AAUW (1882), the Congress of Parents and Teachers, called the PTA (1897), and the National Association of Colored Women (1897) were formed. The University of Chicago established the first parents' cooperative in 1916, Coontz, (1992). In addition to securing a preschool education program for the children of the women at the University of Chicago, it gave the mothers parental education for themselves and child-free time to participate in volunteer Red Cross work. National PTA memberships grew from 190,000 in 1920 to nearly 1,500,000 in 1930 (Schlossman, 1976). Although these studies and the organizations formed during that period didn't directly address the issue of parental involvement in schools, the importance of parents was implied. A more recent focus on parental involvement occurred in the 1960s (Berger, 1995). This attention was aimed at families with a lower socioeconomic status. Title I was enacted in 1965 under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This policy was committed to closing the achievement gap between low-income students and other student. The policy was rewritten in 1994 to improve fundamental goals of helping at-risk students. According to the U.S. Department of Education the purpose of Title 1 funding, is "to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high quality education and reach, at minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments." Title 1 state that schools with large concentrations of low-income students will receive supplemental funds to assist in meeting student's educational goals. Low-income students are determined by the number of students enrolled in the free and reduced lunch program (Education Consolidation and Improvement Act, 1981).

Title I offices have included parents on their councils from the beginning. Title I, includes a school-parent compact that outlines how parents, the entire campus staff, and the students will share the responsibility for improved student academic achievement. It also includes the means by which the school and parents will build and develop a partnership to help children achieve the State's high standards. Title 1 requires that parents are included in the creation of a written policy that is designed to support their children's education. The policy includes annual parental meetings for the purpose of sharing information, for planning the expenditures of Title 1 resources, and for parental education and curricular support to students (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). This was the first direct attempt to provide support to increase the achievement of students of lower socioeconomic status and the parental involvement of their families. Next are two examples of programs resulting from Title I, Head Start and The Follow Through Program.

Head Start

The Head Start Program had its early origins as a result of the "War on Poverty" that was one of several products of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (Zigler & Muenchow, 1992).

Head Start stemmed from an attempt to improve the intellectual capacity and school performance of poor children (Zigler & Muenchow, 1992). The program was designed to provide learning experiences that would engage and motivate students, thereby increasing their overall academic ability. The concept of motivation instead of IQ was revolutionary in the 1960s, even more so was the notion of parents being involved in their children's learning. To extend that further, Bronfenbrenner (1991) believed, in his ecological approach to child development, that children could not be taken from their homes for only a few hours a week and that anyone expect miracles to occur. Any successful program for children would have to involve the child's parents. The initial goal of Head Start was to empower parents to be better parents rather than to organize them for social action (Bronfenbrenner, 1991). As Head Start continued to develop, parent-program specialists were assigned to develop plans that would include parents as equal partners, teachers, and volunteers at Head Start centers.

Head Start's parental involvement program had a positive effect in that parents were encouraged to obtain training in child development and to attend college (Zigler & Muenchow, 1992). Support structures and programs that promote parents to receive training in child development, and parental education ultimately help the children's overall academic achievement. The Head Start Program was one of the first true efforts to involve low socioeconomic status parents in the education of their children. It was also one of the first programs to support the belief that the involvement of parents can support student achievement.

A congressionally mandated Head Start Impact Study was conducted across 84 nationally representative guarantee agencies of 5,000 newly entering three and four year old children applying for Head Start. Students were randomly assigned to either a Head Start group that had access to, Head Start Program services, or to a non-Head Start group that could enroll in available community non-Head Start services. Data was collected in the fall of 2002 and later collected through the spring of the children's first grade year. The study reviewed the differences Head Start can make to parental practices that contribute to children's school readiness. Information was collected from interviews with parents, direct child assessments, surveys of Head Start, and non-Head Start teachers, interviews with center directors and other care providers, direct observations of the quality of various care settings, and care provider ratings of children (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005).

Among children of the three-year-old group, the impact of Head Start on pre-writing skills was apparent in their scores on the McCarthy Draw and Design Test, which was 0.15 higher than the non-Head Start group, effect size of 13%. For the four-year-old group, the impact of Head Start on pre-writing skills and spelling, the effect size was 16% on the Woodcock Johnson. Comparing Head Start students to the nation, including students who are not from the low socioeconomic category, the Head Start students still scored lower by 1/3 standard deviation on the Woodcock Johnson III but by the end of the first year, students were able to close the achievement gap by half (USDH & HS, 2005).

Parental involvement has contributed to the success of the Head Start Program (Ramey, 1999; Lee, 1998). An essential part of each Head Start program is the involvement of parents in parental education, program planning, and other operating activities. Through participation in classes and workshops on child development and through staff visits to the home, parents learn about the needs of their children and about educational activities that can be carried out at home. Parents are encouraged to volunteer in the classroom, and many Head Start parental volunteers have gone on to discover career opportunities at Head Start (USDH & HS, 2005). Another early

parental involvement program aimed at low socioeconomic status students and intended to continue the support for students during the early elementary school years was the Follow Through Program.

The Follow Through Program

The Follow Through Program was established in 1967 as a result of an amendment to the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, to benefit children in grades K-2 of low-income families. It was designed to expand upon the gains made by children in Head Start. Because of the massive cuts made in the Office of Economic Opportunity budget in 1967, the program became an educational experiment. The program format was a planned variation that included sponsors who generally were a group of persons at a university or research institution who had developed a model for early childhood education. For the first 20 years of the Follow Through operation (1967-1986), a total of 23 sponsors developed educational models that were implemented in approximately 200 communities around the United States (Olmsted & Rubin, 1983).

A Chicago longitudinal study of the Follow Through Program conducted by Miedel & Reynolds (1999) indicated that activities in which parents participated in preschool and kindergarten were significantly associated with higher reading achievement, with lower rates of grade retention at age 14, and with fewer years in special education. Teacher ratings of parental involvement in first and second grade were significantly associated with higher reading achievement in eighth grade, lower grade retention rates, and lower rates of special education placement through eighth grade. After the program had been in existence for more than 25 years, the funding for the longitudinal evaluation of the Follow Through Program came through. The evaluation was conducted and discussed the flaws of the Follow Through design and showed too much variation and too little planning (Gersten, 1984). Gersten suggests that comparison groups were often selected in haste and varied in social, economic, and ethnic backgrounds. The Follow Through Program ended in 1994 due to its expense and an evaluation conducted by the U. S. Department of Education. The model was not able to demonstrate a significant number of positive effects, and most of the effects produced were negative. (House, Glass, McLean & Walker, 1987).

The Head Start and the Follow-Through programs were both successful in getting and maintaining the involvement of low socioeconomic status parents in the education of their children. These programs were able to show improved academic success for the students who participated in them (Miedel & Reynolds 1999; USDH & HS, 2005). Next I will review The National PTA Standards and how they align with the work of Epstein and Olivos.

National PTA Standards

The National Parent Teacher Association published six standards, which closely align with Epstein's recommended six categories of parent involvement and Olivos' Levels of Involvement (Epstein, 1987; National PTA Standards, 1997; Olivos, 2006). Components of the standards include: regular communication among the parent and teacher, parental involvement with school councils and decision making, family nights, parental education classes, workshops, and community resources used to support schools. Standard II, for example talks specifically about supporting all families, including those who are not visibly involved.

The standards focus on how to support parents so that they can better help students. Successful parental involvement requires the contribution of many participants. Families are expected to take part in their children's school and their children's learning (CDE, 1994).

Schools are expected to meet state and federal guidelines requiring parental inclusion for School Site Councils (SSC) and English Learners Advisory Council (ELAC) (NCLB, 2001).

Public education is much more inclusive than it has ever been not only including parents but an all- inclusive student population, students with disabilities, and students with special health care needs (CDE, 1994). Categories, levels, standards, policies, and guidelines for parental involvement are all a part of existing legislation, parental involvement literature, research, expectations, and some school cultures but can still be difficult to implement for some African American groups and low socioeconomic status school communities.

Much of the parental involvement literature available focuses on parental involvement within the school and parental involvement at home (Henderson, 1987). Educators and researchers believe that those parents, who spend time at home reviewing and extending what is taught in the classroom, affect in a positive way, the academic achievement of their children (Ramey & Ramey, 2004). This home-to-school relationship is important to extend and maintain the learning but much can be learned from the home to support learning at school.

Gay (2002), for example, asserts that culturally relevant teaching or pedagogy uses the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant to and effective for students. Culturally relevant teaching teaches to the students and through the strengths of the students. Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez (1992), state when families with low socioeconomic backgrounds have a relationship with the school that is appreciated and respected, parent involvement with the school increases (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992). The funds of knowledge literature shows how effective relationships between schools and parents can be attained by valuing the resource knowledge children bring from their home environment, no matter their socioeconomic background.

Review of the Funds of Knowledge Literature

How are funds of knowledge defined?

Funds of knowledge are the inherent cultural resources found in communities surrounding schools. Funds of knowledge are grounded in the networking that communities do in order to make the best use of those resources. Family members are engaged in diverse occupations that give them skills in many areas. Parents' jobs provide them with a varied and extensive wealth of information. Latino women, for example, sell items out of their homes, such as tortillas and tamales, cosmetics, or they have a regular stand at the local swap meet (Gonzalez & Moll, 2002).

Funds of knowledge, as it is defined, emphasize strategic knowledge and related activities essential in households functioning, development, and well-being. They are the resources that exist in a family and community for making a living and getting ahead. Any family, regardless of its social and economic status, has resources, knowledge, and experiences that should be reflected in schooling. The work of Moll et al. (1992) found that schools typically do not recognize the funds of knowledge among working class, immigrant, or ethnic minority groups. There is much to learn from the families of all students. Students come to school with vast amounts of knowledge and experiences that can be channeled in a productive way that can enable schools to understand them, their learning styles, and learning environments. Using the funds of knowledge that families add to the achievement of their children can help students and parents work toward the goal of high academic success. Following are some studies conducted that are examples of the funds of knowledge research.

The funds of knowledge literature, reframes school-family relationships to make communication, interactions, and curriculum development intersect. It differs from one-way approaches that attempt to replicate and transmit school values and activities to the home. With understanding of funds of knowledge, learning is seen as the result of social interactions among the individual, society, and culture. It is particularly relevant for transforming practices in schools that serve minority, immigrant, and poor children, whose school performance may lag behind white, middle-class students. The approach suggests that disadvantaged children can succeed in school if classrooms are reorganized to give them the same advantage that middle-class children always seem to have had, instruction that puts their knowledge and experiences at the heart of learning (Roseberry, McIntyre, & Gonzalez, 2001).

Gonzalez and Moll (2002) researched the Puente Project. The Puente Project is utilized in school districts, designed to increase the number of educationally underserved students who enroll in four-year colleges and universities, earn degrees, and return to the community as leaders and mentors to future generations (Freedman, 1993). Gonzalez and Moll reviewed how local funds of knowledge are identified and incorporated into the communities of Latino families. The Puente model is designed to be a bridge between high school and higher education. In the study, the authors recognized the link between community knowledge and school validation of that knowledge, as well as the bridge between parents and teachers. Practical, out-of school, experiential knowledge, academic knowledge, abstract knowledge, and diverse people all come together to fulfill a common mission (Gonzalez & Moll, 2002). In the Puente Model, funds of knowledge from families contribute to the academic achievement of students. Students become engaged in their education through linkages to the home and validation of their families' backgrounds. They can hone their skills in multiple arenas that bridge from the familiar to the abstract (Gonzalez & Moll, 2002).

In the qualitative study research conducted by Moll et al. (1992), teachers studied the households of their own students as a viable method for bridging the gap between school and community among households in a predominantly Mexican working-class community of Tucson, Arizona. Teachers entered the household of two to three of their students as ethnographers, learners of the everyday contexts of their students' lives. Teachers did not attempt to teach the family or to visit for disciplinary reasons. The focus of the home visit was to gather details about the accumulated knowledge base that each household assembles in order to ensure its own subsistence. As visitors to the home, teachers assume the role of learner. Trust and relationships were created among parents and teachers. Study groups were created to enhance the collaboration between teachers/researchers and university-based researchers, to discuss findings, and to plan, develop, and support innovations in instruction. In an ethnographic study of the origin, use, and distribution of funds of knowledge, teachers wrote field notes, created and analyzed questionnaires that provided the context for inquiry-based visits. As they learned, teachers established new relationships with the students' parents that became the basis for the exchange of knowledge about family and school matters.

Teachers also participated in study groups that offered a forum for the collective analysis of the household findings. Based on the experiences in the households and the study groups, the visits became a way in which teachers thought to form study topics and research teams. In addition, the visits contributed to the academic content of lessons. Parents were drawn into the process by the validation of household knowledge as worthy of pedagogical notice. As teachers came to view their students as competent participants in households, rich in cognitive resources,

they came away with raised expectations of their students' abilities (Gonzalez, Moll, Tenery, Rendon, Gonzalez, & Amanti, 1993).

As a result, teachers strongly affirmed that the study groups provided an important way of maximizing time and combining resources for conceptualizing the pedagogical connection between classrooms and households (Gonzales et al., 1993). However, teachers encountered a number of obstacles that can impinge on the implementation of field research. The dilemma most often cited was lack of time. Although all of the teachers were convinced that these funds of knowledge exist in abundance, extracting their potential for teaching proved to be an intricate process. Teachers found that they were in need of time and support to move from theory to practice or from field research to practice. Qualitative evaluation methods were the most amenable to the methodology, and teachers were willing to document their own intellectual journeys through the use of personal journals, debriefing interviews, and analysis of field notes, study group transcripts, and classroom observations. Unfortunately, being able to provide convincing evidence of positive change was a constant issue (Gonzalez et al., 1993).

Funds of knowledge are the cultural artifacts and bodies of knowledge that underlie household activities (Moll, 2002). They are the inherent cultural resources found in communities surrounding schools and are grounded in the networking that communities do in order to make the best use of those resources. Understanding the funds of knowledge and networking structures of families and communities can help schools to involve parents in their children's education and achievement. Schools that value the investment of time in building social relationships with families are effective in helping families to build strong ties and social capital within the school communities. Next is a review of the social capital literature.

Review of the Social Capital Literature

Family relations with schools are a dimension of social capital. Social capital, as defined by Bourdieu (1986), is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources, which are linked to possession of a durable network of institutions: church, school, community groups, relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. According to Putnam (2000), social capital refers to the collective value of all networks, the idea that people in networks do things for each other. Social capital is the investment in social relations with expected returns in the marketplace and cooperation within society.

Lin (2001) and Hunout, Nahapiet & Ghoshal (1998) suggest that social capital should be considered in terms of clusters: structural- the ability to make weak and strong ties; relational- the character of the connection between individuals and cognition. Social capital is the existence of a certain set of informal values or norms shared among members of a group that permit cooperation. It can be understood in terms of a set of social relations that enables the reciprocal monitoring of children by the parents of peers, thereby increasing adherence to behavioral norms that are presumed to affect school performance, networking and connecting parents to their peers (Horvat et al., 2003).

Building social capital among families can be challenging to develop. Varied degrees of capital can influence how and when parents choose to become involved in school. Social networks come into play when parents are confronted by problematic school situations. Social networks can support the collective efforts of parental involvement. For example, middle-class parents tend to react collectively, in contrast to working-class and poor parents. The relations among parents can facilitate their relations with schools. The middle-class parents are also uniquely able to draw on contacts with professionals to mobilize the information, expertise, or

authority needed to contest the judgments of school officials (Horvat et al., 2003). On the other hand, students of low socioeconomic status are often victims of reactive mobility (Meerman, 2005), representing unanticipated school change, thereby hindering their ability to create and maintain effective social networks. With middle-class students, the mobility is often categorized as strategic and proactive. School changes are attributed to transfers in pursuit of better schooling or relocation of employment for the parents (Ream, 2003).

