UNDERSTANDING PERCEPTIONS OF LATINO PARENTS WHO RELOCATE FROM LOW PERFORMING URBAN TO HIGH PERFORMING SUBURBAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS

A thesis presented by
Mary Ellen Janeiro

to
The School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the field of

Education

College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
August, 2015
Abstract

As the Latino population continues to grow and economic and academic success for this demographic becomes more widespread in the United States, there is and will continue to be a transitioning of students from low performing urban schools to higher performing suburban schools during the course of their K-12 education. How well a suburban school meets the needs of incoming, potentially at-risk students depends on many factors that require educators to be culturally aware and responsive, including the need for Latino students to feel a sense of belonging and value in their new community while not rejecting their own culture (Strobel, Kirshner, O’Donoghue, & McLaughlin, 2008). When Latino students from low performing school districts relocate to high performing school districts, the systems that receive them must be prepared to help these students close any achievement gaps they might arrive with from their prior educational experiences. From a desire to improve their child’s educational opportunities, parents are most commonly the initiators of such a move from one system to another. Yet upon arrival in a new school system, Latino parents are often faced with a new set of challenges in helping their child navigate through unfamiliar cultural and socioeconomic norms and expectations (Marx & Larson, 2012). Given a voice, Latino parents who move their families from a low performing district to a high performing district can serve as powerful allies and advocates as their children acclimate to a new school system (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). This Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) qualitative study utilized a Critical Race Theory framework to better understand the motivations, perceptions and experiences of Latino parents who relocated from low performing urban to a high performing suburban systems. Major findings included commonalities amongst
participants that included being active participants in their children’s academic life, having high levels of expectations and confidence in themselves and their children, encouraging assimilation in the community while maintain pride in ethnicity and family, desiring better communication between home and school, and being aware of but undaunted by economic disparities.

*Keywords:* Latino, parental involvement, achievement gap, community, culture, suburban, urban, relocate
Acknowledgements

There are many individuals that have assisted and inspired me in both the pursuit and the completion of this thesis. I am grateful to my committee chair Dr. Sara Ewell for her guidance and support over the past few years, both as a course professor and as an advisor. Her kind words and gentle suggestions have given this work a solid foundation on which to build. I was most fortunate to have Dr. Chris Unger as my second reader, and I will always remember his reassuring presence and sense of humor from the first evening orientation at Northeastern so many years ago. I would like to also thank Dr. Dan Downs for agreeing to be my third reader. His help along the way, from technical issues to participant contacts, provided me with direction and confidence just when I needed it most.

The members of the Northeastern 2012 cohort have provided much support in so many ways during our journey together through coursework, as well in those endless months of research and writing when it seems that the work is lonely and daunting. I am particularly grateful for the lasting friendship of Mustapha Benaoui; we have shared many hours and laughs in preparation for this milestone.

I am most blessed in the continued support of friends who have cheered me on, propped me up when I stumbled, and believed in my ability to do this when I may have questioned it myself. Jesus Hernandez, Khriseten Bellows, Kathleen Eldridge Stoker, and David Kaupp, thank you for being there in so many vital ways.

Finally, there is no repaying the love and tolerance shown to me by my two daughters from the moment I embarked on this journey. Their high school years have passed with the constant image of a mother at the laptop, often deep in thought, sighing heavily, and sometimes cursing. Jordi and Meghan, you have been kind enough to read the moments and navigate the moods accordingly, providing me space or a hug as needed. I hope that the sacrifices that you
both have made in having an often distracted mom who missed more than a few regattas will turn out to be the inspiration that fuels your own fire for life-long learning and activism that you someday model for your own children and your community.

This research is dedicated to those who are often overlooked and unheard, but nonetheless have an important story to contribute that we might all be the better for hearing.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ........................................................................................................... 2  
Acknowledgements .......................................................................................... 3  
Table of Contents ............................................................................................. 6  
Chapter I: Introduction ..................................................................................... 7  
  Significance of the Problem ................................................................. 14  
  Positionality ......................................................................................... 16  
  Conclusions ......................................................................................... 19  
  Research Question .............................................................................. 20  
  Theoretical Framework ...................................................................... 20  
Chapter II: Literature Review ......................................................................... 24  
Chapter III: Research Design ......................................................................... 49  
  Research Tradition .............................................................................. 50  
  Critical Race Theory as a Theoretical Framework .................................. 52  
  Role of Researcher and Positionality ..................................................... 53  
  Participants, Recruitment, and Access .................................................. 54  
  Data Collection, Storage, and Management ......................................... 56  
  Data Analysis ...................................................................................... 58  
  Trustworthiness, Validity, Limitations, & Protection of Human Subjects ....... 59  
Chapter IV: Report of Research Findings ....................................................... 62  
Chapter V: Discussion of Research Findings ............................................... 94  
References ...................................................................................................... 114  
Appendix .......................................................................................................... 129
Chapter I: Introduction

The changing demographics of America are reflected in its schools, where it is projected that by 2035 students of color will be the majority (Villegas & Lucas, 2003; Williams, 1992). Latinos, as the largest growing ethnic group in America, at a rate that is estimated to exceed 24% of the total population by 2050, will account for the largest portion of those students. In addition, Latinos constitute the youngest ethnic group among Americans, as one in every five schoolchildren and one of every four babies born today (Frey, 2010). Despite the growing population of Latinos, figures are bleak for their academic achievement in U.S. schools. Frey (2010) estimates 41% of Latinos over the age of twenty do not have a high school diploma, and there are increasing gaps in reading and math among current Latino students and their peers.

In many of the largest school systems in the United States, there are pockets of high achieving, publically funded urban schools. However, these schools often admit only small percentages of students through an exam or lottery process. So, while urban education should not automatically assume low achieving, it must be noted that racial achievement disparities, particularly in urban areas, have been tracked extensively in the National Center for Education Statistics publications throughout the years. Trends in racial achievement disparities over the past two decades have found the gap between inner-city children of color and their white and Asian suburban peers to be further widening (e.g. Jencks and Phillips, 1998; Walker-James, Jurich & Estes, 2001).

When equal access to high quality education and concerns over de facto segregation of public school systems first came to the forefront of the collective American conscious in the 1970s, many large cities such as Chicago (Carter, 2007) and Boston (Angrist & Lang, 2004) sought to provide educational equity through the creation of busing programs that continue to enroll inner-city students from low performing schools in affluent suburban schools today.
Numerous studies have considered these busing programs in terms of both their academic and social outcomes for the students they serve (e.g. Angrist & Lang, 2004; Ispa-Landa, 2013; Marx, 2008; Ogbu, 2003). However, this study is not interested in scenarios where students of color are transplanted daily to reputedly excellent suburban schools, only to return each evening to their families in urban communities. Instead, it considers the occasions when urban-residing Latino parents have intentionally chosen to move their families to a suburban community in which they want their children schooled, with the hope that equitable access to education will improve academic opportunities.

Over a decade ago, The Brookings Institution noted that the 2000 U.S. Census showed distinct growth patterns in suburban Latino populations. Fifty-four percent of all U.S. Latinos were living in the suburbs at that point, a number that increased by 71 percent from the previous census ten years earlier (Frey, 2001). The report noted that while many Latinos entering the country were now bypassing the major metropolitan hubs in favor of cheaper housing in neighboring suburbs, it also found that many formerly urban Latinos were leaving the cities in search of a better quality of life for themselves and their families (Frey, 2001.) Research has supported what parents have long observed, that living in an advantaged community where much of the population is affluent and highly educated has the single greatest affect on student achievement, above any other marker for family advantage (Dupere, Leventhal, Crosnoe & Dion, 2010). It is with this in mind that many parents from all cross-sections of life have sought the ways and means to enroll their children in such communities. However, upon arrival in a new suburban school system, formerly urban-residing Latino parents are often faced with a new set of challenges in helping their child navigate through unfamiliar cultural and socioeconomic norms and expectations (Marx & Larson, 2012). Many students find themselves moving from an urban
system where they were the majority to a system where they now represent a small minority (Ispa-Landa, 2013). Further complicating this issue, the National Center for Education Statistics (2011) reports that 83% of the country’s teachers are white and hail from middle class families where English is the only language spoken. This initially can create borders between students and teachers (Sachs, 2004; Watson, 2012) that stem from different experiences, cultural frames of reference, race, or class issues. These socioeconomic and cultural differences can result in many issues that delay or inhibit success for students of color (Goldsmith, 2004; McKenzie & Schuerich, 2008; Walker & Pearsall, 2012). In addition, many underserved students often have disparities in their knowledge base, as well as their academic achievement. These gaps can originate for various reasons including fewer resources for learning in the home, less access to college preparatory courses, tracking, school funding, and teacher attrition or inexperience (e.g. Bell, 2003; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Walker & Pearsall, 2012; Watson, 2010). It is these students who require more support in the classroom from their teachers and from the school system (Song, Hannafin, & Hill, 2007; Watson, 2012).

When students from less resourced, lower achieving schools transition to better funded, higher achieving schools, academic achievement gaps can be exacerbated (Walker & Pearsall, 2012), and therefore an unexpected disconnect can develop between the parents’ intentions and the reality that exists for their children in the new system. For example, despite the fact that nationally over the past several decades, African American and Latino students have been widely underrepresented in honors courses and over-represented in lower level courses (e.g. Goldsmith, 2004; Marx, 2008; Walker & Pearsall, 2012), there had been little discussion of the issue by educators or others in such communities (Ferguson, 2012). As long as the overall measurements of school success, such as college admissions, test scores, and graduation rates remained high,
most of the reputedly excellent schools were happy to consider these benchmarks as proof that their systems were high achieving (Ferguson, 2012). Ironically, it is in keeping the school’s reputation and performance in mind that parents from low performing systems are often compelled to settle in certain school systems, and as the Latino population grows, and seeks improved academic outcomes for their children, many suburban systems deemed high achieving have seen an influx of this population (Evans, 2007). Many of these students arrive with knowledge gaps that further differentiate them from their new suburban peers (e.g. Burris, Wiley, Welner & Murphy, 2008; Ferguson, 2002; Marx & Larson, 2012). Due to federal educational mandates, closing these gaps in high achieving schools has now become part of the broader, national conversation regarding racial academic achievement disparities.

In January of 2002, President Bush signed into law *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), which dictated that states publish academic achievement results separately for racial and ethnic groups, with the intent being to alleviate inter-group disparities (Fusarelli, 2004) within all schools. For the first time in U.S. history, the goal of raising achievement levels and closing gaps for racial and ethnic minorities became a federal priority. NCLB mandates meant that all public schools would be held accountable for the performance of all of their students, including those suburban schools considered high performing by former standards. Suddenly, it was not enough for a school rest on the collective measures of achievement of their student body. Now each child is be tracked for *Adequate Yearly Progress* (AYP) as outlined in the specifics of NCLB, and the school is held accountable for how well it meets the needs of individuals. In states like Massachusetts, high-stakes standardized testing (MCAS) performance is also considered to be integral to a school’s ranking. That has meant that many reputedly excellent schools in well-to-do suburbs have seen their previous Level 1 ranking slip (*Boston Globe*, Sept. 29, 2014).
more closely examined through the statistics reported in the MCAS school profiles, it shows that these level drops are attributed to a school’s inability to significantly cut the achievement gap among students of various races, socioeconomic status, and academic abilities, a gap which must be cut in half by 2017.

As noted previously, a substantial amount of data has shown that black and Latino children were under-represented in advanced level classes in high performing schools (e.g. Burris et al., 2008; Gandara, 2006; Walker & Pearsall, 2012;) and over-represented in the lowest level classes (Ferguson, 2002). Evidence has found that when students move to a high performing school, many experienced a greater level of academic achievement than their peers who remained in underperforming urban environments (Grigg, 2012; Kauffman & Rosenbaum, 1992), but this can no longer create complacency on the part of suburban educators who might be content to point out that at least their black and Latino students pass courses and standardized tests. Educators must expect and provide more for all students.

As more non-white, potentially at-risk students enroll in affluent suburban schools, educators in those systems must accommodate the unique needs of students who arrive in their classrooms with literacy, language, and social challenges. Many find themselves ill-equipped or unwilling to shift practice in order to tailor instruction as needed to suit the needs of English language learners and students who’s skills may not be at expected grade levels (Nunn, 2011; Evans, 2007), but lack of preparation or the desire for status quo are no longer feasible as racial and ethnic diversity become the norm in suburban schools. The high performing suburban school systems must adjust some of their former approaches and attitudes in order to provide a rigorous curriculum for all (Burris et al., 2008), and not be content with dismissing the lower academic performance of blacks and Latinos. As Latino students from low performing school districts
relocate to high performing school districts, the systems that receive them must be prepared to help these students close any achievement gaps they might arrive with from their prior educational experiences, as well as meet the socio-emotional needs of the children within the context of the school environment.

The parents of these students can serve as powerful allies and advocates as their children acclimate to a new school system (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011), but there must be open and effective communication between the parent and school. However, such communication and subsequent parent involvement is almost always constituted on the school’s terms (Miramontes, Nadeau & Commins, 1997), a model that especially suppresses the voice of parents of color, lower socioeconomic status (SES), and less educated parents (Ferguson, 2002).

By studying the perceptions of Latino parents and families who have become residents in a high performing school district, educators, administrators, and other vested parties can begin to understand how to more effectively link their own understanding of the powerful influence of Latino parents on academic achievement with methods, programming, and outreach that support these particular families as they transition into a system that may be very different from the system and community from which they came. Parent-Teacher organizations and community activists wishing to forge a better sense of unity within their demographically changing community would also be considered as audience to any research and subsequent study and/or action plans.

**Low Performing Urban and High Performing Suburban Systems Defined**

To provide a clear understanding of how the five school systems considered in this study were selected, it is necessary to note the criteria that were used. The two cities discussed were defined as urban, in part, because of their population density, one with over 76,000 people in its
less than 7-½ square miles, and the other with over 91,000 residents living in 13.5 square miles. The suburban towns each had populations that ranged from 6,600 to almost 34,000 residents, and had landmass from nearly 14 square miles to 36 square miles, respectively. Each suburb was located within a 20-mile drive from what would be considered major New England cities.

To determine what constituted low or high performance of a school system, the state’s Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website was used to first delineate student demographics, and then note dropout rates, college attendance rates, and performance designation as determined by NCLB level standards. These measures served a means by which to consider a rudimentary assessment of each system to see how it ranked statewide. The urban systems were comprised entirely of schools receiving Title I funding and had a majority non-white student enrollment. Dropout rates at both were reported just under or slightly above 12% over four year enrollment, and college attendance rates were in the mid 60% for graduates. Under the auspices of the NCLB Act, systems and schools within each are given a “Level 1-5” status, with a Level 1 rating indicating that the school and/or system “meets gap narrowing goals”. One urban system was designated as a “Level 3” by national standards, the other a “Level 5”, a system deemed to be “Chronically Underperforming” and currently in the hands of state receivership since 2011.

The three high performing suburban systems considered in this study were predominately white schools; with one having a dropout rate of .3% and Level 1 status. The other suburban systems had .7% and .3% dropout rates, with Level 2 status. The three suburban systems reported an 87-91% rate of graduates enrolling in a 4-year college. A more in-depth look at each of the five systems will be recapitulated in Table 2 found on page 65 of this study. It will include median income of residents and average sale price of homes in 2014 in order to shed light on
household economic imbalances that may account for some of the achievement disparities experienced by students in low performing urban systems.

**Significance of the Problem**

**Local significance.** As demographics shift nationally and the achievement gap seems no closer to closing, what is known about effective teaching for students of color (Evans, 2007; Sachs, 2004; Strobel et al., 2008) must be considered for its transformative power in a suburban setting as students of color move to predominately white communities. The number of students of color from lower SES backgrounds attending high performing suburban schools midway through their K-12 education will continue to increase as the demographics of the country change and as families acquire the means to relocate into such suburban communities.

The needs of these students are unique. Much of the pre-existing literature speaks to forced and voluntary desegregation through busing programs (Angrist & Lang, 2004; Carter, 2007; Ispa-Landa, 2013), or through a demographic shift that brings about what has been termed “white flight” whereby school systems experience a rapid shift in the majority ethnicity of the community (Dondero & Muller, 2012; Evans, 2007; Williams, 1992). On these rarer but increasing occasions when a predominately white, high performing school system finds itself responsible for the fair and equitable education of all of its students, it must be prepared to not only adapt to the needs of those students who arrive with gaps in their knowledge and/or language skills, but who also arrive with cultural norms that may be different than the majority of students.

**State and national significance.** As states compete for funding initiatives such as *Race to the Top* money and grants, the significance of each school system’s achievement and ability to meet the needs and annual yearly progress of students will become more of a shared burden than
it has at any other time in the history of American education. Such population shifts and changes necessitate that the question of how to resolve educational gaps can no longer be left to the local citizens relegated to areas of poverty.

The rapidly growing Latino population, in particular, has begun to move away from urban areas in larger numbers to seek better educational opportunities for their children, and as the largest growing ethnicity (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011) the country can no longer afford to compartmentalize the achievement gap to areas of poverty and race. Recent attention, such as the film *Waiting for Superman* and numerous features on projects such as Geoffrey Canada’s *Harlem Children’s Zone*, have shown the inequity that exists in urban education, but the spotlight must also shine on the realization that when families do manage to leave an urban area there is often little support for them to actually realize the dream of real educational success for their children merely by changing zip codes. The potential for greater, faster gains in closing the achievement gap for these students may be more quickly accomplished through a targeted alliance with their parents.

**Individual and societal.** Writer James Truslow Adams defined the American Dream in 1931 by noting that “life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement”, regardless of class. This idea has become the very core and fiber by which we have built our society. However, one has only to consider the socioeconomic correlation to academic achievement to understand that America is not a class-blind society. Strides have been made to balance educational equity and exposure, but they have fallen short. As families from lower socioeconomic levels find paths to better education for their children by relocating to high performing suburban schools, they are often left to navigate the norms of a community and a system where they lack familiarity. It is through becoming educated
about our neighbors that we learn to live a more productive, successful and peaceful existence.

By helping the individual assimilate more easily into a community, while allowing for and appreciating unique differences, the society is improved as a whole.

**Positionality Statement**

**Author background.** I approach my study from the vantage point of a white female who has taught high school English for 25 years. I began my career in Maine in a school district that espoused the tenets of Theodore Sizer and *The Coalition of Essential Schools*. The superintendent, who later became Maine Commissioner of Education, encouraged his faculty members to put into practice the idea that in knowledge less is more (Sizer, 1984). Highly qualified teachers who modeled engaging lessons served as mentors, and I was allowed academic creativity whenever I could make a case for its implementation to be in the best interest of the students as a preventative from what Sizer termed “a paralysis of imagination” (p. 218). It was also during this time that I partnered with a history teacher as co-instructors for an American Studies course. The ability to present material to students in many facets, with another enthusiastic professional, taught me early in my career that the key to student engagement is largely in helping them to draw connections across disciplines and providing them with enough information that they are naturally lead to critical thinking and analysis and more able to place themselves within the very context of the knowledge.

After moving to another New England state, I taught for eight years in two affluent suburban high schools. Although I enjoy teaching in any form, my own background was not that of the affluent students I found before me each day. My other work as the director of a non-profit arts and community organization had brought me into contact with the young people of the city referred to in this study under the pseudonym “Riverton”. Riverton is predominately Latino, with
over 80% of its high school students identifying as specifically Dominican. “White Flight” during the late 1980s all but ensured that the next decade in the city would resemble the “separate but equal” days of long ago. To be clear, this was segregation de facto versus de jour (Racial Desegregation in Public Education in the United States, 2000), but the results proved the same.

