A Qualitative Case Study Exploring African American and Hispanic Parental Involvement in an Urban High School

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Abstract

Parental involvement in urban high schools is a critical issue for educators, researchers and families because of the positive influence parents can have when they engage in their children’s academic achievement (Epstein, 2001). This case study explored parental involvement in one urban high school in the Northeast. This study’s primary research questions were: (1) What are the experiences of parents, teachers and school administrators regarding parental involvement in the academic success of children in a majority African American and Hispanic urban public school? (2) What factors prevent or promote parental involvement in students’ academic success and the school in this context? Data was obtained through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis. The research was guided by Epstein’s (2010) Six Types of Parental Involvement model and Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) Ecological Model. Insights were collected from parents, teachers and administrators in regards to their parental involvement experiences, challenges and improvement suggestions. The findings suggest that schools must examine their current practices in order to foster and cultivate parental involvement, in a way that is culturally sensitive – particularly regarding technology and communication. This study determined that communication was essential in building positive relationships with children at home and at school. This study also identified many challenges that impacted parental involvement. African American and Hispanic parents faced a variety of challenges, such as full-time employment and time constraints, that impacted parental involvement. The school attempted to get parents involved through a variety of methods despite these challenges. The school conditions that would better facilitate parental involvement in their children’s education include: (1) clear expectations from school officials; (2) culturally sensitive communication systems; (3) technology training for parents; (4) utilizing traditional types of communication,
such as phone calls and home visits; and (5) providing workshops after school hours that allows parents the opportunity to gain the relevant educational skills to assist their children’s education and at the same time address their own educational goals. Overall, this study provided opportunities for educators, administrators and parents to bridge the gap that currently exists between the home and school environments.

Keywords: case study, semi-structured interviews, parental involvement, urban high school.
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Chapter I: Introduction

Parental involvement in urban high schools is an important issue for many educators and researchers because of the positive influence parents can have when they engage in their children’s academic achievement (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009; Epstein, 2001; Englund, Egeland & Collins, 2008; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Lawson, 2003). Parental involvement, as defined by Bower and Griffin (2011), includes a range of activities and influences, from offering inspiration for children to directly providing academic support in the home environment and in the school. Parent involvement includes parent attendance at school functions, communicating with teachers and administrators at school, attending parent-teacher meetings, and volunteering for classroom and school-wide activities (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Horsford & Holmes-Sutton, 2012).

This study examines the benefits of parental involvement in urban schools and analyzes the current barriers that limit parental involvement with a particular focus on what schools are doing to lower these barriers. Specifically, this study aims to identify barriers impeding parental involvement in an urban high school to identify tools that schools and educators can use to implement mechanisms, programs, and activities that will increase the engagement of parents in student academic and social success, at school and at home.

As noted, prior studies support the notion that if parents have access to the proper resources and opportunities, they can become involved in their children’s academic lives at school and at home in ways that will have a positive outcome on student achievement.
Rationale and Significance

The rationale for this study is the researcher’s interest in the role parental involvement in children’s education can have on students’ academic performance and social and emotional growth. The researcher is particularly concerned with barriers to and possibilities for parental involvement in an urban high school setting, where school completion rates, student performance, and test scores are abysmal. Whether at home or at school, parents have a direct influence – albeit positive or negative -- on their children’s education (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009; Epstein, 2001; Englund et al., 2008; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Lawson, 2003).

In order to fully understand how parents can be proactively and positively involved in their children’s education and how to bridge the connection between schools and parents, it is important to broaden the understanding of parent involvement beyond a “White, middle-class monopoly” (Reay, 2008, p. 643).

This study aims to provide schools, administrators, teachers, researchers, and educational reformers with the opportunity to understand parental involvement through a multicultural and economically challenged lens in an urban high school. Urban schools need to break away from ideas surrounding parental involvement that solely focuses on what works for White, middle-class families. By doing so, schools will begin to identify several approaches to partnering with parents in their children’s education (Auerbach, 2007; Stitt, 2013).

This research will create a framework to identify strategies that will assist low-income, urban high schools in providing context-appropriate and sustainable opportunities to increase parental involvement. Grounding a study in this way addresses social justice issues by identifying the kinds of social capital and other support needed to facilitate effective parental involvement in a low-income and culturally diverse setting with the goal of assuring that student
populations in marginalized urban settings have the educational resources to succeed and contribute to shaping decision making at the local, national and global levels (Epstein, 2011; Mattingly, Prislin, McKenzie, Rodriguez, & Kayzar, 2002; Turney & Kao, 2009; Wiseman, 2010). At the same time, it will work to bridge the communication gap by making information systems more accessible and providing pertinent information about college readiness. Parent perceptions can be used by schools to better support students’ academic and social growth with the goal of closing the achievement gap in urban districts (Brooks, 2009; Epstein, 2011; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). In order to meet the needs of society it requires our students to be productive citizens in a globalized economy. Research (Magourik, 2015) is lacking at the high school level with regard to authentic partnership models that carry policy out at the local and state levels. Parent perspectives allow for a better understanding of how relationships could be built to meet the needs of adults working with children.

This research comes at a crucial time for the St. Pierre Public School district. There are at least 12 turnaround schools out of 135 schools that are being taken over by the state (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016). The superintendent has stressed the importance of never letting another school get taken over by the state. This requires schools to increase student achievement scores, decrease dropout rates and create meaningful partnerships with families and the community. A study by Epstein (2010) demonstrates dropout rates amongst students are extremely high nationwide, and she examines the role of parental involvement in this phenomenon. Each year, students drop out of school and a pattern arises in these particular students. Studies reveal that parental influence is relatively low where dropout rates are high with an impact on whether or not a student completes his or her high school education (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009; Epstein, 2001).
Research Problem and Research Question

The problem of practice focuses on how to increase parent involvement in an urban school community. Schools need to make more conscious efforts to involve parents in their children’s education (Hoover-Dempsey et. al, 2005). Throughout the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the expectations of schools have intensified and expanded to increase school achievement levels regardless of race, class, gender or special needs. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003, p. 111-112) refers to this notion as “Leaving No Child Behind.” We have left parents out of the conversation even though it is a moral and legal obligation to include them. Policy makers have created accountability measures, but these initiatives are not monitored or monetarily supported (Epstein, 2010). McMahon (2010, p. 13) states, “At the local level, the infrequent, ritualized events of open houses and report card conferences have created an inorganic structure that inhibits and masks expression, and unfortunately, too often, acts as the only source of home and school coming together”. An essential missing link in improving parental involvement is the communication, particularly at urban schools. Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation is to understand the interactive process between home (the private) and public spheres. Policy makers have long assumed that technology will solve parental communication issues. Yet, many parents and students do not have even basic language literacy.

Parental barriers are exacerbated when the public and the private are brought together in a situation of high cultural diversity; the issue of parental involvement becomes more complex. The research intends to identify the mechanisms and practices that could increase parent involvement by gaining a deeper understanding of the complex relationships that exist between families and schools in a high minority student setting.
Research Questions:

1. What are the experiences of parents, teachers and school administrators regarding parental involvement in the academic success of children in a majority African American and Hispanic urban public school?

2. What factors prevent or promote parental involvement in students’ academic success and the school in this context?

Positionality

Over the past four years, I have worked as a teacher at a private Catholic high school and as a teacher with the St. Pierre Public Schools. Parental involvement at the private school was much more prevalent compared to the urban public school. At the private school level, I interacted with 95% of the parents through open-house sessions and consistently communicated with them through phone or email. I come from a white, middle-class and educated background. My background is similar to the student population at the private school. On the other hand, the St. Pierre Public high school is much more diverse. Communication with parents at home posed a problem in that there was a considerable language barrier with Latino families, which comprise 49.7% of the student body. In addition, open-house events and other extracurricular activities yielded low attendance rates of parents. Communication with parents was difficult, and, in many cases did not exist. Often, the student information system provided incorrect phone numbers for families and parents of students.

From my practitioner observations, I have discerned that on the level of praxis and institutional culture, more compatible communication venues need to be explored in urban high schools to address the lack of parental involvement. Communications disconnects involve both culture based in language and culture identified in relation to the extent to which a population
has access to technology; both of these factors move a researcher to ask questions related to access. Theoretically speaking, there is a misfit between the subjects (parents and students) and their environment (teachers, technology experts and administrators). This dissertation explores the tension parents attempting to make a contribution to their children’s education face when confronting technological and cultural challenges of a traditional school environment. According to Jupp (2006), “scholarship that elaborates on invisible structural frameworks and critiques participants’ understandings as ‘missing the mark’ commonsense deficit understandings require careful unpacking and critique rather than a facile and abstract dismissal” (p. 211).

Any information from this study must analyzed and critiqued in light of common sense. Common sense understandings must not be underestimated; I must take into consideration every condition that impacts the data. On the other hand, Briscoe (2005) argued, “oppression impairs one’s understanding and therefore one must be free in order to correctly interpret an event” (p. 25). Observations need to be noted without bias and observed with an objective lens. Coming from a position of comparative socio-economic, and ethnic and racial privilege, I will as a researcher have predisposed beliefs that were instilled in me through my personal and career life. Parsons (2008) asserted “that the terms ‘deficit’ and ‘difference’ are often encountered in the critique of research involving African Americans” (p. 1127).

This study will examine environmental deficiencies and critique family structure as the reason for parental differences in their involvement in their children’s education. These deficit understandings place the blame on individuals rather than structure. From a career viewpoint, principals and administrators have posed different explanations and reasons why parents are not involved with their children’s education. In addition, teachers, including myself, have “received leadership and direction” (Jupp, 2006, p. 209). Our views have been molded around society as
In researching this topic, I expect to overcome setbacks and handle situations professionally. Due to unequal positioning, the members of an oppressed group may feel distrust about researchers. This may limit the interpretation of this particular subject. In my privileged position, I may not adequately understand meaning to interpret perceptions and data from an oppressed group. People of the oppressed group may also not “freely interact with the researcher” (Briscoe, 2005, p. 26)

Briscoe (2005) maintains that “critical researchers who are in a privileged position have access to social power and thus, strategically, their work may be especially useful in the attempt to stop oppression” (p. 33). In my attempts to preserve my neutral position as a researcher, I will respect and fully understand my participants’ particular culture and background. Parsons (2008) stated, “one way to conduct research that retains integrity to African Americans is to consider the distinctiveness of African Americans as a collective” (p. 1133). Maintaining integrity through research is an important aspect that I will adhere to in my own research. I will maintain integrity by carrying out proper research protocols and establishing trust between parents and other research participants. In terms of data collection, I will ensure the data is accurate and valid. I will maintain and manage scholarly research records. In this case study, it is important to ensure quality assurance and control before and after the data collection process.

In addition, Briscoe (2005) made the statement that “we must learn how to ‘other’ in a way that does not objectify nor subordinate” (p. 34). This is an important statement in that the researcher must gain trust from the people involved in the research. Without their trust, the data will not be reliable. One of the best ways to maintain a neutral position is to collaborate with researchers at Northeastern as well as other doctoral students. Briscoe (2005) furthers this idea
by declaring, “the greater the number of interpretations, the fuller our understanding of others’ experiences will become” (p. 35). This study allows me to account for (you can’t “isolate” or take away you can only acknowledge and bring into consciousness in order to be aware of your biases) my personal bias, opinions and feelings in order to preserve a neutral position.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study seeks to understand how parents, teachers and administrators interact with one another and to understand how the relationships between each of these groups shape the educational system as a whole (Brooks, 2009; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Desimone, 1999; Eberly, Joshi, & Konzal, 2007; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Epstein, 1987, 2011; Ferrara, 2009; Feuerstein, 2000; Griffith, 1996; Grodnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997; Hill et al., 2004; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Marchant, Paulson, & Rothlisberg, 2001). In order to understand the dynamic relationships that exist within the educational system, it is important to view parental involvement through a social-ecological lens. A social-ecological lens examines how an individuals’ beliefs, interactions and attitudes influence their actions and how interactions between individuals influence the educational system to which they belong.

Diversity in schools is an important issue due to the fact that many individuals hold different beliefs and may not share the same views about parental involvement. In fact, these differences in beliefs may counteract the actions made by schools to improve parental involvement (Brooks, 2009; Fan, 2001; Ferrara, 2009; Wiseman, 2010).

Brofenbrenner (1986, 2005) aimed to build relationships between teachers and parents by building a social economical model that analyzed the interactions between the individual and his or her environment. His model was separated into five systems that included, the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Each system interacted with each
other like a set of Russian dolls (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The outermost layer is the macrosystem, while the inner layer is the chronosystem, which is simply the individual. The macrosystem is represented by political philosophies, economic patterns, cultural values and social conditions. The exosystem represents mass media, local politics, social services, neighbors and the industry. The microsystem is a setting that includes families, schools, peers, church and health services. The mesosystem represents the interaction between the various microsystems. This is a crucial area that links parents and students, parents and school staff and staff and students.

Joyce Epstein (2010) designed a parental involvement model that contained six types of parental involvement in children’s education. The six types of parental involvement include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 1988). Together, these six types focus on improving school programs, classroom management, student learning and development, and the improvement of parents’ awareness of their responsibilities and contributions to their children’s education (Epstein, 1988). Epstein incorporated Bronfenbrenner’s work by studying how student success was influenced when parents were or were not involved in their children’s education. In other words, Epstein focused her study on the mesosystem, where she developed her theory of overlapping spheres of influence. She found that parental involvement had more influence on student success than socio-economic status or race.

Epstein’s theory of overlapping spheres of influence focused primarily on the school system and was broken down into three groups; the family, the school and the community. The student was at the center of the three spheres. As each sphere interacted more with each other, it
had a positive affect on the student. Bronfenbrenner denoted each sphere as a microsystem and determined that the mesosystem signified the interplay between the microsystems.

**Critics of the theory.** Bower and Griffin (2011) argue that Epstein’s model cannot work in high-poverty, high minority schools. The authors claim that the model does not take into account the cultural differences that impact parental involvement. In addition, this model does not capture how “parents are or want to be involved in their children’s education” (Bower & Griffin, 2011). This indicates that the model is limited, and new strategies are needed to describe the experiences of parental involvement in the case of high minority and high poverty student populations. A revised model would include the variables of relationship-building and parental ownership as contributing to effective parental involvement. While, both models have attempted to understand parental involvement, they did not unpack it fully. The missing link in Epstein’s model is the cultural aspect. Socio-economic status is not clearly outlined in Epstein’s model, because it relies on the broad concept of the family microsystem. Therefore, using Bronfenbrenner’s theory and Epstein’s model, a deeper model can be determined that incorporates the cultural component to parental involvement.

**Rationale.** This case study explores parental engagement and interactions with an Urban high school in the St. Pierre Public School district. By understanding parent perspectives, changes must be made to create more efficient and engaging parents. Parents will also provide ideas and insights regarding the usefulness of school-sponsored programs. High schools will be able to develop and implement better programing to support parent engagement and encourage more parents to become involved. Determining the types of programs to implement in schools is dependent upon how specific individuals and groups understand one another and work with each
other. According to Epstein’s work on the overlapping spheres of influence, as communication and collaboration is increased between groups, it will result in positive outcomes for students.

**Applying theory to the study.** The urban school under study consists mainly of Hispanic and Black students. Moreover, the dropout rate is consistently higher at this school compared to their schools that are predominately White. Parental involvement is drastically low. Therefore, both the Epstein model and Bronfenbrenner’s theory are useful to frame this study. The models provide a clear understanding of the different types of parental involvement and the reasons behind why parents become involved.
Chapter II: Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the scholarly and policy research regarding parental involvement in children’s education. In this literature review, the information is organized in a way that analyzes key components of parental involvement. The first section analyzes the historical trajectory of parental involvement in policy and in practice in the United States. The second section defines parental involvement. The third section explores the opportunities and challenges for parental involvement in home and at school. The fourth section evaluates African American and Latino parental involvement. The fifth section explores the current ways in which schools attempt to enhance parental involvement inside and outside of school. Together, these threads combine to provide an understanding of the problem historically, the value of parental involvement, and the obstacles to it to identify effective mechanisms through which parental involvement can increase and have a positive effect on children’s academic and social success.

History of Parental Involvement in Schools

Historically, parental involvement has been characterized by a struggle between parents and the government – what one scholar has described as “tumultuous and adversarial interactions throughout the history of education” (Robinson, 2008, p. 37). Parents and schools have been involved in an iterative process that has determined the degree to which the locus of control of education rested in the home (domestic sphere) or the school (public sphere) – or a combination of both. There has been a back and forth dynamic between the government and parents regarding both understandings and practice of how to involve parents in school (Cutler, 2000; Lawrence- Lightfoot, 2003). Since education began to move from largely a rural home-based activity predominately linked to the church, and to honing literacy skills to read the Bible during
the 16th and early 17th centuries, the evolution of formalized education and parental involvement in it has been complex, with families, states and communities at different times having varying levels of authority over schools and educational policies (Cutler, 2000; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; Pulliam & Van Patten, 2003).

This section addresses highlights of the evolution of the changes that have taken placed from home based education to widespread public education, including the move towards taxation and funding schools, and the formation and role of parent’s movements and organizations in school life and governance. It traces the advent of the concept of parental involvement in the early 1900s after the establishment in 1897 of the National Congress of Mothers (NCM), the precursor to the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) which became the “conscience of the country for children and youth issues” by establishing programs for legislation that improved the children’s lives” (Woyshner, 1999).