Some schools have attempted and have been unsuccessful in developing social capital among low socioeconomic status families. Olivos (2006) argues that public schools have consistently been unsuccessful in establishing an authentic relationship with the communities they serve, particularly hard-to-reach parents, African Americans, Latinos, immigrants, and low-income parents. He writes that those parents who do participate often have been made to feel that their participation is meaningless. Economically disadvantaged parents and students need more ways in which their contributions can be recognized and respected (Lott, 2003).

In order to develop social capital among economically depressed families and increase their involvement in schools, policymakers and educators need to consider some important issues. Diamond & Gomez (2004) conducted a study of African American families in which they interviewed both the middle-class and the economically disadvantaged parents who were involved in the school and in their children's education. The data they collected suggests that the families with low socioeconomic status need additional resources in the schools serving children of working-class African American parents. This is necessary in order to improve facilities, enhance teacher quality, and provide students with access to challenging instruction and high teacher expectations. Their findings indicated that parents must also have adequate information with which to navigate the bureaucratic processes associated with school. The processes must be transparent and demystified. Working-class parents must be made aware that they are entitled to visit schools, interview principals, observe classrooms and social routines during the school day. Parental involvement programs can provide and include an element of increased communication with the school and with other parents. Parental programs can help to create social networks for parents by providing services and opportunities to gain information (Sheldon, 2007).

Bourdieu (1986) asserts that capital is accumulated as a result of being part of a social group. Lareau (1996) refers to the importance of the social fields in which parents move and the impact these have on their "potential to produce social profits" (p.58). It is Lareau's (1989) contention that social networks are crucial to the activation of social capital. In a study conducted by Lareau (1989), upper middle-class parents were part of social groupings that enabled the activation of cultural resources and their conversion to social and economic capital. Similarly, Durlauf (2000) argues that membership in a group can influence outcomes and can assert assets that promote social inclusion. He further argues that the level of diversity represented by groups has the potential to achieve some redistribution, and that parents are more likely to be isolated from social groups that could provide cultural resources and may become part of different social networks that would enable them to access resources for realizing capital.

Research conducted by Lareau (2000) revealed that some parents of low socioeconomic status may not value education because they do not have much education themselves. When parents do not value education, they can sometimes transfer low expectations to their children. This low priority for education can influence test scores. Understanding the cultures of parents with low socioeconomic status and providing opportunities for them to become active in their children's school in whatever capacity will encourage involvement in education (Danridge,

Edwards & Pleasants, 2000). When parents become involved in school, value schooling, and take it seriously, their children often adopt the same values.

Social Capital and Social Class

It is important to note that the behavior of individual people is influenced by their social context (Horvat et al., 2003). Family, work, politics economic structures, and religion shape the contours and contexts of individual lives. Examples of social class bias exist. Schools within the same school district often have uniform and universal procedures yet dramatic differences are seen in school outcomes based on social class (Horvat et al., 2003). Social class provides parents with different resources and outlooks, which in turn shape their behavior (Lareau, 2000). Social class and social capital can impact the parental network level within the school. Highly affluent schools tend to have more parental involvement. Highly affluent parents are more aware of how schools work and how to access the school system. They are able to effectively communicate among themselves, with other parents, and form alliances that will work to the advantage of their children (Horvat et al., 2003).

Parents from different social classes differ in what they mean when they say they want to be helpful (Lareau, 1996). There are important class-specific differences in the architecture of parental networks that affect parents’ ability to intervene in school matters (Horvat et al., 2003). Parental networks vary across class categories. Network ties connecting parents of school peers is primarily a middle-class phenomenon. The presence of professionals in parental networks is substantially more prevalent in the middle class (Horvat et al., 2003). For example, when a common behavior problem occurs in a middle-class school classroom, the parents of that classroom will often sit together to address the issue. In a working class school classroom, under the same circumstances, the parent of the child involved will often act alone to resolve the matter.

Horvat et al. (2003) conducted an ethnographic study to examine social class differences in the relations between families and schools. In their study they examined characteristics of networks across different classes and reviewed the ways that networks come into play when parents are confronted by problematic school situations. The middle-class parents in the study reacted in contrast to working-class and poor parents. The middle-class parents were also uniquely able to draw on contacts with professionals to mobilize the information, expertise, or authority needed to contest the judgments of school officials. The study did not find substantial race differences but affirmed the importance of a resource-centered concept of social capital that grants the issue of inequality a predominant place. In the study conducted by Horvat et al., (2003) 34.4% of the middle-class parents requested a teacher for their child in comparison to 15.8% of working-class parents. Notice the comparison in Table 2 below the differences between classes as it relates to the notion of requesting a teacher.

Table 2

Proportion of Parents/Guardians Who Requested a Teacher, By Social Class

Parental requests	Middle-class	Working-class
Requested a teacher	34.4%	15.8%

Unique to the middle-class phenomenon is African American middle-class parents. Their involvement is often not the same as other middle-class racial groups. Because of the history of racial discrimination, black parents, depending on their social class, may approach schools with criticisms and challenges rather than support and deference (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Lareau and Horvat (1999) suggest that it is more difficult for black parents than white parents to comply

with the institutional standards of schools. Social class influences how black and white parents negotiate their relationships with schools; but for blacks, race plays an important role independent of social class, in framing the terms of their relationship. Middle-class African Americans are “much more likely than poor African American parents to maneuver and ‘customize’ their children’s school experiences” by intervening in ways that teachers do not perceive as confrontational. This suggests that social class and race intertwine to influence African American parent involvement (Diamond & Gomez, 2004).

Although middle-class black families benefit from their class position, they sometimes suffer from weaker connections to schools. Because of race and their histories with schools, they face a setting that is different from the one experienced by privileged white families. African-American parents have the added concern that their children receive poor treatment on the basis of their race. Class mediates how this concern is expressed. Since educators generally insist on seeing the family-school partnership as collaborative, efforts by African American parents to criticize or challenge educators’ insensitivity to racial issues are not well received. Thus, African American parents may find it especially difficult to comply with appropriate parental involvement (Lareau & Hovart, 1999). This review will continue with a review of the academic achievement literature that defines academic achievement and the research discussing how parental involvement contributes to academic achievement.

Academic Achievement

Defining Academic Achievement

Academic achievement is commonly thought to occur when students increase their reading comprehension, become more skilled at performing mathematical computations, know history, and understand science. The operational definition of academic achievement is performance on academic achievement tests. Academic achievement can also include increased graduation rates and improved attendance in school (Cunningham, 2003). Students who go to class invariably do better in school and maximize their chances for success (Biegel, 2000).

The research review of 51 studies conducted by Henderson and Mapp (2002) found commonalities in how student academic achievement was defined and measured. For young children those measurements used teacher ratings that included vocabulary, reading and language skills, and social and motor skills. For school-age children, the measures included report card grades, grade point averages, enrollment in advanced classes, and standardized test scores. Also included were good attendance, staying in school, and being promoted to the next grade. Other indicators of achievement were improved behavior and healthy development that would include less substance abuse and disruptive behavior. One final indicator that supports academic achievement included parents guiding students through their educational career (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Henderson and Mapp found in their study that when schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning by forming school learning communities, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more. Research and fieldwork show that school learning communities improve schools and strengthen families. This invigorates the community support and increases student achievement and success (Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Sheldon, 2003). Research collected by NCLB legislation and the Parent Teacher Association indicates that higher grades, test scores, graduation rates, better attendance, increased motivation, better self-esteem, lower rates of suspension, fewer instances of violent behavior are all student benefits from parental involvement in schools. The benefits for the

teacher include: greater morale, and more effective teaching. When students are engaged actively during an instructional task, high and moderate success rates are correlated positively with student learning outcomes. Increased opportunity to learn content is correlated positively with increased student achievement. When students are directly taught or supervised by their teacher; instruction is deliberately and carefully scaffold. Declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge and conditional knowledge are addressed. Teaching is presented in a manner that assists students in organizing, storing, and retrieving knowledge. Students are independent, self-regulated learners through strategic and explicit instruction. Students access potentially relevant knowledge in novel problem-solving situations. Another outcome is better communication among families, and for parents, increased educational level, decision-making skills and a better attitude toward school (Ellis, Worthington & Larkin, 1994). Parent involvement programs are often designed to build and support school communities. Next is a review of parent involvement programs.

Parental Involvement Programs

One of the efforts many schools and school districts are making to address the achievement gap is to create and adopt parental involvement programs. There are multiple definitions for parental involvement and methods to encourage parental participation. This section will outline some of those ways. Some traditional parental education and parental involvement programs are designed to educate parents while others are intended to empower parents, with the objective of teaching them how to access the school and the tools to support their children for success in an additive way (PIQE, 1987). A large amount of the parental involvement literature advocates that one significant way schools can help to improve the academic achievement of students is through the effective utilization of parental involvement programs, bringing schools, parents, and community together as equal partners (PIQE, 1987). For example, two programs, the PIQE and the FIP programs, are designed to actively involve parents and support student achievement. The PIQE program is a parental involvement program that believes the most promising way to improve inner-city children's educational performance is by changing home and family (Zellman, Stecher, Klein, McCaffrey, Gutierrez, & Madison, 1998). The FIP Program is designed to assist parents and students in selecting appropriate college prep classes that will support them academically and give them the tools necessary to attend and succeed in college (U. S. Department of Education, Gear Up, 2001). Both of these programs create awareness for parents and provide support services for families that extend from home to school. Components of the programs are found in the work of Epstein and Olivos discussed earlier. Successful implementation of these programs requires long-range commitments on the part of the parents that suggest an impact on student achievement.

Needed Components of Successful, Sustainable Parental Involvement Programs

Carter (1992) lists several elements commonly found in promising parental involvement programs: having written policies that help both staff and parents to understand their roles; administrative support for the purpose of providing funds, materials, meeting space, equipment and designated personnel; training for both parents and educators; a partnership approach to the work. In all aspects of the programs, including planning, goal setting, definition of roles, program evaluation, and setting school standards, there should be a partnership. There must be open communication between parents and school staff. There needs to be a networking system in which information can be shared and a venue for resources and technical expertise that can be

accessed. Finally, there must be regular evaluation of activities at various stages of the program that lead to revision.

The Parent Institute for Quality Education Program

Effective parental involvement programs can be shown to have a positive impact on the achievement of students as indicated by a parental involvement program called the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE). This is a program that systematically involves parents in ways that enables, teaches, and supports them so they can support their child academically. The PIQE Program provides training to parents for building self-esteem and motivation, strategies for communication and discipline. It shows parents how to motivate teens to read; how to help them be successful in school; and teaches financial aid options for high school students. The PIQE Program encourages and supports low-income, ethnically-diverse parents of elementary, middle and high school children. The program helps parents to create a home learning environment, navigate through the school system, develop collaboration skills with teachers, counselors and principals, and encourages college attendance for children. These efforts support the emotional and social development of the child. PIQE provides a nine-week course that offers flexible meeting times in languages that parents understand.

In 2000, a review of the achievement for students involved in the PIQE Program was reported. The Parent Institute reported that PIQE interventions increased test scores on the Stanford 9. Also included in the report was an increase in the graduation rate of students in the PIQE program. Students involved in PIQE improved an average of four points on their reading and language scores and two points on the math scores. Graduation rates, language arts and math scores were higher for students in the PIQE program.

The design of the PIQE program encourages social capital and develops a networking mechanism for parents that can affect the academic achievement of students. Providing the tools to develop networking skills commonly found in families with highly effective degrees of social capital can improve the achievement of students involved in the PIQE Program. The PIQE Program can allow for families to develop strong ties and connections between individuals that will ultimately benefit the academic success and achievement of the children (Naphapiet & Ghoshal 1998).

The Mississippi Quality Education Program

The Mississippi Quality Education Program (MQEP) was first implemented October 1, 1989. The program had in its design an intense training for parents, teachers, and school administrators. It was established in seven impoverished school districts in Mississippi. In the fall of 1990, the Even Start project was added to the program, providing adult and early childhood education services to families with children ages one to seven years of age. The programs' focus was to establish quality home-school communication as a means to improve student achievement. This program was designed so that field directors work onsite with the school community to monitor the quality of the program by providing assistance and resources. Actual program objectives were designed by a team of parents, teachers, and the principal, customized for particular schools. The MQEP program was developed for the purpose of improving parental involvement. The plan was designed to work with business, medical and religious communities to build rapport and develop support for the schools. Classes were designed to teach parents how to help their children with homework, establish a positive discipline plan; and monitor their children's progress. The classes and workshops were offered to help parents help their children and to answer questions about the children's school.

There were some key components designed to help this program meet its initial goals. First, a district assessment was conducted, involving an evaluation of school personnel, parent and community support, and student population. The assessment was followed by an evaluation of school personnel, meetings with key stake holders, representing all levels of the school district community. The findings of the assessments were openly shared. A rapport was established with the principal, teachers, and the program facilitator followed by developing a parent involvement plan tailored to individual school needs. Materials and resources were provided as needed. Included in this program was time to work to establish a comfort level that was essential in the development of a successful parental involvement program (Lovelady, 1991).

Parental involvement in schools increased from 12.9% to 63.6% during the second year. The MQEP presented data that showed a significant gain in the level of parent involvement, 50.7%. The involvement was measured by the increased number of parents who attended conferences and attended school events and monitored homework. Findings from the MQEP failed to show increased academic achievement as measured by grade point averages, enrollment in advanced classes, standardized test scores, good student attendance at school, students staying in school longer, thereby being promoted to the next grade (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). MQEP is designed much like the traditionally designed programs mentioned earlier with only one-way communication, from school to home, and that limitation may explain the lack of effectiveness.

Although the program results showed an increase in parental involvement, it did not promote parental networking and social capital, that which would enable parents to someday become independent of the program and mentor to families so that they are able to network and do things for themselves (Putnam, 2000).

Read With Me

Read with me/Lea Conmigo was designed to promote a culture of literacy in the home and aimed to empower families to help their children become proficient and independent readers. It provided access to approximately 132 high quality books in English and Spanish through a weekly rotation of backpacks, supports families in their efforts to set up regular reading routines with their children, offers workshops, information, and tips to parents on how to help their child develop emergent literacy skills.

Children who have gone through the program are more motivated to read, have greater book handling skills and familiarity with print. They have a better understanding of the elements of a story and have a larger vocabulary. Teachers and parents in the program began to communicate with one another and form a partnership to support the child's literacy development (Bus, Van Ijzendoorn & Pelligrini, 1995).

Some parental involvement programs are designed to increase parental participation in the home. Next are a series of parental involvement programs that include reading interaction at home with the child and the parent funded by Title I. A successful parental involvement program known as the McAllen Project was designed with funds from Title I. This program targeted three activities: parental education, helping children at home, and participation in parent/teacher organizations. English and Spanish versions of the school handbook were provided to parents.

The Interactive Reading Homework Method enabled teachers to design effective homework assignments that established better home-school connections and lead to improved reading achievement. It provided a means for parents to support their family literacy efforts and sustain children's interest in home literacy activities (Battle-Bailey, 2004).