Riverton remains the poorest city in the state and perpetually ranks in the top 30 poorest in the nation. It was reported by the Department of Revenue in the 2012 Census that Riverton had an annual household income of less than $37,000 among its 77,000 plus residents. When I met the principal in 2001, it had been five years since the high school had lost accreditation and its standardized test scores were the lowest in the state. But I found in these young people warmth and an openness to learn. When the principal asked me to consider joining the faculty, I saw it as an opportunity to both step outside my own comfort zone as a white suburban teacher, and also as a return to the economic level and aspects of a family structure that more closely mirrored my own childhood. What I found during my first year at Riverton High bore testament to the same national statistics for urban schools, with the young people in Riverton often dismissed by many of their own teachers as the future cashiers and shelf stockers of the retail and fast food world.

However, under new leadership, reform and transformation were soon underway at Riverton High School, and by 2005 accreditation was regained, as the three thousand students were divided into six new high schools with thematic approaches. I chose a position on the development committee for the newly created Humanities and Leadership Development High School. I placed myself here specifically because I fundamentally believed in engaged learning through illustrative and universal connections in an approach similar to the American Studies course I had taught years earlier.
After many years teaching at an urban high school, I returned three years ago to suburban teaching in a neighboring community. The affluent town, named in this study as “McCallister”, where I now teach English stands in stark contrast to the city it borders, the poorest city in the state. McCallister cited no less than 244 residents with an adjusted gross income of over a million dollars, or 4.15 per every1000 residents, in the same 2012 Census that measured Riverton’s per capita income under $12,000. For decades, the residents on either side simply did not cross the city limits if it could possibly be avoided. However, in recent years the predominately Latino population of the Riverton has begun, slowly, to move into the neighboring affluent towns in hopes of having their children benefit from the academically high performing school systems. This dissertation thesis focuses on the engagement of parents of color and low socioeconomic status within other neighboring, affluent, high performing suburban systems when they have moved their children from an impoverished, low performing urban district midway through their education. I view this initial work as a way to begin to better understand the divide that often exists when students transition from urban to suburban and bring with them gaps or deficits in the knowledge and skill base they are expected to have in order to perform in a rigorous, high performing district.

Addressing biases. I come to this work with the following biases: I believe that learning happens most effectively when teachers approach lessons with the universal in mind. I am aware, however, that this thinking can be largely refuted when considering that some areas of study such as math or science do not lend themselves to necessary connections in order to achieve proficiency. I am also aware of my assumption that if a teacher can find the “magic carrot” to bait a student’s interest, then that student will want naturally to know more. I realize that sometimes a student’s life outside the classroom may be so overwhelming or encompassing to
them that it prevents them from engagement, but I struggle with full acceptance of this.

I also am conscious of the assumptions often made as urban educators, the “deficit thinking” (Jupp & Slattery 2008), that our students do not care about anything academic and have no exposure to it. We generalize and we complain that we must back up so far in providing them with base knowledge and basic vocabulary, that we often fall into what we believe is the role of sole supplier of information and do not leave opportunity or direction for the students to actively engage beyond the immediate lesson.

I must also be aware of my own biases regarding the experience of urban poverty versus rural poverty. Payne’s (1996) work continues to help me navigate the wide range of experiences that my students face is vastly different from my own experience as a youth in Maine. I am aware of the fact that I am a white, educated researcher whose cannot fully understand the perceptions of those interviewed without interjecting my own interpretation, even unconsciously.

Finally, I must realize that engagement in world events, human experiences, and other connections for the 21st Century student will be different from my own. It is, as Dewey said over a hundred years ago of students then, “useless to bemoan the departure of the good old days of children’s modesty, reverence, and implicit obedience”, which we never really had. The acquisition of knowledge has changed significantly in the past decade, and I cannot judge the parents’ desire for engagement by standards that are the norm for higher socioeconomic levels, either by my own educational experience or by past students in my early years of teaching prior to the wide-spread usage of the internet.

**Conclusion.** The participant parents were integral in helping me to frame a better understanding of the needs of their children. Of course, the wealth of literature that addresses the many facets of how education is connected with income, ethnicity, gender, language, and so
many more served as invaluable resources as well.

I have recently come to understand that I can still be a voice for urban education despite the fact that I no longer work in that capacity. Education, like the world in general, is in a constant state of flux, and I look forward to the evolution of my own work and career as I carry with me into the next stage all the knowledge I have gained from a varied past.

Research Question

*What is the experience of Latino parents who move from a low performing urban school district to a high performing suburban school district?* This question will serve as an overarching guide for my study, which seeks to give voice to a growing and often overlooked segment of suburban parents. By understanding the experiences and perceptions that Latino parents have, a school system might, in turn, be better prepared to meet the unique needs of these potential at-risk students.

Creswell (2012) advises that the central question find the balance between being general enough to allow for “latitude for participants to express themselves” (p.133), while still providing some direction for the study that is clear to the reader from the outset. Mindful of this, the research question allowed the participating parents in this study an opportunity to openly share their experiences free of my biases and assumptions. They were able to expand as they saw fit on perceptions of the urban systems they had left, reflect on their participation in their child’s education in both urban and suburban contexts, critique the suburban systems, and discuss the socio-emotional needs of their family.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory

*Theory selection rationale.* When I first arrived in the suburban system, I was most curious to see how teachers differentiated instruction to meet the unique needs of these particular
incoming students. I quickly realized that little was being done; teachers were content to target their lessons to the children who had grown up with all the advantages of upper-middle class life, mostly whites who spoke English as the first and often only language of the home. While there was also a rapidly growing population of Asian and South East Asian students, these children were coming mainly from families where one or both parents was college educated and in a higher income bracket than the Latino families that fit the profile of this study. This other growing demographic was well represented in the honors and Advanced Placement (AP) level courses at McCallister High while the Latino students were under-represented, something noted already as being reflective of national norms (e.g. Burris et al., 2008; Gandara, 2006; Walker & Pearsall, 2012). Few faculty members seemed concerned that the Latino students were enrolled in the lowest level courses; no one seemed to want to recognize or better understand the unique qualities that exist for this particular population. It was generally assumed that families came McCallister, and others like it for the school system, and while that may be true in many cases, the sacrifices and struggles some families made for their children to receive this education was not being told.

It became apparent to me during the early stages of my doctoral journey that this study would seek to give voice to those often marginalized by the society in which they live, making Critical Race Theory (CRT) an appropriate framework. By using CRT as the theoretical lens to guide the study, voice is given to the Latino parents and students, so that through sharing their lived experiences they might provide understanding that the dominant culture has failed to consider thus far, what Solorzano and Yosso (2009) deemed “shatter[ing] the complacency” of the suburban school system and “challeng[ing] the dominant discourse on race” (p.138) in an attempt to create positive academic reform.
**Features of the model.** CRT traces its roots to the 1970s and legal battles regarding race and racism (Ladson-Billings, 1999). As scholars concluded that laws created to fight discrimination were themselves no measure against the racism that was pervasive in society (Zamudio, Bridgeman, Russell, & Rios, 2009), legal scholars Alan Freeman, Derrick Bell, and Richard Delgado rose to the forefront of CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

The five basic tenets to CRT are based on the belief that racism is part of American culture; that racism requires sweeping change that is not supported by the slow rate of change within the legal system; that the interests of people of color are supported only when there is a convergence of interests of the dominant, white culture; that an interdisciplinary approach is important to understanding the places where intersectionality matter; and finally, that the unique experiences and voices of people of color offer historical and personal perspectives that are important (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Over time, CRT has expanded to include the interests of other groups such as Native Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, feminists, and the gay, lesbian, transgender communities (Kumashiro, 2000).

Notable scholars who fundamentally connected CRT to education are Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate. Their work particularly focuses on the specific tenets of the permanence of racism in the U.S., the colorblind theory as it connects to education and reform, the experiences of students of color, and it calls for an end to racial oppression in schools (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Using CRT provides a different perspective and challenges existing notions of why diverse students might fail to attain the academic successes of their white counterparts (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

In addressing one tenet of CRT, the critique of colorblindness in the classroom, Nieto (2001) found that many teachers today still believe in approaching students without
consideration for differences in culture or ethnicity. This stemmed from well-intended but misguided notions of the 1970s that teachers should be colorblind when it came to their students in order to create equality within the classroom. Despite the importance of race as an influencing factor in education, CRT scholar Taylor (2009) contests that the colorblind theory silences those affected by racism.

CRT lends itself to a qualitative study in that it allows for the capture of experience and story-telling from participants, and it serves as a lens by which to understand why and how race matter, specifically in an educational setting. Racism occurs at the individual, organizational, social, and civilizational levels (Scheurich & Young, 1997). By providing the opportunity to express the feelings of the marginalized individual within a system and a society, the dominant culture, whose norms have formed the standards for the operation of the society, is provided a means to better understand members with differing experiences and perspectives. This becomes the first step in creating more tailored approaches to educating Latino students who do not share the same background as their peers.

**Fit of theory to study.** It was noted that CRT is an analytical tool in which a “racial analysis can be used to deepen understanding of the educational barriers for people of color, as well as to explore how these barriers are resisted and overcome” (Taylor, 2009, p. 9). CRT is the best applicable framework to allow for the counter-stories to be told by the families and students who have transitioned into a community very different from the one in which they formerly resided. It places ethnicity at the forefront of the conversation and addresses the colorblindness of the school and community as it relates to the growing population of Latinos, and the need to better understand their unique and valuable place within the larger school and community by giving voice to the stories that they offer.
Chapter II: The Literature Review

As more potentially at-risk Latino students transfer from low performing urban schools to high performing suburban schools, educators in suburban systems must accommodate the unique needs of students who arrive in their classrooms with potential literacy and language challenges. Many teachers find themselves ill-equipped or unwilling to shift practice in order to tailor instruction as needed (Evans, 2007; Nunn, 2011). The high performing suburban school systems that have not previously enrolled students from varying socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds must adjust some of their former approaches and attitudes in order to provide a rigorous curriculum for all (Burris, Wiley, Welner, & Murphy, 2008), and not be content with dismissing the lower academic performance of students that have not had the benefit or advantage of beginning their academic education in such a system (Marx, 2008; Marx & Larson, 2012; McKenzie & Schuerich, 2008).

Parental involvement has proven beneficial in improving student achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2007), and is particularly important for students who hail from low-income and/or immigrant families (Lee & Bowen, 2006). This involvement can manifest itself in various ways, from engaging directly with the school to helping with homework to shared family values and beliefs around education (Epstein, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005). Awareness of cultural differences as they relate to familial norms can help educators to better understand the role of parental expectations and involvement in Latino families (Yosso, 2005), and serve to foster understanding and communication between home and school that will further enhance the educational outcomes for Latino students (Walker, Ice, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2011) who have transitioned into a high performing district from a low performing system.

Context
This literature review represents an attempt to understand what has transpired in schools that have successfully served at-risk student populations, particularly in predominately white settings, and within Latino families themselves. It seeks to trace a very brief history of such programs as METCO in the Boston area (Ispa-Landa, 2012) and Diversify in the Chicago area (Carter, 2007), as well as the experiences of the students who attend those schools (Angrist & Lang, 2004; Carter, 2007). It also considers those less common, but now increasing scenarios whereby families of lower socioeconomic status move to nearby suburbs of higher socioeconomic status (Grigg, 2012; Kauffman & Rosenbaum, 1992). It was found in those instances that Latinos and children of color were underrepresented in advanced level classes (Burris, Wiley, Welner, & Murphy, 2008; Gandara, 2006; Grigg, 2012; Ispa-Landa, 2013; Ndura, Robinson, & Ochs, 2003, Nunn, 2011; Skerrett & Hargreaves, 2008; Walker & Pearsall, 2012; Williams, 1992). Evidence did, however, find that these students experienced a greater level of academic achievement than their peers who remained in urban environments (Grigg, 2012; Kauffman & Rosenbaum, 1992), but this should not create complacency on the part of suburban educators who might be content to point out that their Latino students pass courses and standardized tests.

A first step in understanding how cultural differences may interplay with the academic success of Latino students when they transition to a suburban school from an urban one is to query the parents in an attempt to generate awareness and connections that might foster home-school partnerships (Jeynes, 2007; Yan & Lin, 2005) that lead to improved academic experiences and outcomes for Latino students. Existing research on Latino student performance and Latino parental involvement has at times considered the growing number of Latino families that reside in rural areas of the United States as well (e.g. Diversi & Mecham, 2005; Zuniga, Olson &
Winter, 2005). However, for the specific understanding of parental experiences as they relate to this study, this literature review reflects primarily on studies concerning urban and suburban experiences for Latino families.

**Organization**

This literature review first considers the recent historical integration of high performing suburban schools as students from urban areas have transitioned into such school communities, specifically considering the achievement gap for Latinos and their underrepresentation in courses considered more advanced and rigorous. It then considers parental support, engagement, and collaboration with schools, particularly, influencing factors for Latino families. It then investigates research that has centered on student perceptions of belonging and engagement within both urban and suburban school communities, followed by educator perceptions of Latino student achievement and parental involvement and collaboration. The review then moves to research that discusses attributes of successful teachers of Latino students and teacher dialogue regarding race in the context of educating in urban and suburban areas. It concludes with a look at existing study of home-school partnerships that have sought to enhance student performance through stronger family connections. It closes with discussion of how the selected articles can inform the work of educators who are now teaching Latino students who have moved into a high performing suburban school district, including outreach to parents and culturally responsive training for faculty members.

**Suburban Integration and Student Achievement**

During the past two decades, American suburbs have become increasingly diverse. By 2000, minorities accounted for 27% of the population, an 8% increase over a ten-year period, which continues to grow today (Frey, 2001). Consequently, as the population of minority and
Latino students continues to increase, suburban schools will face the growing responsibility for their education. Such a change in the demographics of a school system can mean that the system is not ready, willing, or able to address the specific needs of these students (Evans, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Williams, 1992). How educators prepare now for the ever increasing diversity will matter greatly to the nation, and much can be garnered from a brief look back at what we have learned from efforts to desegregate schools through initial efforts of transporting urban children of poverty to affluent suburban systems.

St. John, in her 1970 Harvard University article on desegregation and minority group performance reported that early efforts to create educational equity consisted of various methods of student selection, some random and some selection based on performance and perceived potential of young students of color to attend area schools located outside their own inner-city neighborhoods. Much of this type of programming was experimental in nature, occurring as early as 1964 (St. John, 1970) during the height of the Civil Rights Movement. Evidence showed nearly forty years ago that it was difficult to conclude whether school success rates for these “chosen” students improved because of desegregation or due to other factors (St. John, 1970) when it did improve. In most of the studies, students performed no worse than in their previous academic setting and in many cases better (Coleman, 1966).

Interest in these two early studies resulted from a national trend following Civil Rights legislation to forcefully desegregate the nation’s schools, and as a result the findings needed to consider the overall effects on learning in any school where students were transported, and missing from the St. John article was information regarding the performance of white students when bused to urban schools, which was not her intent. However, historically parents have expressed concern and even outrage when busing situations have placed children in what was
deemed as an underperforming school merely for the sake of integration, as witnessed in Boston and other cities in the 1970s. Others since have relied on data that supports the belief that desegregation through busing programs is acceptable as long as it does not affect the academic achievement of the high performing students (Angrist & Lang, 2004; Ispa-Landa, 2013).

Busing Urban Students to the Suburbs

Angrist & Lang (2004) found that suburban parents and communities were content to offer enrollment to inner-city children in the affluent suburbs of Boston under the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO) program due, in part, to the fact that the suburban students’ education and standardized test scores were not influenced in any way by the busing program, while the black and Latino students experienced only modest positive effects from peer influence on their scores. Programs such as METCO in Massachusetts and Diversify in Illinois are voluntary, both on the part of the students who participate and on the part of the receiving school system. It was noted in several interviews with various researchers in multiple schools (Angrist & Lang, 2004; Carter, 2007; Gandara, 2006; Ispa-Landa, 2013) that parents, faculty, and communities often expressed a sense of pride in feeling that they were offering disadvantaged students an opportunity to receive a better education while creating some diversity in their school system. It should be noted here that these programs allow for control over integration. Students are selected to come, and arrive with the understanding that they must behave according to the code established by the school and the system or they will be removed from the program. The students in these programs are not part of the community as residents, nor are they ever more than a small minority population within the larger majority white student population (Burris et al., 2008; Carter, 2007; Ispa-Landa, 2013; Kaufmann & Rosenbaum, 1992).

Changing Suburban Demographics
Evans (2007) grounds her study in critical race theory and uses the beliefs about and race to serve as a foundation for the question of whether it affects educator’s interactions and response to changes in demographics (Evans, 2007). It documents work at three suburban high schools that each underwent a demographic change and how each, through their own unique circumstances, came to respond to the necessary educational changes, notably how the salience of race affected decision making for both faculty and the school as a whole. The region studied had experienced demographic change particularly from 1990 to 2000. Skerrett & Hargreaves (2008) also compared four high schools that underwent demographic changes and the resulting lower achievement as it correlates to increased standardized testing and assessment reform. Much of what was reported was to be expected when a system undergoes a change that transforms it from mostly homogeneous to heterogeneous. The significance of the study is found in the recommendations that call for more internal strategies for educational change from teachers and others within a school as opposed to more top-down mandates that seem to develop as a result of standardization and demographic changes.

Additional studies found that student movement from school to school (Grigg, 2012) had a negative effect on academic progress during the year that the move occurred, but was inconclusive as to long-term effects on achievement. Grigg (2012) considered students in Nashville Public Schools moving within that system as opposed to a suburban move from the city schools. Of the articles considered, only three (Burris et al., 2008; Kaufman & Rosenbaum, 1992; Nunn, 2011) addressed the specific issue of education and academic success and equity for Latino and black students who reside in a predominately white suburban high school yet hail from and remain in low-socioeconomic households during their enrollment, thus indicating that further study of this particular educational transition for minority students is warranted.
Parental Support and Influencing Factors for Latino Families

Parental support of students who hail from minority, immigrant, or low-income backgrounds is particularly important for academic success as families and schools work to help students overcome deficits and other potential at-risk behaviors that might hinder academic progress (Dearing, McCartney, Weiss, Kreider, & Simpkins, 2004, Lee & Bowen, 2006). It has been suggested that parental support at home is more important as a determinant of achievement than a parent’s involvement directly with the school (Stewart, 2007). However, this should not be interpreted to mean that parent-school partnerships are not important. By creating a community of students, families, teachers, and administrators there is enhanced support of student learning goals. Lareau (1987) determines that parental involvement is the integration of home and school. It has been found that rates of parental involvement are significantly higher among middle and upper class families (de Carvahlo, 2001), whereas lower SES students, with less parental involvement, do not experience academic benefits and achievement at the level of their higher income peers (McLloyd, 1990).

Understanding why minority parents participate less often should not be seen as a lack of interest in the success of their child’s academic performance or their desire to be involved (Trumbull et al., 2001). Despite the desire, the participation levels for minority parents, it is still lower than that of white parents (Jeynes, 2003), and this presents a challenge for school officials who seek to increase involvement. Often the policies and programs created to increase parental involvement in schools fail to take into account the unique cultural beliefs of non-white parents, as well as constraints such as language barriers, employment circumstances, or family obligations (Delgado-Gaitin, 1992; Floyd, 1998).

Hornby and Lafaele (2011) suggest that beyond certain individual factors that serve as
barriers to parental involvements, such as a parent’s belief in their own ability or their perception of an invitation to be involved, there are barriers relating to class, ethnicity and gender that are also relevant in accounting for levels of involvement. Work done by Reay (1998) found that when parents possessed cultural capital in line with a school’s values, the level of participation was greater. Lower SES families were aware of the difference between themselves and that of teachers in terms of cultural capital. Reay (1998) concluded that for these families, home-school relationships were deemed as separate, whereas middle-class families viewed the interconnectedness of the relationship.