The degree to which the public education system or the family has been the dominant actor over time – at the community, state and national levels – has varied remarkably, from parents having full control, to, as Spring (1994, as cited in Stitt, 2013), noted, to a push to strongly isolate the child from parental influences. One of these periods was the Industrial Revolution in America (roughly 1820-1870), when urbanization, immigration, and the growth of the demand for labor – as well as the growth in the political clout of the working classes – transformed the dynamics of home life and home schooling (Stitt, 2013). Previously, as noted above, parents were largely responsible for providing for the education of their children. During that period, children learned a variety of educational concepts that focused on how the church operated and how to maintain a household; literacy and math lessons were also given priority. However, as Gaither (2008) observed, during that period, parents were also responsible for
teaching social skills such as manners and values, as well as practical vocational skills. As Epstein (2011) noted, often, these values overlapped with the public school agenda later implemented (p. 28). When laborers moved into a more than full-time, extended work day in industry and trades, significantly during the period between 1848 and 1855, the role in education that parents previously commanded slowly shifted to public education, with more and more learning occurring in the school environment. At the time, factory fathers actually organized to advocate for taxes to bring “equal educational experiences for their children” in relation to middle and elitist classes (Robinson, 2008, p. 38). During the industrial revolution, the concept of taxation grew in response to the working men’s societies that were created by factory employees. The working class, newly empowered, wanted equal educational experiences for their children (Robinson, 2008, p. 52). In short, parents were requesting a merging of community and parental responsibility for education.

During this era, parental and church authority over governance issues like hiring and firing the teachers, determining the school calendar, or defining the curriculum lessened progressively. While this solved some problems for working parents who were adjusting to a new homeland culture after immigration, some parents strongly resisted surrendering control of their children’s education to professionals (DeMartines, 1992). Immigrant parents were particularly isolated from involvement in the educational lives of their children due to stark language and cultural barriers, many of which persist today. As DeMartines (1992) stated, “The force of immigration lessened parent involvement; differences in language culture, and educational status separated parents from the teachers of the public schools” (p. 40).

Further deepening this isolation, it is important to note that increasingly boards of education were centralized and comprised of upper-middle class professionals and business
people (DeMartines, 1992) who may not have understood fully the challenges working class parents faced in negotiating their involvement in their children’s education. In short, culturally and across class boundaries – similar to the realities facing parents of students of color today – the barriers and opportunities for parents to become involved are diverse and complex. Reese and Rury (2008) noted that, similar to urban union developments, in rural areas, the shift to public schools was also fueled by union protests around the use of child labor in large farming communities. As Watson, Sanders-Lawson, and McNeal (2012) describe, parents in these areas, particularly first generation immigrants, “were viewed as low-skilled, uneducated and unable to properly educate their children in these large farming communities” (p. 42).

The combination of the strong perception that parents were uneducated and incapable of providing children with proper instruction, and the fact that labor laws meant fewer children were occupied on farms or in factories, as well as working class support for public funding and support of schools, further promoted government intervention in and formalized education (Hiatt, 1994). As formalized education gained ground, the role of parental responsibility and involvement continued to decline, and the school became the main provider of education and socialization. As DeMartines (1992) observed:

The late nineteenth century saw diminishing parent involvement in American public schools as professionalism and the growing bureaucratic structure of schools separated the parents from the education of their children. Teachers assumed their role as experts and did not encourage parent involvement within the school. (p. 65)

This shift, however, was rife with tensions. As Epstein (2011) indicated, teachers began to teach subjects that were not familiar to parents, using methods and approaches to learning that were not part of the parents’ experiences (p. 28). Parental discontent over this loss of control of their
children’s education led many to organize; as a result, in 1897, the NCM was formed to counter the detachment of parents from education (Watson et al., 2012). Education continued to develop and adapt to a changing environment where social justice and advocacy for impoverished groups was paramount. In response to an increase in class consciousness around equality and rights, a progressive educational movement ensued that embraced industrial training, agricultural and social education, and educational theorists' new instructional techniques (Boucher, 1998).

Foundational to this movement was the publication in 1916 of John Dewey’s Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education (Chambliss, 2003). This was used to help advance the ideas of the progressive education movement. However, the espoused philosophy of Dewey’s experimentalism and pragmatism in public education largely put the onus on government and society to be responsible for education; he did not specifically encourage parent involvement (DeMartines, 1992, p. 65). Parents, however, persisted in their goals to shape their children’s education and began to develop home school associations and other progenitor groups (Robinson, 2008, p. 41). As a result, in 1919, the Progressive Education Association was founded in order to reform American education. During this time, parent education exploded, and many more PTAs were developed.

This increase in parental involvement however, was short lived. The Great Depression of 1929 led to the U.S. economy crashing, and public education funding was decreased substantially. During this time, parental involvement diminished because people were out of work, which changed parental self-esteem and times were stressful for families. Parents encouraged their children to stay in school, but many focused on the family economic needs rather than parent involvement in the public schools. Many of these dynamics have been
replicated in the past decades in the United States for marginalized communities, as this study explores.

Returning to this era, while schools were built en masse during the Inter-War period in an effort to stabilize the economy, the Works Progress Administration meant that parents participated less in schools because they were holding jobs. Parent involvement had another setback when World War II began. The war meant that women, whose primary role was previously the homemaker, again had less time for community involvement. Women were directly taking on new roles as providers and workers in the war industries (Watson et al., 2012).

After World War II, with a post-war economic boom, parents began participating in school-based activities, such as parent-teacher conferences. There was more time for parental involvement: Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings and fundraising events prospered (Watson et al., 2012). However, as parents became involved, they increased their demands for schoolchildren, including movements for supporting social and economic equity. Brown v. Board of Education marked a pivotal set of demands and a radical return of parents to return to have community control and be involved in school governance. The U.S. Supreme Court mandated the desegregation of schools.

The significance of these developments was huge. As DeMartines (1992) stated, “This signaled schools and the community to communicate to engage parents in school decisions” (p. 122). The Civil Rights Movement began, which allowed government policy to evolve to tout parent involvement as a promising way to improve education for poor and disadvantaged children (Sass, 2016). As a result of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, parents made more demands on the schools and began to organize their strengths through special interest groups (DeMartines, 1992, p. 84). This resulted in various parent mandates and new models for parental involvement.
that focused on movements for community control of education—for example, greater integration of African American and Latino children.

Initiatives like these led to the creation, in 1965, of programs like Head Start which was created as part of the President Lyndon B. Johnson’s declaration of the “War on Poverty.” This program, which still exists today, reiterated the idea that parental involvement is directly related to academic success, particularly for socio-economically challenged students. It was a very powerful plan to unite children and parents in learning life skills and developing positive attitudes toward school (DeMartines, 1992).

In the same year, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was passed and provided funding to involve parents in improving education for low socioeconomic status children (Sass, 2016). As a result, families were motivated to better their opportunities through parent education and participation (DeMartines, 1992, p. 85). During the 1970s and 1980s, researchers (Beverly, 2009; Peterson, 1982) documented evidence that further documented the value of parental involvement. During this time, Henderson and Berla (1994) reported that 35 studies revealed that parental involvement had a positive effect on student performance in school. Henderson strengthened his studies by finding 18 additional studies that supported previous findings on the benefits.

In the 1980s, the economy forced families into financial distress, which increased the demand for families to have a dual-parent income with two working parents. Thus, there was less time for parents to support their children’s education and to be involved both in school and at home. Jeynes (2014) shows during the late 1980s there was a significant increase in divorce rate followed by a surge in working mothers. In short, different but historical and comparable trends affected the capacity of parents to become involved in their children’s education. During
that time, the federal government believed that parental involvement was crucial to student achievement and a federal mandate in 1988 required schools to create parental involvement programs. The mandate needed to be refined and strengthened in order to include school leaders in the mission to increase parent involvement. Beverly (2009) determined that schools began to restructure and focus on standards-based education that highlighted the importance of parent and community involvement in school improvement efforts. In short, for the purposes of this study the dynamic between the broader economic circumstances of families, and their capacity to have an impact on their children’s education, must be taken into account.

If we take this mission into the 1990s we must revisit President Clinton’s revisiting of tenets of the equality in education struggles of the 1960s, when he signed the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, which distributed $86.5 million dollars to schools in order to promote parental involvement particularly (Stitt, 2013). This act encouraged schools to promote partnerships between schools and parents in order to increase social, emotional and academic growth for children. This act was a legislative attempt to bridge “the spheres of home and school by developing partnerships between parents and teachers in an effort to increase academic achievement for students” (Stitt, 2013, p. 88). The Goals 2000 Act further specified exactly how parents could and should be involved in their children’s education. Watson and Bogotch (2015) state, that unfortunately, despite these new requirements and processes, many Black and Hispanic parents were depicted as uninvolved at best (Boutte & Johnson, 2014) and inept at worst (López, 2003). The ambitious act did not reach all goals by 2000 as intended.

This led to the creation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001. NCLB, with Clinton’s urging, intended to have a direct and comprehensive effect on how schools improved students’ academic performance in Grades K-12. NCLB included a set of mandates that required
schools to directly involve parents in the design and implementation of policies and programs. According to NCLB, the NCLB “requires that school districts and campuses notify parents about student progress, school report cards and AYP, school improvement where applicable, highly qualified staff, and annual meetings” (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, p. 1). Specifically, to receive and maintain funding through Title I, in relation to parental involvement, parents today must be part of developing the district’s written parental involvement policy; they are asked to attend an annual Title I meeting at the beginning of the school year to evaluate parental involvement programs (Stitt, 2013, p. 2). The overarching goal of these legislative initiatives and their implementation is, in part, to help parents understand school policies, grading policies and report cards. The NCLB Act evaluated parent involvement programs and determined appropriate measures that schools needed to put in place to increase parent involvement. This list included a written parental involvement plan, yearly parent meetings and active parental involvement programs (Stitt, 2013).

Reaching back into the establishment of the PTA, decades later, President Obama raised the issue of parental involvement in his 2011 State of the Union Speech. Obama stressed the importance of childrens’ education by stating that “the question is whether all of us — as citizens and as parents—are willing to do what’s necessary to give every child a chance to succeed. That responsibility begins not in our classrooms, but in our homes and communities” (Mapp, 2011, p. 2). This underscored nationally a shared responsibility among families, school staff and the community to support children’s learning and development. A substantial body of literature has examined this, which this chapter explores in the following sections.

**Definitions and Value of Parental Involvement**
Research has documented the clear benefit of parental involvement in children’s education, demonstrating that when parents actively and consistently provide academic support and participate in school life, children’s standardized test scores, grade-point averages and other academic outcomes markedly improve (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997; Blondal & Adalbjarnardottir, 2009; Epstein, 2010; South, Haynie, & Bose 2007). Parental involvement includes the participation of parents within school, their presence in students’ academic pursuits outside of school, and communication and engagement with school staff members. Alexander et al. (1997) argued that support and encouragement from parents has a positive impact on children’s learning. South et al. (2007) suggested that comprehensive parental involvement includes social, emotional and financial support. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) determined that parental involvement contributes to the child’s sense of efficacy for doing well in school.

There are four basic components defining parental efficacy: self-image, locus of control, developmental status and interpersonal support (Swick, 1988). Parents’ level of self-image is derived and constructed from their sense of being parents from childhood to adulthood. The locus of control focuses on parent’s ability to carry out actions that maximizes benefits. Developmental status is based on how parents construct and refine their images in relation to different levels of child rearing. Lastly, interpersonal support also encompasses the encouragement and direct assistance coming from neighbors, relatives, teachers and church members. Fan (2001) additionally stressed the importance of parental aspiration as a driving force behind children’s academic success.

Opportunities and Challenges for Parental Involvement at Home
According to Bronfenbrenner (2005), the microsystem describes the immediate settings that contain a developing person. Bieschke (2013) stated, “The Microsystems for parent involvement would occur at school and at home to include any action by the parent to support the education of the child” (p. 19). Different actions taken by the parent to support a child’s education constitute acceptable parental involvement (Fan, 2001). A study by Deslandes and Bertrand (2005) provided research that examined parents’ actions in the school and in the home separately because of the difference in generalized findings. Bieschke (2013) stated, “Included within home involvement practices are actions of parents to supervise school work and actions of parents that include more motivational factors such as discussions about achievement expectations, the value of an education, planning for post-secondary education, or making connections of current classroom learning to areas in the parents’ life” (p. 20).

Parental involvement at home can take on a variety of meanings for parents. Bieschke (2013) indicated that for some parents, involvement at home is more supervisory with rules regarding doing homework at given times, checking homework completion, limited internet or television time, or knowing where a child is after school. Other parents, Bieschke (2013) noted, seek to provide more learning opportunities outside of school by taking children on educational excursions, for example, to museums. Some parents communicate with their children at home about educational goals, values, and the need to pursue higher education or career training. According to Hill and Tyson (2009), home based activities include checking on homework, requiring a child to do homework, homework help, going to museums/exhibitions/library, encouragement of reading, and talking to students about current events. More recently, academic socialization has gained momentum in research when it is correlated to academic achievement. Academic socialization is also described as parent/child discussions about educational topics and
has been shown to produce favorable results toward academic achievement (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Sheldon, 2007). This creates an opportunity for parents to set goals with a child, talk about career aspirations, model the importance of education; and help choose courses; research has also shown that students respond well when parents know the names of teachers and peers and when they discuss children’s academic progress in school. Zellman and Waterman (1998, as cited in Bieschke, 2013), asserted that that parent involvement programs initiated by schools may not be increasing academic achievement as much as was intended and suggest further development of academic socialization initiatives.

Bieschke (2013) stated, “Research on barriers to parental involvement cites a multitude of reasons why parents either choose not to be involved or are unable to participate in the learning of their child” (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Desimone, 1999; Garcia-Coll et al., 2002; Gutman & Eccles, 1999). Home-based barriers parents face includes financial status, inflexible work schedules, race, spoken language, cultural beliefs, style of parenting, parent efficacy, parent education, and parents perceived invitation by the school. Poverty affects parents by limiting material resources for children, and it also creates distress at home (Gutman & Eccles, 1999). Parents are not able to be as supportive, involved or consistent when in financial distress. Furthermore, parents who work long hours or have irregular work days cannot readily assist their children with homework or daily routines. Discrimination is still a current issue in society and race plays a role in parental involvement at home. Ogbu (2003) found that that Black family home environments, as compared those White parents of a similar soci-economic status, are less likely to encourage the cognitive development of their children. This demonstrates the fact that Black families in America have been denied access to equal opportunities to achieve success.
However, a study by Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) determined that Black’s reported more home discussion as compared to their White counterparts.

Many parents who immigrate to the United States may be experiencing cultural dissonance and acculturation. Many immigrant parents may not have had extensive formal education and are thus relatively unfamiliar with school routines and procedures. When parents do not understand the English language, it limits their ability to understand school rules and policies. In addition, minority parents may come from many different countries. This creates a cultural clash that parents struggle with. Adamski, Fraser, and Peiro (2013) found this to be true for Hispanic and Latino families, who, because of cultural norms, may perceive approaching teachers or school officials as disrespectful. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) determined that when parents think parental involvement is not valued by teachers or schools they are also less likely to become involved. Eccles and Harold (1993) supported this assertion, finding that parents often perceive secondary schools as bureaucratic organizations that are not welcoming. This is one explanation for the difference in the higher levels of parental involvement in primary schools compared to secondary schools.

In order to understand the barriers, Bieschke (2013) asserted that the macrosystem needs to be further examined. Bieschke (2013), summarizing Desimone (1999), Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, and Fraleigh (1987), Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, and Darling (1992), stated, “Ethnicity and parent involvement has produced both positive and negative results which calls for further examination of the macrosystem variables that influence behaviors to support educational progress for children (p. 27). Depending on ethnicity, education may be considered under the school’s domain, while lineage and culture are under the family domain. Parents may
be uninvolved in their children’s education if they believe that it is the schools responsibility to educate the child.

Garcia-Coll et al. (2002) determined that parental involvement decreases when a child enters middle or high school from elementary grade levels. Parents may feel like they need to build autonomy in the child, or there may be increases in the number of teachers a child is taught by. The size of middle and high schools may intimidate parents (Garcia-Coll et al., 2002).

Levels of parental involvement are also determined by how parents perceive their role as a parent. Deslandes and Bertrand (2005) stated, “If a parent views their role as having responsibility for the education of their child they will be more involved at school and at home.” Bieschke (2013) indicated that barriers exist for parents with low self-efficacy because they feel that they are not capable of helping their child achieve better results academically. Bandura (1993) defines self-efficacy as the “perceived ability of an individual to act in a way that will produce a given result.” Parents with low self-efficacy may have experienced problems in school when they were young; therefore, they may not feel confident teaching their children complex academic content. Grodnick et al. (1997) linked the positive experiences by parents to help their child as a predictor of parent involvement practices at home and school. DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane (2007) found that parental involvement is higher for parents who have a higher education level because they are more confident that they can effectively give their child academic support. On the other hand, less educated parents are often not involved to a significant degree in a child’s education because they feel they are inadequately prepared to help their child academically.