Laye (1995) lists a series of parental involvement programs created to ultimately improve achievement in Title I schools. Some innovative examples of effective parental involvement programs involved the use of technology and read aloud approaches. One of those programs, the Buddy System Project, was an Indiana-based program that put a computer in the home of school-aged children, ensuring access to many resources for children and parents. With technology, parents could connect to the classroom through computer messages and activities (Laye, 1995).

The Partners in Learning Project was started in an effort to extend the learning environment at home to incorporate basic and higher levels of learning in reading and math. The Be Excited About Reading Program (BEAR) established in Indianapolis, Indiana, was created to encourage parents to read with their children. The Begin Educating Little Learners, a part of BEAR, stressed the importance of reading aloud to children and urged parents to make educational toys out of household items. All of these programs were ways in which parents could interact with their children in fun ways that would build a relationship between the two of them, promote bonding and also offer opportunities for growth for both parent and child. The Interactive Reading Program, The Partners in Learning Project, and The Be Excited About Reading Program all meet the National PTA Standards for parenting skills, community resource, and parents involved in the learning as discussed earlier in this review.

Interactive methods of intervention have been found to have documented success for parental involvement of elementary age students. The Interactive Reading Homework Method enables teachers to design homework assignments that establish better home-school connections and lead to improved reading achievement. It provides a means for parents to support their family's literary efforts and sustain children's interests in home literacy activities (Battle-Bailey, 2004). Parental involvement studies target primarily a change in academic achievement, and educational researchers tend to focus on a single specific parental involvement activity at a time (e.g., helping children with homework, frequency of family-school contacts, or participation in school activities and functions (Fishel & Ramirez, 2005).

In a pilot study conducted by Alameda (2004) the program, Empowerment, Social Support, and Self-Esteem of Parents Involved was reviewed. Designed to increase parental involvement and facilitated by a social worker, it was able to sustain the involvement of parents for a prolonged period of time. The program was used in an elementary school with low socioeconomic status and was found to have increased parents' perception of their empowerment, social support and self-esteem. It also highlighted a relationship between parental involvement and reduced rates of children's school suspensions. One of the strong components of this program was having a resource person, in the form of a social worker, to meet the need of families. Social workers are able to counsel families and identify needed support for health services and other resource agencies designed to sustain students and their parents.

Shaver & Walls (1998), conducted a study of data results and family information for 335 Title I programs. The results of the study showed that students of parents who were more highly involved in school were more likely to make gains in both reading and math than children of less involved parents. Younger students made gains in both subjects. Students from lower-income families made fewer gains in both reading and math than students from higher-income families no matter how involved their families were. It is important to note that students from low-income families made greater gains if their parents were regularly involved. Title I programs can

increase student achievement by developing well designed parent-teacher group experiences (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

What Makes Parent Involvement Programs Successful

Reviewing all of the programs listed above, there are several, common, key elements that helped to make them successful. They are: promoting parental participation; a structured plan and policy to guide the work of the program; a welcoming atmosphere for parents that encourages their continual support and participation; parental involvement that extends in a meaningful way from school to home; supportive, explicit and ongoing communication between the teacher, school, and the parental funding source for resources and materials that are planned and managed for the longevity of the program, ongoing communication, evaluation, and assessment of the program activities; accessibility for English Language Learners; when needed, enduring guidance for parents, supported by stakeholders for the purpose of sustainable partnerships with the community.

This literature review examined parental involvement and the effect it has on the academic achievement of African American, Latino, and students of low socioeconomic status in school. Trends in the field of parental involvement were reviewed that included different types of parental involvement programs, and how social capital and funds of knowledge can work to impact parental involvement and student achievement for students (Horvat et al., 2003; Gonzalez & Moll, 2002; Gallimore & Goldenber, 1993; Lareau, 2000). There is no evident research documenting a negative effect as a result of the implementation of a well-designed parental involvement program, and there is an initial body of literature and research supporting the value of such programs (Desimone, 1999).

The past decade and a half have warranted some parental involvement programs that focused on student populations of lower socioeconomic status and African Americans. To develop effective parental involvement programs, which range from greater support for the school to improving student achievement, structures, practices and policies must be identified that encourage parental trust and involvement in the process of schooling. Encouraging pre-service education for teachers on family involvement would help improve teacher training for successful methods of obtaining participation in school programs (Cooper & Christie, 2005; Machen, 2005).

When parents and the educational system join together with researchers and developers to implement a system that reflects not only sound instruction but also evidence-based practices, resources can be directed systematically toward ensuring positive outcomes for children and families. Parent-school collaboration programs focusing on creating more frequent opportunities for positive communication among the school, parents, and community reduce the barriers that prevent parental involvement (provide babysitters or childcare to allow parents the ability to attend school related activities; schedule requested parent-teacher conferences during times that are favorable to the parents' schedule) and provide formal educational workshops for parents that will serve to increase the parents' ability to be more aware of their children's academic potential and aspirations. Programs designed to relate to the culture and socioeconomic backgrounds and circumstances of parents have the best chance of being effective (Machen, 2005). The practice of inequality among schools that is so prevalent does not need to continue. Schools are now held accountable for the annual progress of African American and Latino students. Parental input and involvement along with researchers' and educators' expertise can help districts implement equitable urban educational reform (Cooper & Christie, 2005).

In order to close the achievement gap of African American children, Hale (2001) recommends better interaction between the teacher and the child and this does not just involve better teacher training. The solution lies in the classroom and in the nature of the interaction between the teacher and the child. This also includes the instructional vision and leadership provided by principals. Meeting the needs of diverse learners must become the heart and soul of a broad effort to coordinate the support services of the entire school community, including tutoring and other services provided by churches, service clubs, fraternal organizations, parents, and concerned citizens (Hale, 2001).

The fact remains that parental involvement alone is insufficient for achieving desired academic outcomes. Teachers must design interactive/constructivist homework assignments (Comer & Haynes, 1991) that interest both students and parents in order to build greater home-school relationships. The work must be done on a consistent basis (Battle-Bailey, 2004). A structured plan and policies for parental involvement that guide the work of the program and are supported by administration financially and with other resources are recommended for sustained success.

While there are many advantages to involving parents in school, requiring parental involvement may not be appropriate in all circumstances. Different cultures may see the school as the “teacher’s arena” and may feel as though they are disturbing the educational process. In addition, requiring parental involvement may cause tension between the parent and the teacher. Teachers and parents working together to make parents feel like they are part of the process and requiring parental involvement may feel patronizing to some parents, and parents may feel they are being forced to do something (Olivos, 2006). This may bring on negative feelings for the school and the teachers.

Finding ways to involve parents in more than just the bake sale is recommended. Encouraging parental involvement in curriculum design, the school council, and other activities can make for a true partnership in their children’s education, not taking away from parental involvement in other traditional school activities. Thompson (2003) recommends that a school district practice “active, open, substantive, and clear two-way communications.” The communications should be directed both within and outside the school district (e.g., students’ families, community representatives and all stakeholders).

Further empirical research is needed for determining the effectiveness of parental involvement in schools. Many governors and state school chiefs cannot honestly tell parents whether their schools are getting better and which student subgroups are making progress over time (Fuller, Wright, Gesicki & Kang, 2007).

Based on all of the research reviewed about parental involvement in schools and the impact on student achievement, schools must be willing to develop programs and structures that include parental participation in the home and in school. School districts must develop policies, implement programs, activities and procedures for the involvement of parents that include structures for ongoing communication, information and venues where parents can convene to discuss and plan for students (Columbia County School Title I Policy, 2007).

As mentioned much earlier in this chapter, the research of Lareau & Hovart (1999) discusses the uniqueness of African American parent involvement in schools. That uniqueness can accompany a lack of involvement by some African Americans, no matter the social class. As an African American, I am aware of the biases that occur in schools regarding teacher views toward African American students and their families. I chose to do qualitative research using

interviews and observations to look at African American involvement in schools. Currently the research does not examine African American groups within school populations where African Americans are in the minority. In an attempt to respond to the gap in the educational research, I have conducted this study.

CHAPTER 3: STUDY DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODS

When I started this research journey several years ago, I planned to look at African American parent involvement in schools, intending to link active involvement with the academic achievement of students. I wanted to show that specific types of parent involvement would directly correlate with the improvement of student grades and test scores. I had further hoped that certain kinds of involvement could be replicated in other schools where parent involvement was not as active and therefore if implemented would increase achievement as defined by student reports and school, district and state assessments. What I ultimately decided to do was to identify three schools with active African American parent groups. This research is the case study of three schools, each representative of three school districts, focusing on effective African American parent involvement, African American parent groups, and utilizing qualitative research methods that include interviews and observations. The research examines the following questions:

1. What characterizes the most successful school and parent relationships between lower socio economic and African American status parents and highly effective schools?
2. Within those schools, what are the qualities, factors, and organizational structures that appear to best nurture those relationships?

I began my work as an elementary school principal in a high performing school in the fall of 2005. At the time, the school had an API score of 916. I was astonished by the amount of parent involvement in the school. On a regular basis, parents were volunteering in the classroom, reading to students, assisting with reading groups, helping with menial tasks, offering their expertise to perform classroom demonstrations on any given subject. Parents supported instruction in the classroom, worked with students in small groups and in one-on-one instruction. They attended school meetings, school activities, and school events, no matter the time of the day, and in high numbers.

I remember the PTA meeting when I first realized that the parent involvement at my school was special, significant, and an important component missing from all of the other schools where I had worked in the past. At that particular meeting, I wanted to ask the questions to the parents, “Why are all of you here?” “How did you know that you needed to be here?” And, “why are not many African American parents involved in school to the level of your involvement?”

Most of the parents of the children at my school are involved in the life of the school. They feel comfortable participating in the daily workings of the school: helping in the classroom, volunteering on the playground at lunch, meeting with the principal whenever they have a problem, concern, or question. In other schools where I was the leader or the assistant leader, parents did not participate to this extent. They did not seem to realize that their presence was needed, and that they were entitled to know and to have a say in the education and placement of their children.

I noticed this, particularly in schools where I worked that had high percentages of African American students. I began to question. Is it possible that schools don't want the involvement of African American families? Is that why they are not involved? Was the reason for their lack of involvement due to the deficiency of the parents, their personal experiences in school? Perhaps, if African American parents realized that they had the right to be involved in the education of

their children and they understood the type of involvement that was necessary for their children to be successful in school, they would become more involved.

If there were structures in place to facilitate relationships with schools and African American families, would there be more of a connection between those families and schools, which would then lead to the involvement of families and ultimately to the success of African American students in school? Parents would better understand the workings of schools. Parents would hold high standards for schools and demand that the educational needs of their children be addressed. Students would be more engaged in school, more interested in continuing their education. The drop-out rate of African American students would decrease significantly, and the achievement gap would begin to disappear. I became very curious in this particular phenomenon of African American parent involvement and wanted to look closely at their involvement in schools.

As an African American parent, I have always strived to ensure the best educational opportunities for my own children. I am aware of the subtle differences that can occur between teachers and children based on race. Although many teachers would never admit to these differences, I have personally witnessed multiple examples of racial discrimination, varied levels of patronizing and unrealistic expectations for my children. Often these variations were covert but occasionally they were presented in a direct way. On numerous occasions, I have had to advocate for my children to ensure that their needs were met. It has been especially troubling for me because I know that without the knowledge that I have as an educator, many of the rights my children have received within the educational system would not have been granted. I feel deeply for African American students who do not benefit from the support of their families. It especially troubles me that the missing support stems from a lack of knowledge about the system and the potential for parent involvement.

This study examined school-based parent involvement and the ways in which the involvement might improve and support the academic achievement of students. I used Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework consisting of the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro systems as ways to explore involvement in schools and how schools can increase the parental involvement of lower socio economic status, and African American parents. Parent involvement was investigated through interviews with parents, teachers, principals, and district officials.

Sampling

The paradigms appropriate for my research were constructivism and pragmatism. The research was constructed by gaining knowledge through case studies at three school sites, parents and school staff. I examined school relationships through interviews and observations. This was mediated by my own prior knowledge on the subject and the experiences of those involved in the study. The study was pragmatic in that it was a practical approach to problems and affairs (Kivinen and Ristela, 2003). I used those approaches to build my understanding of the problem of developing parental and school relationships. The ecological systems theory, looking at the child's development within the context of the system of relationships that form his or her environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1990), and the social capital theory, communities formed and humans interact with the expectation of reciprocation and trust (Platteau, 1994), were used to gather data over a six-month period.

Districts and School Selections

The first school was selected as a result of an assignment for a class within the doctoral program. As a part of the coursework, I was assigned a district superintendent to shadow.

Meeting with various administrators and attending a number of meetings at the district and site levels led me to discover principals who were actively working with African American parents at their school sites. I discovered a school that had an organized and active African American parent group.

The other two school districts were selected based on their location, with African American parent groups in those neighboring districts. Within each district, a school was identified as having established African American parent participation. The criteria for selecting the schools included that there would be African American students attending the school and active parent involvement of those families. A second school was discovered through a Distinguished School Site Visit, and the third school was determined through word of mouth. The total number of African American students at each school site was not a factor in the schools' selection. Principals at the school sites were contacted. My plans and goals for the research were shared with the site administrator. Parents and teachers were surveyed to determine interested participants. Two parents and two staff members, along with one site administrator, participated in the study at each site. Two sites included an interview with district personnel.

All participants met the following criteria:

Active members of the school community

Committed to building relationships between the school and families

Minimum of at least two years at the school site

Respected by the African American community

One school is represented from each district: Blaster School, Charlotte School, and Harrison School.

Table 3
School Data Comparisons

School	School Student population	District Student Population	District Population of AA students	AA Student Population	% in School Lunch Program	API Score 2010
Blaster	545	21,878	3,222	40	77%	739
Charlotte	514	46,099	15,033	97	13%	941
Harrison	429	10,471	1,267	63	62%	818

Selection of Blaster Elementary School

Blaster School was identified as a result of a relationship developed with the former superintendent of the district. I identified informants in the district, the superintendent and the director of student services. With their assistance, I determined an elementary school that was perceived to have high levels of participation from African American families. The high participation was measured by examining the families' relationship with the school using Epstein's typology, family involvement in the life of the school (Epstein, 1987). This included factors such as attendance at the school, parent relationships with teachers, other parents, and other students within the school.

During my observations and interviews with district personnel, I discovered that one of the areas of focus for the district was the achievement of African American students and the involvement of their parents in the schools. In this particular district, the superintendent requested that all schools plan and provide a parent center at each of the sites to offer a setting for parent information and parent meetings.

I was led to the director of student services and families. As a result of those conversations, in which I shared my interest in the involvement of African American families in schools, she recommended three elementary schools for me to contact. Based on conversations with the principals of those sites, I selected Blaster School. I was impressed with the fact that the principal took the initiative to involve, contact, and meet with just the African American families at her school to hear about their concerns and focus on their needs. As a result of those meetings, the principal and the parents decided to form a parent group that included families who were either African American or parents or guardians of African American children. I determined Blaster to be the elementary school with the most clear vision, plan, and commitment to involve African American parents in the school in that particular district.

Selection of Charlotte Elementary School

The identification of Charlotte School was made as a result of a California Distinguished School Visit Team upon which I served. After spending a day in the school, I learned about their work to improve the academic achievement of African American students and their African American Parent Group. One of the reasons that this school received the Distinguished School Award was because of the gains made by African American students. As a part of the Distinguished School Visit, I spent an entire school day, interviewing parent groups, members of the African American parent group, students, teachers, and the principal. I also interviewed: one of the original founders of the African American parent group; a former parent; the current president of the group, and students. I observed in classrooms and the before school intervention class.