Previous research also yielded data on the academic achievement gaps between higher and lower socioeconomic status (SES) as it relates to ethnicity and varying cultural norms (Delpit, 1998; Nieto, 2003, Ladson-Billings, 1998; Landsman, 2001; hooks, 1994), and the connection to parental engagement with their child’s school (Gandara, 2006; Ndura, Robinson & Ochs, 2003). It is often believed that Latino parents do not advocate for their children at school (Flores, Tefft, & Estaban, 1991; Poplin & Weeres, 1992), and that they do not have an expectation that their children will go to college. In Torrez’s (2004) attempt to dispel the notion that there is no aspiration for college enrollment, it was found that often Latino parents were simply unaware of the intricacies of the preparation and process to gain admission. It has also been noted that ideas of what constitutes advocacy and involvement is defined differently by Latino parents and often misinterpreted by school personnel (Marschall, 2006; Ndura, Robinson & Ochs, 2003; Snell, Miguel & East, 2009).

**Latino Parent Perceptions**

Trumbull et al. (2003) and Orozco (2008) have encouraged educators and researchers to more fully understand Latino parent perceptions around education if they are to increase the
involvement of the parents. While this involvement has been mandated under No Child Left Behind reforms for schools receiving Title I funding, it may result in more research devoted to this specific challenge as the Latino population continues to grow. This does not, however, address the specific needs of Latino families who attend high performing schools where Title I funding is not applicable. As research in the last decade has increased in the study of Latino parental involvement, the focus remains on the majority of parents whose children attend lower performing schools. There is much to be gained from the literature that has already considered Latino parent involvement and perceptions of school as it relates to this work because it considers those families that have specifically experienced low performing schools at some point in their child’s education.

Previous works suggest that Latino parents often find school unwelcoming or feel that invitations to the school are not seen as opportunities to interact but rather as highlighting their shortcomings as parents (Inger, 1992; Moles, 1993). This may stem from cultural beliefs around the role of parents versus the role of school, where traditional Latino concepts view the parental responsibility to provide the needed materials and supportive environment to make attendance and learning at school possible (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995). Because teachers and schools are highly respected, many Latinos view involvement in the school as overstepping of their own role (Trumbull et al., 2001). Interviews conducted by Smith, Stern, & Shatrova (2008) found that Latino parents reported language barriers as an issue in school communication and involvement even when they had a more than rudimentary command of English. When asked how parents would advocate for their children in difficult school situations such as bias against the child, parents remained silent. Smith et al., notes that this may be a complex case of both language and cultural misunderstandings as opposed to lack of concern or ideas for solution.
Working under the premise that it may matter who asks rather than what is asked, Shah (2009) surveyed 324 Latino parents in Chicago in order to understand if there may be any positive influence that correlated to improved home-school interactions if the invitations to participate were made by Latino educators to Latino parents. Findings from that study indicate that while there are many factors that influence parental involvement, Latino representation within the school staff itself mattered to parents, as they were able to see themselves represented in the governance of the school and its power holders. The importance of this knowledge for educators in high performing suburban areas is highly informative when considering that data from another study (Mapp, 2003) reveals that parental desire to be involved in a school are enhanced when they perceive the staff as caring and trustful. Other focus group work has shown that Mexican American parents want teachers to be informed not just about Latino culture, but specifically about the local context of Latino life in the community (Jones, 2003).

**Student Perceptions and the Influence on Academic Performance**

It is important to understand attributes and societal influences that can result in overt or covert racial biases and misunderstandings in an educational setting. It is equally valuable to understand the perceptions of the students themselves as it relates to providing the best possible educational experience. Students’ perception of themselves, their peers, and their community affect how they will perform academically (Strobel, Kirshner, O’Donoghue, & McLaughlin, 2008), and when a student of color attends a predominantly white school, it is important to be aware of how a student’s sense of culture is perceived and respected within the larger community in which they find themselves receiving an education (Carter, 2007; Nunn, 2011). By acknowledging the uniqueness of an integrated environment whereby a particular race or ethnicity of student constitutes a small percentage of the school population in which they find
themselves, parents and educators become better informed as to how to partner to meet academic needs. However, for children and adolescents it is especially important to consider the emotional responses and needs of non-white students in a predominately white school as a means to understanding how to improve academic achievement.

It is widely reported that Latino students are underrepresented in higher level and Advanced Placement (AP) courses (Gandara, 2006; Ndura, Robinson, & Ochs, 2003; Walker & Pearsall, 2012). Evidence has found that Latino students educated in a suburban system experience a greater level of academic achievement than Latinos who remained in urban environments (Grigg, 2012; Kauffman & Rosenbaum, 1992), but still lag behind their non-Latino peers. Students reported feeling intimidated in a sea of white and Asian faces in AP courses, and refrained from discussion often because they felt ill-prepared to “talk like the middle and upper-class white students” (Nunn, 2011, p. 1236).

To counteract such feelings of being overwhelmed or intimidated by this so-called “sea”, many students of color will form formal and formal same-race peer groups (Carter, 2007) that can serve as a support network (Bemak, Chung, & Siroskey-Sabdo, 2005; Carter, 2007). Findings from Carter (2007) note that bused students of color at a suburban Boston school congregated in a particular stairwell numerous times each day and use the spot as place to connect with each other on their own terms. Students reported to feeling comfortable with each other in ways that they were not with their suburban peers, and that they were able to encourage and support each other positively both socially and academically. The students reported that their claiming of the stairs in one corridor of the school for use of congregating helped them at times when they felt the pressures or differences that race created within the school. Four of the nine students were METCO students and also admitted to socioeconomic differences as contributing
to their feelings in differences from their white classmates. The study supported the work of Tatum (1997), which explained that students often turn to each other for support within a desegregated school through racial clustering in certain areas of a building, and that this should be encouraged rather than discouraged. Carter (2007) suggests that the concern of administrators is misplaced when they worry about the banding together of students by race within the larger white dominated school setting because the positive effects of developing a micro-community are essential to the students’ ability to succeed while retaining their own cultural norms.

**Community Building**

The relevance of community building for students of color was also found to have positive outcomes connected to student feelings of well-being and the alleviation of ethno-racial tensions. Evans (2007) grounds her study in critical race theory and uses the beliefs about race to serve as a foundation for the question of whether it affects educators “interactions, agency and school response to demographic change” (Evans, 2007, p.323). The region studied had experienced demographic change particularly from 1990 to 2000. However, Evans (2007) chose moderate-income communities so as to avoid issues of SES being a factor in any changes. Findings indicate that providing non-white students with opportunities to express themselves, such as the formation of a black history club, allowed for displays of racial and ethnic pride while lowering the incidents of discipline issues.

Another study (Bemak et al., 2005) indicates that providing students of color with targeted group counseling might improve academic performance and behavior. Researchers improvements in academic scores enhanced learning, and responsible behavior among at-risk youth when group counseling was involved. However, school counseling sessions must be attentive and aware of cultural differences beyond the more traditional European-American
model (Bemak et al., 2005). This need to be culturally aware and responsive is echoed in work that considers the qualities that attract urban youth to participate in after-school programming (Strobel et al., 2008). 120 students from K-12 who participated in after-school programming in order to define what attributes a program might have that encouraged attendance. Strobel et al. (2008) cites numerous other studies that attribute greater self-esteem, improved emotional adjustment, interpersonal skills, communication, leadership, and greater engagement in learning and school success to a child’s attendance in an after-school program. Ethnographic research also connected positive “frames for identity” for minority youth. Findings indicate that the connection to the adult staff had the most significant impact on a student’s positive feelings about attending. They repeatedly reported feeling safe and supported and perceived many of the staff to be mentors, confidants, and mediators. Students also reported their enjoyment of having a time to be with peers outside of school while being given a choice of academic-based programming that would enhance educational performance (Strobel et al., 2008).

One such way to begin a conversation between students of color and white students was considered in Lopez and Nastasi (2012). The research considered interactions of teens in English classes from two high schools that bordered each other, one urban and the other a predominately white suburban school. By spending a day together using literature as a foundation for conversation, students were able to engage in conversations that demonstrated a greater awareness of inequities and expressed a desire to engage in community building work (Lopez & Nastasi, 2012). Through the use of small group discussions and guest speakers, students from both communities expressed a desire to have more time that was less scripted and scheduled that would allow for organic conversation between them, suggesting a desire to build understanding through means typical of natural teenage development (Lopez & Nastasi, 2012). It should also be
noted that by breaking down a larger school setting into small pockets of learning, such as group counseling, the creation of small schools (Skerrett & Hargreaves, 2008), or the formation of clubs and activities specifically for ethno racial reasons (Evans, 2007) allow for adult interaction with Latino students, sending the message to students that they have a place within the school community and that they are valued as members.

These studies all serve as reminders that cultural and ethnic differences are to be recognized and encouraged, and that it is important to Latino students to be able to cluster racially in desegregated schools (Carter, 2007; Evans, 2007), that they are provided with counseling that is sensitive to their uniqueness (Bemak et al., 2005), that they feel safe and respected (Strobel et al., 2008), and that dialogue amongst all students be encourage to foster greater understanding of each student’s educational experience (Lopez & Nastasi, 2012).

**Representation in Advanced Level Courses**

Equally important to consider if academic performance is to improve and the achievement gap for Latino students is to be narrowed is parent and student perceptions around specific curricular placement. Various studies (Gandara, 2006; Ndura et al., 2003; Walker & Pearsall, 2012) have sought to more closely examine the effects of tracking on Latino students in desegregated high schools, as well as the underrepresentation of Latinos in AP and STEM and other courses considered to be high level.

Early intervention is one method of trying to close any gaps that may result from a low socioeconomic status (SES) or as a result of gaps in a parent’s own education (Gandara, 2006). Gandara (2006) centers her call for early intervention and funding to support firmly in the data and demographic history of Latino education in the U.S. Using figures for literacy readiness among white, Asian, black, and Latino five year olds, she echoes the earlier work of Coleman...
(1966), who’s *Equality of Educational Opportunity* concluded that schools did not have much of an influence over academic success because power factors such as family background and peer backgrounds had greater impact overall. This influence of parents and peers is also noted in the work of Ndura et al. (2003), as well as Walker and Pearsall (2012). Gandara (2006) argues that this is not to say that schools cannot have greater influence, only that they do not. There are relatively few programs that have had some success for Latino students (Gandara, 2006); however, they are controversial in nature (i.e. *Success for All*). Algebra has been a determinant of later college attendance, and Gandara (2006) concludes that more effort should be placed in making sure Latino students have the access and tools to successfully confront algebra during the formative middle school years. In order to do this, intervention must happen earlier in their education and not during last-ditch efforts in high school, namely College Board’s Equity 2000 program.

Walker and Pearsall (2012) echo an earlier study contained in this collection (Ndura et al., 2003) regarding under-representation in AP courses in suburban schools. Walker and Pearsall (2012) sought to trace perceptions and understandings of AP enrollment to students and parents in one school and found that the most important factor influencing a student were peer and parental discouragement of AP studies. Important to parents and students when considering AP enrollment was the costs associated with AP courses and exams, as well as issues of worth of the program if college attendance were not plausible. Specifically, two students mentioned that immigration status made college costs as an international student prohibitive to certain students, and this therefore discouraged them from even trying the course (Walker & Pearsall, 2012). Ndura et al. (2003) also note that parents were often unfamiliar with the AP courses and their value for college admissions due to the fact that they had not received their education in
the U.S., had an incomplete high school education, or were unaware of current trends in college admissions.

In their longitudinal study, Burris et al. (2008) share findings from a suburban New York school system that de-tracked courses for middle school and ninth grade and created a “high track” curriculum in heterogeneously grouped classes, and found that over a three year period the number of students receiving Regents and IB diplomas increased significantly for students who were part of the de-tracked class cohort. Impressively, the rate for Blacks and Latinos increased from 52% in 2002 to 83% in 2004, proving it to be an effective strategy for closing achievement gaps for minority students. This rate was almost triple that of Blacks and Latinos statewide during that same period (Burris et al., 2008). The study posits that a well-planned de-tracking movement in an integrated school can have positive outcomes for learning, both for individuals as well as in raising the overall number of students of color achieving at higher levels.

**Perceptions of Teachers of Latino Students**

Numerous studies inform the work of teachers and administrators as to how to better meet the needs of Latino students from low SES backgrounds, both for students attending urban schools as well those attending in suburban systems. For suburban teachers confronted with changing demographics in their classrooms, much of what research finds to be true in an urban school translates into usable knowledge for fostering improved understanding of the unique needs of Latino students as they move into a predominately white system. Much has been written about the characteristics that make for successful urban teachers by researchers such as Lisa Delpit, Julie Landsman, and bell hooks among others. When positively considered, teacher perceptions and practice that proved successful is best termed by Delpit (2012) as being a “warm demander” (p. 71), one who believes in each student’s abilities regardless of the circumstances.
and firmly encourages the student to excel to the best of that ability. Ladson-Billings (1995) states that effective teachers of low-income, culturally diverse students understand that they are dependent on the school to teach them whatever it is that they need to be successful.

Sachs (2004) study considered attributes that were present in an educator’s personality as a predictor of her success with students of color. Indicators of effective urban teaching included socio-cultural awareness, strong contextual interpersonal skills, self-understanding, risk taking, efficacy, and cultural responsiveness. Conversely, other studies (Garza & Garza, 2010; Watson, 2012) have considered teacher language and its hidden implications for race bias and expectations. Watson (2012) used Bourdieu’s (1993) claim that a certain way of speaking around cultural issues demonstrated what was valued and this in turn became cultural capital. All of the nine student teachers interviewed for the study identified as white and from middle-class, suburban upbringing. When participants used words such as “diverse” to describe the population of an inner-city school what they meant was that it was not white rather than actually diverse by standard definition. When student teachers noted that suburban parents knew what to do if their child was struggling, they were implying that urban parents did not know what to do, nor could they afford tutors to help their child, which cast urban in a negative light in the minds of the student teachers. The study recounts numerous conversations and Watson’s dissection of what lay beneath the meaning of the responses, and concludes that better training must be given to perspective teachers to address possible deficits in the beliefs of the teachers (Watson, 2012). Garza and Garza (2012) reported similar findings of well-intended white elementary teachers of Latino students who were considered to be successful teachers of low SES students as evidenced by standardized test performance scores. The study revealed that these teachers still incorporated assimilation language and expectations in their pedagogy and expectations that if their students
failed to perform it was acceptable to believe that as they grew they would find employment traditionally relegated to workers with only a high school diploma.

In a more general sense, studies have found that parents and teachers do not necessarily have similar visions for what constitutes collaboration (Baker, 1997; DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007). Teachers reported that they wanted to be recognized as professionals with the best interest of the child in mind in their decision-making, and for parents to reinforce instructions, discipline, and continuity in the school-to-home context (Baker, 1997). A later study by Moles (1993) found that this attitude was particularly prevalent amongst teachers of low socioeconomic status students.

School-Home Partnerships

A parent’s ethnic or cultural background serves as a key factor in influencing how they view school involvement. Research focusing on Latino parental expectations (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Reese, 2002) indicates that a school’s expectations may be very different from their own beliefs, which often hold that a school is the authority on education and the role of a parent is primarily to instruct moral values and leave academic subject matter to teachers (Rodriguez-Brown, 2010). It is with these findings in mind that this study sought to find if these beliefs are also typical of Latino parents who relocate to a suburban school system. By understanding the experiences and perceptions that Latino parents have, a school system might, in turn, be better prepared to meet the unique needs of these at-risk students that could foster a faster and more effective closure of any learning gaps that the students may have.

Noguera (2007) concluded that if a school does not have a strategy for convincing learners to take responsibility for their education, work hard, study, arrive on time and prepared, and generally care about learning, the school will fail to reduce the achievement gap for students
of color. To this end, Noguera (2007) calls for a strategy that will change the conversation between schools and parents from one of blame to one in which all stakeholders accept their duty to raise the academic achievement of their students.

One such consideration of the impact of parental involvement was a study of Latino parent participation (Rodriguez-Brown, Li, & Albom, 1999) in a family literacy program which revealed that a strategy such as Project FLAME can increase Latino parents’ abilities to provide literacy opportunities, increase their ability to act as positive role models, and improve parent skills and engagement with schools by working closely with the parents to communicate the school’s mission and approach for literacy. Project FLAME itself has made its mission to improve family literacy through culturally relevant pedagogy, particularly of Latino culture.

Marschall (2006) sought correlations between increased parental representation on school governance boards and councils once the school system in Chicago implemented restructuring reforms that encouraged and provided more opportunities for parental involvement. Data found that Latino parents had substantial increases in representation and that this, in turn, fostered the development of other resources for parents such as a bilingual resource center. Marschall (2006) also reported that the higher levels of parental representation was also associated with an increased awareness on the part of teachers around issues of culture and community that then led to increased efforts to engage parents and create stronger home-school partnerships. This study supports the work of Reay (1998) that suggests that parents who possess cultural and social capital are more likely to engage in activities considered as school involvement, and that lower SES parents are likely to have less resources and/or issues with language that can limit the likelihood of their involvement.

Other studies (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Sanders, 2008) have examined the outcomes on
academic achievement from parental involvement that has been fostered through the use of
parent liaisons. British schools in the low SES area of Hull (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011) were able
to provide teachers who worked part-time in the classroom and part-time as liaisons who
facilitated parent meetings and trainings, created parent rooms within the schools to provide a
more welcoming place to engage in a home-school partnership, and covered classes so that
other teachers could make home visits. There were positive outcomes for parental
involvement and improved student achievement, but when funding was reduced in the 1990s,
the liaison program was cut.

Conversely, Sanders (2008) study considered the benefits of parent liaisons to bridge the
home-school gap in diverse suburban districts. Initially, three liaisons were hired for six hours a
week, but the program soon expanded to ten liaisons with increased hours and more specifically
targeted backgrounds in education or social work. They received professional development in
various frameworks and components of parental involvement and logged their outreach activities
weekly. Their role included communication with families whose children had a 20% absentee
rate, inconsistent homework completion, or displayed signs of disenfranchisement from school.
Sanders (2008) qualitative study states that the liaisons enhanced home-school partnerships
chiefly by serving as a bridge to foster mutual understanding of a child’s home situation and
school expectations and performance for teachers and parents alike. Sanders (2008) recommends
that suburban districts seeking to establish improved home-school partnerships for students of
color and/or low SES ensure sufficient funding for such a program, seek and train qualified
personnel, and adequately support the program participants.

Using a critical reflection framework based on the work and philosophy of Paulo Freire
(1970), Snell, Miguel, and East (2009) implemented a participatory action research study
whereby the Latino parents became research partners, helping to solicit feedback and participation in an urban Colorado middle school. The researchers note that it quickly became evident to them as young, white women their outsider status among Latino parents might hinder their ability to elicit open communication around school concerns, citing the work of Tinkler (2002) that found that Latino families do not often share the Anglo cultural norm of freely disclosing concern or problems to strangers. By using eight parents to work as promoters and facilitators of the research study, Snell et al. (2009) were able to gain better insight into family and community issues that Latino parents felt hindered their children’s academic achievement. It was felt that such honest concerns over domestic violence and economic hardship, as well as the parents’ open and detailed responses regarding their attitudes towards teachers and school may not have occurred had it not been for the comfort level that parents felt with the eight Latino parents as facilitators of surveys and interviews.