Time constraints – either due to inflexibility with work or family obligations such as caring for extended family or younger children – are a primary barrier to consistent parental
involvement (Garcia-Coll et al., 2002). These obstacles are particularly strong for low-income and single head of household parents. Parental involvement was found to decrease when extended family or child care obligations are considerable (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

**Opportunities and Challenges for Parental Involvement at School**

Schools provide a variety of ways for parents to be involved in children’s education including attending conferences, volunteering at school, attending open houses, going on field trips, and helping out at school (Desimone, 1999; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Keith, Keith, Troutman, & Bickley, 1993; Steinberg et al., 1992). Parental involvement at school differs between elementary school and middle/high school. Parental involvement in elementary school is often educationally directed. In middle and high school, parental involvement commonly results in the participation in school meetings or attendance at activities. Epstein (1990, 2001) determined that communication levels between teachers and home are more frequent when children are in elementary school. Increasing communication between teachers and parents results in lower absenteeism and fewer behavioral problems (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Bieschke (2013) discussed the importance of effective communication between parents and teachers as a factor that can significantly reduce absenteeism and behavioral problems:

…communication facilitated a positive relationship that Bronfenbrenner (2005) claimed was essential for the developing student and had to be based on mutual respect and trust. One factor that may influence the decreased communication at the secondary level may be the low levels of communication that exist on a consistent basis with middle and high school parents. (p. 20)

Communication is essential between parents and schools because parents need to be informed of the content being taught and the expectations placed on students in the classroom. At the
elementary level, parents are more likely to be involved because they understand the content of subjects more proficiently. However, the content at the middle and high school level is more challenging. Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) determined that parents involved in school activities and who communicate with teachers were more capable of participating in diagnosing problems with the child and finding quick solutions, compared to noninvolved parents.

Bieschke (2013) stated that challenges to parental involvement at school included “negative perceptions of parents by teachers, poor school district parent involvement plans, poor communication methods by the school, and work conflicts with times that parent meetings and events are scheduled” (p. 27). Parental role construction represents the role activity for the involvement that incorporates parents’ beliefs about what they should do in respect to their children’s education (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007, p. 532). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) determined that the role of parents and the degree to which they become involved in students learning at school, as well as their understandings of expectations for involvement, may evolve overtime through interactions with school personnel and parent peer social groups. Parental involvement may increase or decrease based on the quality of interactions with the school, with fewer interactions linked to less involvement. However, regardless of interactions or implicit social pressure, if parents do not believe that they can help their child, if their own self-efficacy is weak, then these parents are unlikely to get involved at school or home (Green et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Many parents do not feel connected to the school environment and need invitations to spur their involvement in the child’s education process (Bieschke, 2013, p. 29). Bieschke (2013) noted the importance of parents’ perceptions of being welcomed into the school environment:
How parents perceive invitations from the school, the teacher, or their child has a direct impact on their willingness to get involved Green et al. (2007). Invitations by the school (Christenson, 2003), by teachers (Epstein, 1986), and the child (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005) all show positive correlations to increased parent involvement when performed in a positive and genuine manner. Epstein (2001) found evidence to support that school related issues, such as a lack of communication between teachers and parents, influence parent involvement. (p. 30)

The studies mentioned above present evidence that ethnographic factors, such as limited English ability, communication from school in home language and the need to work many hours combine, particularly in certain ethnic groups, to limit parental involvement in school (Garcia-Coll et al., 2002). School personnel need to find ways to increase parental involvement for diverse student populations.

**African American and Latino Parental Involvement**

The next section this literature review will address the particular circumstances and factors that impede or encourage parents of African-American and Latino families to become involved in their children’s education both at home and in the school setting. As outlined in Chapter 1, this study takes into account the fact that encouraging parental involvement is complex for parents of any race, ethnicity or economic circumstance. However, addressing the literature that directly addresses issues facing the communities involved in this study is useful and appropriate.

**African American parents and educational involvement.** According to Beverly (2009), current literature on African-American parents does not shed significant light on the ways African-American parents as a whole – fathers and mothers alike --facilitate the academic
and school success of their children. Much of the literature focuses on single-mother headed households; data obtained from fathers is scant (Kuykendall, 2012). A study by Trotman (2001) and Davies (1988) determined that teachers believe that African American parents are disengaged from school and are hard to reach. As a result, teachers made the erroneous conclusion that parents do not care about their children’s education. However, this may not be the case and there are multiple reasons that contribute to uninvolved parents. In the studies previewed, most African American families are living low-income levels, a barrier construct to parental involvement that has been described above. When more in-depth studies compared parental involvement between White parents and African American parents (Nardine & Morris, 1991), these studies determined that parents of African-American children were generally not as involved as White parents due to inflexible job hours and a lack of interest (Beverly, 2009). Contrary to popular belief, African American parents want to become involved, but may not be able to do so (Trotman, 2001).

A qualitative study by Williams and Chavkin (1984) analyzed the beliefs and attitudes that African American parents held about their own involvement in their children’s education. The study determined that parents were hesitant to become involved because they believed teachers were responsible for getting parents involved in school. Economic demands to support their families by providing food, clothing, and shelter for their children further excluded African American parents from having the time to be involved in school. However, Baker (2005) found that African-American parents supported education for their children; they considered it a key component for their youth to get ahead in society. In all cases, African American parents are concerned for their children’s education and want to actively participate (Desimone, 1999;
Baker, 2005); however, the barriers described above often intensively inhibit them from doing so. Regardless of the barriers, parents can still be involved at both at home and in school.

Waggoner and Griffith (1998) analyzed the different ways African American parents were involved in their children’s education (both inside and outside of school). The ways parents took on an active role include helping with homework, teaching a particular subject, organizing class parties, going the PTA, assisting teachers in the classroom and working one-on-one with children. In short, the ways African American parents are involved in their children’s education, when they have the capacity to do so, is very similar to the ways White parents are involved in their children’s education.

Similar to more generalized studies, research specific to the African-American communities determined that parental involvement decreases when their level of education is poor (Craig et al., 2004; Fullan, 2001; Gomez & Greenough, 2002). According to Abdul-Adil et al. (2006, as cited in Beverly, 2009), “African-American parents’ level of education has a profound impact on their children’s overall capacity to learn” (p. 39). Many parents are aware of this disparity in education between themselves and school personnel, so they choose to stay away. Consequently, it is difficult to build relationships and educational partnerships with schools.

Historical analyses of access to schooling, often segregated by race and class, are important to this analysis. Historically, White parents had greater access to schools and school involvement compared to African American parents (McGrath & Kuriloff, 1999). Peterson (1982) claimed that White parents had a different capacity to make parental involvement a central part of their lives. White parents also perceived involvement as a social interaction that differed from the perceptions of school involvement by their African—American counterparts.
For example, Peterson (1982) found that White parents turned to schools for social support through the PTA, while African American mothers received support for education from extended family, churches and neighborhoods. Examining these cultural differences regarding parental involvement is a key component of this study.

Beverly, for example, found that cultural differences remained at the forefront for the main reason why African American parents hesitated to be involved more directly in their children’s education. Julian, McKenry, and McKelvey (1994) indicate that cultural characteristics of African American families include respect for authoritative figures, strong work ethic, a sense of duty or obligation to kin and a strong religious orientation. In terms of respect for authoritative figures, parents may not be involved in education due to their respect for teachers and school personnel. They understand that teachers are professionals and may not want to intrude in their professional lives. A strong work ethic indicates that parents may work long hours and want to set a good example for their child. In regards to the obligation to kin, African American parents may spend time with their family in different ways, instead of focusing on the child’s schooling. A strong religious orientation denotes the parent’s and child’s obligation to go to church or other religious dwelling, which hinders their ability to attend to school matters. Beverly (2009) noted that school systems are not adapting to the cultures of these communities in a way that allows for channels of engagement. Beverly (2009) concludes:

For example, family structure and lifestyles, job/work schedules and educational levels are viewed as beyond the scope of public education, if schools are going to establish partnerships with African-American families, they must learn skills that support connecting with these families. Educators need to have some understanding of the needs and concerns of these families. (p. 40)
Defining cultural difference is complex. Cultural differences are often overlooked from the school’s vantage point when evaluating parental involvement. As this section has outlined, African American parental involvement typically occurs at home and in school. Similar to African American parents, Latino families face similar circumstances that either inhibits or prohibits their involvement.

**Latino Parental Involvement**

Studies by Olivos (2004) and Tinkler (2002) demonstrate that Latino parents are less involved in schools compared to non-Latino parents. This viewpoint is similar to the parental involvement perception of African American parents (Julian et al., 1994). According to Hill and Torres (2010), Latino students rank at the bottom of the achievement scale and the Department of Commerce recorded the highest dropout rates amongst this group. Lawrence (2013) notes a cultural clash between United States schools and the expectations of Latino parents through which Latino parents expected their children to assist, respect and support their families. Children have an obligation to assist their families with chores at home or watch their siblings if their parents are away. The responsibility in their homes may more important than their school obligations. Moreover, Latino parents’ expectations include that their children will achieve higher socio-economic status than they themselves have achieved (Lawrence, 2013, p. 115). This brings this study back to the barrier addressing self-efficacy among parents. Latino parents may come to the United States with high hope, for their children to succeed; however, because they might be undereducated, role ambiguity exists regarding how they should participate. This may contribute to or be exacerbated by different ideas Latino parents may have about the extent to which a parent should challenge authority of the teacher. Some Latino parents come to the United States as professionals, but the majority are unskilled and semiskilled workers (Portes &
Rumbaut, 2006). As this study has previously observed, Carranza, You, Chhuon, & Hudley (2009) determined that the educational background of parents was linked to parental involvement. Thus, in the case of Latino parents, lower educational background and thus a lower level of self-efficacy for parents may be yielding lower parental involvement. However, key to note Zarate (2009) indicates that the parental education variable is complex and may provide more opportunities to parents because they are committed to having their child succeed.

Language barriers also weigh against the effectiveness of Latino parental involvement. This is compounded by a lack of understanding of school expectations, long working hours, and different value systems (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Hughes, Valle-Riestra, & Arguelles, 2002; Kuperminc, Darnell, & Alvare-Jimenez, 2008). The scholars identified value systems that include familismo, respeto, simpatia, and personalismo (Lawrence, 2013, p. 37). Familismo represents the Latino attitudes, beliefs and values that encompasses parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents and godparents. Respecto represents the respect for authority of parents, older family members and the expectations for politeness, obedience and deference to elders (Lawrence, 2013, p. 37). Simpatia denotes pleasantness and congeniality and refers to the behaviors and actions that promote healthy relationships and behaviors. Personalismo encompasses personal character and inner qualities that establishes social relationships. It is clear that the defined culture is a learned process that is shared amongst the Latino population. Thus, when Latino children and parents are placed in American schools, their value systems may not align. Snyder-Hogan (2010) indicates that there are few studies that focus on Latino cultural factors, but there are even fewer studies that focus on home-based strategies that promote achievement or education aspirations among Latino families (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Garcia-Coll et al, 2002).
Delgado-Gaitan (1992) analyzed six different Mexican-American families through qualitative methods and determined that parents were actively involved in their children’s educational development in the home learning environment. Parents share a great deal with their children surrounding the areas of aspirations, motivations, physical resources, which encompass the total learning environment. Parents were involved at home by providing discipline, allocating homework time and enforcing bed time. By completing these tasks, Latino parents were doing their best to assist their child in school. In this study, the parents understood their “lack of educational opportunities” and used it to “motivate” their children by socializing them to the concept of education and its importance to their lives. (p. 512). These parents told their children to be well-educated in the academic realm and emphasized the importance of respect and cooperation. The theme that arises is the continual persistence for Latino parents to inform their children that education matters.

Snyder-Hogan (2010) suggested that Latino parents “provide social and emotional support for the learning process” (p. 29). At home, parents helped with homework and discussed school matters with their children. Building relationships with their children at home is extremely important for Latino parents. Support at home was often constricted by academic tasks that parents were confused by. This is attributed to the lack of formal education that many Latino parents share. A lack of formal education for parents led to parental confusion about homework and contacting the school. In addition to limited formal education, parents faced a language barrier. Communication about school assignments with their children was difficult for Latino parents. Latino parents misunderstanding homework assignments and they could not help their child in that respect. Garcia-Coll et al. (2002) conducted a quantitative study of 101 low-income Dominican parents regarding parental involvement and determined that there are higher
levels of parental involvement with a greater comfort of the English language. Language plays an important role at home and at school.

In terms of the school participation, Latino parents reported “language barriers, confusion about school events, and a desire for increased contact with teachers” (p. 30). The study demonstrated that although parents may want to be involved, there was a lack of interpreters and inconvenient meeting times for parents. In this aspect, parents felt abandoned and helpless. Yet, language is not the only barrier that parents face in school. In other studies, school-based barriers included language barriers, low acculturation and long working hours (Durand, 2011; Garcia-Coll et al. 2002). In terms of acculturation, Latino parents may give schools the ultimate authority and responsibility to educate their child. Impeding on their progress is deemed as disrespectful. Thus, parents take on a passive role and let teachers independently educate their child. In this aspect, Latino parents may feel disconnected. However, Latino parents have high expectations for their children and are often disappointed with the academic results of their children. There is clear disconnect between Latino families and schools. In the eyes of Latino parents, they may feel that they are doing everything in their power to become involved. Yet, schools do not see this happening because of their unresponsiveness to the personal lives of Latino families. An important first step is for schools to recognize the socioeconomic and cultural differences amongst Latino families.

Research has identified many barriers to the desire for Latino parents to negotiate involvement in their children’s education and the structures or opportunities that actually lend them some space to become involved more deeply, given their socio-economic and cultural realities. Snyder-Hogan (2010, p. 31) emphasized: “Latino parents consistently express the desire to be involved in school and communicate effectively with teachers” (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992,
Hughes et al., 2002; Ramirez, 2003). How Latino and African-American parents can fulfill this role, given this barrage of challenges is precisely the focus of this study.

**Recommendations to Increase Parental Involvement**

Educational systems operate across four general levels -- the federal government, the local education authority (districts), the specific school, and the teacher. In order to produce long lasting, effective parental involvement, action must be taken at each level. Moreover, current parental involvement programs at a school site need to be evaluated and compared to others that have failed, stalled or succeeded. Karther and Lowden (1997) argued that schools need to reconsider past assumptions and practices in order to increase parental involvement. At the federal level, a national policy needs to be developed that clearly identifies the expectations from the government and state officials, school district, school leaders, teachers and parents. In return, the federal government must provide the necessary resources to support effective parental involvement programs (Sampson, 2003).

The local educational authority needs to develop clear policies for involving parents in their local schools in part to comply with funding requirements like Title 1 and NCLB (McDonnell, 2005). Parents need to be informed on a consistent basis about the policies, procedures, and compliance requirements that have been implemented to increase parental involvement. Policies need to be reexamined to include parameters establishing parent councils, accessibility for parent-teacher conferences, and home-school communication (Zarate, 2007). To achieve this task, it is important to work with parents at the beginning of each school year to clearly define expectations (Sheldon, 2007). Zarate (2007) emphasized the need for measurable objects and goals for increasing parental involvement in schools. Schools need to motivate and make incentives for parents to become involvement. Professional development sessions for
teachers and staff are necessary to share best practices for involving parents. In sum, schools need to evaluate their interactions and activities with parents to ensure that they are implementing the best strategies to increase involvement. According to Smith (2006), schools need to define parental involvement and welcome parents, seeks the input of local agencies and understand the community the schools serves and offer services to parents to bring them into the school.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has summarized the historical tensions that exist between parents and the government stemming from the 16th century. Overall, the relationship has been complex in both understanding and practice of how to involve parents in school. It is a shared responsibility amongst families, school staff and the community to support children’s education. Multiple studies have documented clear evidence that support the notion that parental involvement benefits children’s education (Alexander et al., 1997; Blondal & Adalbjarnardottir, 2009; Epstein, 2010; South et al., 2007). However, opportunities and challenges persist in the home and school environments that either encourage or deter parental involvement. It is particularly important to understand urban communities in respect to African American and Latino families. These families have been limited historically due to stark language and cultural barriers, many of which persist today. African American and Latino families want to be involved in their children’s education and their high aspirations for their children’s success is clear. In order to produce long last parental involvement, action must be taken on the federal, local, school and teacher levels. By understanding parental involvement as a collaborative endeavor, positive changes can be implemented by schools to enhance parental involvement programs.
Chapter III: Methodology

The purpose of this research study was to understand how parents are involved in an urban school environment by analyzing the interactive process between home and school. The research was a qualitative case study. A qualitative approach is inductive and utilized when the researcher seeks to inquire, explain or learn about an issue or problem (Ravitch & Riggon, 2012, pp. 43-44; Creswell, 2012, pp. 93-94). Moreover, this approach helped the researcher to “discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and world views of the people involved” (Merriam, 1998, p. 11). Using Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model, the protocol of the study was guided by the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of parents, teachers and administrative officials regarding parental involvement in the academic success of children in a majority African American and Hispanic urban public school?

2. What factors prevent and promote parental involvement in students’ academic success and the school in this context?

In this section, the research purpose and questions were restated in order to demonstrate their connectedness to the methodology, design and tradition. In addition, this chapter described the prospective participants in the study, recruitment methods, interview locations, data collection process, data storage methods, and analysis procedures. Finally, it addressed ways to increase trustworthiness, ways to protect human subjects and the potential limitations of this study.