The African American parent group had been in existence for several years. It is a viable and functioning group within the school community. Their goals are to maintain relationships among families and the school and to support the student achievement of children. After conversations with representatives of the school, I was able to identify staff and parents who were willing to participate in the study.

Selection of Harrison Elementary School

Harrison School was identified because of its' established African American parent group. Their purpose was to build relationships within the school community, strengthen communication between home and school, and to improve the achievement of African American students. African American parents are active in the school, but they do not currently have a specified, distinguishable group that exists just for African American parents. The group existed under the leadership of the former principal. During that time the school had an African American parent group. The principal was a Caucasian woman committed to building relationships between the parent community and the school. During her tenure, the school received the Title I Award each year. The school was awarded this honor six consecutive years, primarily for the achievement of its African American students. The research collected for this school is unique in that data was collected before and after the existence of the African American Parent Group.

Theoretical Perspective

Parent involvement has been defined by many researchers to be based on the typology of Joyce Epstein (Epstein, 1987). This study was examined through a constructivist approach, in which I constructed and built my understanding of parent involvement from the experiences of parents, teachers, site administration and district administration. I informed my construct by the ecological systems theory as referred to by Bronfenbrenner (1990). Bronfenbrenner's construct

states that the two environmental conditions necessary for human development are the love of one or more adults unconditionally, and that adults must encourage the child and spend time doing joint activities with the child in and out of the home environment.

The ecological system originates in the psychology field and specifies four types of nested environmental systems: Microsystem: Immediate environments: family, school, peer group, neighborhood, childcare; Mesosystem: A system comprised of connections between immediate environments- a child's home and school; Exosystem: External environmental settings which only indirectly affect development (such as parent's workplace); Macrosystem: The larger culture-Eastern, Western, national economy, political culture, subculture; and a system that was later added- chronosystem: The patterning of environmental events and transitions over the course of life (Henderson, 1995). I wanted to understand what parent involvement connecting the home to school and parent-school relationships were supportive of the academic achievement of students. This was conducted through parent interviews, interviews of district administrators, and observations.

Within this study, I have applied the social capital theory, funds of knowledge, network structures and the importance of developing a community of practice within schools and school communities. Relying on social capital theory - the existence of a certain set of informal values or norms shared among members of a group that permit cooperation (Lin, 2000; Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998), helped me to discover ways in which parents' social capital can impact their involvement in schools (Yuan, Gay & Hembrooke, 2006). Using the social capital theory, I considered network structures. These structures were individual organizations that were pulled together to develop specific opportunities (Worley & Lawler, 2007). I studied how network structures and a community of practice developed in parent involvement organizations.

It is important to develop a community of practice in order for parent involvement to be successful in school. A community of practice is defined as the process of social learning that occurs and is shared. Socio cultural practices emerge and evolve when people who have common goals interact as they strive towards those goals (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Developing a community of practice among parents and schools that can effectively support the academic achievement of students can be difficult.

Developing effective parent participation in schools using communities of practice that applies network analysis can develop significant connections among families and schools. Parent involvement can improve information flow and knowledge-reuse; develop a system that responds to key problems and opportunities; nurtures value-creating interactions and engage individuals through community efforts (Cross, Laseter, Parker & Velasquez, 2006).

Relationships with Parents

Educational research indicates that schools can best improve the academic achievement of African American children only when they work in partnership with parents (Wu & Qi, 2006). Forty-four years after the Brown decision, "educators must join with African American communities" that have lacked access to resources or power to address together the ongoing educational crisis playing itself out in rural counties, particularly in the South. As Delpit (1988), explains, appropriate education for poor children and children of color can only be devised in consultation with adults who share their culture. Black parents, teachers of color, and members of poor communities must be allowed to participate fully in the discussion of what kind of instruction is in their children's best interest (Delpit, 1988). From the pragmatic perspective, this method of research will show the benefits and consequences of the parent actions.

It was important to me to establish a rapport with the African American community at the school site in order to build trust for the research. I was surprised to find the openness and willingness of families to share their thoughts and concerns about the school and to see their participation in their child's school. The time I spent attending meetings and creating a rapport proved to be beneficial when I later began the actual research and collection of data. That investment in time allowed me to get genuine feedback and information from the staff and the parents.

Interviews with Principals

An additional advantage that I had as a practicing practitioner was with the site principals. I was able to develop trust with the principals because we shared a common position, common goals and struggles to support students and their families. My reputation as an educator in the area helped to validate me and therefore made my work with the principals more accessible. Principals were open and willing to discuss their real thoughts, fears and concerns regarding student achievement and parent involvement.

Research Methodology and Methods

The epistemological assumptions for this design were to visit the participants in a variety of settings, through observations and interviews and to collect data. I focused on information and data collection. Research indicates that parent involvement programs can support student achievement. There is also research that shows some parent involvement programs do not work. I wanted to find out which aspects of the parent involvement causes parents to get and stay involved.

Data Collection

The collection of data occurred in two segments that involved building relationships with the African American community at the school followed by the actual research, which included interviews and observations. Staff and families were recruited through a recruitment letter, and I followed up with a conversation regarding the nature of the research. Following the agreement to participate in the research, interviews were conducted. Participants were also observed in evening meetings. Each observational meeting began with a brief introduction and description of the research project. All initial attendees, and in future meetings, additional attendees, were given an opportunity to consent or decline the observation of the meeting. Building relationships with the school involved spending time at the school, attending school events, informal conversations with parents and staff. Parents and staff were identified for the study. Each person involved in the research participated in a 40-50 minute interview held at the school site. No data was collected anonymously. All direct identifiers in the data were stripped from the data at the earliest opportunity and codes were substituted for identifiable information. Certain identifiers attached to the participant data were retained for data analysis purposes. These identifiers were: the participant's name and the school name.

Interviews and Observations

Interviews involved questions about parent involvement for African American families. Parents and staff members were asked questions that included what were the benefits of the African American Parent Groups, their challenges with meeting attendance and the role of leadership within the group. All interviews and observations were audio taped and handwritten notes were taken during the interviews and observations. The second phase of the study took place during the evening parent group meetings. Audio tapes of the meetings were transcribed to capture the conversations. Data collected during these meetings was coded to show relationships

between members of the group, the teachers and the principal. Also collected was data that indicated the roles that emerged within the groups, both official and unofficial, leadership dynamics within the group, consistent attendance of group members, focus and commitment of the group members.

Table 4
Record of Interviews and Observations of School Staff and Parents

Schools	District/Principal Interviews	Teachers Interviews 50-60 minutes	Parents Interviews 50-60 minutes	Meeting Observations 2-3 Meetings each month
Blaster	2- 40-50 Minute	Teacher -1	Teacher -1	60-70 Minutes
		Teacher -2 50-60 minutes	Teacher -2 50-60 minutes	
Charlotte	Principal 2: 40-50 Minute	Teacher -1	Teacher -1	60-70 Minutes
		Teacher -2	Teacher -2	
Harrison	Principal -1 2: 40-50 Minute	Teacher -1	Teacher -1	60-70 Minutes
	Principal -2 2: 40-50 Minute	Teacher -2	Teacher -2	

Data Analysis

The epistemological assumptions for this design were to visit the participants in a variety of settings, through observations and interviews and to collect qualitative data. Within the parent groups, I looked for indicators contained by schools that caused parents and schools to develop relationships that fostered and maintained their involvement. Data collection was ongoing, in that I continued throughout the data collection process to look for emerging patterns and themes. As data was collected from the initial interviews and observations, it led to additional protocols and other observational focuses. A journal was used to write memos and link connections to theory. In addition, transcripts and observational notes were reviewed and studied along with marginal comments.

There were two levels of coding. The first level was based on questions that pertained to organizational structures, leadership, climate and invitation and building relationships. The second level included a sub level of coding that related to each component of the first level. Under the level of organization was group purpose and group effectiveness. Under the level of leadership was strategies used by the leader. A sub code of the school climate and invitation code was how parents are encouraged to become involved in the school and the overall successfulness of the group. Final sub codes were, building relationships were benefits, challenges, and supports in the classroom. Codes were designated as high, medium and low, based on the amount of attendance at school functions, meetings, community involvement, longevity in the community, relationships developed with families and others in the community and outside of school activities. Staff data was coded based on factors that include: involvement in parent programs, systems to increase parent relationship, and supports provided by the school for the purpose of maintaining and sustaining parent connections.

All information in this study was gathered through the interview process, observational data, and qualitative data. In chapter three, I have included summary charts, and diagrams to

support findings. The charts and diagrams show data results from families, community and school staff. Limitations of this research are that there are only a small number of participants in the study. The sample of schools is equally small. There is variation in the school data including free and reduced lunch, API scores, school and district size, and number of participants per school site.

In the following three chapters, I detail the findings and analysis of the research. Chapter four describes each school and research participants for this study. Chapter five is the analysis of the research outlining systems and supports that enable and discourage the effective and ineffective implementation and sustainability of African American parent groups in schools.

CHAPTER 4: SCHOOL DESCRIPTIONS

This chapter describes each of the samples used in this research. Within this chapter are descriptions of the three school districts, the individual schools, and the study participants. I have selected certain features of the participants and places to describe so the reader will be able to understand the uniqueness of each situation. Facts specifying demographics, API scores, school population, location and residence in and out of the attendance areas will be detailed within the school and school district information when applicable. Along with factual information, descriptors of the setting will be included when they impact the function of the school. As you review the information, make note of how the differences in school setting and school location might have a bearing on the effectiveness of the group; the group’s attendance at monthly meetings; and the influence the group has within the school overall. Also recognize that certain descriptors like the feel of the school and descriptions of personalities of certain participants, are mentioned for a reason and should not be ignored when noted. As you read the descriptions of the individual participants in this study, consider their relationships to the group, the principal, and the school; their ability to influence; their leadership style; their level of commitment to the school and African American students; and their individual ethnicity. Again, note that these descriptions are highlighted because they are significant to the overall understanding of the situation at that school site and should be considered as you read information throughout this chapter and Chapter 5. Details describing the origins of each group and their relationships to school leadership and the school community will be discussed in depth in Chapter 5.

Following is a table outlining the schools and their participants. Immediately following the table are the descriptions of each school.

Table 5 describes the number of participants, their role within the school, and number of observations.

Table 5
Number of participants, their role within the school, and number of observations¹

School	Participant	Role at the school	Date(s) of Interview	Relationship with the school and ethnicity	Length of Interview	Number of Meeting Observations
Blaster in the Packard School District	Ms. Dodge	District Office	10/2/10	Head of Student Services African American	50 minutes	10 –Meeting Observations Back to School Night Multicultural event
	Mrs. Sanchez	Principal	10/9/10 12/1/10	Began as a teacher, children attended Latina	50 minutes (2)	
	Mrs. Mason	Teacher	12/2/10 3/14/10	12 years in the school, only AA teacher in the school	40 minutes (2)	

¹ All names in this dissertation are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the participants.

				African American		
	Mr. Jones	Teacher	12/3/10	6 th grade teacher for two years African American	40 minutes	
	Mr. Andrews	Parent	12/10/10	Parent of first-grade student African American	40 minutes	
	Mrs. Wills	Parent	12/9/10	Grandmother of second-grade student African American	40 minutes	
Charlotte in the Greenville School District	Mr. John	Principal	6/13/10	Current principal, was not the principal when the group began Caucasian	50 minutes	6 - Observations Back to School Night Promotion Ceremony SSC Meeting PTA Meeting Multi Cultural Night
	Mrs. Francis	Teacher	3/17/10	Current Saturday School teacher Caucasian	40 minutes	
	Mrs. Holden	Teacher	2/12/09	TSA three years Caucasian	40 Minutes	
	Mrs. Connors	Parent	2/11/09	Former PTA president, long-time parent African American	40 minutes	
	Mrs. Larson	Parent	2/12/09	Parent Group Co-Chair African American	45 minutes	
Harrison in the Peninsula School District	Mrs. Davidson	Principal	2/11/09	Principal at the time the group existed Caucasian	50 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SSC • Back to School Night
	Mrs. Blackman	Teacher	2/12/09	Title I teacher Caucasian	40 minutes	
	Mrs. Anderson	Teacher	3/16/10	Third-grade teacher Caucasian	40 Minutes	
	Mr. Maine	Parent	2/11/09	Parent of a third-grade student African American	40 minutes	
	Mrs. Stuckey	Parent	3/16/10	Parent of a fourth-grade student African American	40 minutes	

Blaster School

Located in Northern California in the Packard School District, Blaster School is a K-6 school of 570 students whose origins date back to a time when the area was primarily farm country. The district has the distinction of being one of the top 10 most ethnically diverse

communities in the nation. The estimated average housing price of homes or condos in the area is approximately \$294,000. 31.2% of residents speak Spanish at home. 36.7% of residents are foreign born. The dominant ethnic group in the district is Latino.

In the whole district, the Latino kids are the biggest group that we have. And of course all the other ethnicities. And probably after that maybe Filipino. And after that Pacific Islanders and then Asian. And we have a small Middle Eastern group of students that are starting to come in. In a nutshell those are probably our biggest group of students. (“[sic]”Dodge, Mrs., In-Person , Interview, 10/2/10)

The school is situated in an urban area of the city. In the immediate vicinity are several businesses that include fast food restaurants, car dealerships, and gas stations. It is a noisy area. Located directly behind the school is a railroad track where trains pass by periodically. The school is an older facility and structured in a way that has a dark, closed-in feel, even on sunny days. As you walk through the school, you see vast diversity. Several languages are spoken with the dominate language being Spanish. Students are often accompanied to class by a parent and very young sibling, and the noise level is high as you walk the halls of the school.

They have a thriving before and afterschool program designed to help students with homework and provide enrichment activities. The Bowman School has an afterschool boys’ choir, which travels around the area performing and provides enrichment experiences for its’ 14 members. Blaster students live within walking district of the school and inside the attendance area.

Currently, the school does not have a traditional PTA. The school has an active English Language Learner group with a group of parents who meet regularly and in great numbers each month (30-40 parents), a School Site Council and the African American Parent Group. Parents at the school are content with that arrangement and have no plans to form a traditional PTA.

Staff

Blaster school has a staff of 30 teachers, two Title 1 teachers, a full time resource teacher and speech teacher. The extended staff includes two office staff members and two staff members who facilitate the before and afterschool program. These staff members help students with their homework and provide after care until 6:00 p.m. The two men who run the program are African American and Latino.

Parent Group

The Packard School District and Blaster School are unique in that they have committed as a district and as a school site to focus on the development of programs to increase the achievement of African American students. The school serves about 35 African American students. Out of those 35 students, a core group of about 10 parents are present on a consistent basis at any given meeting. The focus for the African American parent group has been on building relationships with the families and the principal.

Principal

Mrs. Sanchez, the principal of the school is Latina, well-liked, respected and appreciated by the families at Blaster. She began as an English Language Development teacher at the school. Both a teacher and a parent at the school for several years, she was promoted to principal in 2006. She is hardworking and willing to go out of her way to support students and families.

Mrs. Mason, Teacher

Mrs. Mason is African American. She has been a part of the Blaster staff for more than 12 years and is the most senior teacher on the staff. A religious women and minister, she has held

meetings with African American student groups afterschool and at lunchtime to help build self-esteem. She has a calm and quiet demeanor and is seen as a leader among the staff.