**Latino Students Who Move to Affluent Suburbs**

Multiple searches were conducted using ERIC, JSTOR, and Google Scholar using various combinations of key words *Latino, student, parents, families, urban, suburban, suburb, upwardly mobile, reside, move, transition, low socioeconomic, affluent, low performing, high performing, and school*. All of the numerous attempts to pin-point a scenario whereby Latino families moved, and were not bused, from a low performing urban school with a high ratio of poverty to a high performing suburban school with an above average per household income resulted only in research that discussed the discrepancies in achievement between urban and suburban, Latino and non-Latino. Many of these findings have been mentioned previously in this literature review, but it should be noted that there is a gap in current research that specifically addresses the topic of this thesis, particularly as it relates to academic and social experiences.
Discussion

The number of Latino students, particularly those from lower SES backgrounds, who attend high performing suburban schools midway through their K-12 education will continue to increase as the demographics of the country change and as families acquire the means to relocate into the suburban communities (Frey, 2001). The needs of these students are unique from much of pre-existing literature that speaks to forced and voluntary integration through busing programs or through such a demographic shift that brings about what has been termed “white flight” whereby school systems experience a rapid shift in the majority ethnicity of the community. On these rarer but increasing occasions when a predominately white, high performing school system finds itself responsible for the fair and equitable education of all of its students, it must be prepared to adapt to the needs of those students who arrive with gaps in their knowledge and/or language skills, but who also arrive with cultural norms that may be different than the majority of students. As of yet, however, there is little existing study of either the experiences of Latino students or families from low SES urban areas who move to more affluent suburban areas.

Previous studies of busing programs (Angrist & Lang, 2004; Carter, 2007; Ispa-Landa, 2013) shed light on the perceptions of students of color attending affluent suburban schools, and revealed a strong connection between the students’ sense of well-being and belonging within the suburban environment to be tied to ethno racial clustering (Carter, 2007; Ispa-Landa, 2013) as a means to preserve identity and support each other socially and academically as the minority group. Ispa-Landa (2013) noted gender differences, however, that reveal a tendency for Black and Latino boys to fit in more easily with the predominately white student body. The boys were popular due to a perceived attraction to either athletic ability and/or physical attraction by white
girls, whereas the girls of color were perceived as being loud and confrontational and excluded from social interactions and dating within the suburban context. These studies speak to the social experiences of the student, and are important factors for educators to keep in mind as they engage in conversations with parents that must consider the whole experience for the child, both academic and social well-being and acclimation.

Three studies for this review considered academic performance of students of color specifically in a suburban setting (Kaufman & Rosenbaum, 1992; Ndura et al., 2003; Nunn, 2011). While the Kaufman and Rosenbaum (1992) study found that low-income black youth fared better academically and in their employment than their black peers who had remained as urban residents, the study should stand as a measure of what it is that educators consider as fair and equitable. The benefit of receiving a suburban education after their families moved into community Section 8 subsidized housing was only marginally better than if they had not (Kaufman & Rosenbaum, 1992). Ndura et al. (2003) and Nunn (2011) both contribute to the field through discussion of underrepresentation of Latino students in higher level courses. Findings support the influence of parents, peers, and teacher recommendations on a student of color’s decision to enroll in an AP course. It should be noted that teachers often do not recommend Latino students for AP (Ndura et al., 2003), nor do parents readily pursue enrollment for a variety of reasons (Gandara, 2006). Students themselves often admit to feeling intimidated by the majority of white and Asian students in these courses (Nunn, 2011).

As demographics shift nationally and as the achievement gap seems no closer to closing, what is known about effective teaching for Latino students (Evans, 2007; Sachs, 2004; Strobel et al., 2008) must be considered for its transformative power in a suburban setting as more Latino families move to predominately white communities. Latino parents, as a child’s first teachers, are
a valuable ally for educators in fostering a better understanding of both the individual student and the culture from which the student hails.

**Conclusion**

As more non-white, at-risk students enroll in affluent suburban schools, educators in those systems must accommodate the unique needs of students who arrive in their classrooms with literacy, language, academic or social challenges. Many find themselves ill-equipped or unwilling to shift practice in order to tailor instruction as needed (Nunn, 2011; Evans, 2007), but lack of preparation or the desire for status quo are no longer feasible as racial and ethnic diversity become the norm in suburban schools. The high performing, suburban school systems must adjust some of their former approaches and attitudes in order to provide a rigorous curriculum for all (Burris, Wiley, Welner, & Murphy, 2008), and not be content with dismissing the lower academic performance of blacks and Latinos. Data has shown that black and Latino children were underrepresented in advanced level classes (Walker & Pearsall, 2012; Gandara, 2006). Evidence has found that when students move to a high performing school, many experienced a greater level of academic achievement than their peers who remained in urban environments (Grigg, 2012; Kauffman & Rosenbaum, 1992), but this should not create complacency on the part of suburban educators who might be content to point out that at least their black and Latino students pass courses and standardized test. Educators must expect and provide more for all students.

Research revealed much of interest when students are transplanted into communities solely during school hours for educational purposes of creating opportunity and diversity in a suburban community. Less was found that discussed the movement of lower SES Latino students to affluent suburbs as full-time residents with their families, and what was reviewed did little to
address specific ways in which a school system could engage both Latino students and their families in order to create a sense of belonging within the community that might lead to higher levels of academic success and the closure of achievement gaps that many of these students arrive within the suburbs as their families move from urban systems. Existing literature does call for Latino engagement through better representation (Marschall, 2006; Sanders, 2008, Snell et al., 2009) of Latino parents on school boards, councils, and as liaisons that promote home-school partnerships.

Review has lead to gap spotting in the area of parental engagement in order to foster improved and more rapid academic gains, as well as to how suburban schools specifically and successfully use tailored techniques to promote cultural awareness and respect for their Latino students in an environment where the Latino population is still low in comparison to percentages discussed in urban studies. It is with these gaps in mind that a call is issued for further research of how and to what extent suburban schools extend opportunities and outreach to low and middle income Latino parents and to what effect it has on the academic success of their child. It would also be beneficial to research how these same schools foster a sense of community and belonging within the larger school community of predominately white, affluent and middle-class students, particularly as it relates to and is tailored specifically to gender and varying ages of incoming students new to a suburban school system.

Whilst these can be done concurrently, it is important to proceed with an awareness and sensitivity to race for all parties. It is a challenging and difficult dialogue historically, but one that must continue. As bell hooks (1994) notes in *Teaching to Transgress*, educators “who embrace the challenge of self-actualization will be better able to create pedagogical practices that
CHAPTER III: Research Design

This study focuses on answering one key question: What are the experiences of Latino parents who have children that move from a low performing urban school district to a high performing suburban school district? To more fully understand the collective experience, it was necessary to ask what strategies were employed by these parents at home to help their children acclimate to the new system, as well as to seek their input into how teachers might also help children better acclimate and perform at school. In order to conceptualize the entire scenario, it was important to consider influencing factors both academic and social. It is for this holistic reason that the research methodology for this study is qualitative.

Creswell (2013) notes that qualitative research allows for the idea of multiple realities. By choosing a qualitative approach, the questions allow for a reporting of these multiple realities through a lens of inquiry that relies on and allows for the individual experiences of the participants to be told (Creswell, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Qualitative research is inquiry using a distinct methodological approach to explore a social or human problem (Creswell, 2013), and its purpose is to reveal how parts work together to form a whole (Merriam, 2008). The focus of qualitative research is to better understand how participants perceive their experience within cultural, social, and political contexts (Creswell, 2012). Guba and Lincoln (2005) state that the reality that exists for participants in a study is constructed over time by their cultural, social, economic, gender, ethnic, and political values.

Scottish philosopher, historian, and economist David Hume (1748) was the first to present the concept of a social construction of reality (Boyd, 2008). Social constructivism argues that it
is possible to trace cause and effect through reasoning from experience, analogy, and observation. As an interpretive framework, a social constructivist paradigm also seeks to incorporate the researcher’s views, as the researcher recognizes how their own experiences and background influences their interpretation of the findings (Creswell, 2013). Social constructivism requires the researcher to take an approach that is hermeneutic, whereby the ideas presented by participants are subject to interpretation, and then compared through logic and discussion (Guba, 1990).

Exploring how Latino parents perceive their experiences when transitioning their children from a low performing urban to a high performing suburban school district, and understanding what strategies parents use to acclimate their child to the new system can be critically examined through the use of a philosophical framework of social constructivism within a qualitative study. Creswell (2013) notes that a holistic picture of the complexities of human nature and interactions are possible through qualitative research, and that qualitative methods encourage interpretation of finding through intuition and past experiences. It is for this reason that this method best suits the study of Latino parents’ experiences.

**Research Tradition**

This study uses an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). An IPA approach focuses on the meaning derived by participants that share a similar experience (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). First introduced by Jonathan Smith (1996) as an extension of a qualitative research approach, namely phenomenology, Smith (2004) later described IPA as a separate and actual approach in which participants make sense of their experiences and meanings relative to those lived experiences. Using an inductive approach and a small, purposeful sample, IPA analyzes themes that surface in participant interviews and looks for crossover in those themes.
(Smith, 2004). Like other forms of qualitative research, such as narrative, IPA engages in in-depth study and provides thick, rich description through interviews and findings (Smith, 2004). However, a narrative study reports the experiences of the individual, whilst phenomenology is intent on examining and describing the common, shared meanings of lived experiences for several individuals (Creswell, 2013).

**Phenomenological study.** The purpose of phenomenological study is to reduce individual experiences down to the essence of how a particular phenomenon is universally experienced (van Manen, 1990). Qualitative research identifies a phenomenon, or “object” of shared human experience (van Manen, 1990), and then collects data from those who have experienced the phenomenon. The researcher then describes the “what” and the “how” of the experience for the collective group (Moustakas, 1994).

The underpinnings of phenomenology are borne from philosophical components that trace back to the writings of Husserl (1859-1938) and were expanded upon by Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty (Spiegelberg, 1982). Various perspectives have arisen regarding the philosophical arguments for using phenomenology (Creswell, 2013), however there are certain assumptions with this approach that share common ground (van Manen, 1990). Stewart and Mickunas (1990) stress that essential to all types of phenomenology is that it is an approach without presuppositions. Husserl termed the suspension of all judgments until grounded on more certainty as “epoche” (Creswell, 2013), and noted that phenomenological study uncovered reality, not as subjects or objects, but rather as how one was conscious of the subject or object (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990).

**Hermeneutics and IPA.** The Greek verb *hermeneuein* means “to interpret”, and hermeneutics is the study and method of interpreting the “text” of human experience and life
Hermeneutics and psychological phenomenology recognize the historical and psychological context of the researcher (Moustakas, 1994), but require the researcher to set aside their experiences (epoche or bracketing) in order to look at the phenomenon from a new perspective (Creswell, 2013). IPA is therefore considered a double hermeneutic, whereby the participants’ interpretation of their experiences is then interpreted by the researcher (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). While phenomenology describes a study in terms of specific shared experiences, IPA further seeks to understand what we can learn from how people interpret and make sense of the world around them (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). IPA is also idiographic in nature, always taking into account the individual’s responses and claims to be considered before deriving more general themes and conclusions (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Use of an IPA methodological framework informs this study by allowing for the voices of distinct individuals with certain commonalities within a community to share their specific, unique experiences as it relates to the education of their children within that community. An IPA framework both gives voice to the collective experiences of Latino parents and seeks to learn from what is discovered through what is reported in the hope that the discovery leads to improved education for this population.

**Critical Race Theory as a Theoretical Framework**

Guba and Lincoln (1988) articulated the “axiomatic” issues that guide qualitative research as four philosophical assumptions, which include ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological issues. A phenomenological study as an interpretive framework describes common or shared meanings that arise from the lived experiences of several individuals (Creswell, 2013).

Critical theory arose from Marxism and the oppression of workers (Willis, 2007), and
modern critical theory paradigm now focuses on the roots of oppression and the connection to race, gender, and ethnicity (Willis, 2007). Reality is shaped by each individual based on social and personal history and by factors of ethnicity, economics, gender, culture, and politics (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Critical Race theorists have noted that a society constructs its own understanding of reality through the formulation and exchange of experiences about individual situations, and that order is imposed by the interpretive structures derived from the exchange of these stories (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

The lens chosen for this inquiry is Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT lends itself to a qualitative study in that it allows for the capture of experience and story-telling from participants (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), and it serves as a lens by which to understand why and how race matter, specifically in an educational setting (Taylor, 2009). Racism occurs at the individual, organizational, social, and civilizational levels (Scheurich & Young, 1997). By providing the opportunity to express the feelings of the marginalized individual within a system and a society, the dominant culture, whose norms have formed the standards for the operation of the society, has provided a means to better understand members with differing experiences and perspectives (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Role of the Researcher and Positionality

A researcher’s role is to gain a holistic overview of the material examined (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014), while Creswell (2013) adds that the role is also to draw boundaries in context and time. Researchers have a personal history that situates their inquiry, as well as personal ethics and political beliefs that inform their study (Creswell, 2013). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) state that the researcher herself is a “multicultural subject” (p.12) whose own history and views of self, ethics, and society serve as a beginning for inquiry.
With this in mind, Creswell (2013) suggests that the qualitative researcher ask open-ended questions, collect a variety of data, analyze carefully, experiment with narrative, (re)present the data, and discuss findings and how they compare with personal views, existing literature, and emerging models of belief. Creswell (2013) suggest that good qualitative research has the following characteristics: rigorous data collection, a study framed within the assumptions and characteristics of the qualitative approach, an approach to qualitative inquiry that is recognized for its rigor and sophistication of research design, a single focus or concept initially, detailed methods of data collection and analysis, data that is analyzed on multiple levels of abstraction, persuasive writing, a reflection within the study of the researcher’s history and background and how it might shape the study, and that it is ethically conducted and reported.

As a long-time educator who spent a decade teaching in an ethnically diverse, urban environment, I have come to understand the relevance of the individual’s story as it relates to one’s view of society and one’s own place in it. My inquiry posture is one of “transformative intellectual as advocate and activist” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p.196). It is my belief that in telling the reported experiences and strategies of Latino parents who have moved their families to suburban settings in search of a better academic outcome for their children, such school systems will be better prepared to meet the unique needs of these students as enrollment increases.

**Participants, Recruitment and Access**

**Participants.** The data was collected in a New England state from two public, high performing K-12 suburban school systems in 2015, re-named in this study as Parsonville and Meadowview. It was conducted through individual interviews with parents who had relocated from two different low performing K-12 urban systems within the state, re-named as Riverton and Langley for this study. The researcher currently serves on the English faculty of another
neighboring suburban high school in the area, herein called McCallister, also noted to be a high performing system. Three of the parents interviewed had relocated to McCallister after initially residing in Parsonville or Meadowview and some of their responses may sometimes have pertained to that community as well. Because of this, information on all five locations is provided on Table 2 found on page 65.

Relying on parent outreach initially made by school administrators, as well as snowball or referral sampling (Creswell, 2013) from other Latino parents, participants were identified and considered for the study if their child or children had transferred from a low performing urban system at some point in their K-12 education. The study employs a maximum variation sampling strategy (Creswell, 2013) to ensure that the multiple and diverse experiences of the Latino parents are represented. In order to do this, concerted effort was taken to extend invitations to participants of both genders, of varying ages, and of varying levels of education and income, as well as those at various stages of parenting. An initial invitation was sent via letter to parents as potential subjects (See Appendix A) extending an offer to participate in a research study. Fourteen Latino parents were contacted with the final sample size consisting of five participants who consented to be interviewed. Individual interviews focused on the specific experiences of those parents. Questions (See Appendix B) related to parents’ previous experiences with children in an urban school as compared with current experiences with those children now in a suburban school. Both academic and social issues were considered.

**Recruitment and access.** Phone calls were made to prospective participants following initial contact by letter inviting them to participate in a research-based doctoral study that would seek to better understand the experiences and perspectives of Latino parents who had moved into the suburban community within the past ten years. It was explained that the purpose of the
interviews would be to study the familial experiences surrounding the educational strategies and goals employed by the parents, as well as parental perceptions of the educational and social experiences of their children both prior to moving and once enrolled in the high performing suburban system. It was also explained that the end result would be a compilation of data that would strive to give voice to Latino families within the community and that may, in the future, serve to foster better communication between parents and the school system.

Written permission was obtained from each participant. Incentive for participating was in the form of a gift card. Willing parents were then scheduled to take part in individual interviews lasting 60-90 minutes each, with follow-up interviews for any needed clarification or expansion lasting an hour or less. Preference for selecting participants was given to those who had resided in both urban and suburban communities for significant amounts of time during at least one of their child’s K-12 experience. This negated parents who had only very young children in the first three years of elementary school, but the voices of experienced parents offered a wider scope than those only newly acquainted with the parenting of a public school student.

Data Collection, Storage and Management

Data collection. Data was collected through individual interviews, and coded for common words and themes, while hand-written notes were also used to record both words as transcribed and non-verbal physical cues that might also reveal key information (Saldaña, 2013). Interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the participants by use of an iPad audio application. The purpose of the study was clearly explained to the participants, both in writing and orally, at the beginning of the interview. Answers to the open-ended questions followed with clarifying questions by the researcher. The participants spoke with the researcher in a location mutually agreeable to both parties. In some cases, a follow-up interview was necessary for further
expansion or understanding of findings from the initial interview.

Following the suggestion of Rubin and Rubin (2012) to set the participants at ease, the scripted questions (Appendix B) began by asking about individual family motivation for moving to the suburbs, as well as their initial experiences with both the urban and suburban schools districts. Having previously identified as a long-time urban teacher in a predominately Latino city, sympathetic to and knowledgeable of the concerns of Latino families, the researcher offered occasional, causal reminders as questioning potentially became more sensitive due to ethnic and socioeconomic factors. All participants were bilingual so conducting the interviews in English was not a barrier. The researcher is fluent in Spanish and any use of non-English words and phrases were immediately translated aloud by the researcher in order to verify meaning and intent with the participant. In addition, the interviews used main questions to scaffold, probe and follow-up on concepts and themes that came to light (Saldaña, 2013). The researcher paid close attention to conversational management probes, in order to regulate and control the details and depth, as well as clarify and focus. Credibility probes were employed in a non-confrontational manner to check and counterbalance the quality of solid evidence and potential bias of the participant (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Of particular importance is what Rubin and Rubin (2012) term the “slant probe”, particularly the asking of opinions, in order to help a researcher determine the lens through which a participant might see and interpret their experiences. As this study sought to better understand the experiences and perceptions of Latino parents, it was key to understanding the lens through which the Latino parents interviewed had been and were now experiencing the education of their children.

**Storage and Management.** Data was stored on the researcher's personal devices, under a password-protected system (Creswell, 2012), and coded so as to protect the identity of the
participants through pseudonym usage. The key to pseudonym identity was stored separately in a password-protected document. Access to the data was limited to the researcher and the Principal Investigator, as requested. All material related to the study participants will be destroyed by deletion of files at the conclusion of a successful defense of thesis and the passage of five years.

Data Analysis

Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) state that in qualitative research, analysis is done through coding. Data is compiled through the chunking of information into clusters through two coding cycles (Saldaña, 2013). Coding provides patterns that emerge and from this categories can be formed (Morse & Richards, 2002). This then leads to the emergence of themes that best represent the patterns that run across the categories (Saldaña, 2013). The data collection for this study took place over the period of one month and the analysis began immediately after the collection of information. Any gaps were identified and filled by conducting follow-up interviews as needed. The data was interwoven from the start.

Field notes and other raw transcribed data were analyzed for patterns and analytical memoing, recording the researcher’s perceptions for later analysis. Creswell (2012) explained that this explorative analysis in qualitative research has the purpose of making “general sense of the data, memoing ideas, thinking about the organization of the data, and considering whether you need more data” (p. 243).

Elements of the initial, individual inductive analysis incorporated in vivo coding and process strategies during first cycle coding methods (Saldaña, 2013). This was completed manually, first with highlighting of responses and double underlines of in vivo words and phrases (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Process coding notes, which employ the use of gerunds to note action in the data (Saldana, 2013), was used as a means to find common ideas and themes that occurred
throughout the interview and passages were labeled with various codes in order to assure that there was consistency throughout (Boeije, 2002). During second cycle coding, constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as outlined by Boeije (2002), was used to draw comparisons between interviews. As memos and codes increased, patterns and themes across interviews became apparent. Through this use of code weaving (Saldaña, 2013), data was reviewed again until the codes identified were sufficient to cover the themes that emerged (Boeije, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The collected data was analyzed inductively using comparative analysis. Miles and Huberman (1994) discussed analyzing data comparatively and Saldaña (2013) provided a structure to analyzing, condensing, and interpreting data. Professional services were provided by the online service rev.com for transcription of the interviews.

**Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (2005) advocate for terminology that is in line with naturalistic research, and this includes techniques such as prolonged engagement and triangulation of data in order to establish credibility in the study. Creswell (2013) further elaborates on Lincoln and Guba’s (2005) criteria by noting that both dependability and confirmability, rather than objectivity, are established as the researcher audits the process by with the data was gathered, coded, and analyzed. Creswell (2013) states a preference for the term “validation” in order to emphasize the process of qualitative research rather than “verification” which denotes quantitative methods. This study employed methods of validation in line with naturalistic research including: triangulation, member checking, and rich description.

**Methods of Validity.** Data was gathered for this study through the use of individual interviews with Latino parents. Member checking required that the researcher provide the participants an opportunity to review, clarify, and elaborate on the findings in order that it was
represented accurately (Creswell, 2012). Parents involved in the interviews were given transcripts of the interviews and follow-up contacts was made with those who took part in order to verify accuracy of the transcript, as well as to elaborate or address any questions on the part of both the participants and the researcher that warranted further discussion or clarity. Finally, much attention was given to provide rich, thick description in order that the reader might determine transferability to other settings. Stake (2010) states that, “A description is rich if it provides abundant, interconnected details…” (p.49). Details can include physical and verbal communication and movement, and may begin as general ideas that narrow and interconnect details to each other (Creswell, 2013). Such details were observed and included in this study as the researcher sought to provide the reader with a vivid picture into the experiences of the Latino parents who participated. Concentrated effort was made to consciously seek how data is interconnected and representative of the complexity of their individual and collective experiences.

**Addressing potential threats to internal validity.** Threats to internal validity occur when there are problems with key underpinnings of a study or when the inferences made are incorrect due to issues between the presumed treatment variable and the outcome reflects a causal relationship (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). This interpretive phenomenological analysis was conducted within an allotted time frame of three months; therefore issues with history, maturation, and regression were not factors (Creswell, 2012). However, consideration regarding threats to internal validity was ensured through use of random selection of participants from the study sites. While certain general criteria (i.e. Latino, parent, former resident in low performing school district) was used to initially invite parents to participate, inclusion in the individual interviews was voluntary.
As previously disclosed, the researcher is a teacher and a resident in a neighboring high performing school district where this study took place. While familiarity with both the urban and the suburban environments provided a bridge by which to deepen understanding of the situation and to process the data, the researcher also was cognizant of her various roles beyond research, and those moments that she might appear as either an “insider” or an “outsider” to the participants. Conscientious effort was made to remain neutral both during data gathering and data analysis so as to protect against bias, and to self-check and seek peer audits when biases might be possible. This was done through peers in the doctoral cohort and former Latino colleagues not connected to either school district.

**Protection of Human Subjects.** Due to the personal nature of the responses, there was a potential for non-physical discomfort, but the risk was minimal and participants were reminded that if they felt uncomfortable answering any questions they could decline to do so. No risks such as financial, social, or physical occurred due to participation.

In order to protect the identity of each participant and their children, culturally germane pseudonyms were used during data coding and within the findings. As recommended by Creswell (2013), any information that might be used to identify participants or their child that could potentially cause any harm was altered to protect their confidentiality. Member checking was employed often to ensure for correct understanding (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Permission to audiotape interviews for transcription was given by participants (Appendix B). Any recordings of participants made during the study were labeled with the pseudonym assigned to them for all coding and data analysis. Researcher notes were used for content analysis and fact checking and stored in a secure, off-site location. All files related to this study were doubly protected (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) by password protection and encryption and only the researcher and the Principal
Investigator have access to these files.

Chapter IV: Report of Research Findings

The purpose of this study was to consider, explore, and better understand the expectations, perceptions and experiences of Latino parents who transition their children, via residency, from a low performing urban school system to a high performing suburban system. The five participants in this study each provided rich and detailed descriptions of their lived experiences and hopes for their children’s education. The parents’ motivation for uprooting his or her family from the urban settings naturally varied from parent to parent. However, from these stories, three categories emerged as distinct themes: (1) Prior Experience in an Urban System That Motivated Moving, (2) Experiences upon Arrival in a Suburban System, and (3) Experiences Over Time within a Suburban System. A more comprehensive understanding of each of the three themes is best considered separately through the two sub-categories of academic experiences and social experiences. Interwoven into each theme, albeit sometimes implicit, are also the expectations, parental involvement, and sense of community expressed by the participants.

Of central importance to phenomenological research is a deeper knowledge of a participant’s lived experiences. For a brief overview and to facilitate delineation and clarity amongst study participants, Table 1 is first provided to synthesize and highlight pertinent characteristics. In order to provide a better contextual understandings of the subject findings presented in the fourth chapter of this study, a more in-depth introduction to each parent interviewed is then presented using pseudonyms. In addition, any names of third parties, their titles, or locations mentioned by participants were changed or removed to protect privacy.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Carlos</th>
<th>Miguel</th>
<th>Deborah</th>
<th>Benza</th>
<th>Gisela</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Background</td>
<td>Dominican / White</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>Dominican</td>
<td>Dominican</td>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Background of Co-Parent</td>
<td>Dominican</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>Dominican</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of Birth</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Dom. Republic</td>
<td>Dom. Republic</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Level of Education Completed</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>6th grade</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Children</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in Urban Area</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in Suburban Area</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1.* A table representing the primary characteristics delineating study participants

**Carlos.** Carlos is a 26-year-old single father of a 10-year-old girl. He self-identified as half Dominican, half white, having been raised in the neighboring, predominately Latino city of Riverton. Carlos reported that he lived with his Latina mother and attended the urban system of Riverton until his final two years of high school when he moved to a very rural area of another New England state to live with his white father and attend a predominately white high school. His daughter’s mother is Dominican and resides in Riverton, from which he removed his child a year ago after the mother became unable to care for her. He works as a representative for a cologne company within department stores and as a part-time disc jockey for various events. Carlos and his daughter live in a low-income housing unit, one of two in Parsonville. His mother still resides in Riverton, and he often seeks her advice in the care and raising of his daughter. He is bilingual, as is his mother, but his daughter has been resistant to speaking Spanish even though she seems to understand much of what is spoken to her by her grandmother. The language used
between Carlos and his daughter is exclusively English.

**Miguel.** Miguel is a 39-year-old immigrant from Mexico now living in McCallister. He came to the U.S. at age 17 seeking work and having completed the equivalent of 6th grade in his native country. His wife left Mexico at age 13 and also completed 6th grade before arriving in America to work. They eventually made their way to New England, settling in Langley, a city with a diverse ethnic population known regionally for its high poverty and crime rates. Their two children, a girl and a boy, attended Langley’s schools through their 6th and 4th grade years respectively. Miguel and his wife were employed as farm workers. When an opportunity for housing was included in Parsonville, a large suburban town with a reputable school system, they decided to relocate the family. After four years, the farm work ended and Miguel found new employment in another town about 30 miles west. However, out of a desire to have the children remain in a high performing school system, the family decided to stay in the area and relocated once again to an apartment in McCallister, the town adjacent to Parsonville. At the time of this study, Miguel was making the hour and a half round-trip commute to a factory job and working long hours that often consisted of a second shift schedule. He is bilingual, his wife less so, and the family language spoken at home with their two children is Spanish.

**Deborah.** Deborah was born in the Dominican Republic and moved to Riverton at the age of 15. She graduated from Riverton High School in 1990, and went on to obtain both Bachelors and Masters degrees in the social services field. Her husband is also Dominican, and they are the parents of twins, a boy and a girl, age 16. Their children attended public school in Riverton until they entered 2nd grade, at which time the family opted to move to Meadowview after Deborah spent extensive time researching top public school systems within the area. She used the statistics found on the state’s Department of Education website, as well as her own
informal investigation via visits and conversations with staff prior to choosing Meadowview. Three years ago, when the twins entered 7th grade, the family moved to McCallister. Deborah stated that the move was made in order to be closer to work and family in Riverton. The family uses both English and Spanish in the home, with the daughter being bilingual and the son preferring to answer in English only.

Benza. Benza’s brother is married to Deborah, and she was also born in the Dominican Republic. She came with her family to Riverton as a young child and spent her entire K-12 education in the Riverton Public Schools. Benza is married to an African American man with whom she has three sons, ages 17, 14, and 13. Her oldest son completed 2nd grade in the Riverton schools before their move to Meadowview for his 3rd grade year. The youngest two were homeschooled by Benza until they moved into the Meadowview system. Extended family and community are of great importance to Benza and her husband, and after four years in Meadowview they decided to relocate to McCallister when Deborah and her family also moved. She served as a coordinator for the Parsonville Senior Center at the time of this study. The language of the household is English, although Benza reported that the boys had, at various times and to varying degrees, expressed some growing interest in learning her native Spanish.

Gisela. Gisela was born in New York City to Puerto Rican parents, as was her husband. Both were educated through high school in the city’s public school system. Gisela had her son while in high school, and reported a sense of pride in the fact that she completed her studies, had two more daughters, and remained happily married to their father 24 years later. She and her husband believe strongly in the value of education and wanted their children to attend college in order to obtain opportunities they themselves did not have. To that end, they decided to move their family from New York to New England in hopes of a better education and an opportunity to
grow up away from the hustle of the city and the major avenue on which they lived. They chose Riverton because of its affordability and large Latino community. Gisela’s oldest two children attended Riverton elementary schools and the regional vocational high school. However, after many academic struggles during her youngest daughter’s 8th grade year, Gisela and her husband made the choice, at great financial risk, to move to Meadowview so that their child could attend high school. Both Spanish and English are spoken in the home, with English being predominate.

For reasons of clarity in differentiating the urban and suburban areas discussed in this chapter, the following table is provided as a means to review, expand, and simplify previous information provided in the introduction of this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of City or Town</th>
<th>Urban or Suburban (population)</th>
<th>Median Household Income</th>
<th>Average 2014 sale price of homes</th>
<th>% Latino Students</th>
<th>% White Students</th>
<th>Dropout Rate</th>
<th>% of grads going to 4 yr. college</th>
<th>NCLB Act Level designation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Langley</td>
<td>Urban (91,589)</td>
<td>$44,849</td>
<td>$223,931</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCallister</td>
<td>Suburban (33,746)</td>
<td>$112,681</td>
<td>$604,324</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>.7%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meadowview</td>
<td>Suburban (6,602)</td>
<td>$78,486</td>
<td>$359,795</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>.7%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parsonville</td>
<td>Suburban (28,677)</td>
<td>$96,002</td>
<td>$499,888</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>.3%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverton</td>
<td>Urban (76,820)</td>
<td>$32,851</td>
<td>$212,221</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2. A table synthesizing demographic, economic, and system performance indicators
Sources: 2012 Department of Revenue, Trulia.com, Department of Secondary and Elementary Education 2014 Statistics*
Prior Experiences in an Urban System That Motivated Moving

**Academic experiences in an urban system.** When participants were asked to describe their previous experiences and perceptions as parents of children enrolled in a low performing urban system each noted varying degrees of and reasons for disappointment in the academic education their child(ren) received. Two major factors emerged for their disappointment. First was a feeling that the urban system was not able to address the specific needs of their child, either for extra support or because their child was performing beyond their peer group academically. Secondly, parents expressed that there seemed to be apathy on the part of teachers, students, and other parents in terms of academic engagement and achievement.

**Unmet needs of the student academically.** Four of the five participants directly stated their disappointment in the urban system’s ability to effectively meet the needs of their child either because the child had not experienced certain benchmark academic successes, or because the child was ahead of his or her peers and had experienced wasted opportunities to learn further as they waited for other students to acquire skills.

It became apparent that the participants expressing disappointment with the academics of the urban systems were highly aware of and involved in the academic performance of their child at home. They were also actively involved in conversations with the school system in an attempt to advocate for their child’s best interest. For Carlos, this took the form of monitoring his daughter’s homework and grades, and by her 3rd grade year in Riverton he was left wondering how he could help. “I was always asking the teacher if she needed help with homework or was she having problems in math or anything, [to] let me know. I just hated my daughter always coming with an ‘F’ or a ‘D’ or a ‘C’ on a test.” He said that he wanted better communication between teachers and parents, but was left with little or no response from the teacher. “I’d rather
have the teacher call me, ‘Hey, she needs help on this.’ I wasn’t getting that at all.”

Like Carlos, Deborah was concerned with the lack of support services one of her twins received after being diagnosed with a processing disability and language acquisition issues during 1st grade. “It took about a year and a few conversations with the counselor at the school and we just decided that we needed to move out of the city to get the services that he needed.” Deborah recalled that she had been left on her own as a parent to navigate special education testing in Riverton, so she decided to research other options. “I went into the website [for the state’s Department of Education] and looked into the school systems that were performing, that had a good program for kids with disabilities. One of the systems that popped out was Meadowview.” From there, Deborah took the initiative to contact them and request a visit.

“Something I really loved was that I actually got to talk to the teachers and the school counselor, just to have more information. So it felt like the school was working with you, not against you.”

For Benza and Gisela, the disappointment with the Riverton school system lay in the fact that they did not feel that their children were being pushed academically to a level they were capable of attaining. Both mothers stated that their child had advantages and skills in language and reading that were not shared by their classmates. This resulted in the child being held back or otherwise distracted in acquiring more advanced skills that they were ready to learn. In contrast to Carlos and Deborah’s frustrations over obtaining help to bring their children’s skills up to accepted grade level benchmarks, these mothers felt the school system was overwhelmed in attempting to meet the needs of the many students struggling with English and reading skills.

Benza, who is sister-in-law to Deborah, recalled an incident that was central to the family’s decision to move from Riverton. “My oldest is exceptionally bright, and he was being taken from his 2nd grade class to learn with the 8th graders so that he could excel.” She said she
discovered that he was teaching some of the older students to read. “We said, ‘This cannot be! A 2nd grader should not be teaching that!’” She explained that it hurt her as a parent, knowing that she “needed to do something better.” Her growing disappointment, coupled with Deborah’s own disappointment and research, made the decision to move to the Meadowview system easy as it provided the two extended families with the support they needed in making such a move to a community very different from Riverton. She reported that once they agreed to move, they shared transportation duties as well as at-home support. “I became the reading teacher; my brother became the math tutor. That’s how we did it.”

When Gisela’s family first settled in Riverton from New York City, they rented in the southern section of the city and were pleased with the schools and the education that their oldest two children received. Their youngest daughter did well until 5th grade when the family purchased a home and relocated to the northern part of Riverton, an area they soon discovered was plagued by high rates of crime, arson, and other social issues that spilled into the neighborhood school. Gisela relates this story of her daughter’s transition:

She went to the 5th grade and that school where she was at was 90% Hispanic, of non-speaking English, and here she was speaking English, 5th grade honor roll student, and just fell through their system because they were catering to those that didn’t speak English. We went through a really hard time, but as parents, we would still continue to say, “Ok, well that’s them, you’re you. You still do what you have to do. This is what you’re responsible for and I’m sure that they’re not forgetting about you. They’re teaching you still, but you’re not interested because they’re paying more attention to the other kids.” I didn’t know my child because she just, it wasn’t the same child. She just wasn’t. She really disliked school. She didn’t give it any effort.
The struggles that her daughter faced began to manifest themselves in behavioral issues and truancy. Gisela said that her daughter was never a problem at home, but her unhappiness at school would cause her to “act out” and “be fresh and just giving teachers a hard time.” This pattern continued for the next four years, causing Gisela and her husband to ask themselves, “What are we doing wrong? What’s happening?” At one point a teacher suggested that the family have her tested for ADHD and get her on medications, a suggestion that Gisela vehemently resisted. As it came time to enter high school, the city offered only one choice for Gisela’s daughter: the alternative high school, which was reputed to be a dumping ground and a dead end for most students. She and her husband were “mortified” at the thought of having their child denied access to the other college preparatory high schools and the vocational high school that their oldest two children had attended. Out of desperation, they made a difficult decision in 2010 during a time when the country was still in the midst of an economic recession. “We said, ‘We’re not losing our child to society. We’ve come along this way.’ And we let our house go, let it go into foreclosure.” By ridding themselves of the house and finding an apartment to rent in Meadowview, the family could enroll their youngest in Meadowview High as a freshmen and still allow their oldest daughter the opportunity to finish her senior year at the regional vocational high school she had been attending. Moving from a house to an apartment was a sacrifice the parents were willing to make for the chance to provide their youngest with a more rigorous approach to academics and a future potentially filled with better options.

**Feelings of general apathy amongst many teachers, students, and parents.** Miguel, the father of a 16 year old daughter and a 13 year old son, said that while his main reason for relocating to a suburb six years ago was work-related, the reputation of the Parsonville school system factored into the final decision. Although Miguel seemed hesitant to complain or criticize
much about any school system his children have attended, he did note that in the urban environs of Langley there had been a “need to improve a few things.” He felt that the Langley schools did not “care as much as they do in Parsonville about the education that they are giving. I think the teachers don’t care about the kids and the kids don’t care too much about the teachers. It’s just, everybody seems to do whatever they please.” Some of Miguel’s reticence regarding the critiquing of American schools may be attributed to the fact that he himself attended school in Mexico only until the age of 12, and it is understandably difficult to know how to navigate a foreign system of which one has not been a part of and may feel unqualified to judge, as he stated during the interview.

Even when participants were familiar with the system, in fact alumni of it, they still expressed that they were initially reluctant to be involved. Deborah said that she is naturally reserved but felt that she “had to get involved”, that she had no choice “because if I didn’t get involved, my child wouldn’t get the service he needed.” She astutely observed that “in Riverton not a lot of the parents were involve with the kid’s education” because many of the parents worked numerous jobs that did not allow for them to participate or attend school events.

Benza, who at one point stated “we are an introverted family”, reported feelings of frustration in her role as PTO president at her son’s Riverton elementary school. She attributed this to lack of participation from more parents and the belief of teachers that parents just didn’t care. “We were pulling teeth at the beginning to get five parents to show up”, and when few parents attended events, teachers misinterpreted the poor showing to mean “Oh, they don’t care.” She felt that urban teachers became accustomed to a minimal parental presence and too easily dismissed it as the expected norm. Benza expressed exasperation that during her tenure her efforts and eventual success in increasing parent participation in the PTO were met by the
administration with a lack of gratitude. “They didn’t like it. ‘Why are these parents getting involved when we’re already running things? We already have what we need.’ Then we said, ‘That’s the answer that’s going to drive us all away,’ and it did.”

Social experiences in an urban setting. The fundamental reasons for relocating to a high performing suburban school varied from family to family, with some participants stating that they explicitly sought out the school systems they felt would best serve their children’s academic needs. It was also noted that there were social considerations that weighed heavily in the decisions of some of the families. This was evident throughout the interviews when parents said such things as they felt “other kids were not good influences” on their child, or “that my son saw bad behaviors in classmates and in the neighborhood and started to copy it.”