Research Methodology

Creswell (2013) suggested that qualitative research examines multiple layers of an existing problem. The researcher played a critical role in the data collection process by analyzing data through pictures and words. The data was analyzed for trends as well as the
participant’s meaning (Maxwell, 2005). The first step of this study was to identify the parents at a specific high school and the type of qualitative approach that best fits the aforementioned problem. For the purposes of this study, the high school was assigned the pseudonym St. Pierre High School. A case study was determined to be the best fit after understanding the intended outcome of the study. Creswell (2013) identified a case study as “an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or case over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involvement multiple sources” (p. 97). Yin (2003) elaborated on this notion by iterating the fact that data comes from multiple sources of evidence. Evidence was collected through surveys and face-to-face interviews. Surveys in a case study can be created as either formal or informal assessments if necessary. While these sources of evidence provided quantitative data, it would not be analyzed as an actual measure for research. Thus, these served as only one part of a case study (Yin, 2003).

In pursuit of the case study, a survey was created that contained open and close-ended questions. Likert scale response items were employed. In addition, face-to-face interviews were employed to provide a deeper understanding of the problem of this study. The multiple sources of data collection sought to determine the participants’ understanding of the problem in a natural setting by creating a larger picture of the issue of parental involvement at St. Pierre High School.

This study followed Creswell’s (2013) four reasons for employing qualitative research.

1. To answer research questions that begin with how and why.
2. To recognize a topic that needs to be examined.
3. To present a detailed view in order to present a problem.
4. To study subjects in their natural settings.
The study sought to examine the issue of parental involvement at St. Pierre High School, a high poverty, urban high school. When examining the parental involvement problem, the study’s main focus was on how St. Pierre can increase parental involvement. This study examined the specific factors that led parents to either become involved or not. Through a qualitative approach, the survey and face-to-face interviews focused on three aspects that Maxwell (2005) denoted in his research.

- The influences of context on those events
- The influences of context on those events
- The process by which the events occurred

Creswell’s four main reasons to conduct qualitative research were deemed to be the most logical approach for the problem of practice for this particular study.

**Case Study**

According to Yin (2009) a case study has the ability to answer the how or why questions. In a qualitative case study, researchers answered their posited questions through interviews and then linked the data to determine emerging themes. Researchers were able to determine factors affecting a group of persons through descriptive case studies. This qualitative case study determined the relationships between schools and parents. Since the purpose of this study was to explore parents’ ideologies regarding parental involvement, a descriptive, qualitative case study format was appropriate. A general consensus existed that research design and tradition should be based on “fitness of purpose” (Briggs & Coleman, 2007, p.8). This case study allowed the researcher to explore organizations in the context of the real world. In addition, specific phenomena were explored within the organizational context.
Given the purpose of this study, a qualitative case study allowed the researcher to “(a) explore effectively the in-depth meanings and structures of the participants’ attitudes and practices, (b) make a connection between the research objective and findings derived from the data, and (c) describe the most common themes that reflect teachers’ and parents’ ideologies of parent-teacher relationships in urban elementary schools” (Yin, 2003, as cited in Rached, 2015, pp. 60). According to Yin (2003) a qualitative case study uses inductive reasoning that produces general ideas. The research direction emanated during the data collection and analysis, rather than on a prior research plan (Yin, 2003). Since the research questions were all “how” and “why” type of questions, this type of research tradition was an excellent fit that is paired with the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm of inquiry (Butin, 2010; Yin, 2003).

**Context.** The school to be researched was located in an urban school district in New England. It was a Title 1, Low-Income high school. The school population was comprised of 42.9% African American and 49.7% Hispanic students (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016). Moreover, the school had been designated as a Level 4 school in Turnaround Status. Turnaround status implied that, because of poor performance on standardized tests, the state has placed stipulations on the school to increase student test scores. At this location, 25% of the students were labeled as English Language Learners (ELL) and 85% were labeled as “high needs,” which indicated that students need additional academic support to prevent dropping out of school. The dropout rate for the school was 6%. Graduation rates was extremely low at 65%, but after five years that percentage increased to 75% (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016).

**Participants.** The population included 8 African American and Latino parents, two administrators and a teacher in an urban high school. According to Creswell (2012), 10
participants represented an adequate size for interviews in a qualitative study. The reason that the researcher chose high school parents was because they have been through their children’s entire schooling. Teacher and administrators were interviewed to determine their views on parental involvement at the school and their experiences with parents. The teachers and administrators taught a high school class in which at least 40% of the students were from low socioeconomic backgrounds. They had participated in a school-family partnership program and showed a willingness to participate in the study. Teachers and administrators had minimum of five years teaching experience in urban high schools. Podsen (2002, as cited in Rached, 2015), contended that teachers who have taught for at least five years may be considered “teacher specialists” who have acquired the necessary skills to “seek more in-depth understanding of students and their learning needs” (p. 61).

The researcher needed to include teacher and administrator perspectives in order to triangulate the data. Of these participants, parents represented students in 12th grade. They were of minority family representation. The parents were also selected based on their willingness to be candid and offer insights into understanding parent-school relationships. In addition, parents were recruited who are actively involved in the school. Parents were recruited at the parent support group meetings after school hours at the school. The parents were available to participate in interviews throughout the study process. By selecting participants who represent the aforementioned criteria, the researcher hoped the data collected would be representative of a high school parent population and could be transferred to other school settings. These criteria also required participants to have experience with the case under investigation (Creswell, 2013).

**Recruitment and access.** The researcher recruited parents at the parent support group meetings. The researcher used a homogeneous sample to ensure that controls were
maintained. Letters were distributed to the parents at the parent support group meetings. The letter included information regarding the rights as participants throughout the research process. The letter was made available in Spanish. The participants received a five-dollar gift card to a coffee shop after their participation in the interview and questionnaires.

**Data Collection**

**Survey.** The survey was the first part of this case study. It was used to gather information about parents regarding demographics, participants’ perceptions of St. Pierre High School and its parental involvement problem. To collect all possible data, the questionnaire included open and close-ended questions as well as a Likert scale. In order to maintain a qualitative approach, the questions were structured to be qualitative in nature. The open-ended questions will allow participants to express their true feelings in a descriptive manner. The Likert scale will contain approximately 27 five-point scaled questions dealing with the perceptions of parental involvement. Survey items were created through a review of the literature. The researcher will use literature and knowledge of the population to design a survey that aligns with the objectives of the study. The survey was designed to be brief, which would not take longer than 10 minutes to complete. The survey was designed to be simple and succinct in order to increase parental participation. District and site administrators reviewed the survey in advance for input on wording and design. Appropriate revisions to the survey and protocol were made. The survey was entitled “Parental Involvement Survey Questionnaire.” The survey was comprised of 27 questions. This will also be made available in Spanish. Thirteen of the questions were fixed choice, Likert scaled items. The five choices available on these items were:

1. Strongly Agree
2. Agree
3. Neutral
4. Disagree
5. Strongly Disagree

On the other items, participants were given the option to choose the most appropriate answer for each question.

The survey was used to elicit information about the welcoming environment of the school – or lack thereof. This assisted the researcher to understand the parents’ perception of being valued and respected by the school. Questions 4-10 addressed communication between the school and the parent. These questions were used to determine how parents were contacted and approached by the school. In addition, these questions addressed how comfortable, confident and supported parents felt when communicating with the school. This section provided insight to the school’s definition of parental involvement. The final questions were used to understand the nature of support provided by the parent. This was used to assist the researcher in understanding parents’ definition of parental involvement.

The panel of experts piloted the survey. The panel consisted of 10 bilingual parents and parent advocates from the parent support group meetings. The parents of this panel were presented information regarding the scope of this study and copies of English and Spanish versions of the survey. This process allowed the researcher to ensure appropriate translation of the survey tool and to ensure the tool provides information needed to answer the research questions.

Surveys were distributed and collected by the researcher. Each survey was collected one week following the distribution by the school at the next parent support group meeting. The
researcher conducted follow-up phone calls for parents who express interest in completing an interview.

**Interviews.** Answers from the surveys served to guide interview questions. Interviews took place after the survey in order to gain a more in-depth understanding behind the survey response items. It also provided more clarification. In-person interviews with parents in this school provided parental perceptions of opportunities for and barriers to parental involvement for urban high schools. These interviews shed light on parental definitions, perceptions of parental involvement and opportunities for urban high schools. The researcher used survey responses to guide the development of interview questions. The survey responses provided focus on the perspectives of African American and Hispanic parents for individual parent interviews.

Interviews were conducted in person and recorded with the permission of the interviewee. Each interview session lasted approximately 45 to an hour minutes and was conducted at the participants’ home or neutral location with their permission. A set date and time was determined that best fits the parent’s schedule. A translator, trained in interview techniques and known by the researcher, assisted in interviewing Hispanic, non-English speaking parents. The researcher used member-checking to verify accuracy of the transcripts. Member checking was considered to be a valid method for verifying information observed or transcribed by the researcher (Merriam, 1998).

**Storage and Management**

The interview was uploaded to Google Drive, which was password secured. The interview recordings were destroyed after the analysis and final completion of the write-up. The interviewees were informed of this process before the interview began. The researcher sent them a copy of the transcription and recording within 24 hours of the interview.
Data Analysis

The qualitative case study methodology generated a wealth of raw data. The data was maintained in an organized manner (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003). According to Creswell (2012) and Saldaña (2009), there is no universal way to code qualitative data. Research findings emerged from the “frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data (Thomas, 2006, p. 238). This study adhered to Patton’s three step process for constructing case studies which are to assemble the raw case data, construct a case record, and write a final case study narrative.

The researcher used descriptive statistics to determine the perceptions of African American and Hispanic parents toward parental involvement and parental involvement opportunities at the child’s school from survey results. The descriptive statistics included percentages and both relative frequency distributions of survey responses. The researcher tracked non-responses to survey items.

In constructing a case record, the researcher compiled qualitative interview responses of parent interviews and presented the findings in a summary narrative. The interviews were used to validate analyst constructed typologies based on the researcher’s perceptions of survey data and to better understand parents’ expectations and needs related to parental involvement opportunities. The researcher used survey data and parent interviews to gain an overview of the types of parent involvement opportunities and engagement of parents. It was used to better understand the attributes of parent involved as defined by the school and parents. In this study, the interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded. The data from the transcribed interviews were examined and analyzed in Bourdieu’s (1973) Theory of Social and Cultural reproduction. All of the transcribed interviews were then be sent back to the interviewees for verification.
purpose. These were sent back for added trustworthiness to the results of the study (Creswell, 2012).

The data analysis took an inductive approach to coding and move from a descriptive coding pattern to a pattern using thematic reduction (Saldana, 2009). An individual profile was created for each participant by reviewing transcripts, notes and interview recordings. The interviews were analyzed and hand-coded using first cycle descriptive coding (Saldana, 2009). The data was categorized with single words and short phrases to create a basic organizational understanding of the study. The data was re-coded from the first cycle coding using a second-cycle coding that applied a pattern coding method through the matrix system in MAXQDA 11 software data analysis. The pattern coding procedure reduced the number of original codes to a fewer number of specific themes. Patton (1990) suggested that inductive analysis means the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed prior to data collection” (p. 390). Thus, the coding and recoding of data was an excellent procedure for this study. It helped the researcher make critical decisions about which categories were the most important and thematic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Reporting of Findings**

In order to write up this study, the researcher intended on providing a narrative account of the participants. The themes that were identified were put into various tables and diagrams. Once the final tables were constructed, the researcher intended on writing up each theme one by one. The themes needed to be described and supported with illustrative quotes from the interviews. The quotes from the participants were essential in order to enable the reader to assess the pertinence of the interpretations and the quotes retained the voice of the participant’s personal experience (Shinebourne, 2011). Writing up the themes served two functions:
1. It enabled the reader to assess the pertinence of the interpretations

2. It retained the voice of the participants’ personal experience and gives a chance to present the emic perspective (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Once the narrative account was completed, it was important to transition to a discussion section. This section related the themes to existing literature. The researcher also included personal reflections on the research as well as the implications of the study, limitations and future directions of research. In this study, there were no direct or indirect risks that impacted the participants. In fact, information gleaned from the interviews improved information to high school parents, students and schools. At the conclusion of the study, an executive summary was provided to Family Engagement Office within the school district.

**Trustworthiness, Quality and Verification**

In this particular study, it was extremely important to gain trust in a qualitative study. Four criteria were used to ensure the presence of trustworthiness in this case study. These criteria include credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. According to Creswell (2012), credibility refers to the act of establishing credible findings and interpretations. Merriam (1998) defines transferability as the “extent to which the finds of one study can be applied to other situations” (p. 39). Dependability refers to the ability of another researcher to carry out the same research study under the same conditions, with the same methods and participants and obtaining similar results. Creswell (2012) defines confirmability as the extent to which the study’s findings reflect the ideas of the informants rather than the perspectives and preferences of the researcher. A variety of strategies were used to increase trustworthiness of this study. Member checking, triangulation and interview techniques were used to account for credibility. Transferability was accounted for by using dense description and member checking.
Dependability was accounted for using triangulation and the code-recode procedure. Finally, confirmability was accounted for using triangulation. The participants needed to fully understand the intentions of the research and understand that any information they reveal was completely confidential. The researcher needed to explain the role as a researcher and describe the process that was used to choose the participants. The researcher intended on keeping the participants informed about the process.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

In this study, there were no direct or indirect risks that may impact the participants. All participants were assigned a number and a pseudonym. Participants had the choice of being interviewed or in other words their participation was voluntary. Participants also had the option of withdrawing from the research process at any given point. The participants received no direct benefit for participating. Yet, the information gained from the interviews improved information to high school parents, students and schools.

**IRB Approval**

The research study did not begin until the approval was received from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Northeastern University to conduct a study of human subjects. To obtain approval, the researcher submitted a detailed plan of the study, an example of the letter of informed consent, a plan to keep participants informed throughout the study and an outline of questions to be asked in the interviews and questionnaire. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), the research employs a conversational approach through interviews and provides the IRB with guiding questions and potential follow-up questions for the parents. In addition, the researcher denoted potential ethical issues in relation to the participants and explained the professional role throughout the research process. As a teacher at the particular school, the
parent participants may view the researcher as a source of authority and the participants may feel they need to alter their responses in order to “please” the researcher. The researcher reminded participants to be truthful in their answers and to ask questions at any time. Personal biases and experiences were accounted for in order to prevent them from shaping the participant experiences.

**Limitations**

This study was limited to one urban area in one urban school. Ideologies may have differed significantly across urban areas nationally. Another limitation was related to the interview process. The process could have been hindered by the poor negotiation of questions. The researcher’s bias could have influenced the process as well as time constraints, unexpected participant responses and the sensitivity of the research problem of the study (Shank, 2006). Issues also arise when parent participants feel intimidated to share their true feelings and do not answer questions truthfully. These issues may have impacted the findings of the study. It was important to keep an open dialogue with parents to explain that there are no right or wrong answers as a way to increase the confidence of the parent participants.

**Conclusion**

This research was reflective of my professional experiences, observations and passions in the education field. The methodology was guided by the literature review and theoretical framework in order to prevent biases. The researcher gained valuable information regarding parental involvement in an urban high school by acknowledging and planning for the complex role as a participant observer.
Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of parents, teachers and administrators regarding parental involvement in the academic success of children in a majority African American and Hispanic urban public school. Eight African American and Hispanic parents were selected to participate in this study based on their personal perspectives regarding parental involvement. The parents’ educational background ranged from incomplete high school diplomas to graduate level degrees. Parents were either employed or unemployed; many had stable middle class incomes, and others were dealing with the complexities of part time employment and unemployment. Surveys were distributed to parents and collected. In-depth interviews followed the surveys, which were recorded and transcribed. Parents provided insight into their parenting styles, beliefs, and experiences over the scope of each child’s life throughout high school.

A teacher also participated in the study, and the teacher had a minimum of five years teaching in an urban high school. Similarly, two administrators were selected for interviews to understand the broader dynamics of parental involvement. One administrator interviewed was the school’s parent liaison, and the other administrator was an assistant headmaster. Epstein’s (2010) parental involvement model guided the outline of emerging themes. After analyzing the data, themes emerged and were placed into three categories. Within these categories, there were subthemes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Participants understanding of parental involvement</td>
<td>1. Parents stressed the importance of communication at home and school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Building trust was essential in parental involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Parents experienced a positive school environment</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>4. Parents noted the importance of</td>
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actively involved parents

| 2. Challenges impacting parental involvement | 1. Parents faced time constraints and work commitments
| | 2. Technology use was difficult for parents
| | 3. Social and cultural background influenced family involvement
| | 4. Parents experienced a lack of communication and inconsistency within the school
| | 5. Parents had independence struggles for children

| 3. Strategies to promote parental involvement | 1. Schools took a variety of steps to involve parents
| | 2. Parents were involved in their children’s education at home and in school

**Characteristics of Participants**

For this study, eight parents, two administrators, and one teacher were interviewed. Each participant was given a pseudonym to protect their confidentiality.

**Rey.** Rey was a 42-year-old African American woman. At the time the study was conducted, Rey had a 19-year-old son attending St. Pierre High School. Rey grew up in Boston and had lived in Boston her entire life. In addition, Rey attended the same school district in Boston for all her education. At the time of this interview, she was currently working and had never been married. She had three sons and one daughter. Two of her sons and her daughter were approximately ten years older than her youngest son Matt. Matt attended St. Pierre High School and was a senior.