Mr. Jones, Teacher

Mr. Jones is one of only two teachers at the school who is African American. He is a role model for the African American males and has a special gift for working with students to build a rapport. He, like Mrs. Mason, met with students afterschool to help them with homework, and he facilitates a chess club.

Ms. Willis, Parent

Mrs. Willis is the grandmother of a second-grade student. She has the distinction of having had a daughter and a son attend Blaster. She is a retired elementary teacher and was instrumental in starting the African American Parent Group. Mrs. Willis brings that caring, grandmother feel to all of the relationships that she makes as Blaster. She diligently works each day to build relationships with African American families so that they are aware of the group and meeting times. African American parents know her, her role and importance in the school. She is a very influential and respected parent in the school, including the Latino community.

Mr. Andrews, Parent

Mr. Andrews is an African American parent and very active in the school. He has a daughter in first grade and spends much of his time volunteering in the school during the school day. He was elected as the parent group president and plays an active role in encouraging parents to attend meetings and to be active in the parent group.

Charlotte School

Charlotte School is located in the Greenville School District. The district is one of the most diverse districts in the state. The diversity is represented in its demographics, culture, and economics. There are approximately 75 different languages spoken in the Greenville Unified School District. There is a definite division within the school district of the “haves” and the “have nots,” the “hills” verses the “flats.” That distinction is apparent as you drive through the different communities within the district. As with many school communities, the differences are apparent in the way many of the homes are kept, whether the lawns are manicured, the type of cars seen on the street and in the driveways, the types of dogs people walk each day, the time of day they walk their dogs, and whether or not they walk their dogs. Neighborhoods are defined by the existence of street vendors, the sophistication of the farmer’s market, and the availability of fast food restaurants and other businesses in the neighborhood. All of these portrayals are defined differently depending on the level of the “haves” and “have nots.”

Greenville’s history stems from years of segregation among the schools. Although today most of the “hill schools” display a diverse population by day, many of the students of color, specifically African American students, return to their homes in the “flats” after school.

Charlotte School is located in an affluent neighborhood in the hills of Northern California. The school is surrounded by pristine, landscaped streets, and beautiful homes. As you enter this quiet, well-guarded, neighborhood-watched community, you are assured that it is relatively safe to take early morning and evening jogs. As a member of the community, you enjoy the daily walks to school with your child. The housing prices in that neighborhood range from \$250,000 to more than two million dollars. About 70% of the total student population lives in the school’s attendance area. The total student population of Charlotte is 558 students, and the school serves students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. The grounds of the school are immaculate, even though there is still some construction underway, funded by the recent passing

of a school bond. The halls are clear, the classrooms are well lit. The school smells clean, not just the clean that you might expect of a school that is consistently cleaned by a the custodian, but the smell of middle and upper middle class, where students and parents are well-groomed and pass through the halls on a regular basis shedding their freshly-spruced scents.

Charlotte has a very active Parent Teacher Association, raising almost \$250,000 a year to provide enrichment to students, teachers and support programs. The Parent Teacher Association has always had an active membership. From as far back as the late twenties, the PTA has been instrumental in bringing support programs to the school such as a gardening program, school field trips, swimming classes, and provided monetary support to committees and groups for the school.

Charlotte is one of the most academically successful schools in the entire district. The API score for the school is 941. The current API for the African American students is 880, up from 814 the prior year. The API score for white students is 967. Charlotte School has made Adequate Yearly Progress each year for the past several years. Each year student achievement in English, Language Arts, Math and Science has increased, moving more students into the proficient category for student achievement. The school has received multiple district recognition awards for the academic achievement of African American students and recently was awarded the Distinguished Schools Award from the state of California. Being awarded the Distinguished Schools Award was particularly noteworthy because the current criteria requires that the school provide data that shows significant academic achievement of African American students over time, new criterion for the award. This distinction would not have been possible without the financial support of the PTA. The PTA has helped to support the African American Parent Group by funding the Saturday School and the intervention teacher who services students who fall below proficiency. Under the umbrella of the Parent Teacher Association, the African American Parent Group receives partial funding to finance school events such as the beginning-of-the-year picnic, supplies for Saturday School, and recognition awards for completing Saturday School.

Students

Admission to Charlotte School, and other schools in the district, is determined by the designated attendance area and the district's Student Assignment & Bilingual Testing Office. This office is responsible for registering and assigning all students in the district. Charlotte has a total student population of 558 with 60% of the student population white, 21% African American, 11% Asian, and 6% Hispanic. 7.5% of the school's population receives free and reduced lunch, and 2.2% are English Language Learners. Many of the African American students attending the school do not live in the attendance area and are transported to the school from all over the school district and outside of the district. The African American students make up 70% of the students outside of the attendance area. The district does not provide bus service for students to attend the school, which means that families are responsible for getting students to school each day. From time to time this has proposed a tardy and attendance problem; with student drop off, students arriving too early, unsupervised; and student pick up, students remaining long after the end of the school day, unsupervised. Fortunately, many of those students are enrolled in the before and after school intervention programs provided at the site that offer English Language Arts and Math support to students. Currently, Charlotte School has an overall daily attendance rate of 96% and has data to support that percentage for the past three years.

Staff

The staff consists of 23 teachers: a teacher on special assignment who acts as teacher in charge in the absence of the principal, two resource teachers for special education students, three teachers each at the kindergarten, first, second, third, fourth and fifth grade levels, and two intervention teachers for pull out and in-class support to students. Among the staff, whom are predominately Caucasian, there are two African American teachers. One male teacher is at grade four and one female teacher is at grade five. It is a very stable staff population, with the average length of time that a teacher is assigned to the site being 14 years.

Including support and classified staff, there are six African American staff members at the school. One male staff member is the office clerk and was a former student at the school. Another support staff member works with students at recess and afterschool, providing assistance with organized games and activities. An additional support staff member works in the afterschool academic intervention program. She is a non-credentialed teacher, there to provide facilitation and monitoring for students using the computer-based program. Another African American, credentialed teacher works during the school day to provide intervention and support to students in the classroom during instruction and as a pull out teacher outside of the classroom.

Parent Group

The African American Parent Group began in 2004 under the administration of the prior principal. The principal at the time, and a few interested African American parents, came together to form the group to help improve the school climate among African American students and staff and the achievement of the African American students at the school.

“My child’s teacher said, ‘I have that same problem with all of the African American students.’ She didn’t even realize what she was really saying to me.” (Stuckey, Mrs., In-Person, Interview, 10/16/10) The purpose of the group was to give support to African American students in a way that would ensure that student achievement, specifically test scores of those students, would not have a negative impact on the total achievement of this high performing school. “I wasn’t there at the time, but I think the group was formed so that the black students wouldn’t be blamed for the achievement gap.” (Francis, Mrs., In Person, Interview, 3/17/10) In addition, the group was formed to increase the voice of the African American parents and families and to address race relations at the school between staff, families and students.

The majority of the African American students attending Charlotte School are from outside of the school’s attendance area. Soon after the initial establishment of the parent group, parents were asked to meet to discuss their feelings, thoughts and concerns about their children’s attendance at the school. The results of that meeting indicated the following:

- (1) Some African American parents felt that their children would be accused of pulling the test scores down.
- (2) They shared concerns regarding the school’s discipline problems being highly represented by African American students.
- (3) There were concerns as to how the teachers at Charlotte interacted with their children and they felt that teachers needed sensitivity training.
- (4) Parents wanted to have African American parents more active in the PTA and the School Site Council.
- (5) Parents wanted enrichment classes that focused on ethnicity.

(Charlotte School Parent Survey Results 2/10/05)

Some of the outcomes generated by the parent group and the survey were:

- (1) A data coach was identified for the group.
- (2) Saturday School was formed to support students in English, Language Arts and Math.
- (3) Before and afterschool intervention program was formed.

These three key interventions have been the cornerstones attributed to the success of the African American students at Charlotte. They have been maintained over the years and are considered by the staff and parent group to be the most significant accomplishments of the parent group.

Principal

The current principal is a white male and has been the principal for the past six years. He is an experienced administrator with a background in mathematics and business. His particular expertise enables him to find ways to manipulate the school budget to help finance the school's intervention coach, the Before and Afterschool programs, and the Saturday School. His background includes work in the community and with diverse family populations. This has allowed him to be an effective communicator with staff and families and to help support the mission of the group. He attends meetings regularly and contributes his knowledge base and expertise to the group.

Mr. John, the principal, is a kind and patient man. He works well with the staff and all of the different groups and community members of the school. He is open, honest and fair. He is not afraid to share himself with others. He has a big job, working with a demanding community, and manages those demands well. One of my school observations included attendance at the end-of-the-year promotion exercises. There were multiple opportunities for African American students to be featured during the ceremony. Out of the 15 African American students in a class of 75, not one of them had a speaking part or leadership role. Following the ceremony, the principal met with the African American parent group to discuss this matter.

The ceremony and the results of the conversation with the group were discussed with me in an interview. "So next year we are going to make sure that doesn't happen again. Next year, it doesn't matter who applies, we need to have more people take an active part in ensuring that African American students participate." (John, Patrick, Charlotte Principal, In-Person, Interview, 6/24/10)

Mrs. Larson, Parent

Mrs. Larson is African American. She is the parent of two students, a fifth-grade and a third-grade student. She is actively involved in the parent group. She began her initial involvement in the Saturday School when it was recommended that her son receive additional help in math. Her daughter, who does not struggle in school, also attended the Saturday School. This involvement led her to become involved in the group and now currently co-chairs the African American Parent Group. Mrs. Larson, in comparison to Mrs. Connors, the other parent participant from Charlotte School, is relatively new to the school community. She attends meetings regularly but has shared that she is puzzled by the lack of attendance at meetings and events. "I don't understand why they don't come. We send reminders and I try to encourage people personally to come but they just don't." (Larson, Mrs., In-Person, Interview, 2/12/09)

Mrs. Connors, Parent

Mrs. Connors is African American. She is a long-time parent at Charlotte School. She has been active in the school for a number of years, beginning as an active member of the PTA, SSC and later as PTA President. Mrs. Connors has had two children attend the school and

currently has one child in fourth grade. Mrs. Connors is also an afterschool aide for students in the computer lab. She is a positive person, having a reputation for working well with staff and parents. Her attitude toward the leadership of the PTA is not very positive because she is not in agreement with the philosophy of the PTA President. The African American Parent Group has sponsored events during the president's tenure. Mrs. Connors has noted that the president has not been in attendance for those events and does not attend the African American Parent Group meetings, a factor that causes strain within their relationship. The PTA President lives in the attendance area, Mrs. Connors does not. Currently, Mrs. Connors is the co-chairman of the African American Parent Group.

Ms. Francis, Teacher

Ms. Francis is a teacher at Charlotte School. She is Caucasian and is currently teaching third grade and is the teacher for the Saturday School. She is young with about four years of teaching experience. She has been a teacher at Charlotte School for her entire teaching career. She is the one teacher in the school who attends the African American Parent Group meeting on a regular basis. She often recommends students from her class to the Saturday School. There is some concern on the part of the principal regarding her effectiveness with students as compared to the former Saturday School teacher. "So Mrs. Marsh was great. Mrs. Marsh was just better at direct instruction. She could also talk to them and say, hey, this is what's coming in middle school." (John, Patrick, In-Person, Interview, Charlotte Principal, 6/13/10) When asked why another, more effective teacher was not asked to teach Saturday School, the principal responded, "Nobody else was willing to do it." (John, Patrick, In-Person, Interview, Charlotte Principal, 6/13/10)

Mrs. Holden, Teacher on Special Assignment

Mrs. Holden is a TSA, which means that her duties and responsibility lie outside of the classroom. She is a support to the principal and acts in many cases as an assistant principal, sharing some of his duties, and she is in charge of the school when he is unavailable. Mrs. Holden is a Caucasian woman with a soft, caring demeanor. Her background is social work, and she uses much of that training to support families at Charlotte School. She has been a part of the Charlotte staff for the past five years. She occasionally attends the African American Parent Group meetings, supports their activities with her attendance and contributions. "I've gone to a few meetings in past years. I try to go to whatever events they sponsor... I try to help out with the potluck. Make sure the room is reserved. Getting the word out to staff." (Holden, Mrs. In-Person, Interview, 2/12/09)

Harrison School

As you read through the descriptions and information about Harrison School, keep in mind that the information given about the school is current unless otherwise specified. The data collected through interviews of the participants was based on their accounts that occurred back when the African American Parent Group existed at the school site. Currently, the group does not exist. Part of this study addresses that phenomenon and the implications for the group's discontinuation.

Harrison School is located in the Peninsula district. Like Greenville, it is a diverse district with its own version "haves" and "have nots." The district is small, only about a third of the size of the Greenville district. Harrison is one of four Title I schools in a district of 10 elementary schools. The quaintness of the school district may not alert one passing through to the definitive differences and attitudes of the people toward the division of the areas. The district is

close to Greenville but somewhat isolated from major school districts close by. Many of the residents have lived in the area for many years and some have only lived in that area. At one time the district was a flourishing, well-endowed place, able to receive much of the revenue from a nearby army base. About 10 years ago the base moved away, leaving the district financially handicapped. The loss of revenue has crippled the district over the years causing it to make severe cuts in services to students and to school services every year. Divided into the east side and the west side, residents on the east are primarily middle to upper middle class with a few lower end apartment dwellings interspersed. Families drive their children to school but most walk each day. The areas in the Peninsula district are very flat so you will often see parents riding their bikes to school with their children. Many of these families have bike attachments for younger siblings. Comparing Harrison School's PTA to a school in the east end of the district is significant, with the Harrison School PTA raising a fraction of that raised in the east end. The average cost of a home in the Harrison School attendance area is around \$650,000. The area is saturated with many apartment dwellings, as compared to the attendance area of the Charlotte School, there are none.

Harrison School is located on the west side. Students walk to school and parents push strollers, but there is a definite difference to the feel of the community. In the Harrison community there is much more diversity than in the schools on the east side. The diversity is not only represented in the ethnicity of the families but in the social class of the families. There are many more families at Harrison School less likely to access the school in a way that is supportive of their children, especially African American families. Unlike Charlotte but similar to Blaster School, the students attending Harrison School live in the attendance area. At the time when the African American Parent Group existed at the school, many parents had been residents for many years. I was able to contact the parents in this study because they still lived in the area.

Harrison has a student population of 430 students, serving students grades kindergarten to fifth grade. At the time when the African American Parent Group existed at the site, the school was not up to earthquake code and was eventually moved to a temporary site for a year for renovations. It was during that time that the principal left the district and the group disbanded. Throughout that time and currently, the school demographics have remained constant.

Staff

The Harrison Staff at the time had 20 teachers, who included a Title I teacher, an English Language Development teacher, special education and part-time special education teachers. Two of the 20 teachers were African American. The two office persons were African American. The two male teachers on the staff were Caucasian.

Many of the Harrison staff have been at the school site for many years. Some were said to have poor relationships with African American families. "We want to know how to talk to the teachers. We want to understand certain policies and practices. We want educational language. You know, there was a group of not strong literate folks, and they wanted to be able to have these conversations with their teachers." (Davidson, Mrs., In-Person, Interview, Harrison Principal, 2/11/09)

Students

Harrison School, a Title I school, located in the Peninsula Unified School District, has a total population of 418. The school's population is 46% Asian, 22% Hispanic, 16% white and 15% African American. This school receives additional funding for intervention during the school day. Struggling students are identified and pulled out of class daily to receive services.