Carlos was most vocal in stating his desire to remove his daughter from Riverton because of social and societal issues he had experienced there:

The main reason why I brought her to Parsonville is pretty much just I didn’t want her being around the urban community. I know, I lived there all my life. I seen a lot of things that I don’t want her to see. I’m not trying to say Riverton is a bad city, it’s not. It’s just, I just, the neighborhood, maybe it’s a bad neighborhood or something like that, and they learn from the bad things they see, and the next thing is pretty much that my daughter starts learning from the other kids that grew up in those tough situations and I don’t think my daughter should be around that. [Coming to Parsonville] was a choice that my mom actually was like, “Hey, it’ll be a better place for your daughter.” I just recently had got custody, so I was thinking about, I like to think ahead, so I’m like, yeah, maybe I should move there. I know my baby mom is not doing that well and I need to step up as a parent and do right for my little one.
Gisela expressed concern that other children in Riverton were often allowed more freedom than she felt was wise as a parent. Her children, even in their later teens, had a 10:00pm curfew that she and her husband firmly enforced. However, because they welcomed other children to come to their home after that time, there was not an issue within the family over the time restraint. She was shocked to learn that many of the teen visitors had no curfew at all. “Are you kidding me? Girls! Are you kidding me?” Gisela attributed this to the fact that many of these children came from single parent homes. “Kids would come to my house and they would see mom, dad, three kids, mom’s cool, dad’s cool. They were constantly wanting to be around us.” Although they were able to pacify the needs of the oldest two with their open demeanor and inviting home, and therefore keep the children insulated from some of the issues that plagued the city, this did not work for their youngest. Work schedules necessitated that they place her in a program at the Boys & Girls Club two hours each day after school. However, their daughter soon lost interest in the sports-oriented activities and began to find other places to go, often with friends that Gisela did not approve of her having. “So that was a problem for us as we’re trying to pull her out of Riverton, not wanting to let her be over there [out on the streets] or hang out with anybody over there.”

Experiences upon Arrival in a Suburban System

**Academic experiences upon arrival.** Participants reported great satisfaction in both Meadowview and Parsonville school systems as their children made the transition from low performing urban systems to these high performing suburban ones. Each parent indicated that they found in these schools what they had been looking for and deemed lacking in the previous schools in terms of academics. Benza summed it up this way: “We uprooted ourselves, not because we were looking for mediocrity. So that means that as a family unit we are not mediocre
people. We are looking for excellence. We are looking for academic push.” All five parents stated that their children were challenged in the suburban systems in ways that they approved of and felt made for positive gains for their children. Each parent discussed their awareness of perceived knowledge deficits as their children entered the new schools that needed to be addressed soon after their arrival in the suburbs.

**Closing academic gaps.** The “academic push” that the children received from the suburban schools meant that there would be a lot of extra work on the part of teachers, students and parents alike. For some of the students this meant either intensifying the special education needs that they arrived with, as was the case for Deborah’s son, or providing testing and creating a plan for services as part of early intervention for Carlos’ daughter. For Benza’s sons it meant spending time with tutors. All of the students found it necessary to work harder to catch up with the suburban systems’ expectations of what they should know and be able to do, and the parents reported an awareness of the increase in homework and time spent on homework because of various gaps in reading or math.

At the time of the interview for this study, it was nearing the end of Carlos’ first year parenting in a suburban system, and he and his daughter were both still adjusting to the demands. “I’d say academically Parsonville is a little tougher on my little one, but she’s getting extra help”, and she would soon have a Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) in place for special education services. The school quickly paired her with an additional aide in the classroom, and Carlos was pleased that her grades had gone up. This was the result of much effort at home as well. “I spent about an hour, an hour and a half with her doing homework, two hours, just sitting with her, trying to get it done. I feel like there’s homework for me, too!” He, like many parents in the past decade or so, admitted that sometimes the math homework required him to “do
research on it” in order to help, but that he was more than willing to do it in order to provide the extra support at home.

When her twins began 2nd grade in the Meadowview schools, Deborah said that her daughter, who she deemed to be “pretty bright”, had a hard time catching up with her classmates. Her son “was completely lost”. In the beginning, he would stay after school and, like Carlos’ daughter, was paired with an instructional aide during class time. Deborah noted that within six months her daughter had closed significant learning gaps. She felt that by 4th grade her son had made great strides, and with the help of an “unbelievable” language arts teacher he was closing gaps in reading and writing. She also appreciated that, upon arrival in Meadowview, the school separated the twins into different classes. In Riverton, the twins had been in the same room each year, something Deborah felt was unfair to her daughter because it often placed her in the role of caring for her brother. The initial separation in Meadowview was difficult for the twins, but their mother felt it was necessary and allowed her daughter to “flourish and do her own stuff.”

Gisela recalls that she and her husband were nervous because they knew that their daughter would struggle academically as she entered Parsonville High School as an incoming freshmen from Riverton. “She came home the first week and she wasn’t discouraged, because I think she liked the challenge.” Gisela felt that it helped to have her older daughter, a senior at the regional vocational high school, doing similar work as her freshmen. “She was just amazed that here she was learning stuff that we didn’t learn until you’re in 12th grade where we come from.” She credits her daughter’s drive and desire to compete academically, not only with her older sister, but also with her new peers as a factor that helped motivate her in Parsonville. However, Gisela felt that there was a certain amount of complacency on the part of the high school teachers to go beyond their regular work to help her daughter. She relayed it this way:
She reached out for help, and she got it. She got it, not from the teachers per se; she got it from the counselors, the guidance counselors, and the principal right away took a liking to her and saw her perseverance of trying to do something…As far as teachers, maybe…I’m not going to say no, they didn’t, but I’m not going to say they sat there with her and guided her. It’s like, ‘You’re here, here’s the lesson for the day, and if you have a question, raise your hand, but there’s a lot of us here.’

Miguel stated that when his children moved from Langley to Parsonville his daughter had a difficult time catching up in her 6th grade classroom, “so much that she frustrates herself”. He admitted to feeling his own frustration over his inability to help her due to the fact that it was beyond his own level of education in his native Mexico. “There wasn’t any way for me to help her with her homework. It’s not on my…you know, I can’t understand what she is asking me about.” However, with afterschool help, he reports she was able to work with teachers and try to close knowledge gaps. When asked if he felt she had caught up with her peers in Parsonville, Miguel said he thought she had somewhat, yet she continued to struggle and she had not obtained the “all ‘A’ grades” she had received in Langley. At the time his son, who he described as “smart” and “easy going”, was in 4th grade, and appeared to have a much easier time adjusting to the increased rigor of the Parsonville system.

For Benza, it became evident that she would need to enlist the help of her father, a retired math teacher, to improve her son’s math skills when they moved from Riverton to Meadowview, and again a few years later when they moved to another high performing system in McCallister. “We had to Skype with my father for three months to get him back on track. When my father came for his vacation, he was doing a daily regiment to push him to get him up.” She continues to worry that her youngest two will encounter similar math deficits in McCallister High School’s
notoriously rigorous program, despite the fact that they were educated solely in Meadowview.

**Social experiences upon arrival.** Participants in this study reported very different social experiences amongst their children when they first arrived in their suburban schools. The social experiences ranged from no difficulties to difficulties that included a race-related issue that stemmed from an argument amongst students and an incident with a teacher. In some cases it was unclear, even to the parents, how much of their child’s ease or struggle could be attributed to their personalities as gregarious or reserved. Some parent participants also wondered aloud if their child’s social experiences were somehow connected to ethnicity or the mindset with which they were raised. Additionally, a few of the participants shared social transitional experiences or issues as they themselves acclimated to their new community as parents.

**Social experiences for children upon arrival.** Despite incongruent experiences and reasoning to explain why some children transitioned with more ease socially to their new suburban surroundings, all participants were highly cognizant of how their children were adjusting to the new school systems. Participants shared observations of their children that were often centered on their children’s individual personalities as influencing factors accounting for their degree of social interaction and adjustment in the new setting.

Miguel and Deborah, each with a son and a daughter, were quick to compare the personalities of their children and attribute the level of ease of the transition to each child’s natural inclinations and behaviors. Miguel stated that the transition for his daughter was difficult due to the fact that she was shy and it was “hard for her to make friends”. Yet his son, two years younger and more outgoing, had an easier time socially. “He can make friends in no time so that helps him out. He didn’t get stressed so that [the move] was really good for him.” When asked if he thought the school could have helped to make the transition easier for his 6th grade daughter,
he replied that it was partially up to his daughter to speak up and let her counselor know that she was having a hard time academically, but that the social challenges where not the responsibility of the school. “You can’t make someone be friends with someone else.” However, Miguel did express a wish that the school had taken notice of his daughter’s struggles, but was reluctant to make them aware of what he saw:

She came to a point that she was really frustrating[frustrated] and I don’t know. It doesn’t seem like they notice that part. I wish…you know, especially a counselor. I think they have counselors in the school. Half the time she said, “Well, I don’t want to talk to somebody” or “He doesn’t have time for me.” So it would have been nice if the teachers realized she was having a hard time. For me it was just trying to do my role as a parent…To me, if I was to call the school, then I feel like I want them to do my part as a parent. For me, it was up to my wife and I to figure it out and to help her out. So we don’t, of course, we don’t have experience with the school system. So, I don’t know. I don’t feel like I’m comfortable to call them.

Deborah reported that her daughter was always more outgoing than her twin brother, who she described as “very quiet”. She felt that her daughter had “flourished” in the new school. However, while her son improved academically there was an early social issue within the classroom that was not positive. She relayed the story of an argument her son had with another student in class, and the teacher made some sort of reference that Deborah now only recalls as being taken to be somewhat racial in nature and that upset her when her son came home and told her. Yet, looking back years later, she now states what took place was probably more of a misunderstanding. “I think that culturally we were not communicating actually because she [the teacher] did feel horrible, you know, then I felt horrible after the whole incident. She did
apologize and I never had any other incident."

Her sister-in-law, Benza, also alluded to something racially upsetting during their time living in Meadowview. Although she declined to speak further about the details of the incident, it was clear that it had left a lasting impact on her and her children. Benza’s three sons are biracial, her husband is black, and the context of the racial issues could have stemmed from a bias for one or both of the children’s racial composition. She was comfortable to only revisit the situation in this manner:

We didn’t have the conversations of the struggles that they were going through with the racial issues and we didn’t find out about them until after. Once we left Meadowview, it then became heartbreaking to know that your children were in so much pain…Yet, as a parent, especially as a mom, you see something is wrong. “Why are you so quiet? What’s wrong? Why is it that we never invite somebody over? Don’t you want to have this friend over or that friend?” “No, no. You know, they’re not that kind of friend, mom.” “Oh, okay. No big deal, whatever.” In the end, we left and once we left, the flood gate is open and the truth came out.

Carlos reported only a minor social issue when his daughter first moved to Parsonville. There was an isolated incident with a friend, which he termed as “bullying”. He felt compelled to talk to the parent of the other girl. His daughter had expressed a desire to be friends with this child, but told her father that “sometimes she’ll be mean and pushy”. The conversation with the parent resolved the matter to everyone’s satisfaction, and Carlos said he was happy that it could be handled so directly in a community like Parsonville. He felt that in Riverton it would not have gone as well. “It’s not like that in Riverton. Riverton, you tell a parent or you tell the school. I wish they would take more effect and handle the situation right away, but they don’t really do
anything.” Otherwise, he reported that his daughter made friends easily and had experienced a “healthy social environment” in Parsonville upon arrival.

The transition for Gisela’s daughter from a Riverton middle school to Parsonville High School was viewed as smooth, and she made friends quickly. “That’s one thing I could say is the kids here in this town were very welcoming, and not only are they welcoming, they want to learn about the culture.” As they had in Riverton, Gisela and her husband soon found they had frequent teen visitors around the Parsonville apartment, and that they seemed very curious to learn more about their family, particularly their food and its preparation.

**Social experiences for the parents upon arrival.** Because this study considers the experiences of Latino parents, it is important to give voice to not only what they observed and perceived of their children, but also to their own experiences as adults who themselves were transitioning from an urban to a suburban area. Four of the participants stated during the interviews that there were school and community related social experiences for them as well as for their children as their family settled in the suburban area. Some of the experiences were conveyed to be positive, and although none of the experiences were construed as negative, the participants were not without a realization that as parents they were in many ways atypical of other parents in the town in which they now resided.

Carlos cheerfully proclaimed that he felt comfortable in Parsonville. “I love people, all types of people! They’re all beautiful to me.” He felt that his daughter shared his philosophy and had adjusted well because of his attitude and approach to their new community. He said that having spent two years during high school living in a rural New England area with his white father had helped make this transition to suburban life very easy. He laughed as he recounted his time there being markedly different than his urban upbringing in Riverton. “I went cross country
skiing. I played tackle football with cross country skis! Who does that for gym? I drove, in the winter time, I rode on my ATV to school through the woods.”

Gisela had a similar perception regarding her life’s experiences as contributing factors to how she viewed others and her ability to adapt to varying environments. She and her husband are both second generation New Yorkers, their grandparent all arrived from Puerto Rico in the 1950s and 1960s. Her first language being English, Gisela stated that she learned Spanish on the playground once she began kindergarten in the New York City public schools. She spoke of great diversity and co-existence with people from all races during her 25 years there, and the strangeness of coming to Riverton and being in a place so predominantly Latino. Their only concern in moving from Riverton to Parsonville was one of economic differences. “We don’t belong there….it’s very expensive. The kids that would be going to that school would be lawyers’ and doctors’ kids. It was nerve-racking. I think we were more nervous than what she was.” After their move to Parsonville, Gisela and her husband wondered if they would maintain the level of parental involvement in sports and club activities that had also served to connect them with other parents in Riverton. Their youngest daughter was not involved in extra-curricula activities at that time, but seemed to understand her parents need to socialize in the new town. Gisela reported that her daughter would say, “I want you to meet so-and-so, Mr. So-and-So,” and “I think you guys would get along if we could all go out for dinner or we could go to a movie or even a beach day”. They were able to meet some Parsonville parents that way, but were “ecstatic, happy people” when their daughter decided to become a hockey cheerleader during her final year of high school there, knowing they would meet a wider circle of parents at the games.

For Deborah, the transition to Meadowview was made easier because she felt strongly about the purpose for the move as a mother seeking the best education for her children. She told
the twins explicitly why they had moved and did not allow their status as minorities to interfere with learning. “There was no kind of nonsense of ‘I don’t feel okay because I am the only brown person in the classroom.’” Deborah did not allow herself these feelings either as she set out to meet other parents:

When you go, you know how when you go some place and you sit there and you’re almost invisible? And some communities you didn’t really feel that. I didn’t feel that at Meadowview. The moms were inviting. “Oh, you’re Lisette’s mom!” Usually Lisette’s mom, because Felix is so very quiet. “Oh, you’re Lisette’s mom. Oh come in here. Sit down. Are you doing anything? Have lunch with [us].” Felix’s best friend is actually from Meadowview and [his mother] was unbelievable making sure we got connected in the community and that we were feeling comfortable.

However, Deborah was quick to mention that she felt her husband was the family member who struggled the most with the move, having left family and life-long friends thirty miles away in Riverton. “He was living in Meadowview, but living in Riverton at the same time. He would just come socialize with our friends in Riverton, and it was very difficult for him.”

Miguel related the transition from their predominately Latino neighborhood of Langley to suburban Parsonville as akin to moving to a foreign land. In recognizing that it was difficult for his two children, he also admitted how hard it was for he and his wife. His response to the question of had the move been difficult socially was this:

Socially, definitely. Very hard because its such a different environment. It’s just so different. Even for us, it’s very hard. I can’t imagine [for]the kids. It’s just culturally…It’s a different…like to move to a different country. They have a lot more
Spanish students [in Langley]. For some reason they can relate a little better. And when they come here I think they kind of see us different. They kind of see us differently. If not, they feel that way, that we’re not the same, that we’re different.

**Experiences Over Time within a Suburban System**

With the exception of Carlos, who had resided in a suburban system for only one year with his 10-year-old daughter, all of the participants had a range of four to nine years of experience within suburban schools. Of those four, all had at least one child who was either enrolled in high school or had graduated from a suburban system. It is important to note the natural inclination when parenting to alter and/or lessen one’s direct involvement with their child as they get older in order to foster independence and prepare them to enter adulthood. With this in mind, questioning and the responses that follow reflect the growth of the child, as well as the passage of time experienced in the suburban communities, both academically and socially.

**Academic experiences over time.** It became clear throughout the interviews that the participants were generally satisfied with the education their children were receiving in the high performing suburban systems. All parents stated that they considered any sacrifices the family had made to reside in their particular community as worthwhile and one that they had positively affected the education of their children. The participants were not without particular critiques and criticisms of the schools, which included a need to have better communication between school and family, higher teacher expectations of their children, and an increased awareness on the part of the school of how to help these families better acclimate to the suburban system.

**Better communication between school and family.** Each of the five participants expressed a desire for better communication with the school. Carlos felt it would be helpful if his daughter’s Meadowview elementary school had an online program whereby he could monitor
her grades and homework from home. Benza stated that her McCallister system had a parent portal to monitor student progress, but she and other high school parents she knew were not familiar with how it worked. Gisela wanted to use the parent portal, but found it was not working. After calling the school to ask for help, she was informed that many parents were having issues, but no answer was provided as to how to resolve the problem with the program. She ended up logging in under her daughter’s student access to monitor academic progression. It was clear that there was some frustration over limited access to their child’s progress or difficulty in determining progress that participants wanted rectified.

Issues with language were not a problem for the parent participants interviewed in this study. However, Miguel did state that written school communications to families in English were sometimes not fully comprehended despite otherwise having a “good connection” with the school via email. “It is an issue, especially for my wife. It’s hard for her to understand some of this stuff. For myself, too, because my short education because when I come here I didn’t go to school, I just went right to work.” In urban Langley, written communication had been bilingual, but Miguel did not expect that in the Parsonville suburb. He indicated that he felt comfortable enough asking the school if he did not understand something. However, his wife, who is the parent primarily at home with the children would probably not ask for clarity, but rather “hope for the best” in her own understanding of the school missive.

Deborah expanded on the need to enhance communication between faculty and parents in terms of how information regarding special education services is shared amongst school staff and with parents. She had expected the transference of information to be an issue when the family moved from Meadowview to McCallister, another high performing suburban school district, four years ago. However, she did not expect having to explain her son’s history each year within the
same system. “Sometimes when you go to meetings you have to explain everything all over again. And then people question you. It’s sometimes hard; I find it difficult when it’s like somebody new.” She continues to “go to as many meetings as you need to go” and to “tell each person whatever to make sure that your child gets the services they need”, but she said it also made her feel like a “complainer”. Deborah found herself wishing that the teachers would first communicate her son’s strengths before launching into his areas of weakness. “They keep coming back with ‘He has poor handwriting.’ He does. ‘Felix is not good at language arts.’ Yes, it’s true. But they don’t focus on he is really good at math. Start with things he is good at. I already know he’s not good at language arts.”

*Higher teacher expectations of their children.* Benza, although satisfied that her son’s teacher would email her, worried that she was being critiqued as a parent who was not addressing the teacher’s concerns at home with the student. She came up with a solution that helped her alleviate any misinterpretations by copying her son on all emails between teacher and parent. “I don’t want [the teacher] to feel blamed either, but at the same time it’s such a fine line. As educators you have the fine line of, ‘Okay, we got to change something but at the same time I don’t want this parent to run off to the hills because they got offended.’” Benza believed that it helped everyone involved to know that her son felt supported by his parents, but that he also understood he was being held accountable. “His parents are, one, sticking up for him, but two, saying, ‘Get your work done!’” She felt that because he was one of only about “seven minority kids” in his school, there was less expected of him by the teachers. “It seems more like, [the teachers] want to push him, but then they’re like, ‘Well, you know, maybe we shouldn’t because….’ I don’t know, [it seems]they are shying away from it, and we’re not shying away from it at home.” She conveyed that “the other Latina mom” in her son’s
class had expressed a similar feeling. “I’ve actually told them that he needs to be pushed, not to be afraid to push him academically.” She then reiterated that her purpose in moving to Meadowview and later McCallister was because these were high performing schools with reputations for rigor in education. “We’re here for the challenge of excellence that you are providing all these other students.”