**Vivi.** Vivi was the second parent that was interviewed. Vivi was a 44-year-old Hispanic woman. Vivi was from Santo Domingo and came to the United States when she was 18 years old. She graduated high school in Santo Domingo and attempted to complete a college degree, but she did not finish due to work commitments. When this study was conducted, she was
unemployed and raising two children. Vivi had one son, Jason, and one daughter. Her son Jason was 18 years old and when this study was conducted, he was attending St. Pierre High School as a senior. Vivi was divorced when the interview was conducted, but she was supported by her mother who lived relatively close to her home in Boston. Her daughter was attending a different high school in Boston and was 14-years old.

**Dory.** The third parent interviewed was Dory. Dory was a 47-year-old Hispanic woman from the Dominican Republic. She had three sons, who all went to St. Pierre High School. Two of her sons, ages 24 and 19, graduated from St. Pierre High School. One of her sons, Javi, was a Junior at St. Pierre High School at the time Dory was interviewed in 2017. Dory came to the United States in 1990 and speaks English and Spanish. She lived in Boston since arriving to the United States. Vivi, when interviewed, was working a full-time job and was also a housekeeper. Vivi was divorced and was living in a house in Boston with her children. Vivi said she had completed high school and hoped to go back to college.

**Janice.** The fourth parent interviewed for this study was Janice, an African American woman who was 46 years old. She grew up in Jamaica and was married. She moved to Boston one year before the time this study was conducted, and had one son, John. John was in the 11th grade when this researcher interviewed his parents; he came to the United states with his parents. Janice worked full-time as a school secretary at an elementary school in Boston. Janice spoke English fluently, but was familiar with Jamaican Patois.

**Tasha.** The fifth parent interviewed was Tasha, a 57-year-old African American woman. She was married and had one son. Tasha grew up in Boston, went to Boston schools, and sent her child to Boston schools. Tasha had one son, who was a Senior at St. Pierre high school.
When interviewed, Tasha owned a business and was allowed the flexibility to set her own hours. She was living with her son and husband in Boston.

**Toni.** The sixth parent interviewed was Toni, a 46-year-old African American woman from Great Barrington, MA. She grew up with her two parents and moved to Boston when she had her son. Her son was in 12th grade and had always attended Boston Public Schools from elementary school through high school when this researcher interviewed her. He was a senior at St. Pierre high school. Toni had another daughter who was in 9th grade at a different high school in Boston. Toni was working full time at a health center down the street from the school.

**Mari.** The seventh parent interviewed was Mari. Mari was a 46-year-old Hispanic woman. She was from Guatemala. Mari came to the United States in 1997. Her husband came to the United States in 1994 from the same region. They had four daughters together. Three of the children returned to their home country after graduating high school, and one was attending high school at St. Pierre when this study was conducted. Her name was Corine and she was in 12th grade at St. Pierre High School. Both parents were working full-time. The husband was in construction, and Mari was working as a housekeeper. Both parents are fluent in Spanish and English.

**Ronaldo.** The final parent interviewed was Ronaldo, a 49-year-old Hispanic father. He had a son and a daughter, ages 18 and 14, respectively. He was married and was born in Mexico and spoke English and Spanish fluently Ronaldo was self-employed as an electrician, which allowed him the freedom to define his own hours. Ronaldo attended church with his wife and children each week, as devoted Christians. He completed his high school degree.

**Diane.** The teacher interviewed was Diane, a 62-year-old Caucasian woman involved in teaching and education for over 30 years. Diane was a divorced parent of two daughters who
attended Boston Public schools and both graduated college. Diane lived in Boston for over 30 years and was an English teacher at St. Pierre high school. She taught special education and was certified to teach at the high school level. Diane completed her Doctor of Education degree at Lesley University.

**Jackie.** The first administrator interviewed was Jackie, a 42-year-old African American woman who worked at St. Pierre's as a parent liaison. She had been an administrator for three years in Boston. Prior to coming to Boston, Jackie was a teacher and a counselor. At the time of the interview, she was living in Boston and working full-time in the school. Jackie worked directly with the Office of Engagement in Boston Public Schools.

**Brittany.** The second administrator interviewed was Brittany who was in her 14th year as an administrator. Straight out of college, she worked as a teacher and then started a non-profit organization. After leaving the non-profit organization, Brittany worked for a publishing company. She was currently the assistant headmaster and worked directly with the headmaster and executive director. Brittany was married and was a parent as well. She lived in Boston and attended Yale as an undergraduate student. She went on to complete her masters at Boston College.

**Defining Parental Involvement**

During the interviews, one of the first questions asked was, “How do you define parental involvement?” Parents, teachers and administrators had different definitions of parental involvement. The section below depicts the differences between each group of participants.

**Parents.** Throughout the interviews, parents were asked how they would define parental involvement. In many cases, parents expressed that they felt stressed bridging the home and school spheres by being actively engaged with their children’s education. Dory explained,
You know, they know they have to go to school, they know they have to learn, they have to study. But when they don't see parents involved in or calling teachers or seeing what's going on in school, it's like ‘what I doing’?

This consistency of engaged parents was important for the student to be successful. Vivi stated:

You have to be consistent. Calling them, texting them, going to school. You know what I used to do before? I used to show up at school. They used to get very mad. I used to show up with no notice.

Other parents stressed the importance of education and determined that their involvement was a huge part of their child’s education. They said that they wanted to direct their children towards valuing a strong educational trajectory, even beyond school into college, or to be adeptly prepared in vocational skills to enter the workforce. Parents stated that they wanted their children to understand that they were invested in their education, as Janice noted: “So parents being involved in an integral part of schooling. If a child knows that their parent was not interested and the parent doesn't care, they also do not care."

Tasha said she was extremely interested in her child’s education and that she cares deeply about her children. For her, building relationships was an essential component to parental involvement that led to better communication. Tasha explained:

… I think you should be involved with your children. I think you should have built a relationship with them and see what ... Let them know that you are concerned. Let them know that... it, it ... you are concerned about their grades and let them know that… they can do better… then if it's a low grade, always try to boost them up to get to the higher grade.

Parents consistently expressed that involvement means more than just helping with homework.
and checking in on it. They expressed that they felt they needed to be actively involved with the school, through activities such as attending open houses, calling teachers – thus bridging the gap between home and school. Toni stated:

Parental involvement…starts at home…in order to be involved, involvement was…it's, it's a lot because it's not just in one area. You have to become involved completely. So first thing was, like I said analyzing your kid. In order to, to completely be involved, you know you got to be able to relate. You have to be able to understand what they're going through, you have to process, because they won't, they're still little, they don't know how to fully communicate.

These definitions provided by the parents coincided with how teachers and administrators defined parental involvement.

**Teachers.** When a teacher was asked how she defined parental involvement, it was clear that showing up for events and open houses, supporting students in the residential setting with homework, were both important. Diane stated, “How would I define parental involvement? I would define parental involvement as being very supportive. Very supportive of ah, first of all being clear.” Being clear meant that the parent had certain expectations of their children and understood the different elements involved in their child’s education. Diane, an 11th grade teacher, stated:

Being clear where-being clear as to where you're sending the student. What-what-what goes on in that school? The parent would be supportive by doing his or her homework. Finding out you know what the school was like and just getting some important information about what the school was like.
In addition, teachers expressed that parents needed to read and seek out information about particular rules and regulations pertaining to parental involvement. They said that parents needed to understand their responsibilities and to be involved at home and in school. As Diane stated: “Getting that clear; reading, reading the handbook about the rules and the regulations. Uh attending-attending parent/teacher conferences, reading the report cards. Getting online -- we have an SIS system.”

**Administration.** The views from administrators were similar to those of the teachers. They basically expressed that parents need to be active participants in their children’s education. As Jackie, the parent liaison, stated:

> So, I'm a big proponent of parents, helping us, you know not enabling their children, and building that independence, you know being a support system but not so involved that you know, their enabling their child. But when we have a high-risk situation we really need the parents on board, and if they can't be on board for whatever reason, they need to help us identify a family member or an advocate that can step in

In summary, both parents and teachers struggled to create a balance in a space through which youth could negotiate defining who they are as individuals, an important process that adolescents go through. Creating a space and communication between home and the school, where adolescents could feel safe, was essential. Parents facilitated this process by developing relationships with their children as well as developing trust with the school. Administrators can support this process by checking grades and reaching out to the parents to facilitate an integrative process as youth move into adulthood: As Brittany, assistant headmaster, stated:

> My expectation for parent involvement was just that… we support these students, you know? ... or, or we find adults who can and help support these students You gotta pay
attention to the report cards and the progress reports. And if there was a problem, first talk to your son or daughter, but then if that's not, if you're not satisfied with what the direction was of that conversation, then you reach out to the school. So I think that parents, that's their role in most situations, I think with our high risk students, parents do need to take a more active role. You've got kids that are failing, and ... either they you know they've got learning issues that are getting in the way, or they've got attendance issues. That's where we need parents to take a front seat.

Overall, parental involvement encompassed home and school environments. It required parents to be engaged with their children by checking their grades, developing relationships, building trust, helping them with their homework, contacting the school and taking on an active role.

**Theme 1: Participants Understanding of Parental Involvement**

**Parents stressed the importance of communication at home and school.**

*At home.* After interviewing parents, teachers and administrators, the theme of the importance of communication emerged, and participants identified a variety of communication tools that connect parents to schools as well as parents to their children. When parents were involved with their children’s education at home, they used a variety of methods to communicate with their children, and asked how their day went or if they had homework. For example, Jim’s mother stated that, “I will ask for help when he needs it, but I, every day, every single day, he comes home "Do you have homework? Have you started it?" This type of communication was constantly present in homes. Ronaldo’s father not only asked about homework, but taught his children essential life skills. Ronaldo stated:

What was, what was work, what was help, what was serve. They don't know that. I'm teaching my kids all that, how to say thank you, how to say please, how to work, how to
behave, so you can gain stuff. It's one thing at a time. You have to work hard in order to get your first car. You can't expect that, you just graduated, you can have a brand-new car because your parents, they, they will give it to you because you need to go to work. Uh-uh. No. You work for it. You sacrifice yourself for it. Nothing was for free.

Parental teaching not only had to do with purchasing a car or learning to be respectful, but it also had to do with teaching social-emotional skills. As Toni related:

You know, I, I have conversations with them that I wish someone had with me. I communicate with them on how to control their feelings. How to control their buttons. That's what I call feelings, you know, your buttons, don't let anyone push your buttons and make you do something or react in a way that you don't want to. You know I have conversations with them about their credit. About saving money for the future, different things. My parents didn't tell me a damn thing about that and I wish they would've. (laughs)

Other parents said they were persistent in their communication with their children and that they pushed to have open dialogue with them. As Vivi stated, “Talking, asking them, ‘How was your day? What did you do today? What's going on?’ You know? Be nosy if you must be nosy. Go to school, go to the teachers, call.” It was clear that parents tried their best to communicate with their children and attempted to involve themselves in their child’s school work. Rey explained: “Well when he had a science project, that's what he works on. And like, uh, he struggles with math and I try to help him as best I can.” Parents expressed that this kind of presence and that communication can enhance positive relationships with their children. Toni stated, “Oh we have a good relationship, we have a good relationship... communication's good.” Parent’s cared deeply about their children, which also contributed to communication. Toni stated, “So I'm very big on
children being children. I'm very big on communication, I'm very big on trying to acknowledge their, their needs, their lives, their every movement, because I didn't have anyone to do that for me." This internal drive appeared to keep parents actively engaged in their children’s lives. The internal drive was based on the past experiences of the parents, which included many life struggles.

Parents needed to overcome language barriers, stressful work conditions, and time constraints. They consistently expressed that they were dedicated to wanting what is best for their children so they could achieve long term goals. In many instances, these parents demonstrated ‘grit’ which is defined, in part as resolve, or strength of character. These parents sincerely wanted their children to be successful and have guidance to overcome barriers they themselves had faced. While they struggled with the barriers described above, they recognized that, while communication existed at home, it was also important for parents to keep an open line of communication with the school, so that the children experienced an integrative, supportive movement between the two spaces.

At school. Parents, teachers and administrators stressed the importance of being connected to each other and using a variety of methods to communicate. Parents communicated with the school through phone calls, open houses, letters home, the online student information system (SIS) as well as in-school visits. SIS was the main tool used by the school to communicate with students and families regarding grades, testing information as well as other information pertaining to students. Many parents reiterated the fact that the school reached out to them several times throughout the year and were well informed about school events. The parent liaison for the school, Jackie, said she communicated daily with parents. She commented that the SIS was user-friendly and that, at the time this study was conducted, communication was
completed through “phone, email and text messaging.” For this administrator, communication was important for:

building those relationships, getting them to come in, and getting them to plan these things through school parent council and things like that. Get in a parent body to have that type of voice and say, “We wanna see this more. We need more community. We need more."

The effectiveness of the frequency of calls, emails and text messages was emphasized by one parent. Jim’s mom said, “I get calls like maybe once, twice every month, at least, and sometimes three to four times.” Parents expressed that they were appreciative of this communication, as Toni observed: “But, you know this year I'd noticed a lot of, I'd gotten a lot of calls, some of just a lot of different reports within St. Pierre and I was surprised but then I was very appreciative about it because that's really good it's needed. I don't know how long that's gonna last....”

Parents not only used technology to receive phone calls, text messages or check SIS, but they physically entered the school to communicate. Ronaldo described that he frequently visited the school:

Because, because I'm in the area. I leave work early, so let me go by the school and see how he's doing. And I get the surprise that, that, Oh, yesterday he was [leaving 00:14:57] after, after 12:00. [In 00:15:00] such and such date wasn't here after 12:00 neither. Today he's not here after 12:00 neither." All right, and I go like, "All right. [Why 00:15:08] the heck are you guys waiting to let me know?" ... because I was getting calls at, at random times, random days, "Hey, you have to come back to, you have to come to you, to, to, to, to your school's son, sorry to your school son. That [something came up 00:09:53]. We need to talk to you. We need you here." So, that's why I was going on the weekly basis
for the last two years to St. Pierre. Then, we always [assist to 00:10:05] meetings. ... met, met, met, uh met with the teachers and would have any, any events uh, we, we always were going, my wife and I, uh to those events. [You know 00:10:21] showing my son that we, we, we worry about him. We are concerned about him. We ... That's the involvement that I had in the school with my son.

Other parents were actively involved in the school and served as school volunteers. One parent volunteer, Rey, noted, “When I started to volunteer, I got to see what was going on, you know, so many changes and entering a headmaster, and I was just here to try to help because I was a school secretary, so you know, I know how a school runs.” Rey even tried to get other parents into the school by hosting international night. This seemed to bridge the gap between parents and the school. Rey stated:

Okay, we uh, do parent practice - practice. Uh, we had, like I said, we had an international night. ... we have - we've had, well let me see, what else did we do? Well, we can't even really do anything like - like that anymore, because you can't have food. Each year was like so many different things. We've been doing the parent breakfast for like, uh, two years. We used to have bacon, eggs, all that. This year we can only have like, light breakfast. When we had all that, we might have a few more parents.

Building trust was essential in parental involvement. What came across in interviews in interactions was that parents trusted the ability of their children to complete school work and do well in school. This trust placed responsibility on the student and played an important part in positive parent-child relationships. Grades played an important role in establishing trust. Jim’s mom stated:

In Jamaica I was more constantly there. Basically, with him you know but now, I just
said, I just had to ask, did you get homework? I don't even get the time to review, so he just came here, I wanted the time to review to work because I know you know, I don't care if you wanted to be perfect. You know they're going to take shortcuts, but he doesn't necessarily want me reviewing his homework. He wants to see that he had the ability to do his own, so I allow him and I tell him make sure, if the grades are good, I won't be in your face and in your business, but if they aren't, you better believe that we are going to be one on one every single day.

As students moved into advanced grades, what was reflected through the interview process was that they need to establish trust with their parents, and this was emphasized this through conversations with their parents. Dory reiterated this fact when her son told her, "You can trust me, that what he means to me, like you can trust me. So. Yeah." Parents found that supporting the freedom and independence of their children was important as youth progressed into their adolescent years. However, while the parents allowed this trust, they also said it was important to keep a close eye on their children. Dory stated:

Right now, uh you know, as I say there's a game play because you know because I have to give that trust. But it still I, I. When I had to come to open house, something like [gasps] a little bit scary. How you doing, how you doing. It's doing bad, or not. So when I see the report card they might stop going back to the ground

Trust must not only be established between children and parents, but between children and teachers. Parents wanted their children to establish trust with their teachers. Dory stated:

When my kid was little I always say to my kids "treat your teachers not as teachers, as your parents. Trust them," you know, "if you have any problems, or you have to say something, or you have any question that you feel that you are comfortable, trust your
teacher. Male or female." You know... you know, let him call me, you know, I'm, you know, I'm her for them too. So whatever they have, you know, to say or any problems, you can tell them to call me. And I also came to school, and tell them.

Trusting relationships played an important role in a student’s success in their academic endeavors. Parents, meanwhile, used the trust to ensure that their children considered education necessary in life, to make the right decisions. Trust was built by parents by connecting their experiences of their own lives to their children’s lives. Whether their children had good grades or not, this researcher observed that most parents kept an open line of communication based on trust. Tasha stated:

Overall if he had not a good grade, he still comes to me and shows it. Yeah, he's not ...

You know, I make sure he's not trying to change something either. I told him, "I've been there.