Students who attend this school live in the attendance area. There don't seem to be structures in place that bring together the African American parent population.

Parent Group

The African American Parent Group existed under the former principal. "So we formed this parent group. And we had 30 and 40 parents showing up and these were some affluent but these were all of my folks. And it wasn't just AA. We have some nice mixed races in there." (Interview, Harrison Principal, 2/11/09) The group was created to support parents so that they could better understand how to help their children and communicate with their children's teachers.

Principal

The group existed prior to the current principal. The participants of that former group no longer have children at the school site. During the time the school had an African American parent group, the principal was Caucasian. Currently, the principal is African American and has been the principal for the past four years. At the time when the group was formed, the former principal had been principal for about a year. She was an experienced administrator and had moved up the ranks in the district beginning as a teacher. When she accepted the challenge as principal of the school, she knew she would be contending with a contentious staff. Supported by the superintendent, she was able to focus her work and tried to bring together the voices of the diverse community. A very strong-willed person, she was able to develop and maintain the group, invite various presenters to speak to the group, and to educate the parents. She also kept the staff abreast of the progress of the group and the issues that arose.

Mrs. Stuckey, Parent

Mrs. Stuckey is an African American parent. She is the single mother of two students, an older daughter and a son in fourth grade. She was one of the key parents who helped to formulate the group. A long-time resident of the Harrison community, an accountant by trade, her job afforded her the opportunity to be involved in the school. Mrs. Stuckey was active in the SSC and the PTA. She began being involved with the group when she met with the principal to share her concerns regarding her son's relationship with his teacher.

Mr. Maine, Parent

Mr. Maine, who is African American, was another parent who was consistently involved in the group. He attended meetings regularly and was pleased that the school had a group that was attempting to support and address the needs of African American children. As a parent on disability and one who lived very close to the school, he found it easy to regularly attend meetings. A good-natured man, Mr. Maine had nothing but positive information and comments to share about the African American Parent Group at the school.

Mrs. Blackman, Teacher

Mrs. Blackman, who is Caucasian, was a first-grade teacher when the group formed. As part of her extra duties, she attended the meetings on a regular basis. She was able to assist the principal in reporting information and agenda items that were discussed in meetings to the staff when they held faculty meetings. Mrs. Blackman is a supportive teacher and felt that her relationship with African American students was positive. All accounts from the principal and parents interviewed confirmed that opinion.

Mrs. Anderson, Teacher

Mrs. Anderson, who is Caucasian, was new to the school at the time the group formed. She often attended meetings and shared information as it related to current academic student progress. A very young teacher at the time, she seemed a little naïve but was willing to support the principal and the group. A very organized person, she was able to locate notes from past meetings dating back five years.

This chapter described the three schools and the study's participants. The following chapter will discuss the African American groups' relationships, the groups' origins, their relationships between the school leadership, and their relationships within the school communities. As you read Chapter 5, notice how socioeconomics, school location in relationship to where the families reside, and leadership impact the different groups.

CHAPTER 5: CHARACTERISTICS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN PARENT INVOLVEMENT GROUPS

When we talk about successful school and parent involvement, we are referring to a theory of practice that addresses the relationships that parents and teachers as adult learners develop as they grow and learn along with their children (McDermott, 2007). To begin to answer my research question, it was important to look at what characteristics determine the most successful school and parent relationships between lower socioeconomic, African American parents, and highly effective schools. Looking specifically at African American parent involvement, what needs to happen to get and keep these parents involved? Are there some specific programs, leadership qualities and strategies, organizational structures and factors that can best nurture and maintain those relationships? Based on meeting observations and study participant responses, I grouped school and parent relationships into three major categories: the African American parents and their relationship with one another and within the parent group; the relationship between school leadership and the African American parent group; and the African American group's relationship to the school and school community. Most of the data collected from all interviewed participants showed a positive relationship between the members of the parent group, and a positive relationship between school leadership and the parent group.

Most of the negative responses collected in this study refer to the relationship of the African American parent group and the school community. The parents, school staff, and principals of each school site involved in this study all agreed that the African American parent group is a necessary and valuable group needed to support African American students at the school. Each of the African American parent groups included in this study felt empowered by their existence as a separate entity within the school. Although these African American groups were supported financially and/or there was participation from school community members outside of the group at African American group sponsored events, the African American groups still felt that they were not totally included in the fabric of the school by parents of the school community at the completion of my research.

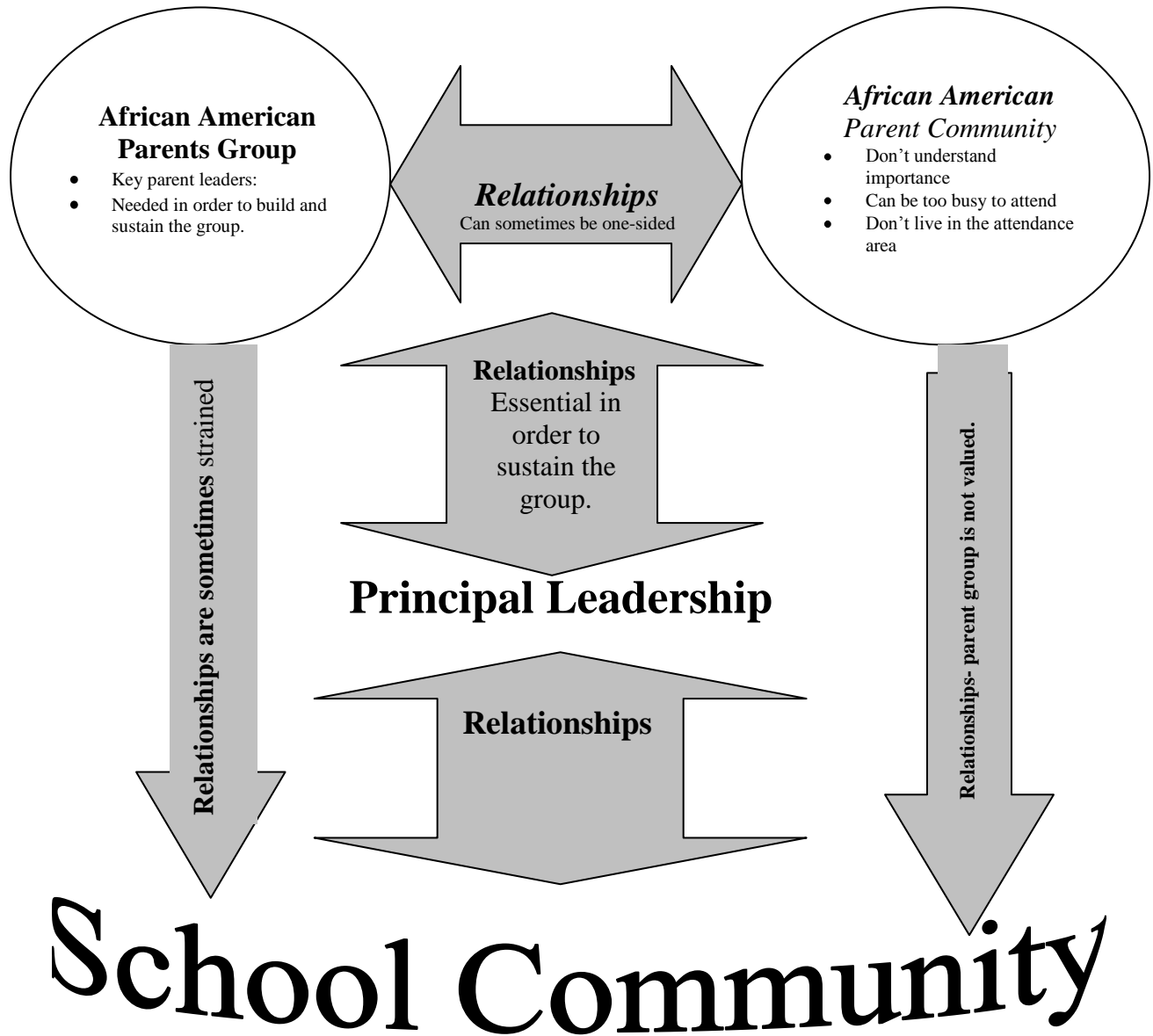
Figure 1 shows the relationships between the African American parents within the group and the other African American parents in the school. Key leaders within the parent group continue to reach out to get more parents involved, but there are African American parents who are not involved in the school because they: don't understand the importance of the involvement; don't live in the attendance area and attending meetings is not convenient; don't feel comfortable aligning themselves with a specified group; and/or some of their involvement is sporadic for meetings and African American sponsored events. These factors can limit the relationship between the group and the other African American parents.

Relationships between the African American families and the school are sometimes limited based on several factors: PTA members feeling that the group is unnecessary and that the goals and objectives of the African American parent group should be folded into the PTA; African American parents not feeling welcomed to attend PTA meetings because the PTA is dominated by voices in the community with an agenda that does not consider or include them; members of the African American parent group feel isolated from the school because they do not know how to speak up and ask question; school staff and parent community are dominated and represented by non African Americans.

The link with leaderships is an important key. The relationship between school leadership, the parent group, and the school community is strong at all sites; they just don't

always connect to one another. School leadership represents a connecting link between the groups that is necessary but not always shared by all of the groups.

Figure 1. Relationships Between African American Parents, Leadership and School Community



Parent Groups and parent community have working relationships with the site principal.

Parent groups would like to be but are not fully connected to the school community.

African American Parent Group as a Community

Each African American group studied in this research had two components that enabled it to establish the group at the school. The groups had one to two key parents committed to the establishment of the group who were able to work to develop a relationship with the site principal who was willing to support the existence of the group.

Forming Groups

In most cases, parents took an active role in recruiting other parents to attend meetings and become members of the group. “I talked to the principal about it. She agreed with me and I started calling, and called them on the telephone to get them involved. And when I started out, it wasn’t a lot of them attending. As time went on, it got better.” (Wills, Emily, Parent In-Person Interview, 12/9/10) Staff members knew the parents who were committed to forming the group. “The parent name I associate with the group was Ms. Stuckey.” (Mason, Barbara, Teacher, In-Person Interview, 12/2/10) In the case of the Charlotte principal, he knew the main parents involved in the formation of the group and the leaders of the group from his predecessor.

You had two strong women with ideas and policies, so the former principal and Debra were a nice co-mixing of doers, and people with vision and structural ideas. So it was probably a unique gathering of African American women. So like the two of them thought, let’s create something special here. So the parent group came out of two visionary women who came together. (John, Patrick, Charlotte Principal, In- Person Interview, 4/14/10)

The parent group at Charlotte felt empowered with a specific focus and intent. The group had also been in existence for several years. “The group is empowered in that they began before the current principal, based on their own initiative.” (Larson, Pat, Parent, In-Person, Interview, 2/10/09) Individuals within Blaster School had a different focus and sometimes had a different objective for participation. “We thought that the group was valuable for African American students and all students. We thought we could pull in some of the Spanish parents and push the principal for Spanish classes.” (Andrews, Martin, Parent, In-Person, Interview, 12/10/10) Still, the African American Parent Group at Harrison School believed that teachers had low expectations and were not relating to African American students. “I spoke to the principal about starting the group because I felt that some teachers weren’t relating to African American students.” (Stuckey, Elise, Parent, In-Person Interview, 3/16/10)

Ways to Involve Parents

One of the biggest challenges at the schools was to get and keep parents active and involved in the group. Schools worked in an extensive and organized way to increase the involvement of parents in their groups. Blaster School held meetings each month with a large parent percentage in attendance. Charlotte held meetings with smaller groups, while Harrison School had even fewer members in attendance. Blaster and Harrison held a series of meetings that were facilitated and planned by the principal. “I carry flyers around in a folder everyday and when I see them, I give them one.” (Wills, Emily, Parent, In-Person, Interview, 12/9/10) “A verbal reminder is sometimes better than a face-to-face. Verbally I talk to them.” (Wills, Emily, Parent, In-Person, Interview, 12/9/10) Schools used face-to-face contacts with other African American parents to get parents involved in the group. “Any organization about ‘us’ needs reminding.” (Wills, Emily, Parent, In-Person, Interview, 12/9/10) As the year progressed, the

principal at Blaster encouraged the group to elect officers to run the meetings. Although some parents were willing to attend meetings and participate in planning activities and discussion, I noticed in my observations that they were not so willing to take over the facilitation and the planning of meetings. The principal continued to gently push parents toward identifying their own leaders for the group, and they were eventually able to elect a president, vice president, secretary and treasurer.

Charlotte School's parent group had been in existence for more than four years. Their officers and organizational structure were in place prior to the current principal. They planned social events to encourage parent participation.

When my son was in kindergarten, I was invited to a welcome barbecue after the first full year. I was told that African American parents were concerned about African American student achievement. I think the group has helped to close the achievement gap. It's gone from 600 to 800." (Connors, Charise, Parent, In-Person Interview, Interview, 2/11/09)

"I think the group was more of social type stuff.... potluck kinds of things and not necessarily academic until Saturday School arrived." (John, Patrick, Charlotte Principal, In-Person Interview, 4/14/10) Much of the planning for the group began with one key parent. She also help to create the parent involvement criteria for Saturday School participation.

So the little brain child..., we should probably really credit Amana...She said, let's make it mandatory for the parents to sit there next to the kids so that they are a piece of the learning. And that was our big push. I'm all about that because I'm a teacher, middle, and VP.... Once the grandma is sitting next to the kid, all of a sudden, school is a little more real. (John, Patrick, Charlotte Principal, In-Person Interview, 4/14/10)

Involving parents in the group was an ongoing process. Parents held school events such as potlucks, picnics, multicultural night dinners; made phone calls and posted flyers to announce and encourage attendance at meetings. "I approach parents daily and I call every parent on the list. I get on the phone and I call them." (Wills, Emily, Parent, In-Person, Interview, 12/9/10)

They also used face-to-face contacts with other African American parents to get parents involved in the group. "As I walk through the campus everyday, I talk to them about coming, and usually we get new members." (Wills, Emily, Parent, In-Person Interview, 12/9/10) "We feed them every meeting. Last year we didn't do that." (Andrews, Martin, Parent, In-Person, Interview, 12/10/10)

We had a welcome barbecue. Went through and got all of the African American parents that were new. Personal phone calls, emailed all current.... Yahoo group set up. Had a welcome, with PTA, table set up, evening meeting last year to invite people to come asking people what would you be interested in... Different things... We did a carnival. Flyers went out for the carnival. The school has the carnival "[sic]." The group always sponsored a booth at the carnival. This year, we sponsored a multicultural book sale. We were always having the barbeque but we wanted to get it back to supporting the achievement gap and we didn't want to always make it about food so we sponsored the book sale, and it's multicultural "[sic]." (Larson, Pat, In-Person, Interview, 2/10/09)

Other schools used food to intrigue parents to attend meetings and relieve excuses. "We've had potlucks, the African American show last year... we raised money to do some things

that we needed to do.” (Wills, Emily, Parent, In-Person, Interview, 12/9/10) “We use food. We served parents food at every meeting. And now we have our own room, room 17 and we have our space... It is quite and relaxing.” (Andrews, Martin, Parent, In-Person, Interview, 12/10/10)

The parent group at Charlotte has held a Welcome Barbecue each year for the past four years in an effort to get new parents involved and introduces African American parents to one another. “I think it has been effective. I don’t think it has solved the problem, but it is moving in the right direction.” (Holden, Samantha, Teacher, In-Person, Interview, 2/12/09)

Resources and Benefits

Building relationships among parents is a resource. Parents attend meetings for a variety of reasons, but African American parents attend because of the relationships. “I’m building relationships with them. Same thing I do with all the parents there.” (Wills, Emily, Parent, In-Person, Interview, 12/9/10) The Blaster parents have better attendance at their meetings because of the relationships that occur between the parents. Mrs. Wills is a longtime member of the school community. People listen to her, and they respect her.