As previously mentioned, Gisela also felt teachers could do more to push her child to realize her full potential. When her daughter made the choice not to complete her homework, she would tell her mother that while she understood it would drop her grade a bit, she was content with the “C” she would receive, saying it would “only bump my grade a bit.” Gisela said that she was not happy to have her daughter content with a “C” if it could be higher with more effort and more encouragement from her teachers to excel. She again attributed this to the fact that teachers had large class sizes and perhaps didn’t take time or “think it mattered as much to us a family” than to others that her daughter be pushed harder academically.

This sentiment was implied by Miguel when he stated that he wished the school in Parsonville had realized how hard his daughter was trying to catch up academically to her peers, but they never mentioned to him if they were aware of her struggles. “It would have been nice if the teachers realized she was having a hard time.” Instead her grades during middle school dropped from “A”s in Langley to “C”s in Parsonville without anyone in the system questioning how this affected the child or what the family’s feelings might be. This pattern continued in McCallister after the family moved. The move to McCallister was made after they lost work-related housing. McCallister was chosen because of its reputation for excellent schools. Miguel stated that he and his wife both felt that an occupational change should not mean a lesser education for their children who had benefitted from the high performing Parsonville system.
**School help in transitioning students and acclimating families.** The four participants in this study who had been long established in high performing suburban communities each expressed a desire to have had more help and information from the school systems that might have guided them more easily through the transition. For Deborah it would have come in the form of a meeting with a counselor:

When I transferred I wish somebody would have sat down with our family and asked about our needs instead of having me feel like I’m fighting for this, and this is what we need. It would have been nice to have that person, a friendly face that you could just go and say, “My family is struggling with this. This is what I need.” It would have been nice to have either a guidance counselor or a mental health counselor talk about certain issues that the community has.

Gisela echoed this desire for some sort of outreach to the families. “I think that there should be more reaching out because if they had said, “We need this…” or anything that would bring us together, I would have volunteered.” She felt that in Parsonville she had to “throw herself in”, unlike Riverton’s regional vocational high school where the faculty was constantly asking for parental help. The fact that Parsonville High sent copious informative emails still felt too generalized and impersonal to her.

Cultural differences and expectations were only acknowledged on one occasion for Miguel’s family. This came about on a day when their children’s school was celebrating various cultures around the world and their family was asked to prepare authentic Mexican food. When asked if this cultural sharing is something that Miguel would like to see the school do more of, Miguel responded positively. “Yeah, it would be more interesting. It would open a door to ask some questions to us. ‘Who are you? Where you come from?’ I think it would be nice.” When
further asked if he thought these types of conversations would help his children academically in the long run, he said, “It’s hard to know, but yeah it would give the opportunity” to teachers to know more about who we are, why we are there, and what we want for our kids.”

Benza stated that a “New Family” orientation at the elementary school had been helpful, but the lack of this specific programming for her middle and high school sons was a noticeable oversight and greatly needed. She said it helped to meet other new families, “away from the 500 other students” who would attend a general orientation that included existing residents. The smaller group set her at ease for her youngest child’s transition, and it provided him with two “of his closest friends” throughout the past few years in McCallister.

**Social experiences over time.** The five participants settled into the suburban systems, and initial transitional hopes and fears gave way to the reality of daily life and social interactions. For the students, it was a matter of becoming accustomed to the rigor of academics and the necessity of making new friends. Each participant stressed a desire to provide their child(ren) with opportunities to socialize with their suburban peers, as well as to remain in close contact with their urban peers and family members. For the parents, it was a matter of learning new norms within their children’s schools and determining the role they would play in this new situation in terms of parental involvement. Overtime, it became apparent to the established parents in this study that the social issues they and their children faced had less to do with ethnicity and more to do with socioeconomic differences. As Benza said, “It’s not about racism as much as it is about ‘classism.’”

*Making friends through school and community participation.* Each participant spoke with pride of their child’s activities within the school and wider community. For Carlos, it was satisfaction in the afterschool program his daughter attended that was run by their Parsonville
housing project for young residents. He was pleased that she also attended an art program in Riverton. Miguel smiled widely when he told of his daughter’s recent trip to Florida with the school choir and his son’s membership in the Lego Mechanics Program and the school band. Gisela was thrilled that her daughter joined cheerleading, but was equally proud of her work with Down’s Syndrome students at the high school as a peer mentor. Deborah enjoyed seeing her daughter in McCallister’s Show Choir, as well as in a recent performance of *12 Angry Men* by the Drama Guild. Her son, Felix, a bit more withdrawn than his twin sister, still found activities to do with friends on weekends. Benza reported that her three sons were very active in school, including a Poetry and Spoken Word Club and a variety of sports teams. She also had enrolled them in a regional summer writing program that was primarily composed of Latino students from Riverton, in which the boys had thrived and enjoyed for many years.

The participants reported few issues regarding socialization and acclimation for their children in the suburban systems as time passed. An issue with a middle school racial slur directed at one of Benza’s sons was “handled quickly and properly” by an administrator. Another son told her he enjoyed the summer writing program because he was “with kids who look like me and nobody wants to touch my hair!”

**Parental involvement in suburban system.** Each parent reported that they viewed the monitoring of and occasional help with homework as an essential part of parental involvement. Deborah, Benza, and Gisela cited frequent conversations with their children regarding readiness and preparation for college as essential dialogue within their families. All participants made it clear that they expected their children to do well in school and perform to the best of their individual abilities. Participants with older children were less “hands on” than they had been during the younger years, but it was evident through conversation that all were aware of the
academic progress of each child, either through direct use of an online communication tool or through constant conversations with the children themselves.

Miguel expressed that he felt welcomed by his children’s teachers when they had attended open house events and concerts in which their children had performed. Gisela stated that she had only been to the high school for two open house events and stopped attending after her daughter told her it was unnecessary. She reported that she had called the school numerous times to ask questions, but was hesitant to be one of those parents “that are out there constantly arguing with the school.” As reported earlier, she and her husband were thrilled to attend the hockey games her daughter cheered for, as it allowed them to be involved as parents in ways they had been previously with their other two children. Carlos stated that he enjoyed the opportunity to chaperone numerous field trips for his 3rd grader’s class. He found pleasure in being “the only dad” and getting to know her classmates better during these excursions. He felt appreciated by the teachers, and sensed that it helped them to better know and understand his small family.

Deborah and Benza had both been very involved parents during their children’s early years in Riverton. They each reported that they had become involved out of a sense of duty and need, feeling that other parents could or would not do such things as oversee the P.T.O. or chaperone field trips. Eight years later, at the time of this study, both reported that they had found ways to participate as parent volunteers that were subtler, but that they felt were also expected of suburban parents. Deborah noted the expectation this way:

It’s more almost like you’re supposed to volunteer. For example, Lisette was in one of the plays. There was one day that the parents were supposed to have a meeting, a parents’ meeting. I didn’t have the time that day, but I came to the meeting because I felt I have to be there. They don’t say, “Oh, you didn’t come to the meeting.” Sometimes it does feel
like that though. I don’t mind. I just come to the meetings....Sometimes I get a little anxious and nervous. “Here we go again. I have to volunteer for this.” With my personality, but I try to make the best of it. I do enjoy it sometimes…Now that they’re older it’s difficult. I do ask, “Do you want me to volunteer?” I don’t want to be the helicopter mom. I had to be the helicopter mom for so long.

Benza, too, felt the pressure to volunteer and contribute in some significant way. She intoned that in the suburban system this was sometimes tied to some sort of financial contribution as well. “I was out of work for a year and a half, so it was hard. I was the ‘Box Top’ mom that year, that was what I could do.” Additionally, she recalled with amazement an event that took place at 10:00 one morning:

We’ve always looked to be involved. Even when jobs prevented, we tried to at least show up to the night events or things like that. We were not expecting more than 80% of the school parents to show up to a middle of the day event. That kind of blew us away. We were like, “Why are these people out of their jobs?” It just was like a thing. That’s the thing, we did not expect it at all… The teachers expect it and they want you to come in and they want you to see everything. It’s actually pretty neat to have an open door where you can ask all the questions you want.

“Classism” in the suburban system. In its strictest sense, classism can be defined as a bias for or against someone based on their social or economic status. Certainly, none of the participants in this study expressed that they or their children had been the subjects of explicit bias because of their economic status in the suburban communities in which they resided. However, it was noted by the four long-time suburban parents that one of their greatest
challenges in moving to the suburban area had been in helping their children understand and navigate the discrepancies in income between themselves and many of their new affluent neighbors. At times this meant explaining to the children their own values and work ethic, and instilling in them a deep love and appreciation of extended family and culture.

Miguel, in a follow up interview, said that he only questioned his decision to keep his children in the suburban systems on occasions when they would come home from school and start reeling off exotic lists of vacation spots their classmates would be going, and then turn and ask him why they never went to such places. He said it “was hard” and frustrating to see his children grow up thinking that they were somehow lacking what others around them seemed to have. This false sense of the world had compelled him to convince his daughter to get a job so that she could “have some responsibility” and “be more aware of reality.” He felt that answering to a boss was an important part of her education and entrance into adulthood.

When they decided to leave Riverton behind, Deborah’s family also left a single-family home for apartment living in the more expensive suburban communities. She remarked that her twins often had overheard telling their suburban friends about their “house and dogs” in the Dominican Republic. The Caribbean home and pets belong to her parents, but she does not correct the children, sensing that they feel the need to somehow compete or prove something to their more affluent peers who regularly hail from large homes, many of which are valued close a million dollars and beyond.

Gisela and Benza both commented on the day-to-day, pricey material goods as well as the real estate that their children have been exposed to in the suburban communities. Gisela’s daughter would balk at a shirt at a discount store, but covet a similar one at a high-end mall store. “You just saw that at Marshall’s,” she would tell her, only to hear, “I didn’t want it from
Marshall’s. I want it from here.” Gisela felt there was unspoken pressure on the children to have the “right” label and look, and that look was an expensive one. This desire for the finer things translated to homes as well:

When she went to [her friends homes], she was like, “Mom, you wouldn’t believe the house I just came out of!” And I’m just like, “Yeah, it happens.” And she’s like, “I’m going to live this way. I’m going to get my education and I’m going to get a good job and I’m going to be able to do this. It doesn’t matter,” she would say, “It doesn’t matter whether you’re Spanish or not. It’s all how you apply yourself.”

And I said, “That’s right.”

Benza agreed, stating that her son proudly proclaimed he was “Ghetto Finch”, preferring to relate to and flaunt his racial difference amongst his predominately white classmates, while still dressing as they did in the suburban school. “He said he’s Abercrombie met the ghetto. He’s not either, or, he’s both, and that’s what we are.” Still, she said, socioeconomic differences and values have been her greatest challenge with her three sons:

That’s the number one thing that we struggle with them is classism for them is huge. It’s blown out of proportion in their head. “What do you mean we can’t go away for spring break? What do you mean we’re not doing blah, blah?”

And I’m going, “What? What?” It’s been the biggest struggle and I never foresaw that. I foresaw all sorts of other…We can work on the social. We can work on the [academics], but I wasn’t expecting that. I wasn’t expecting to go to New Balance Outlet and be told, “I can’t wear those. Those are not what are in style.” I’m going, “Really?! Excuse you?”
She said this attitude also manifest itself in such comments by other children who would ask her son, “Why do you have to work?” Benza recalled that in her experience growing up in a Latino family they would often have as many as nine or ten people living in “one little apartment.” This contrasted with those times when she would drop a son off at a friend’s large home, and inquire as to how many children the family had. “Just one! What? It’s intimidating because you don’t feel like you’re going to measure up, but at the same time you’re not here for that.”

A final point shared by all participants was that of sacrifice. Each family had made enormous sacrifices for the sake of providing their children with the best education they felt they could. Time, effort, money, home ownership, and the comforts of living in a community where they were a majority instead of a minority, surrounded by friends and family instead of being what Benza termed, “a country without a flag, a boat without a sail” were traded for the opportunity to experience excellence in education that was lacking in their previous city. When asked if his children understand and appreciate the sacrifices he and his wife had made, Miguel laughed. He said his children would often turn the tables on them and tell them that it was they who had sacrificed their urban friends, without choice, to come to the suburbs. Benza and Gisela said their children had expressed similar sentiments from time to time. “Someday, maybe they will know,” was as far as Gisela was willing to venture.

Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter attempted to give voice to the lived experiences of Latino parents who transition their children from low performing urban schools to high performing suburban schools through resettlement of the family. Although each participant shared a journey that was uniquely his or her own, mutual experiences still existed. Chapter five considers the context and meaning of these commonalities and how they might serve to improve
outcomes for such families in the future.

Chapter V: Discussion of Research Findings

This study considered the motivations, experiences, and expectations, both academically and socially, of five families who relocated from impoverished cities where they were the dominant ethnic group to nearby affluent suburban towns that were predominately white in composition. The findings of this study were guided by the overarching question: What is the experience of Latino parents who move from a low performing urban school district to a high performing suburban school district?

An interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was utilized to assist in the organization and examination of data collected from participants. Using an inductive approach and a small, purposeful sample, IPA analyzes themes that surface in participant interviews and looks for crossover in those themes (Smith, 2004). Like other forms of qualitative research, such as narrative, IPA engages in in-depth study and provides thick, rich description through interviews and findings (Smith, 2004). An IPA study posits that from relationships based on culture and semantics, we construct meaning and understanding (Smith et al., 2009). Additionally, IPA is an inherently interpretive analysis, focused on experiences and their meaning as perceived and understood by the participant, as well as the researcher (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, the particular phenomena studied and presented here should be understood as findings based on the perceptions of the research participants.

The theoretical framework for this inquiry was Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT partners logically within an IPA study in that it allows for the capture of experience and story-telling from participants (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), and it serves as a lens by which to understand why and how race matter, specifically in an educational setting (Taylor, 2009). Reality is shaped by each
individual based on social and personal history and by factors of ethnicity, economics, gender, culture, and politics (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Critical Race theorists have noted that a society constructs its own understanding of reality through the formulation and exchange of experiences about individual situations (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Findings indicate a connection to the five tenets of CRT and the subject matter researched for this study. The first and second tenet of the theoretical framework note that racism exists and that the legal system is slow to make the necessary changes to help eradicate it (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). While racism was not an explicit or pressing issue for the participants, it was mentioned that some of the children had experienced name-calling or bullying that had racial overtones. More importantly, it was felt by one mother that race factored in to the school’s approach to expecting less from her child because he was not white. This issue was not legal in nature, but rather can be considered societal, and reflects an antiquated attitude that has been slow to change amongst some educators (Watson, 2012). This study situates itself firmly in the fifth and final tenet of CRT that calls for giving voice to those who are not members of the dominant race or culture within the society in which they reside. It was through this provision of voice that participants were able to express the challenges of not only being a minority within their chosen suburban communities, but also how it was difficult at times to face economic challenges in the context of residing in a very affluent area. This reflects directly back to the fourth tenet of CRT that states that it is important to understand the places where intersectionality matter (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

Research findings supported much of contemporary literature regarding the perspectives of Latino parents educating their children through utilization of American public school systems. However, a closer look at the findings notes marked differences in the approach,
experiences, and involvement of those Latino parents who relocate their families from low performing urban systems to high performing suburban systems from those previously studied who have remained in low performing and/or low SES systems. These findings will add depth of understanding to contemporary research that has yet to consider these unique families whose numbers will continue to grow as the demographic becomes more populous and as formerly urban Latino parents demand more from the suburban school systems that they hope will yield improved academic outcomes for their children. Below, I present a discussion of the findings and suggest further implications for future research. The findings and recommendations are intended to serve educators and administrators in high performing suburban school systems that enroll Latino students who have moved from underperforming schools in urban areas. Five important findings emerged from the analysis of participant transcripts. The findings presented in this section consider common traits shared among some or all of the Latino parents interviewed and are classified as follows: (1) Active participants in child’s academic life at school and at home; (2) High levels of expectation and confidence in themselves and their child; (3) Encourage both assimilation in suburbs and pride in ethnicity and family; (4) Desire for better communication and understanding from school system; (5) Aware of but undaunted by socioeconomic disparity.

Active Participants in Child’s Academic Life at School and at Home

Participants expressed numerous and varied ways in which they were active in their children’s education, both before moving from their urban community and after relocating to the suburbs. Participants shared that they were happy to be involved in such activities as “Parent Night” and other academic events and celebrations. Participants expressed joy and enthusiasm for chaperoning field trips and attending sporting and musical activities in which their children were involved. Each stated that they or their spouse closely monitored the children’s daily and
weekly academic assignments, many of the parents taking a hands-on role in tutoring their child as needed. Participants also reported that their children had received additional support, either from the school or from private tutors, when they felt that the academic needs were beyond their own scope of provision.

Parental support began for each family as their oldest child entered kindergarten or shortly thereafter, and each parent said they understood the need of remaining involved throughout their child’s public school education, even in the face of increasing resistance from older teens. The participant parents with high school students named many ways in which they had continued to volunteer in their children’s academic lives, and the sole parent of a single elementary child expressed his desire to be involved even though he expected his daughter’s enthusiasm for his involvement to diminish. Interesting to note was the fact that each of the female participants said that they had readily volunteered in their urban community out of a sense of duty to contribute when they felt that few other parents could not or would not help due to such reasons such as work schedules, childcare issues, financial ability, or interest in participating. The mothers reported a desire to be of use, whereas when they moved to the suburban system they reported volunteering more out of guilt because they felt teachers and other parents expected it from them. Neither father reported feelings of being compelled to participate out of guilt, yet both reported a higher level of participation in the suburban systems than previously in their urban systems.

These findings are supported in research done by Reay (1998) that suggest that when parents possessed cultural capital in line with the school’s values, the level of participation was greater. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) went further to suggest that there are often deeper, personal barriers to the level of participation which may include a parent’s belief in their own ability or their perception of an invitation to be involved, as well as barriers relating to class, ethnicity and
gender that may be relevant in accounting for levels of involvement. This may explain, in part, the participant mothers’ reports of feeling obligated and duty-bound as volunteers in the suburbs whereas formerly they were enthusiastic, assertive parent leaders.

Findings in this study also support research that attempts to dispel the notion that Latino parents do not advocate for their children at school (Flores, Tefft, & Estaban, 1991; Poplin & Weeres, 1992) and do not have expectation for college attendance (Torrez, 2004). Torrez posited often Latino parents were simply unaware of the intricacies of preparation and process needed to gain college admission. This study indicates that advocacy may be more closely tied to familiarity and comfort with the norms of an American education system and the level of education attained by the parent. This was evidenced in the one outlier participant who’s sum total of formalized education consisted of elementary school in his native Mexico. He alone expressed a reluctance to intervene at school when his child struggled. Three participants had attended kindergarten in the U.S. and had a minimum of high school completion. The participant with the highest level of education, a Masters degree, had spent half of her 18 years of formal education in American systems. The two most highly educated participants had the greatest levels of academic advocacy for their children.

**High Levels of Expectation and Confidence in Themselves and Their Child**

When participants responded to questions asked during the interviews, there was little doubt that they or their children had the necessary skills and abilities to be academically successful in the suburban system. As they discussed challenges upon arriving in the new communities and their hopes for the future there was a sense that each participant felt confident in his or her own aptitude as a parent to provide and help their child acquire a better education. Even in the case of the participant unfamiliar with the American school system, there was a
quiet confidence that as a family they would figure out whatever they needed to in order to succeed in the high performing suburban system.

This confidence and drive on the part of the Latino parents manifest itself in hands-on help with homework, constant monitoring of grades, communication with teachers, and the use of tutors for their children. This finding supports the work of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) examining how and why parents are involved which reported that Latino parents in their study choose not to allow any perceived deficits to prevent them from helping their children succeed in American schools.