Overall, parents kept an open line of communication with their children, which allowed them to stay connected to the experiences their children were having in their school environment.

Parents experienced a positive school environment. Many parents interviewed expressed that there was a positive environment that exists at the school and that created community, allowing them to feel comfortable, which was essential to their continued involvement. The parent liaison for the school stated, “Yes. They go, and then they are not, they’re not intimidated by the space. It becomes a part of their community." Physically, the school itself was over one million square feet and had ample space for a variety of activities to be going on at once. In addition, the front office was centrally located within the building, and a secretary greeted parents or visitors coming into the school. Toni stated, “Well, to be honest with you, when I walk him to St. Pierre... well to answer your question everyone that I, I come
across, they just seem to be polite and very friendly and welcoming." Participants of this study valued that positive environment, and they affirmed that a welcoming space was essential to curbing low parental involvement. Maria stated, “Yeah for me it’s not bad, I like to go there."

Parents also expressed that they were impressed with the steps that the school was taking to ensure their child was receiving top quality education. Jackie stated:

I mean I, I think ... I definitely think that the, the, the space was welcoming. ... well, there are certain parts of our building that are welcoming. ... I believe that we get a lot of bang for our buck with this, uh, vocational piece here, and so when parents come in, they’re very impressed. ... it was a big school, so they can become overwhelmed. ... but it’s a nice-looking school-

During school-wide events, such as the science fair, parents expressed that they were impressed with the school as well as the teachers. Jim’s mother stated:

They were dressed in formal attire …I believe they do really well, and ... the teachers are pleasant, the teachers are friendly, they're very open to talking to you. They take the time. When I've come in to talk about …when I've made a call about him, it's really good, the interaction was really good…with the parents and with the students at the school.

Overall, the interviews exhibited that the school tried to create a positive environment where staff were actively engaged with children and supportive of parent communication. Jim’s mother stated, “Even when I've called the administrative office, to inquire about anything, it's always really good.”

**Parents noted the importance of actively involved parents.** Parents, teachers and administrators stressed the importance of deep parental involvement at home and at school to help their children to be successful. One teacher stated, “parental involvement happens not only
at home but even in the school too." Providing support was also a reason why parents are actively engaged. The same teacher stated:

I think the role of parents in a high school should be very supportive. In that, in that they're supportive in the home. And they're supportive by just coming to the, ah, the events at the school. Let's say the open houses, the picking up the report cards, going to in my case IEP (Individualized Education Plan) meetings.

The overwhelming result from parents and teachers was that parents and teachers and school staff need to understand the different levels of support a child may need. Some students needed additional reinforcement at school, and when parents attended school functions, they may have discovered what was working or what was not working for their child. Parents suggested that it was important for them to be involved because they wanted to show their child how they grew up and matured into adulthood as individuals, to give them life lessons. Many parents, from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds expressed that, coming from different countries can be difficult, that it takes hard work to be successful. They wanted their children to understand that lesson. Vivi stated:

Sometimes I know what I tell him go here and then goes out here but I'm trying to show them the way I used to live, the way I like to live. So you have to be responsible at the job. You have to be always on time, no matter what just be there. Don't get excuses, you'll lose the job. Be responsible with your money, with school, with your girlfriend if you have one.

Parents expressed that they wanted to teach their children essential life skills and habits, especially as they matured towards adulthood. Tasha explained her perceptions of the importance of having an education, especially as it related to reading and writing. It was obvious
in the interview that Tasha cared deeply about her children and wanted to do everything she could for them to have options. She stated:

That's the most I ... advice I can give. Just be close, as close as you can to your children...

explain 'em how important it was to have education. Explain to them how important it was to know how to read, write ...

The parent liaison for the school suggested that parents understood how important education was by saying, “You know? And so this school was really important and parents understand how important it was. It’s just that, we as a school need to build culture and community, right?”

Building a community was an important part of parental involvement and the administrators wanted the school to be a place that parents could rely on as a resource. Diane stressed the important goal of having students succeed and said she believes that it was everyone’s responsibility to be involved in children’s education. She said:

And consequently, the student's part. And we as teachers have to assess...our responsibility as well. And so the administrators, all of us do. But there had to be an equal input of responsibility. If the most important goal can be achieved in any school and that was that student succeeds.

Student success seemed to emanate from different interviews, and this was why it was important to have parents involved in their children’s education at home and at school.

**Theme 2: Challenges Impacting Parental Involvement**

**Parents faced time constraints and work commitments.** Many challenges persisted for parents that prevented them from being actively involved in their children’s education, both at home and at school. Parents worked many hours throughout the day and this conflicted with school hours. Many functions took place in the school during school hours, and even if there
was an after-school function, parents still had work commitments that interrupted their ability to be involved in their children’s education. They worked multiple jobs as well. Dory stated that, “…So sometimes I have to work in the mornings, sometimes I, I don't make the schedule. They do it for me”. In addition, parents felt stress taking time off of work and felt they may be reprimanded by their supervisor. One parent stated:

So Wednesday I took off, what I had to do was take an extra hour on my break time from school, from my job, and did that. So most of the times I just, I drop in for 20 minutes if I can, but I always try to be there on major days like those. But I have to [inaudible 00:09:13] from my work.

The school realized this issue and understood that problems exist with parents’ work schedules. The parent liaison said: “And... and it's also maybe because they're-the parents are working. They're working a lot. Just talking to the students, you know that what's happening in our community was very very stressful.” These stressful situations placed parents in a precarious situation and ultimately many decided not to go to school functions. Due to work and time constraints, parents were forced to miss meetings during school time, and they were unable to connect with school officials to be supportive of their children’s academic success. The data collected revealed that working parents were limited to volunteer tasks in the school, and their attendance to these meetings was sporadic.

**Technology use was difficult for parents.** In addition to time constraints, many parents were not technologically adept. At the school that was the focus of this study, the student information system (SIS) was an online portal that parents, teachers, administrators, and students used to communicate, share information and upload grades about students. The platform was difficult for many parents because they were not adequately trained on the technology of the
system, and language barriers were paramount to them not having adequate access. The parent liaison stated:

Speaker 2: You know, especially some of our Sp-Spanish-speaking... or, you know, Spanish-speaking parents. It’s like-Speaker 1: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 2: They don't know how to use it. Not to mention that it’s not maximized.

The Assistant Headmaster confirmed this online system was difficult to use in general. He said even teachers and administrators had a difficult time using it, let alone parents. Brittany explained:

Right. I don't think anyone yet had done that well. I mean I'm, obviously 14 years as an administrator and I log into my kids account and I'm like gosh, if I didn't know what I was doing I'm not sure. You know, I mean you can see one page where you see like, the progress to date, but because some of the assignments haven't been graded, it's really not a good tool for parents. What I don't want to do was have another tool that doesn't flow directly from SIS because then the databases don't match when you're in a school like this with lots of transients that's a disaster

However, other technology worked more effectively to contact parents. This included text messages, letters sent home, or emails. The parent liaison said her office used these methods frequently, but the assistant headmaster reiterated that there was a language barrier that existed within the technology that’s being employed. She asserted:

I think that there are other ways that we could communicate more directly with parents, like remind me, you know things like, that teachers can blast stuff out [of] my text, and parents at least now that there's a big assessment or a project of whatever. But I don't think that we can, with the language barriers and all that, rely on SIS to be something that
Parents log into Parents expressed that they wanted to be informed about their children’s progress in school, but they needed assistance or training to be able to understand the technology. Tasha stated:

[A]nd you, you know, you did your, your homework and you went on to school. But now, the parents are more ... and technology, everything was different now, so the parents now need to know what's going on with the, with the children now, with the kids now. What they're doing, we have to actually be old school [with] new school parents right now.

Parents expressed that when they went to school, technological advancements, like the ones that currently exist today, did not exist, and that they were unfamiliar with how these tools worked. Ronaldo stated:

I don't have SnapChat. I don't have Instagram. I don't even know how that works, period. I'm an old fashioned guy ... that's another thing. The kids today have everything, have way too much.

Students may have understood how to use technology, but their parents did not.

The interviews revealed that, frequently, when grades were posted online, they were unseen by many parents. In addition, report cards were not sent home and brought back to the school signed, indicating whether or not the parent had viewed the report card. In addition, the online system contained incorrect contact information for the parents. Teachers had an extremely difficult time reaching out to parents when there were incorrect phone numbers or emails listed.

**Social and cultural background influenced family involvement.** The Hispanic and African American community in Boston faced a variety of challenges that became apparent through the interviews. This was a population where many parents were working low-wage jobs
in a high price city. In addition, language barriers existed that prevented parents from directly communicating with the school. The parent liaison articulated:

I think that you have a lot of families that are... you know have single parent homes, parents working one or two jobs, uh language barriers that make parents not feel empowered... in contacting us.

In the site that was the focus of this study, there were many single-family homes where parents were consistently absent. Stability simply in housing was a primary issue for students, parents, and the school struggled to maintain parental involvement and contact information. Jackie stated: “Lots of kids in crisis and lots of families in crisis so, we're not always finding the stability at home. So I think that I would call the engagement for a lot of our students pretty low.” The school parental involvement levels at the school are drastically low at 20% attendance.

**Parents experienced a lack of communication and inconsistency within the school.**

While an abundance of positive communication was observed, there was a persist theme of a lack of communication between parents and the school. In addition, there was a lack of communication between parents and their children. Ronaldo explained:

Because, because I'm in the area. I leave work early, so let me go by the school and see how he's doing. And I get the surprise that, that, "Oh, yesterday he was [leaving 00:14:57] after, after 12:00. [In 00:15:00] such and such date wasn't here after 12:00 neither. Today he's not here after 12:00 neither." All right, and I go like, "All right. [Why 00:15:08] the heck are you guys waiting to let me know?"

The school did not inform Ronaldo that his 12th grade son was not in school. Ronaldo stated that if he had known where his son was, he would have intervened and ensured that his son was attending school. In regards to how children were doing academically, the school sent out
progress reports and report cards home to parents. Assistant Headmaster Brittany determined that this communication was not effective and needed to be more personalized. Brittany explained:

I think we send out the progress reports, we send out the report cards ... but the communication really needs to be personalized. Some of it is two way, and some of it you know, the benefit of email for you know we have translators in the school but it's not always something that you can just grab someone when you want to make the call, email can be good because often times a relative can translate for the family... phone calls can be arranged but, you know parent meetings where there was a translator are going to be the most effective.

When teachers tried to reach out to parents through phone calls, report cards were often discussed. In many instances, the teacher noted that parents never viewed their child’s report card, because their child did not show it to them. Diane stated, “Right when ... and that goes back to I think the original point that was brought up in this discussion. And that was ... That's a lack of consistency and communication and support.” When report cards were distributed at open houses, there was low parent attendance. The school documented 20-25% attendance at these events. This suggested that most parents were not receiving their child’s report card in person. Report cards were sent home by mail if the parents did not receive them at the open house.

In addition, the academic structure at St. Pierre was not conducive to teacher collaboration between different departments. Teachers did not collaborate enough to check on students to ensure they were present in all classes throughout the day. This schedule made it difficult to reach out to parents when their child was not performing well or missing class. Brittany explained the structural problem and said:
I think we have a structural problem here at St. Pierre that we're hoping to solve for next year, in that in aca- the academics do not correspond to the academies... so your classes, you know typical teachers classes have kids in both academies. And therefore we are not able to implement the SLC model to, you know like we should at least every other week be sitting down as a group of academic teachers and vocational teachers and talking about a group of kids. But we can't do that because the academic teachers don't have…so you know, I think we need to move closer, we'll never get to 100% because you know, high need students that need specific learning, and specific teachers like you know the scythe students or ... students with severe disabilities

Communication between teachers was difficult because the SLC model could not be implemented, as the assistant headmaster explained. Brittany, the assistant headmaster, detailed that communication was not streamlined to parents. She said,

But we could get to 90% where we could streamline communication to families by getting together ... to talk. And so we'd have the four content areas plus the vocational teachers and the vocational teachers have a really unique perspective on kids because they are seeing them for three and a half years. And so I think, you know we're not able to streamline communication to families, so I would say in light of that structural problem, whenever I have gone on a students SIS account I have been extremely impressed with the level of ... teacher communication to families.

While teachers consistently updated SIS, parents rarely checked the online system.

Teachers may have reached out to parents, but several attempts needed to be made to reach the parent. Many attempts failed due to incorrect information found in the SIS system.

Diane stated:
And you know, I don't ever take that as apathy, I take it as extenuating circumstances at home. But you know there are often times, it takes me a couple calls or it takes me a few contacts in the list to get a parent.

The school had a high turnover rate in administrators. In the past five years before this study was conducted, St. Pierre High School had had five different headmasters. Parents’ confidence in the school dropped, and teachers understood that students were not benefiting from this inconsistency. Diane stated:

Right when ... and that goes back to I think the original point that was brought up in this discussion. And that was ... That's a lack of consistency and communication and support.

Overall, St. Pierre High School struggled with the online student system and the inconsistency of administrative support.

**Parents had independence struggles for children.** As children entered high school, they grew mentally and physically. Parents supported their children as much as they could, but children wanted to gain independence. Independence was a large deciding factor into whether or not their parents were actively involved. Assistant Headmaster Brittany stated:

And three different schools, obviously two in Boston but.... You know I think that no matter where you are, parent engagement was going to drop off at the high school level. I'm a high school parent myself. You know when it comes to high school, and I'm never been a super PTO kind of parent, because I'm a working parent. But you know when it comes to elementary school, you're all gonna go to the science fair, you're all gonna go to the, you know the general meetings, the open houses. When it comes to houses, you're gonna go for your kids parent conferences, you're gonna go for your kids activities, athletics, music, whatever they are.
Brittany was a parent as well as an administrator. She stated that parental involvement dropped off at the high school level. Her idea was that parents needed to build independence for their children. It was a learning process for parents and children. Brittany explained,

I might surprise you. I'm not a huge fan of parents checking SIS on a daily basis, looking at a site. You know because, we also have to create, and I feel this way personally as a parent, so I feel this way about the school, was that there was a certain amount of independence that we have to build for our children and if we're always stepping in and email the teacher, what was he missing? What can I do to make up the grade? Like it's not about the kid it's about the parent

One parent, Vivi, suggested that her son did not like to be badgered about his school work by saying, “He don't like me to be, how he call me, nosy. He ... Juan was in the age that he can ... He thinks that everything I say was that I want to be nosy, I want to know his business.” As children became older, and their independence increased, it appeared as if they would feel embarrassed if their parents were involved in school life. As Jackie stated, children who gain independence want to take ownership of their education:

Yeah. So would you say that it’s not that parents don’t wanna become involved, it’s that maybe, you know, their son or daughter might be a little bit too embarrassed to have them around? Or maybe like, you know, “Oh, no. I’m old enough now. You don’t need to show up to school.” Something like that?

This study revealed that children do voice their opinions; a transitional period occurs when they become more independent and do need to make their own conscious decisions. Jackie described some reactions by students and said, “Yeah. I think that’s where it starts with... “I’m old enough.” ... students first verbalizing that they feel old enough.” The struggle with independency
started at the beginning of high school, and this researcher perceived that parents felt that they
needed to let their children develop more independently.

**Theme 3: Strategies to Promote Parental Involvement**

**Schools took a variety of steps to involve parents.** The school that was the focus of
this study had taken a variety of initiatives to increase parental involvement. School officials
expressed that they believed that open houses represented an efficient method to increase
parental involvement. As Brittany stated:

So I think that you have to recognize that... open houses, and I didn't mention that
because that's a school wide initiative. I mean, open houses are an incredible opportunity
to get parents in here, and it's you know, sort of a place where I can't imagine a parent not
trying. You know many of our parents work... into the evening and can't make it. But you
know that was certainly a point of contact that I think all parents would agree was really
really important.

In addition to the open houses, school officials and teachers constantly made phone calls to
parents or emailed them. The parent liaison’s goal was for families to understand the graduation
requirements as well as the additional support services provided to the students and parents. She
explained,

... just making sure that our families understand the graduation requirement, and
understand all of the additional resources that the school brings. So we've done quite a bit
of outreach, generic outreach to families. We had an assembly for students and that night
we sent the parents the PowerPoint the we delivered and we expressed the ... you know,
well reinforced the notion that this was a graduation requirement, these are all the layers
of support. We did that a couple times
The school worked with parents to implement the parent site council, which met once a month. Rey was on the parent council and explained how the school got parents involved.

... or - or if there's like a ... I don't know about ... I really don't know how they do it. All I know was on our part. If we're having a meeting - a parent meeting, or if we're having breakfast, or if we're having a raffle, we reach out. We used to send like, little invitations, but now Ms. Perry might, uh, do the role call, or we send an email blast, or whatever it's called.

Even with these attempts, teachers as well as the school secretary continued to distribute letters home and invited parents to the school.

These approaches had different results. For example, Ronaldo said he believed he would like to see more parents in the school and that he could not believe the parent turnout at the open houses was so limited. He stated:

And get more of them to school. That's another thing, he, like the teacher said, he sent 30 plus letters, only two parents showed, two parents show up. The rest, they [were care less 00:31:13].

The school was actively involved in reaching out to parents through open houses, parent conferences, phone calls, and the online student system. The parent liaison was the main contact person for parents in the school. She represented a resource for parents to utilize daily.