Monthly meetings at Harrison, Blaster and Charlotte gave parents an opportunity to learn about support services available to students. They also discussed services offered just to the African American community. Meetings were designed to discuss how parents could help their children. “They would come to learn how they can help their student... If they have concerns about their child’s education.... If they want to talk about problems their child is having...” (Blackman, Teacher, In-Person Interview, 12/13/10) “A couple of parents mentioned that they had heard about problems their child was having the first time at parent-teacher conferences... They mentioned that in the meeting.” (Mason, Barbara, Teacher In-Person, Interview, 3/14/10)

At each site, a lot of the meetings consisted of providing information to parents that included an explanation about test scores and the achievement gap. “It was helpful as a parent so that you could sit down and learn how to help your kid.” (Maine, David, Parent, In-Person, Interview, 2/11/09)

It’s an awareness thing. They are learning things that they probably would not have learned. Blaster was a model school for the African American Parent Group in their district. We’ve had other schools in the district to come to see how we set it up because they wanted it at their school. It was a place where we were able to get information about African American students. Some of the parents there are not really educated to the point where they know how important it is for their kid in a predominately Spanish school, you know? And there are a lot of things there at Blaster that need to be addressed with them. And I’m there everyday and I know what’s happening.” “[sic]” (Wills, Emily, Parent, In-Person Interview, 12/9/10)

Building human capital was an important benefit of the group to some families. Parents shared their expertise and strategies that they used to help their children to be successful with the members of the group. “I told them, yes, you put in a full day of work but if you show them a workbook it will help and it’s not going to take much of your time and it’s going to help.” “[sic]” (Stuckey, Elise, Parent, In-Person, Interview, 3/23/10) The group also offered support services for families. “Building relationships, building up that network... Okay, where does everybody live? How do you get to Charlotte? Which way do you go?” (Connors, Charise, Parent, In-Person, Interview, 2/11/09) At Blaster and Charlotte Schools, information was

distributed regarding organizations and events that supported students throughout the community. “The information that people had to share was very helpful. One parent was getting his daughter into middle school. He shared information about A Better Chance, giving people access to information that they would not have known.” (Larson, Pat, Parent, In-Person, Interview, 2/10/09) “Would information about A Better Chance have been posted on the Chabot Broadcast? No, because ABC is only about minority students. If he had sent the ABC info to the Broadcast it would not have been distributed the way it was to the (African American Parent) Yahoo group.” (Connors, Charise, Parent, In-Person Interview, 2/11/09) We’re learning what can be done for all kids, not just my grandson.” (Wills, Emily, Parent, In-Person, Interview, 12/9/10) “The first part of the meeting is informational. It lets us know what is going on in the school. We learn about test scores... We can give input and discuss things.” “[sic]” (Andrews, Martin, Parent, In-Person, Interview, 12/14/10)

Parents discussed situations that occurred at the school between their children, their children’s teachers and non African American students. In one meeting I attended at Charlotte, a parent shared an incident that occurred regarding a field trip. She shared with the group that one of the reasons she began attending the meetings was because she wanted to find ways to get more involved in the school as an African American parent. One way she did this was by volunteering to help drive students on a field trip. When students were divided to ride in certain cars, her daughter overheard a student in her class say to another student that she didn’t want to ride in the black lady’s car. The mother was concerned that if these types of comments were being made in her daughter’s presence, what other kinds of discriminating remarks were being made of which she was not aware. At Harrison School parents discussed behaviors that were associated with African American students. “When I see children yelling at each other on the yard, they are not angry. They are just trying to have a voice and be heard.” (Anderson, Janet, Teacher, In-Person, Interview, 3/16/10)

Limits of the Parent Group

The groups are only as strong and as effective as their members. The sustainability of the groups is dependent on the individuals committed to the group. There are no set policies or rules requiring or governing the groups. Three years after the formation of the parent group at Harrison School, the principal transferred to another district. Also that same year the school was relocated to another school site in order to complete renovations at Harrison. The new principal combined with the temporary relocation caused the group to disband. Over time parents that were instrumental in forming the group also left the school due to student promotion, and there weren’t any passionate parents left to continue or share the work with the new principal. Blaster School has a much smaller African American population. If key members choose not to continue their pursuit for members and attendance at meetings, attendance will decline. They are also the most newly formed group. “Progress is slow. We just have to stick with it.” (Andrews, Martin, Parent, In-Person, Interview, 12/14/10)

What Can Be Explained

There are reasons why attendance fluctuates at meetings. One reason why more parents do not attend meetings and events may be because of the fact that they do not live in the attendance area. “A lot of them work at night, and they give me their reasons as to why they cannot come.” (Wills, Emily, Parent, In-Person, Interview, 12/9/10)

We’ve been spinning our wheels. I think people don’t come because it’s another reason to come back to the school. Tuesdays are a horrible day to come back to

the school. I think the older parents think it's the same old thing. We are working on a survey to ask would you come on another day of the week. (Connors Charise, Parent, In-Person Interview, 2/11/09)

“And then there's also an economic thing, the whole challenge of having two parents working, you know it is... not having the school right in the immediate neighborhood. A lot of the families have one family working. It's more than a notion to come from West Greenville back over here.” “[sic]” (Holden, Samantha, Teacher, In-Person, Interview, 2/12/09) Charlotte planned a multicultural potluck night. Attendance of the African American families was not good. Mrs. Holden was asked her opinion for the attendance of African American parents. “I don't want to say involvement because parents are involved in their kids' life but they are not involved in the school. So I would have loved for them, some of the families I know for SSTs are really loving, great families, to have been there and I was surprised that some of them weren't there.” (Holden, Samantha, Teacher, In-Person Interview, 2/12/09) When Mrs. Larson was asked why she thought parents didn't attend a PTA sponsored school dance on a Thursday evening, she responded: “One parent told me, ‘I'm not going to drive all the way back to East Greenville from North Greenville on a Thursday night.’” (Larson, Pat, Parent, In-Person Interview, 2/10/09) “We have parents who don't give a darn and are not concerned. In the African American community, that happens a lot. I check in at teacher conferences. Some people don't have but one student attending.” “[sic]” (Wills, Emily, Parent, In-Person, Interview, 12/9/10)

What Cannot Be Explained

The leadership of the African American parent group at Charlotte School is capable and competent parents from the school community. Although they do not live in the school's attendance area, they are very active, dedicated, and committed to involving all members of the African American community in the group. The Blaster parent questions why parents don't attend parent conferences. “I don't know why we (African Americans) don't come to conferences, respond, and be there. I don't know. They say they like to dance. Seems like we have more people come but still we don't have a lot of African Americans.” “[sic]” (Wills, Emily, Parent, In-Person Interview, 12/9/10) The same concern exists at Charlotte School.

Mrs. Larson works for a non-profit. Mrs. Brown works for some bank in the city. Janice is a lawyer, a civil rights lawyer. Marsha Anderson's wife, she was our treasurer. She was the treasurer of our SSC and our Parent Group and she was like a superior court judge for the state of CA and taught at UCLA. So like our people have resources that are in the figure heads of the African American Parent Group. (John, Patrick, Charlotte Principal, In-Person Interview, 2/9/09)

“It still not 100% of the people coming, but I've got a few. I would say probably 85%. I don't know why they don't come.” (Wills, Emily, Parent, In-Person Interview, 12/9/10)

As parent communities change, it may always be necessary to focus on parent participation for African American parents. School leadership is one way that parents can be made aware of the importance of their involvement. Strategies used by school leadership can aide in achieving that goal.

School Leadership as it Impacts the African American Parent Group

Parents met with the principal to request starting a parent group. In every case, parents felt that the group would help African American parents to have a voice in the school and to support African American student achievement. Through variety of means, parents were

instrumental in spreading the word and encouraging other parents to attend the monthly meetings. At two of the three sites, parents were concerned that the African American students were not properly served and that the achievement gap was not being addressed to meet their needs.

How Leadership Impacted the Start of the Parent Groups

I overheard one of my new students that was a sixth grader. One of my African American students talking to her older sister, high school or older. You know, how was your day? Oh it was great. Fine. How did you like your teacher? Oh she was fine. But it's a Mexican School. And she hadn't met me yet. I knew she was a new student because of the conversation she was carrying on with her sister. But she didn't know me yet. And I, her first impression was, "This is a Mexican School." And I just thought, what does that mean? How is she going to feel like this is her school? And I thought, AA, what is that experience? "[sic]" (Sanchez, Anna, Blaster School Principal, In-Person Interview, 10/9/10)

Interviews with key parents and principals in the study indicated that both principals and parents attributed themselves as the cause of the initial inception and the reason for the existence of the groups.

Yes. I wrote a special letter to call a meeting. I promised them a one-hour meeting. And I just wanted to meet with them briefly to just get their feedback. to get to know each other... No agenda. And so I invited DL to help me. And so she said, "Go girl. I'm proud of you." It made me nervous because this is new to me. I had never done it. I talked to other principals and they didn't have groups, much less focused on AA, parents of AA students. "[sic]" (Sanchez, Anna, Blaster School Principal, In-Person Interview, 10/9/10)

The group began at Harrison School with lots of enthusiasm and interest.

I sent out a flyer and started calling and talking to my AA parents and said, "Uh, what do you think about having an African American parent group?" And we can invite everybody but it's focusing specifically on that. And I had all kinds of folks jump forward and say, "Absolutely, we want to. We want to know how to talk to the teachers. We want to understand certain policies and practices. We want educational language." You know, there was a group of not strong literate folks and they wanted to be able to have these conversations with their teachers. So we connected it back to the data and we said that Johnny's coming from this family dynamic. And when the parent walks in the door, what's going on with that communication to help the parent understand what Johnny's needs are?

"[sic]" (Davidson, Lynn, Former Harrison School Principal, Interview, 2/11/09)

These examples help to show the need for parents and leadership to work together for the successful involvement of parent within schools.

How Parents Worked With the Principals to Involve Parents in the Group

The principal of Charlotte School was an experienced community organizer. He felt that those skills helped him to work successfully with the parents at his school site.

I was a community organizer. I worked with poor families, deep with Latino folks in West Greenville and East Greenville. The former principal was African American. She could say, look your kids are a little below grade level here. It's not just about these 12 weeks. Do your times tables this summer. Start

memorizing them while you're going to work. You know, you're driving them yourself to school. Go over the fours every day. What are you waiting? You know, she could say stuff like that. "[sic]" (John, Patrick, Charlotte School Principal, In-Person Interview, 4/14/10)

The Blaster principal was the meeting facilitator. She created the agenda and prepared information to distribute to parents in a very structured way. Parents were given an opportunity to give feedback and there was much discussion, but the bulk of the information and planning was from the principal. The principal offered needed leadership and stability to the group. At Charlotte meetings, the principal was more of a meeting participant. He would occasionally speak to a topic and deliver information, but his primary role in those meetings was that of a participant. I attended one meeting at Blaster when the principal was absent. The meeting was not as structured and parents were less respectful and abrupt with one another. It was clear to me that parents were much more productive and on task when the principal was there to conduct the meeting. The Harrison principal was much of the driving force for the group. "She was great. She would give out information on how we could help our kids." (Maine, David, Parent, In-Person, Interview, 3/22/09)

She reached out, gave us information from the data. She pointed out what things that needed to be done at home. They don't participate in the things. She tried to recruit African American teachers. She brought in a retired African American man to help her. He was a big old guy. He was there to help assist her. She talked about the different programs, talked about how she could help. She was giving us information feedback to us. It was helpful as a parent so that you could sit down and help your kid. Kids loved her. "[sic]" (Maine, David, Parent, In-Person, Interview, 3/22/09)

"She cared. She was a great principal. She knew all her kids personally. That's amazing that the principal could know all the kids instantly. The parents liked her without a doubt." "[sic]" (Maine, David, Parent, In-Person Interview, 3/22/09)

When the Harrison principal transferred to another district, the group disbanded, even though some of the parents who participated were still a part of the school. In contrast, the Charlotte School has undergone a second administration and has been able to exist in spite of the change.

The principal was very instrumental in supporting the programs of the parent group. At one site the school held a weekly Saturday School designed to support math and English language arts achievement. As a part of her regular duties, the principal made reminder calls to parents to attend Saturday School.

Yeah, I call. What I do is let the whole process go throughout its things, get the numbers out. By the Tuesday of the week the kids are supposed to come on Saturday, I just personally call probably like 10- 15 families, like one Latino kid he did go and could have used it. And he's below, he's ELL, and he was getting his whole catechisms class this year so... I said so fourth grade I'll definitely call her again and say OK, fourth grade, this catechisms, he needs it. He just needs that hit. So I'll, I kind of keep track of the kids that we had for a few years. We definitely got through all of our fourth and fifth graders which is where our transfers came from. We try to go after them, too. "[sic]" (John, Patrick, Charlotte School Principal, In-Person, Interview, 2/9/09)

The principal also used school resources to support African American students, arranging support services to students that would best utilize and maximize the time of the in-class intervention teacher. "I stacked her from 11:30-3:00 Tuesday & Thursday. We get basically 20-30 kids, and it's consistent and will turn into a portable with a whiteboard, so many people loved it." (John, Patrick, Charlotte School Principal, In-Person, Interview, 2/9/09)

This girl, Mary, came to us first time fifth grade, and way below proficiency.. And the mom's in my face, second week, because we offer these free scholarships to our afterschool programs. We went from having only students receiving scholarships because they were in the group of who was in the know... from having these white families... So now we have this like 50 scholarships. So now, any of those afterschool classes, we're active in getting free scholarships for everybody. So she comes in screaming at me .We gave her daughter this \$150.00 scholarship class free. It was her second choice, not her first choice. She said, you're taking care of your own ... just because we're new you are not taking care of us. So examples like he,. I wasn't able to get along with her, I mean she was like crazy throughout the year. "[sic]" (John, Patrick, Charlotte School Principal, In- Person Interview, 2/09/09)

The Harrison principal brought in presenters on a regular basis to share information about the school, academic preparation and assessments. "Presenters were brought in by the principal to talk about testing." (Stuckey, Elise, Parent, In-Person Interview, 3/23/10)

Limits of the Group

Even with the support of the principal, attendance at meetings was an ongoing concern.

I was disappointed because there wasn't enough parent participation. They were just expecting too much. They would drop their kids off at school and then think that everything was supposed to be okay. They wanted the school to provide miracles and then they wondered why their kids weren't passing the grade.

"[sic]" (Maine, David, In-Person Interview, 3/22/09)

"It didn't take me long to realize that the (African American)parent group families are more professional. And they wanted to reach out to the poor families, and they didn't know how to get in touch. It wasn't because they were black and all black people are all poor." (John, Patrick, Charlotte School Principal, In-Person Interview, 4/14/10) It takes committed leadership, leadership within the parent group, and the group working together to support and maintain the group. A sharing and a passing on of the knowledge and the vision will help to continue the existence and success of the group.