Parents were involved in their children’s education at home and in school. In addition to the school’s actions, parents took additional steps to become more involved. Parents suggested that they needed to check-in on their children more often. Vivi said, “Juan, he called me, he told me very, very nice things about you but he told me the bad things too. That you're always late.” Creating positive relationships with their children was important for parents to gain
trust and to develop healthy conversations. Other parents suggested that all parents needed to go to every meeting to show that parents care. Vivi said,

I been home and this was driving me crazy, but I want to tell parents like to be involved in his kids schools with the teachers. Go to every meeting; try to know everything they do. That's the only way to know who your son was, who your daughter was, what they do, what they want, how they feel.

Some parents expressed that volunteerism could be a positive channel for involvement. Rey stated:

Well I am ... I first started out to volunteer because that's when they went to the - the year that they had no schedules and all that, and I wasn't workin', just got married and so, I had some free time.

Parents did become involved in their children’s education in a variety of ways. They checked their child’s grades online, talked with teachers and administrators, talked with their children, went to the school for meetings or help their child at home with their homework.

**Conclusion**

In this case study, perceptions and understandings of African American and Hispanic parental involvement were explored at St. Pierre High School in the northeastern region of the United States (a pseudonym). Insights were gleaned from parents, teachers and administrators at St. Pierre High School in regards to their parental involvement experiences, challenges and improvement suggestions. This in-depth analysis provided an abundance of useful information in order to enrich positive school atmospheres and to enhance parental involvement in children’s education. The findings suggest that schools must examine their current practices in order to foster and cultivate parental involvement, in a way that is culturally sensitive – particularly
regarding technology and communication. The themes that emerged from this case study were noteworthy.

The first theme identified was related to participants’ understanding of parental involvement. These participants explained that communication was essential in building positive relationships with children at home and at school. To build positive relationships, trust must be established. Parents place trust in schools in that they expect and understand that schools care about their children and want them to succeed. In addition, parents trust their children to complete all their schoolwork and succeed in school. This study revealed that parents are more than willing to support their children on this journey, even with socio-economic, cultural, and work limitations. St. Pierre High School was found to have a positive school environment for parental involvement. Many participants suggested that they felt comfortable inside the school which fostered student learning and interactions between the home and school environments. Lastly, actively involved parents were essential in building a school community. Participants suggested that parental involvement exists in many forms, but it was important that parents be actively engaged in the school as well as at home.

The second theme identified many challenges that impacted parental involvement. African American and Hispanic parents worked full-time and had many time constraints. Often, this limited their ability to participate in school functions or other school events. Many parents were not adapted to 21st century technology and had difficulty with accessing the online student information system. This created a problem when checking grades or information regarding the child. In addition, student and parent information in the system was found to be inaccurate in some cases. The system displayed incorrect parent emails and phone numbers, which made communication difficult when the school tried to reach out to parents; often the disconnect was
often a two-way street with parents not updating information. Some parents noted that it was hard to maintain confidence in the school with such a high turnover rate in administration. At this location, over five years, there were five different headmasters, which affected trust. This inconsistency was found to be a negative influence on parental involvement.

Lastly, parents wanted to give their children independence as they grew older; negotiating this with older students was a challenge. Children did not want their parents in the school, actively engaged, due to the embarrassment that the child felt with what might be perceived as an over-protective parent. Ultimately, parents cared deeply about their children’s feelings and wanted to respect their independence, but they struggled to negotiate this dynamic.

The final theme produced an abundance of strategies that promote parental involvement. The school attempted to get parents involved through a variety of methods. The school’s parent liaison was the backbone in reaching out to parents. Letters were sent home, calls were made, and text messages were sent to parents through the school’s parent liaison. In addition, the school implemented the parent site council, which met once a month. During these meetings, parents shared their concerns about the school and suggested ways to involve other parents. The school hosted events, such as the open house and international night, to increase parental involvement. Teachers reached out to parents regarding student performance in class. Parents took additional steps to become involved by volunteering at the school by participating in the parent site council. Parents worked extensively to promote student success at home. They helped their children with homework or checked in to see how their day had progressed. These represent different ways that promoted parental involvement.


Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter provides a summary of the key findings of this research study and the implications of it for current educational practices and future research, based on the theoretical framework and the literature reviewed. This case study of one urban high school in Boston, Massachusetts explored the experiences of parental involvement through a qualitative lens. Data was obtained through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis. In addition, this research was guided by Epstein’s (2010) Six Types of Parental Involvement model and Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) ecological model. Using a combination of both models, two questions guided this research study:

1. What are the experiences of parents, teachers and administrative officials regarding parental involvement in the academic success of children in a majority African American and Hispanic urban public school?

2. What factors prevented and/or promoted parental involvement in students’ academic success and the school in this context?

Discussion of Major Findings

In this school, parental involvement plays an integral role in African American and Hispanic schooling. Overall, parents, teachers and administrators have a solid understanding of parental involvement at the high school level. Engaging with teachers, administrators, and parent participants, this study sought to understand the mechanisms through which communication, data sharing, and enhanced engagement -- within and beyond the school -- contributed to streamlining children’s’ educational progress. Parental involvement involves the home and school environments, which confirms previous research identified in the literature review (Christenson, 2003; Epstein, 1987; and Ramirez, 2003). In the home environment,
parents built trusting relationships with their children and explained to them the importance of schooling. Hispanic parents in this study came to the United States to have a better life. Through their life struggles, they broke down barriers and learned how to deal with many of the struggles of coming to a new country. Parents demonstrated “grit,” which is the ability to overcome barriers to achieve a long-term goal. The parents in this study were hard working and cared deeply about their children. They wanted to instill values that they learned throughout their lifetime for their children to have the best opportunity for success. African American parents demonstrated similar qualities as Hispanic parents. The parents interviewed in this study had low-wage jobs and lived in poverty-stricken areas. Yet, this did not prevent them from openly communicating with their children.

Communication happened not only at home, but in the school as well. Parents communicated with their children about the importance of schooling and explained to them their past experiences that served as a living example of how important education is. Parents did not want their children to go through the same life struggles that they went through. They wanted the best for their children. In the school, parents tried to communicate with teachers, and the school did a fair job at reaching out to parents. The school communicated to parents through open houses, letters home, phone calls, and emails. The school that is the focus of this study consistently engages multilingual translators to accommodate non-English speaking parents, which this study found was extremely important. When parents went to events at the school with these support systems in place, they noted the positive school environment which facilitated their involvement.

The parents in this study confirmed that the school created a positive environment that promoted student achievement. Staff in the school welcomed parents as they walked in the door.
The school’s parent liaison played an important role in setting the precedence for a positive school environment. The parent liaison, an African American woman, was organized and deeply cared about parental involvement. The parent liaison understood the life-struggles that African American and Hispanic parents faced throughout their lives and wanted to break down these barriers by doing everything possible to get them involved. The parent liaison saved documents, such as attendance records and parent flyers, from the past three years. She used this information to reflect on past experiences and changed different modes of communication in order to better serve parents at the school. This positive school environment was enhanced through the implementation of the Parent Site Council, which is a group of parents who volunteer their time to make school-wide decisions about the school and their children’s education. Two of the parents interviewed in this study were on this council and regularly attended these meetings.

The volunteer parents and parents interviewed noted the importance of actively involved parents. Parents recognized the importance of providing additional support for their children to succeed in school. They wanted to their children to exhibit essential life skills and habits as they mature towards adulthood. In addition, actively involved parents simultaneously played an important role in building a positive culture and community. The school was a resource for families; lessons learned from this case study should be taken advantage of.

**Addressing Barriers**

While parental involvement played an important role in children’s education, there were a variety of factors that prevented parents from actively engaging with their children. In this study, it was found that Hispanic and African American parental communication occurred, but it was limited for a variety of reasons. Parents tried to communicate with their children about school work at home, but were limited because of the hours parents worked. Time constraints
and work hours were consistent in multiple families and had a direct effect on how involved parents could be at home and in school. The school’s parent liaison understood this barrier and tried to acknowledge this by holding school events at different hours throughout the day. Yet, parental involvement attendance did not improve. However, if parents did not go to school events, they would check their child’s school progress on the online student information system (SIS).

An important caveat regarding technology is needed here. Parents did not find SIS to be helpful because many parents did not understand how to use the system. Parents were not the only ones to struggle with this online student portal. Administrators and teachers had a difficult time using SIS as well. Parents were never trained on how to use the system and the system was not culturally sensitive. Many African American and Hispanic parents lacked the ability to access online student information or resources because they lacked the ability to purchase computers or laptops. In addition, the site was described as difficult to navigate for parents who did not speak English fluently. If parents were not able to access the online student portal or attend school-wide events, they relied on more direct teacher and child communication to check-in on their child’s academic progress.

Teacher’s noted how difficult it was to reach out to parents because of the incorrect information listed on SIS. This presented a huge problem, because teachers were not able to reach parents, especially if there was an issue in school. Moreover, if teachers reached out to parents, there was often a language barrier. The school was not offering enough translators for the number of non-English speaking parents. This left many parents dependent upon their children for updates about their academic progress. Yet, parents wanted to give their children independence as they moved into adulthood. Parents expressed that they did not want to be
over-involved because their children would be embarrassed. In fact, some parents did not want to annoy their children by asking them how school went. This created barriers for parents’ understanding the progress of their children’s education.

**Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework**

Joyce Epstein’s (2010) parental involvement model provided the theoretical framework for this study. According to Epstein (2010), there are six types of parental involvement that include parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Each area was explored throughout this study.

**Parenting.** In terms of parenting, parents in this study had an understanding about parenting, adolescent development, and most were aware of changes in home conditions that had an impact on learning throughout a child’s education. In addition, parents were aware of their own challenges, such as work commitments and time restraints. Parents expressed that they felt support from the school, but they also understood that they need additional support in parenting practices. The school’s parent liaison provided suggestions to parents at parent meetings held once a month. These suggestions were important for parents to create home conditions that supported learning conditions at each grade level. However, this study revealed that more support is needed for parents, particularly for individuals facing challenges socio-economically, and culturally. The parent liaison was in the process of creating family support programs as well as developing parent programs to enable parents to obtain college credit, for example, to address these challenges to inter-generational success.

**Communicating.** In terms of communication, the school designed and implemented parent meetings that were held twice a year. During these conferences, translators were provided to assist families as needed. However, there were not enough translators to support the number
of non-English speaking parents. Parents were also informed of their child’s grades through report cards as well as check-ins with teachers. Teachers consistently called parents at home and calls were documented on the Student Information System (SIS). Parents were also informed of school events through letters home, phone calls and text messages/emails. Parents expressed that they did feel that they had a deep understanding of the school’s programs and policies, in spite of technological challenges.

Volunteering. The school created opportunities for parents to volunteer by creating the Parent Site Council. This council met once a month and was orchestrated by the parent liaison for the school. A specific room in the school was dedicated for parents and was utilized by the parent liaison on a daily basis. Parents were recruited by the parent liaison through open house events and by phone calls. Flexible schedules were made to enable all parents to participate. Parents noted the welcoming environment that the school created and said they felt valued when they volunteered. Parents noted difficulties, however, when trying to attend these functions, even when flexible schedules attempted to accommodate their work schedules. Parents who regularly attended each meeting were mainly self-employed parents.

Learning at home. A calendar of events was provided to families for them to support student learning at home. In addition, parents were informed on how to access the online student information system (SIS), which was useful in determining students’ grades, behavioral issues or homework. Parents did not check this system regularly and were not always informed of their children’s homework assignments. The district provided training for parents, but many parents did not find the training useful, and many did not understand how the system worked. Parents who used the system found the system difficult to navigate. Parents also noted the importance of
independence for their child. They did not want to intrude on their education and expressed that they felt that they could trust their children to complete all their academic work on their own.

**Decision-making.** In terms of decisions parents participated in parent organizations, such as the Parent Site Council. In this council, parents made decisions regarding school policies and were kept informed of school reform and improvements. Parents exchanged information, which created a network of informed parents. Parent’s provided input into policies that directly impacted student learning. They said they had a feeling of ownership and shared their experiences with other families.

**Collaborating with community.** The parent liaison created opportunities for families to be involved with the community. In addition, parents were aware of local resources that provided additional opportunities for their children outside of school. Businesses were actively engaged in the school and created opportunities for students to have full-time jobs after graduating. The school displayed banners that demonstrated the school’s commitment to the community and the strong relationships that existed between the school and outside organizations.

**Findings in Relation to the Literature**

Researchers have documented the multiple benefits of parental involvement through children’s education. Studies have claimed that parental involvement has a direct impact on academic achievement of students (Sheldon, 2007; Van Voorhis, 2003). Moreover, students are more likely to have higher grade point averages, lower drop-out rates, and better attendance rates when their parents are actively engaged in their education. With the help of existing literature, educational policies and models have been created to increase parental involvement, specifically in urban high schools.
Efforts have been made through educational policy to close the achievement gap between low and high achieving students. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, for example, addressed the needs for schools to create opportunities to involve parents of “at-risk” students. Additional education policies, such as A Nation at Risk, Goals 200, and No Child Left Behind, continued to make efforts in trying to involve parents in schools by establishing partnerships between parents, teachers, and school administrators.

Lawson (2003) defined parental involvement as the participation in traditional school centered activities. Furthermore, educational models, such as Epstein (1990 and 2010) and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995), have been developed to identify ways parents can be involved in their children’s education at home and in school. These models are directly related to the objectives of a school as it relates to parental involvement. Stitt (2013) stated that the “idea of parental involvement surrounding the schools and educational policies tends to embrace a ‘white middle-class’ ideal.” There are many attributes to parental involvement that are recognized by educators. The attributes include, communicating with the teachers, volunteering in the school, attending school events, and attending parent-teacher conferences (Bower & Griffin, 2011). This study found that parents consistently communicate with teachers and volunteer in the school. However, their attendance may be limited due to barriers addressed in the literature, as this study has examined. Although research has made progress in understanding parental involvement of ethnically, racially, and socio-economically diverse groups, further research is needed to gain a deeper understanding of parental involvement. Current gaps in literature still exist concerning the definition of parental involvement and expectations from both the perspectives of educators and administrators, and the parents themselves. American public schools are changing demographically at a rapid pace and are becoming more diverse. Parental
involvement needs to be re-conceptualized to be more inclusive and recognize the efforts made by a diversity of individuals.

**Recommendations**

This study has analyzed a district where most of the school population is defined as minority, even though it is a majority. The data that was collected in the study affirms that parents care. Parents, particularly from minority groups, care and want to be actively involved in their children’s education. In this district, which was 49.7% Hispanic and 42.9% African American, affirms values that were deeply imbedded in their cultures. They were trying to assist their children to commit to hard work, education, and service to others. They faced remarkable challenges, yet they remained committed to being involved in their children’s education. The conditions that would better facilitate their involvement in their children’s education included the following:

- They would appreciate clearer expectations from school officials. School personnel, such as teachers and administrators, might take the time to get to know their children and families on a more personal level. This could make families feel more comfortable in being actively involved in school activities and parents would be more likely to trust the school.

- Families in diverse settings need more culturally sensitive communication systems. Schools need to understand that technological and communication challenges exist because of economic and cultural constraints.

- Poverty denies effective access to these tools. Trainings and workshops would provide parents the opportunity to understand how to more effectively access these tools.
• Language barriers prevent parental involvement. Due to a lack of translators, the schools must address language barriers more effectively. It is important to utilize more traditional types of communication, such as phone calls and home visits, rather than focusing on using technology to communicate with parents. The current structural limitations of the school do not permit adequate access to translation services.

• Understanding misalignments between the parents’ educational background and their children creates is essential for effective parental involvement. The school could provide workshops after school hours that allows parents the opportunity to gain the relevant educational skills to assist their children’s education and at the same time address their own educational goals.

Limitations

There are a few limitations to this study. One limitation is that the study was conducted in one specific region of Massachusetts in Boston in one school. Therefore, the results may not be typical of the rest of the population. Also, this research study was conducted in a brief period, instead of involving a longer case study. The number of participants was limited to eight parents, two administrators, and one teacher interviewed. All interview data came from these eleven participants. Another limitation was that information was collected primarily through interviews. While interviews provide reliable information, the process has innate limitations. There are a variety of human factors that come into play, such as personal bias or anxiety. In addition, qualitative research is subject to interpretation – a double hermeneutic process where the researcher has an impact on what the participants expressed, with his or her own biases.

Future Research
This study provides a solid foundation for future studies related to African American and Hispanic parental involvement in schools in the United States. Additional research could address specific perceptions of parental involvement and determine the frequency in which parents are involved in the different parental involvement activities. Another future study could determine the different ways that various districts assist in getting parents actively engaged, directed at understanding the relationship between the district level and school level. A longitudinal study of parental involvement over a child’s education (K-12) would give a more complete understanding of parental involvement as well as the frequency with which parents are actively engaged in activities. Since this study was conducted in one school, a study that might include various school districts and schools would offer more data and more themes. An increase in the number of schools and districts would add more validity and reliability to the study. The study also involved parents, teachers, and administrators only; however, student interviews could be incorporated, which would provide different perspectives on parental involvement and how it impacts students commitment to their education.

**Personal Reflection**

As a teacher within this district, this dissertation has proven to be extremely valuable. When I first started recruiting parents, I recognized the value and importance of actively involving parents by completing in-depth interviews. Parents were generous enough to invite me into their homes, share meals, and share openly with me their stories of what it’s like to be a parent. Trust was established each time I interacted in these settings; this benefited not only the research, but my personal teaching life. As a teacher, I recognized that it is of the upmost importance to reach out to parents and build positive relationships to effectively communicate about their children’s education.
Many districts currently have home visits from community field coordinators or parent liaisons, but it is rare to see home visits by teachers. It is my hope that more teachers will bridge the gap between the home and school environments by establishing effective relationships and eventually making home visits. While in the home, I learned about parents’ lives, their current living situation, and most importantly, I learned about their children’s learning over time. This is valuable information that I could use to create more learning opportunities for students in my practice as a teacher.

Home visits provided opportunities for parents to express their feelings in a more comfortable setting. In addition, it provided an additional communication channel that is different from traditional parent outreach methods that schools provide. Teachers might be able to demonstrate that they care about the children they are teaching on a more personal level when home visits are made, particularly in economically, ethnically, culturally, and racially diverse settings. Overall, this entire journey was rewarding for me on a professional and personal level.
References


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Appendix A

Permission Letter to Conduct Research to the Boston Public Schools IRB September 24, 2016. Dear BPS IRB Review Board,

As you know, I am a Chemistry Teacher for the Boston Public Schools. I am also a student researcher through Northeastern University (NEU). Currently I am working on a thesis proposal to study parental involvement in public K-12 schools. The purpose of this letter is to request permission to conduct a research study at the Madison Park High School. I have spoken to Principal Shackelford about my interest and he has consented to work with me on the study.

My interest is to study the interactive process between home (the private) and public spheres regarding parental involvement. My plan is to focus on how administrators, parents and teachers understand parental involvement. I see my background as an asset to approaching this proposed case study. Data will be collected from individual interviews of approximately ten participants. The voluntary participants will be a combination of administrators, parents, and teachers. Following your approval, I will apply to the NEU Internal Review Board for further approval to conduct research with human subjects.

The proposed study will examine how teachers worked collectively with administrators to implement the new evaluation system, what staff learned from the process, and what gains will ultimately be made for our students. The study will explore the innovative strategies utilized by the district that promoted distributed leadership practice to incorporate system-wide change as directed by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education through Race to the Top.

Please contact me directly at (401) 212-7307 or via e-mail if you have additional questions, or the chairperson of my committee, Dr. Sara Ewell at Northeastern University, can be contacted at (877) 668-7727. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you regarding this request.

Respectfully,

Robert Andersen  Doctoral Candidate 2016 College of Professional Studies Northeastern University, Boston

APPROVAL CONTINGENT UPON NEU PROVISIONAL IRB APPROVAL

IRB# CPS16-10-07 Approved: 12/8/16 Expiration Date: 12/7/17
Appendix B

Recruitment Letter Dear Parents, Administrators and Teachers:

As you may know, I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University (NEU) and I am working on my dissertation. I have received permission from Boston Public Schools and approval from the NEU Internal Review Board to conduct my research study at Madison Park High School. I am asking that you consider volunteering to participate in this study. Your participation is completely voluntary, and if you decide to participate, you may quit the study at any time.

The title of the research study is *A Qualitative Case Study Exploring African American and Hispanic Parental Involvement in an Urban High School*. The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding regarding parental involvement. Data will be collected through surveys, individual interviews and field notes. There will be one individual interview per parent, and one survey per parent. Teachers and administrators will complete an interview. Each individual interview will take approximately 45 minutes and the survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. I would like to interview two administrators, two teachers, and six parents individually. All interviews will be held after the school day at a mutually decided location.

Your participation is meaningful to the success of the research study, as we will have the opportunity to understand how parents are involved in an urban school. Your participation is entirely voluntary. I want you to know that confidentiality will be strictly adhered to, and I will use a different name for you in order to protect you. In addition, the data collected will primarily be used for the student researcher’s doctoral thesis project, and potentially for future journal articles.

Please contact me by email at Andersen.r@husky.neu.edu or call 401-212-7307 if you are interested in participating in this study. Thank you for your attention and consideration. This will be the only time I reach out to you in regards to this study.

Thank You,

Robert Andersen  Doctoral Candidate 2017 College of Professional Studies Northeastern University

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Appendix C

Robert Andersen

Recruitment Letter in Spanish

Estimados Padres, Administradores y Maestros:

Como usted puede saber, yo soy un estudiante de doctorado en la Universidad de Northeastern (NEU) y estoy trabajando en mi disertación. He recibido el permiso de las Escuelas Públicas de Boston y la aprobación de la Junta de Revisión Interna de la NEU para conducir mi estudio de investigación en la Escuela Preparatoria Madison Park. Le pido que considere ser voluntario para participar en este estudio. Su participación es completamente voluntaria, y si decide participar, puede dejar el estudio en cualquier momento.

El título del estudio de investigación es Un estudio de caso cualitativo que explora la participación de los padres afroamericanos e hispanos en una escuela secundaria urbana. El propósito del estudio es obtener una mejor comprensión con respecto a la participación de los padres. Los datos se recogerán a través de encuestas, entrevistas individuales y notas de campo. Habrá una entrevista individual por padre y una encuesta por padre. Los maestros y los administradores completarán una entrevista. Cada entrevista individual tomará aproximadamente 45 minutos y la encuesta tomará aproximadamente 10 minutos para completarse. Me gustaría entrevistar a dos administradores, dos maestros y seis padres individualmente. Todas las entrevistas se llevarán a cabo después del día escolar en un lugar mutuamente decidido.

Su participación es significativa para el éxito del estudio de investigación, ya que tendremos la oportunidad de entender cómo los padres están involucrados en una escuela urbana. Su participación es totalmente voluntaria. Quiero que sepas que la confidencialidad será estrictamente respetada, y usaré un nombre diferente para ti para protegerte. Además, los datos recolectados se utilizarán principalmente para el proyecto de tesis doctoral del investigador estudiantil, y potencialmente para futuros artículos de revistas.

Por favor, póngase en contacto conmigo por correo electrónico en Andersen.r@husky.neu.edu o llame al 401-212-7307 si está interesado en participar en este estudio. Gracias por su atención y consideración. Esta será la única vez que te dirijo la mano con respecto a este estudio. Gracias,

Candidato Doctoral 2017 Colegio de Estudios Profesionales Northeastern University

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Appendix D

Signed Informed Consent Document Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

Investigator Name: Principal Investigator – Sara Ewell Student Researcher – Robert Andersen

Title of Project: A Qualitative Case Study Exploring African American and Hispanic Parental Involvement in an Urban High School.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

We are inviting you to take part in this study because you are a parent of a student who is currently attending Madison Park High School.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this study is to identify how administrators, teachers and other school personnel understand parental involvement in an urban high school. The goal is to understand parent’s views on parental involvement.

What will I be asked to do?

The researcher will be looking for you to participate in the following ways:

1. Participate in an interview session that will be audio taped

2. Participate in a 10-minute survey.

3. Participate in a member check process to verify the contents of the interviews and interpretations of the primary research.

4. The researcher will collect field notes.

Your participation is voluntary, and you can quit at any time. Where will this take place and how much time will it take?

Individual interviews will take approximately one hour each. The survey will last approximately 10 minutes. Individual interviews and the survey will take place after school at a location that is mutually agreed upon between participants and myself.
Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?

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There are no significant risks involved in being a participant in this study.

Will I benefit by being in this research?

There are no direct benefits for your participation in the study. However, the information learned from the study may provide valuable insights to school personnel and educators who work collaboratively to institute a new school-wide practice regarding parental involvement.

Who will see the information about me?

As a participant, your part will be confidential. The data collected for this study will be kept by the researcher, including audiotapes, but will not be shared with others. False names will be used in reports related to individual interviews. All audiotapes will be destroyed following transcription of the interviews.

In rare instances, authorized people may wish to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. The researcher would only allow people who are authorized by organizations such as Northeastern University to view the study data. No identifying information will ever be shared with people at the Public Schools or other institutions.

If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?

You are not required to take part in this study. If you do not want to participate, you do not have to sign this form.

What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?

There are no known significant risks involved in being a participant in this study.

Can I stop my participation in this study?

Participation in this study is voluntary, and your participation or non-participation will in no way affect other relationships with teachers, school personnel, school administrators or other parents.
You may quit at any time.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**

Please contact Robert Andersen at (401) 212-7307 or via e-mail at Andersen.r@husky.neu.edu if you have additional questions, or the chairperson of my committee, Dr. Sara Ewell at

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Northeastern University. Dr. Ewell can be contacted at (877) 668-7727 or s.ewell@neu.edu.

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: (617) 373-4588, Email: nregina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**

You will receive a $5.00 gift card to a local coffee shop.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**

There is no cost to participate in this study.

I have read, understood, and had the opportunity to ask questions regarding this consent form. I fully understand the nature and character of my involvement in this research program as a participant and the potential risks. I agree to participate in this study on a voluntary basis, and understand that I can depart from the research study at any time.

____________________________________ Research Participant (Printed Name)

____________________________________ Research Participant (Signature) Date

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Appendix E

Firmado el Documento de Consentimiento Informado

Northeastern University, Colegio de Estudios Profesionales

Nombre Investigador: Investigador Principal- Sara Ewell Estudiante Investigador- Robert Andersen

Título del Proyecto: Una Exploración Cualitativa Estudio de Caso Participación de los Padres Afroamericanos e Hispanos en una Escuela Secundaria Urbana.

¿Por qué me piden que participe en este estudio de investigación?

Le invitamos a participar en este estudio porque usted es el padre de un estudiante que asiste actualmente a la Escuela Secundaria Madison Park.

Por qué se realiza este estudio de investigación?

El propósito de este estudio es identificar cómo los administradores, maestros y otro personal escolar entienden la participación de los padres en una escuela secundaria urbana. El objetivo es entender las opiniones de los padres sobre la participación de los padres.

Lo que se me pedirá que haga?

El investigador estará buscando a participar de las siguientes maneras:

1. Cualquiera de participar en una sesión de entrevistas que será grabada en audio

2. Participar en una encuesta de 10 minutos.

3. Participar en un proceso de verificación miembro para verificar el contenido de las entrevistas e interpretaciones de la investigación primaria.

4. El investigador va a recoger las notas de campo. Su participación es voluntaria, y se puede optar en cualquier momento.

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¿Dónde va a tomar su lugar y cuánto tiempo tomará?

Las entrevistas individuales tomarán aproximadamente una hora cada uno. La encuesta durará aproximadamente 20 minutos. entrevistas individuales y la encuesta se llevará a cabo después de la escuela en un lugar que acuerden mutuamente entre los participantes y yo. Los lugares de las entrevistas y la encuesta pueden incluir la sala de conferencias, en casa o en el aula en la escuela, la biblioteca pública, o que tuvo lugar en un sitio alternativo en la comodidad de los participantes.

¿Habrá cualquier riesgo o incomodidad a mí?

No existen riesgos significativos que implica ser un participante en este estudio.

Son las ventajas de estar en esta investigación?

No hay beneficios directos para su participación en el estudio. Sin embargo, la información obtenida a partir del estudio puede proporcionar información muy valiosa para el personal escolar y los educadores que trabajan en colaboración para instituir una nueva práctica de toda la escuela respecto a la participación de los padres.

¿Quién va a ver la información sobre mí?

Su parte en el estudio será completamente confidencial. Seudónimos serán utilizados para todos los participantes en el estudio. Sólo el investigador tendrá conocimiento de las identidades de los participantes. Los informes o publicaciones usarán la información que le puede identificar de ninguna manera.

Como un participante individual, su parte será confidencial. Los datos recogidos para este estudio serán mantenidos por el investigador, incluyendo cintas de audio, pero no serán compartidos con otros. nombres falsos serán utilizados en los informes relacionados con las entrevistas individuales. Todas las cintas de audio serán destruidas después de la transcripción de las entrevistas.

En casos raros, las personas autorizadas pueden solicitar ver la información de investigación acerca de usted y otras personas en este estudio. Esto se hace sólo para estar seguro de que la investigación se realiza correctamente. El investigador sólo se permitiría a las personas que están autorizadas por organizaciones como la Universidad del Noreste para ver los datos del estudio. No hay información de identificación será nunca compartida con la gente en las escuelas
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públicas u otras instituciones.

Si yo no quiero participar en el estudio, qué opciones tengo?

Usted no está obligado a participar en este estudio. Si no desea participar, no tiene que firmar este formulario.

¿Qué pasará si sufro ningún daño de esta investigación?

No existen riesgos importantes que se sabe que implica ser un participante en este estudio.

¿Puedo detener mi participación en este estudio?

La participación en este estudio es voluntaria, y su participación o no participación afectará de ninguna manera otras relaciones (por ejemplo, el empleador, la escuela, etc.). Usted puede terminar su participación en este programa de investigación en cualquier momento sin penalización o gastos de cualquier clase, naturaleza o tipo.

A quién puedo contactar si tengo preguntas o problemas?

Comuníquese con Robert Andersen al (401) 212-7307 o por correo electrónico a Andersen.r@husky.neu.edu si tiene preguntas adicionales o al presidente de mi comité, la Dra. Sara Ewell de la Universidad de Northeastern. El Dr. Ewell puede ser contactado al (877) 668-7727 o s.ewell@neu.edu.

¿A quién puedo contactar acerca de mis derechos como participante?

Si usted tiene alguna pregunta sobre sus derechos como participante, puede comunicarse con Nan C. Regina, Director de Protección investigación con seres humanos, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: (617) 373-4588, e-mail: nregina@neu.edu. Usted puede llamar de forma anónima si así lo desea.

Se me pagará por mi participación?

Usted recibirá una tarjeta de regalo de $5.00 a una cafetería local.

¿Me costará nada a participar?
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No hay ningún costo para participar en este estudio.

He leído, entendido y tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas acerca de este formulario de consentimiento. Entiendo completamente la naturaleza y el carácter de mi participación en este programa de investigación como participante y los riesgos potenciales. Estoy de acuerdo en participar en este estudio de forma voluntaria, y comprender que no puedo apartarme del estudio de investigación en cualquier momento.

____________________________________ Participante en la investigación (Nombre Impreso)
____________________________________ Participante en la investigación (Firma) Fecha
1/17/2017

Mr. Robert Andersen
19 Spring Street
Apt. 1
Stoneham Massachusetts 02180

Dear Mr. Andersen,

I am in receipt of your research proposal entitled “A Qualitative Case Study Exploring African American and Hispanic Parental Involvement in an Urban High School.” Your research request has been approved.

Enclosed please find a copy of the Research Proposal Review Form for conducting research in the Boston Public Schools. It is your responsibility to take this form and have it signed by the Principal or Headmaster of each school (or appropriate BPS office) in which you plan to conduct research.

A copy of your executive summary (max. of 1 page) must be submitted along with the Review Form. Approval for this study is contingent upon your returning the signed consent forms to me. If you have any questions about this matter, please feel free to contact our office at (617) 635-9450.

Sincerely,

Nicole Wagner Lam
Executive Director
Office of Data & Accountability

End.
RESEARCH PROPOSAL NOTIFICATION FORM

The research proposal described below has been:

[ ] APPROVED  [ ] DISAPPROVED

Nicole Wagner Lam
Executive Director
Office of Data & Accountability

Name of Researcher: Mr. Robert Andersen
Affiliation: Northeastern University
Title of Proposed Research Project: "A Qualitative Case Study Exploring African American and Hispanic Parental Involvement in an Urban High School"
Topic of Proposed Research Project: Education: Parental Involvement
Comments:
Research Proposal Review Form

Dear Headmaster/Principal:

Enclosed please find an executive summary and proposal to conduct educational research in the Boston Public Schools. The proposal is being sent to you for your input. Although the Office of Data and Accountability has determined that the proposal satisfies the criteria for research outlined in the "A Qualitative Case Study Exploring African American and Hispanic Parental Involvement in an Urban High School" research, the decision to involve your school in the study rests with you. If you need further information in regards to the research, please reach out to the Principal Researcher. Should you decide to participate in the proposed study, please return this completed form to the researcher who will forward it directly to my office.

Thank you.

Please note: Research may require a survey component; you have the discretion to opt out of the research.

Comments:

Nicole Wagner Lam
Executive Director
Office of Data & Accountability

Name of Researcher: Mr. Robert Andersen
Affiliation: Northeastern University
Title of Proposed Research Project: "A Qualitative Case Study Exploring African American and Hispanic Parental Involvement in an Urban High School"
Topic of Proposed Research Project: Education: Parental Involvement
Reviewer Please check one:
☐ Proposal Supported
☐ Proposal Rejected
Reasons for rejecting proposed research:
Date: ____________________________
Signature: ____________________________
Please Print Your Name: ____________________________

Please check one:
☐ Headmaster or Principal: ____________________________
☐ Other: ____________________________ Department: ____________________________
NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION

Date: December 8, 2016  IRB #: CPS16-10-07
Principal Investigator(s): Sara Ewell
                       Robert Andersen
Department:           Doctor of Education Program
                       College of Professional Studies
Address:              20 Belvidere
                       Northeastern University
Title of Project:     A Qualitative Case Study Exploring African American
                       and Hispanic Parental Involvement in an Urban High
                       School
Participating Sites:  Boston Public Schools approval forthcoming
DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7
Informed Consents:    One (1) signed consent form (English and Spanish)
Monitoring Interval:  12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: DECEMBER 7, 2017

Investigator's Responsibilities:
1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when
   recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new
   information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must
   be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month
   prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any
   other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630