What Can Be Explained

Principal leadership had a huge impact on the success of the parent groups. Harrison moved to a different location for a year, changed principals and the group was disbanded. The facilitation of the meetings at Blaster was dependent on the attendance of the principal. Charlotte School is directly linked to the principal. "Harrison changed to that other location for a year. That changed things. The principal got another job offer and the group didn't meet anymore. I loved what she tried to do." (Maine, David, In-Person Interview, 3/22/09)

What Cannot be Explained

Groups used a variety of strategies to get parents involved in their groups. They continued to be puzzled as to why attendance was still a concern.

It wasn't the greatest participation as it should have been... I was disappointed because there wasn't enough parent participation. They were just expecting too much. They would drop their kids off at school and then think that everything was suppose to be okay. They wanted the school to provide miracles and then they wondered why their kids weren't passing the grade. (Maine, David, In-Person Interview, 3/22/09)

Change in leadership or parent numbers should not affect the level of support of the principal. It is important that school leadership continue to help focus the community as to the value of the group.

The African American Group Within the Fabric of the School

Blaster School is a unique situation where there are several separate groups at the school. The principal is distinctive in that she began at the school as a teacher, connecting the school to the students in a very unique way. Having a separate group from the rest of the school was intentional on the part of the principal. "Some members of the African American group hoped to combine the resources of the school, sharing funds of knowledge among the school community. "We hoped to work with the principal to have Spanish taught for our students. They already have a class to teach English. We want the Spanish community to learn about us and we learn and share with them." "[sic]" (Andrews, Martin, In-Person Interview, 12/10/10). At Charlotte School, the current African American parent group chairman is the former PTA president. "I was the PTA President. I went to the parent group meetings. We had the PTA meetings on the same night as the parent group. I would always go for the first 30-40 minutes of the African American parent group meeting. Parents came over to PTA after they finished parent group meeting." (Larson, Pat, In-Person Interview 2/10/09) "Teachers did attend meetings, the counselor and the principal was always there." (Stuckey, Elise, In-Person Interview, 3/23/09)

School Resources And Supports For The African American Parent Group

Charlotte School views the African American parent group under their umbrella of school groups. Judging from a monetary standpoint, that is true. In actuality, the creators of the parent group requested that the PTA help support the group financially. "To tell you the truth, PTA kicks in about \$4,000 a year and they never raise more than \$1,000." (John, Patrick, Charlotte School Principal, In-Person Interview, 2/9/09)

Some teachers felt the group was an important resource for African American families. I thought the group was valuable. It was valuable to have the parents together. I know it was valuable for me to make some connections. I would have liked for it to continue. We were off site. I don't know if it was brought up with the next principal. We were off site. I don't remember it being brought up. (Mason, Barbara, In-Person Interview, 12/2/10)

What Can be Explained

Charlotte School is at the mercy of their location and demographics.

I think Charlotte definitely has a white middle class culture that is the culture of the school. I think that with any culture it takes a lot of deliberate effort. To make sure that other voices feel comfortable, represented and included. I think that there is more inclusiveness and it is very important that the group still exist and I think it still has work to do. (Holden, Samantha, Teacher, In-Person Interview, 2/12/09)

As parent leader of the school, I would go to the PTA meetings, I did the carnival the year before. The PTA President the year before was really, really nice. She said, "I don't like how the PTA is viewed as a clique. You did great with the carnival. You are super friendly. Would you be interested in being PTA President? I was like sure I would do it. I was the first black person to be PTA President and the first person not to be a neighborhood family. If you look at the leadership now it's totally white. Except for Lawanda and myself it's totally white. Nobody has really even asked. If you look at half the enrollment of the school now. When my son was little it was very easy to transfer into schools like Charlotte. Now it's extremely difficult with the way the economy is going. They are choosing not to send their kids to private school. The opportunity for transfers are very, very few. (Larson, Pat, Parent, In-Person Interview, 2/10/10)

What Cannot be Explained

In all three settings, the groups are on the outside of the fabric of their school site. Whether the barriers be demographics as in the case of Charlotte, language as in the case of Blaster Elementary or misplaced leadership as in the case of Harrison, all schools need to be included in the fabric of their school site in addition to functioning within their group.

So one of the gals that sat on our SSC, I went to her and I said, "Can I have an honest conversation about this?" And she said yes. I said, "Why is it that our AA parents don't show up for PTA and there is not a lot of mingling going on and some of our school folks are kind of afraid of you guys?" And she said, "Well, basically we got chased out." (Davidson, Lynn, Former Harrison School Principal, In-Person Interview, 2/11/09)

Funding and resources make it economically sound for schools to share and pool together. Still, within the African American community, there are concerns regarding low expectations for students and the lack of relationships between other groups within the school. "I will be honest with you. I really don't know if the white teachers are supportive of the African American students." (Wills, Emily, Parent, In-Person Interview, 12/9/10) "I was on SSC and I was relaying to them how African American, boys in particular, were being treated..." (Stuckey, Elise, Parent, In-Person Interview, 3/23/09) "When I go to other meetings in the school, few of 'us' all of 'them.'" (Wills, Emily, Parent, In-Person Interview, 12/9/10) "It is difficult sometimes to get parents to bring their child to Saturday School. They know they need the help. They know they need to be there, they just stop coming. The program was originally for African American students. We have opened it up to other students in the school who are struggling." (Francis, Danielle, Teacher, In-Person Interview, 2/17/10)

This year we've asked the PTA President to come to our meetings and she will not come. I don't think she thinks we need the African American Parent Group. She's not an African American parent. Her feeling is, "Why don't you just merge the parent group under the PTA because PTA helps fund Saturday School?" Her feeling is, "Why don't you just be a part of PTA and not have the parent group because we help fund it?" We said no because the parent group addresses the achievement gap and the way she wanted it, it becomes more of a social... We are trying so hard to accommodate PTA meeting that we are not doing what is best for parents. "[sic]" (Larson, Pat, Parent, In-Person Interview, 2/10/11)

Currently, the Charlotte School group has limited African American parents who attend. Half of the group now is white. One parent adopted an African American daughter. One has a son in preschool who is adopted. Charlotte, Harrison and Blaster Schools each have minority populations of African American families. Each school is dominated by a race of people other than African American.

Along with all of the efforts and the attempts to address equity with the schools, African American families and students are still overlooked. Below are two examples of why this work needs to continue.

The following meeting occurred as a result of the fifth-grade graduation ceremony held in the spring.

You know it is interesting. We were at our parent group yesterday, we got a chance to debrief with yesterday. The things were, it was one of those things, I don't know the slide show, totally too many white folks. It wasn't balanced. I didn't study it like that. It was not good. It was this mom that forced her way in. I wanted it equally represented. I wanted it five minutes and she made it 15 minutes and her friends. They got a picture of everybody but it was. But I did debrief because our promotion will end up being five white kids speaking with the four kids doing the donations, the bench. It all happened.. you know like I'm doing a million things... Tuesday as I go through our speakers and as I look at our teachers, and Ms. Battist who is African American and Mrs. Vilobose, who is very good on stuff, they, when they went and picked their people, the only kids that applied to speak at promotion were white kids. They got chosen. So, next year we are going to, next year, it doesn't matter who applies we need to have more people that... The cover, the art cover was done by Jeremiah, who was black, but we didn't have acknowledgement of him in our program.. so people who knew, okay, Jeremiah did it, needs to be much more intentional. "[sic]" (John, Patrick, Charlotte School Principal, In-Person Interview, 6/13/10). I mean, I mean, I don't have a specific agenda but I definitely have the sense and I have talked to them and I don't feel that they don't feel totally included in the Charlotte community. Don't feel 100% comfortable, don't feel, don't spend a lot of time here, don't necessarily know how to talk to the teacher. They just don't, you know, things like that. I think there is still a significant group of families that feel self-described as being on the outside. "[sic]" (Francis, Danielle, Teacher, In-Person Interview, 3/17/10)

The research of the three parent groups reviewed in this study showed a strong correlation between school leadership and the sustainability of the African American parent groups within the school. In order for the groups to maintain their existence, consistent committed leadership must be preserved by site leadership, leadership within the parent group or both. Parent leadership plays an important role. As in the case of Harrison School, when the site leadership changed at the school, the group ceased to exist. The vision for the group was not shared by the new principal and parents were not committed enough to continue the work.

Data collected in this study showed the importance of parent commitment over time in order maintain the longevity and focus for the group. At Charlotte School, the school leadership changed. The parent group continued even though parent membership and parent leadership changed. At the inception of the group, parent leadership did not live in the attendance area and

they still do not. Parents at Harrison School lived in the attendance area. Still, the group did not continue. Blaster School's parent group began with the vision of both parents and the principal. It will be interesting to see if they can maintain their commitment to the group over time.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Research shows that parent involvement can play an important role in the success of students in school. Social class often determines how families choose to participate. Many times class influences how parents negotiate their relationships with schools. For African Americans, race plays an important role independent of social class, in terms of building those relationships. Middle-class African Americans are better able to maneuver their children's school experiences by intervening in ways that teachers do not perceive as confrontational. Their interactions with the school sometimes suffer from the social class and race interlink to influence African American parent involvement (Diamond & Gomez, 2004). African Americans often face a setting that is different from that experienced by privileged white families and families of other races. (Lareau & Hovart, 1999).

A number of studies confirm that parent involvement programs can organize parents in ways that support students in school. Some programs suggest that certain types of parent involvement can improve student achievement. The literature does not discuss the characteristics of the most successful parent-to-school relationships nor the factors that best nurture those relationships.

In this case study, I focused on African American parent groups as a way of developing and nurturing successful parent and school relationships. I studied African American parent groups at three elementary schools. The groups were located in three different school districts. Using the case study format, I interviewed principals, parents, and teachers to assess the benefits of their African American parent groups. Through interviews and observations I learned that building a supportive and effective African American parent group is difficult but that it can and should be done. When African American students and their families are in a school setting in which they are in the minority, an African American parent group can be an effective way for students and families to build meaningful, supportive relationships with the schools.

Each school studied in this research was unique. Blaster School had a relatively new parent group. The group was formed by the principal and key African American leaders, and they worked together to encourage parents to attend meetings and to become active. Charlotte School had the oldest parent group in the study. Parents at that school had been active for several years and were able to sustain themselves beyond the tenure of the initial principal. The group at Harrison School was impacted by numerous factors: a year of school relocation, a principal who did not share the vision of the group, and key parents who no longer attended the school. This caused the group to discontinue.

Limitations of the Findings

The limitations of this study are that only three schools within three districts were studied. All three were elementary schools. Only one of the three elementary schools had groups that lasted longer than five years. The conditions of each group varied. The schools discussed in this study differed in size, African American student population, student population socioeconomics, and API scores. One school included an African American group in which the majority of the families lived outside of the attendance area. One group no longer exists. Some additional limitations of the study include that there were no middle or high school groups reviewed in this study. The study was also conducted over a short period of time, 18 months.

Recommendations from the Findings

The findings suggest some key elements necessary for successful and effective African American parent groups. In order for groups to thrive, they need to have mechanisms for

stability. Harrison School was unable to sustain its group. The group did not have a structure in place to ensure the continuation of the group. Parents were not identified as leaders so that the leadership of the group could be passed on to new parents. Therefore, the group could not sustain itself. Harrison's parent group suffered from the worst conditions for stability: simultaneous loss of the founding principal, no system for sustaining parent leadership, and relocation of the school. Perhaps, if one of these factors did not occur, the group would still exist.

Charlotte School was able to survive the transition to a new principal. Each year parents are designated as co-chairpersons of the group. Leadership structures were in place so as to pass on the leadership each year and the group was able to continue with a new administration. With this type of structure, the parent group is not so dependent on the principal for its existence, and the power of the group is stronger because it can maintain and continue year after year.

In addition to the having a mechanism for sustainability, the group must have commitment. Groups that are the most successful are the ones with members who are committed to the work, committed to the continuation of the group, and are committed to encouraging other parents to be a part of the group. Groups that have had the most success seemed to have key parents who acted as ambassadors for the group and the cause, and worked continuously to get other parents to join, participate and attend their sponsored functions.

Commitment can prove to be a challenge for parents who do not live in the attendance area. Parents who understand the important of involvement may still have problems with participation, because it is an extra effort for them to return to the school to participate and an effort for them to be around the parents who are controlling and creating events. As in the case with the school promotion ceremony, Charlotte School, African American parents were completely out of the conversation for planning and participating in the event. Perhaps members of the African American group thought they were involved in the school, as measured by the functionality of the African American group. In addition, the over-arching purpose of the group should always be to support students within the fabric of the school.

Another type of commitment necessary for the success of an African American parent group is the commitment of the principal. The principal needs to have on his agenda the groups' interest. There are always going to be opportunities for families and students not to be included. Parents are often only committed to their child and their child's interest. One way to ensure that all students are included and supported is for the principal to actively oversee the interest of the African American students. Unless the principal is acting as the center figure for the school and the central clearing house for the school, there will always be an opportunity for students and families to be ignored.

The Importance of a Successful African American Group

The natural disconnection that African Americans often feel as a people defines the need for establishing a group in which they can feel bonded and learn about how they can support their children in school. African American parents are often busy, involved in other things, basic survival and work. They need to be knowledgeable about the school and to involve themselves in its fabric. There is a lot to learn about a school. There is a lot to learn about building relationships with teachers. African American parents are often affected by their own experiences in school and that can affect how they relate and interact with the school. Many African American parents need to learn that they have a right to be involved and that their involvement can support their children in significant ways.

In addition to the commitment of the group, the commitment of the principal and structures for sustainability, the group must be united. Developing a united force has been historically significant for African American people. That same type of united structure needs to be created for families in order to ensure their success in schools. One successful structure for accomplishing that goal is an effective African American Parent Group dedicated to supporting, promoting and empowering African American students and their families. African American parent groups do help, can help, and can also make communities stand up, take notice, and provide African American students the support that they are entitled to ensure their success. African American parents might be able to get results as individuals, but they will be able to get better results and longer lasting results if they unite together.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol: Principal, Parent, Teacher

[Say date, time, location, interviewee]

Welcome. This interview will help find out how African American Parent Groups are organized to support the involvement of African American parents in schools. You are a part of this interview process because you want to be here. You can change your mind at any time whether to participate or not. If you don't want to answer any of the questions you can just say "pass" and we will move on to the next question.

Organizational Structures

- How was the African American Parent Group established at this school?
- What is the purpose of the Group?
- In what ways is the group effective?

Leadership

- What is the impact of your leadership on the African American Parent Group?
- What strategies have you used to get parents involved in the group?

School Climate and Invitation

- What components of the group might encourage parents to become involved?
- How successful would you say the group has been in representing the total population of AA families at the school?
- What kinds of things do you think might discourage parents from becoming involved in the group?

Building Relationships

- What have been some of the benefits of the Parent Group?
- What do you see as some of the challenges of the group?
- How does the group support what children are learning in the classroom?
- Are there any other things that you would like to share about the group?

APPENDIX B
Observation Protocol

1. My participation in the observation protocol will be as an outside observer.
2. Descriptive and reflective notes will be written.
3. Following the observations, charts will be used to organized data.
4. Notes from the observation will include: Date, time of observation, number of participants, material distributed, and outcome of meeting.
5. Included in the meeting notes will be room environment and attitudes of participants.
6. Focus of the observation will be:
 - Interactions between the principal and the members of the parent group
 - Interactions and behaviors of the parents between themselves
 - Interactions between parents and teachers.