All participants expected each of their children to attend college and each made it clear during the interviews that their children were fully aware of this expectation. In her work on effective urban teachers, Lisa Delpit (2012) termed “warm demanders” as educators who believe in each student’s abilities, regardless of circumstances, and who firmly motivate students to excel while doing it in a warm and encouraging way. Findings here suggest that this was also an important tactic used by the parent participants in this study as they raised their children. This was accomplished in such ways as sharing teacher emails with their child and numerous accounts of family conversations regarding school performance and aspirations. Through anecdotal examples, participants each made it clear that they spoke to their children in a manner that was both firm and loving. Participants of older children recalled times that they reminded their child that much had been sacrificed to provide for their suburban education, much was expected of them both there and in the future, and that they as parents would always be available for any needed support to help them.

Analysis of the interviews reveals little concern on the part of participants in moving from their urban communities to the suburbs, knowing that whatever challenges might arise, each had
an important purpose in providing for the betterment of their child’s education. That is not to say that participants were unaware of changes or differences, only that they did not express that intimidation of a new environment was considered as a reason not to move. Because there is little existing literature on Latino families moving from urban to suburban school systems, it is difficult to definitively state these seemingly shared traits as indicative of urban Latino parents who consider residency in a suburban community for educational benefits to their children. However, it may be claimed that these high expectations coupled with a belief that whatever situation arises is worth the cost are in some way important factors in the determinant of the move and the later success of the family within the suburban community.

Additionally, consistent with existing literature that found greater levels of academic achievement among Latino students educated in the suburbs than those peers who remained in urban environments (Grigg, 2012; Kauffman & Rosenbaum, 1992), the parent participants in this study reported academic improvements in their children’s skills and knowledge, despite the fact that many reported receiving lower grades than in the urban schools. When asked, parents stated that they knew their children were academically much better off in the suburban system, but responses often included the deduction that it was due in part to the social interactions with other children who came from families also invested in education.

This is not to say that the participants did not feel the quality of the education was lacking, but rather that the expectations placed on their child were often somehow less than those expected of other children. One mother stated that she felt the quality was not as great as first perceived or reputed, but that it was still good. She felt that suburban teachers at the high school level had done little to differentiate instruction to suit the needs of individual students. Another mother boldly proclaimed they had come for excellence and the expectations for the teachers was
that they would deliver on that, regardless of ethnicity. She expected her children to be challenged and she expected them to perform. Although none of the participants directly mentioned the subjects studied or the rigor levels of those subjects, it was evident from comments that the parents perceived that their children were often not performing at the same level as their non-Latino suburban peers. This finding correlates with a wide body of work that supports the under-representation of Latinos in honors and AP courses (e.g. Gandara, 2006; Ndura et al., 2003; Nunn, 2011, Walker & Pearsall, 2012). It was clear that while each participant had high expectations for the academic standards for which their child should be held accountable, it remained unclear if they felt it appropriate or if they understood fully how to effectively communicate these expectations to the suburban faculty.

**Encourage Both Assimilation in Suburbs and Pride in Ethnicity and Family**

The Latino parents who participated in this study provided encouragement, opportunities, and enthusiasm for their child’s involvement in a myriad of activities with suburban peers. All expressed pleasure in knowing that their child had friends from a variety of racial and economic backgrounds. The parents seemed to perceive that part of their child’s academic success was tied to a feeling of belonging within the community, and to that end they supported things such as sleepovers with classmates and out-of-state school trips. Of interest was the fact that none of the participants stated that they had made many of their own social connections in the suburban community unless it was in the context of meeting other parents for the purpose of a school-related activity. Three of the participants specified that they had retained close ties to friends and family in their previous urban area and would consider returning once their children graduated.

Pride in ethnicity and family featured heavily in participants perceptions and experiences in helping their children maneuver in the suburban community. All of the participants stated that
they wanted their children to remain connected to their extended family, friends, and activities in the urban areas. For some families, this was as simple as visiting, for other parents it meant actively seeking programming experiences that their child could participate in with other Latino children. It was reported that the children enjoyed these experiences and that as some entered their teens they sought out these experiences for themselves. When they did not find them, they sought to create them by forming clubs with other minority students after school hours. Extant literature on Latino students in desegregated schools (Carter, 2007; Evans, 2007) shows that this clustering and temporary self-segregation is important and should be recognized and encouraged. Previous studies cited (Strobel et al., 2008) that when minority youth have positive “frames for identity” provided in such activities beyond the classroom, there is evidence of increased self-esteem, improved emotional adjustment, interpersonal skills, leadership, and engagement in learning and school success among other attributes.

Family featured prominently in the responses of the participants. It should be noted that four of the five participants were married to the co-parent of their child. The spouse was reported to be an active partner in the raising and educating of the children. The youngest participant had not married and was not living with his child’s mother, but mentioned numerous times throughout the interview that he was trying to help her through some recent difficulties that had necessitated him gaining full custody of their daughter. He spoke of the mother of his child with care, concern, and a respect for her role in the child’s life. He also stated that he, like the other participants, relied heavily on the advice and help of his own parent and extended family in the raising of his daughter. Although there was no research found in preparation for this study that spoke to the connection between academic success and extended family support, this factor should be considered as important information regarding the strength of the Latino families in
this study that relocated to suburban systems.

Participants did not advocate for placing ethnicity at the forefront of their child’s educational experiences, but each mentioned anecdotal examples of times when it was important or appreciated that the suburban school had recognized their child’s cultural background. Although not every participant stated a desire to formalize this in some way, it was implicit in the commentary of each that they desired a greater understanding from the school of how culture affected their child’s education or outlook specifically. Jones (2003) found this to be true of Mexican American parents who expressed a desire for teachers to be informed, not just about Latino culture, but about the context of local Latino life within their community. Ways in which participants in this study made their wish for cultural sensitivity known included positive comments regarding comfort their child felt with a Latino administrator, the enjoyment of cooking Mexican food for a school event, and the appreciation when a principal understood that an extra week was needed for payment of a school trip. Negative comments included an incident with a teacher that demonstrated racial misunderstanding, feelings that faculty may not understand the unique needs of a minority freshman transfer student from an urban school, and the general lack of interest in asking about their child’s culture.

Desire for Better Communication and Understanding from the School System

From this natural flow of conversation during the interviews there arose an expressed desire on the part of participants for better communication and understanding from the teachers and administrators at their children’s schools that would reflect their unique needs. This should not be confused only with standard missives issued by the school systems, for which there was also a justified complaint.

Each participant indicated that they were aware of and used online communication tools
from their child’s school to monitor progress, receive news, or converse with faculty. At times, they reported issues with the online systems indicative of large organizational changes being made without proper instruction provided to users. At other times participants mentioned feeling inundated with dozens of school communications, many of which did not apply to them, causing them to become overwhelmed by the volume and therefore miss some important ones. This is not an issue related to Latino parents only, but it can exacerbate gaps in information when one considers that these participants reported having few community connections with other parents outside certain limited school-related activities. Often in suburban communities, well-connected networks of parents serve to inform each other in the course of casual conversations had in various places outside of the school context. If suburban schools are to increase Latino parent involvement and awareness the systems will need to take into consideration this under-representation in the community. This claim is supported by research that showed that Latino parents had increased engagement and stronger home-school partnerships when they felt they had better representation in their child’s school system for governance and communication (Marschall, 2006).

In addition, participants cited that they desired better direct communication from teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators on issues specifically relating to their child. Participants each stated that they wanted the faculty to be aware of the unique issues and challenges in their child’s life, from personality traits, to academic struggles, to family circumstances that might effect or hinder academic progress. However, when asked if they had taken any steps to inform the school, there was also reluctance on the part of participants to be the first to bring up issues, particularly ones deemed as socio-emotional. Statements were made regarding the fear of being wrongly judged by faculty, or feeling like they were asking the school to handle what they felt
they should handle as a parent, or being viewed as overbearing. These reported feelings are supported in the works of Reese (2002) who found some Latino parents believe education should be left to the teachers, and Rodriguez-Brown (2010) who reported that Latino parents saw their role as distinctly different in that it should include the teaching of morals and values. This study therefore finds an interesting dynamic whereby the participants could be viewed as strong advocates of their child’s education, willing to make many sacrifices to relocate to another system, but who, once in the system, became reluctant to bring issues to the forefront unless first asked. This again speaks to the perception on the part of the Latino parent to have cultural capital (Raey, 1998) that would enable him or her to feel empowered to speak up versus hoping that the school might eventually notice and inquire.

**Aware of but Undaunted by Socioeconomic Disparity**

In an examination of findings, the participants indicated that they felt their children had adjusted to the changes in academic rigor and expectation and had found social outlets within the suburban systems. Being part of an ethnic minority within their schools did not seem to have a negative impact on any of the children. Albeit there were two reported incidents of what might be described as racial conflict for two of the sons of two participants that had occurred when they were in elementary school. These incidents were recalled as part of open-ended interview questions, and both participants indicated that in recent years no such issues had occurred.

However, of import is the revelation by the four participants of teenagers that the greatest social difficulty they had as parents residing in their suburban community was one of socioeconomics. They registered shock and frustration when their children insisted on certain clothing brands or asked why other families travelled during school vacations to exotic places while they remained at home. Participants themselves admitted to feeling inadequate when they
would pick a child up from a friend’s large house in an neighborhood of large homes. In these moments they stressed family values and the importance of hard work and a good education as a means to live well. One father pushed his daughter to get a job in order to learn social skills not taught in school; two other parents proudly stated that their children had grown and matured in their part-time work, even as their friends questioned why they needed jobs. One mother’s retort to her daughter’s awe at her friend’s wealth was simply to work hard, go to college, and maybe someday live like the friend. It is through these comments and other expressions of family values that these Latino parents were letting their children know that the sacrifices made to live in an affluent town could one day be worth it, but not without continued hard work and effort.

Each of the participants in this study was living in an apartment in their suburban systems where single-family homes were the norm. Two of the families reported selling urban homes in order to move to the suburban communities as renters. One family made the difficult decision to let their urban home go into foreclosure when the national economy went into recession just as their child hit her academic low-point in their city. One family traded free housing in one suburban community as farm workers for life in a neighboring suburb that included grounds-keeping duties in return for lowered rent as a means to keep their children in a high performing school system. The lone unmarried parent in this study shared an apartment with his daughter in a public housing complex, and at age ten, it can be assumed that her awareness of the economic disparities between her and her classmates would soon become apparent even if they were not an issue at the time of this study. However, it was evident from all participants that they were committed to remaining in the suburban systems until their children graduated. They expressed resiliency and determination to provide the best education they could while not allowing feelings of intimidation by the wealth of their communities to stand in the way. Pre-existing literature on
this subject was reviewed for this study, but nothing pertaining directly to Latinos moving from urban areas of poverty to affluent suburbs was found. Any future research on this topic should include consideration of socioeconomic discrepancies in such areas and the impact on education for those minority residents of lower SES status.

**Implications for Future Research**

The overarching purpose of this study was to provide insight into the unique experiences of Latino parents who moved from areas with low performing urban school systems to suburban areas considered to have high performing school systems. Hearing the experience of the parents is intended as a first step in better understanding the needs of their children as students. In order to more fully comprehend the parents’ experiences, factors such as motivation for moving, challenges upon resettling, and achievements and concerns over an extended period of time were explored. In consideration of the academic and social challenges reported by participant parents, the following recommendations and suggestions are offered with the hope that practitioners and researchers alike might further contemplate and act upon the needs of all minority and lower SES families who find themselves undertaking great sacrifices to make their way to affluent suburban communities in hopes of finding a better education for their children. Recommendations include areas that require further study as well as more immediate ways in which schools might implement programming and professional development aimed at improving the home-school partnership with the purpose of attaining higher levels of academic achievement for Latino students in suburban communities considered high performing.

This study suggests that there may be multiple factors and characteristics that might exemplify the type of parents who would fit the profile considered for this study. However, the small sample size limits broader understanding of the many constitutions of Latino families that
make the kind of residential move detailed herein. Further study of parental factors such as place of birth, generational status in the U.S., level of education, years educated in American schools, marital status, family income level, as well as personal beliefs, values, and personality traits might serve as indicators, and aid in the understanding of Latino families who relocate to the suburbs. With insight into the backgrounds of these families, school systems would be provided with a foundational knowledge on which to begin to target and provide better support.

Participant dialogue indicated a desire for school staff to have a deeper understanding of Latino culture particularly as it related to any struggles their child might encounter in the transition from an low performing urban system to a high performing suburban system. While they felt that their children had closed most of the large gaps in achievement that they may have arrived with in the suburbs, it was stated by some of the participants that they felt the school was unaware of times when their child felt as though they were struggling. Participants also reported that they felt the faculty was unaware of the parental expectation for the child to continue to be pushed to excel academically, even in the face of struggle. It is recommended that further research be done to identify the particular types of academic and social issues Latino students face overtime in a high performing system and methods of instruction that might alleviate any issues. This would build on existing literature that has identified lower academic performance by Latinos in desegregated schools (Ndura et al., 2003; Nunn, 2011), as well as on early intervention work, particularly in the area of math (Gandara, 2006), to help close gaps and ensure college readiness for Latino students.

It is recommended that research consider the challenges faced by lower SES families in affluent areas. Knowledge of what issues are encountered by parents and children alike, as well as how they manage such disparities is of importance to school systems in affluent areas for
reasons of mindfulness and sensitivity to all students. It is easy to forget in such communities that not all the students in the classroom share the same experiences. Feelings of inadequacy and a sense of not belonging may be shared by both child and parent, and how a family copes with this in the company of wealthy classmates and neighbors is highly relevant to educating the whole child in a manner that is compassionate and sensitive, while still demanding and rigorous.

Finally, it is recommended that future research further consider those high performing schools that have successfully closed gaps in skills and knowledge for minority students who arrive on their doorsteps midway through their education. This is not a call to consider systems that accept students from urban communities, through residency or through busing programs that are then merely content to have those students linger in lower level classes. It is rather, a challenge to researchers to find those pockets (e.g. Burris et al., 2008) where the national averages of under-representation is defied (Grigg, 2012), and Latino students excel at the same levels as non-Latino peers. Discovering what strategies have been incorporated to improve academic outcomes is transferable to other knowledge for other systems.

Future Implications for Practitioners

The benefits of parent involvement in improving student achievement have been demonstrated in numerous studies (e.g. Fan & Chen; Jeynes, 2003, 2007). When a parent is engaged in the education of their low income, minority, or immigrant child, the home-school partnership serves to support student learning and helps overcome issues that might hinder learning (Dearing et al., 2004; Lee & Bowen, 2006). It is vital for the school personnel that serve these children to possess cultural sensitivity and cultural competency. Competency, in a cultural sense, means going beyond just understanding differences and being sensitive to them, it allows for practitioners to work effectively across cultural populations, understanding the many
diverse groups of people within a given system. Changing suburban demographics necessitate
that educators must exercise cultural competence if they are to be successful teachers of all
students, and by seeking opportunities to encourage and improve parental involvement
effectual partnerships are formed. This community building must extend beyond the majority
population, and in order for it to be more inclusive, the recommendations below are offered as
suggestions for further consideration by school staff to further engage Latino families who
relocate to suburban systems.

First, it is suggested that suburban school systems identify a point person to serve as
liaison for incoming Latino families. This person would be generally perceived as welcoming
and well versed in or capable of anticipating the questions and needs of the family as they
familiarize themselves with the new school system. The person in this position could be an
employee or a knowledgeable volunteer. Heeding the findings of previous literature (Shah,
2009), schools would do well to place either a Latino or someone very familiar with Latino
culture in the position of parent liaison.

Secondly, suburban schools should consider professional development activities around
cultural awareness and outreach as it specifically relates to Latinos and other growing
demographics they might be experiencing within their system. Trumbull et al. (2003) have issued
this same challenge to educators to understand more fully the culture of Latino parents in order
to improve parent involvement. Understanding Latino parents’ perceptions is a key step in
improving conversations around learning as well. Just as other Latino parents in previous studies
(Inger, 1992; Moles, 1993), some participants in this study stated that they sometimes found
interactions with staff as highlighting their shortcomings as a parent rather than as valuable
conversations between school and home. Finding ways to counteract misunderstandings and
partner for the sake of improved student outcomes will require further inquiry.

Finally, educators should encourage opportunities to celebrate the growing diversity of suburban schools through the formal and informal support of such activities clubs and events of ethno-racial composition. Participants stated a desire for their children to remain connected to their heritage and their culture, even as they encouraged them to assimilate to the norms of the suburban system. Providing and encouraging opportunities that allow for adult interaction within school settings allows Latino students to develop a strong sense of identity which has been shown to increase self-esteem, improve emotional adjustment, interpersonal skills, leadership, and engagement in learning and school success (Strobel et al., 2008). The work of Bemak et al. (2005) suggests that small group counseling of students in minority clusters has also been effective in improving student learning and lowering behavioral incidents, therefore schools would do well to establish these whenever appropriate.

Ultimately, this is a call for awareness and open dialogue between suburban schools and the Latino families they now serve in growing numbers. As found in the work of CRT scholars Nieto (2001) and Taylor (2009), if educators follow the misguided but well-intended notions of the 1970s approach of “colorblindness” in the classroom, we will move a step further from equity for all students and another generation of voices will be effectively silenced.

**Conclusion**

In a time when America’s largest growing demographic is Latino, it is important for the suburban systems that have for so long effectively served predominately white students to better understand the needs of their changing student body (Jeynes, 2007; Yan & Lin, 2005). As more Latino families relocate from low performing urban systems to high performing suburban systems, it has become increasingly important to understand how Latino parental expectations,
motivations and involvement shape and influence their children in the suburbs, particularly in light of knowledge gaps (Burris et al., 2008; Gandara, 2006; Skerrett & Hargreaves, 2008) and SES disparity (Grigg, 2012). Given the importance of family engagement in the education of a child (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, Fan & Chen, 2001), and the fact that Latino parents are often misunderstood (Reese, 2002; Rodriguez-Brown, 2010) it is imperative that this particular cross-section of Latino families be asked to share their experiences, their expectations, and their hopes.

The findings in this study align with much of the previous work that has been done in the area of Latino parents, students and educational experiences. However, it also indicates that there is much to learn from the growing number of dedicated, persistent, devoted parents who have refused to accept a low performing school as the only means of public education for their child. In places where school choice and busing programs are not an option that are either available or attractive to Latino parents, more are choosing to leave the familiarity of their urban neighborhood to relocate to a place they believe has more to offer their child, even if it means huge personal and financial sacrifices must be made. The participants in this study were actively involved in many aspects of their child’s education, they had high expectations for their child’s future, and they were pleased with the suburban schools, but desired better communication and a deeper understanding on the part of faculty regarding cultural issues. Finally, participants in this study demonstrated persistence, resilience, and determination while raising children in affluent suburban communities in the face of the challenges of that were often the result of socioeconomic disparities.
References


Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W.F. (1995, Fall). Toward a critical race theory of education *Teachers College Record, 97*(1), 47-68.


Poplin, M., & Weeres, J. (1993). *Voices from the inside: A report on schooling from inside*
the classroom, part one, naming the problem. Institute for Education in Transformation at the Claremont Graduate School.


APPENDIX A

LETTER TO PARENT/GUARDIAN REQUESTING PARTICIPATION

Dear Parent/Guardian:

My name is Mary Ellen Janeiro and I am a Doctoral student at Northeastern University. I am also a full-time teacher at ********* High School. Prior to working at ********* High, I taught for 10 years at ***** High School. It was there that I became very interested in Latino families and their educational expectations for their children.

As the Latino population in area suburban districts continues to increase significantly, I want my research to lead to a better understanding of the unique needs of Latino families when they move from an urban school system to a suburban system. I believe that the findings of this study will improve the academic and social outcomes of Latino students in this system and others.

If you are interested in participating in an interview please indicate by emailing or calling me this week so that we might arrange a time and place that is convenient for you. At no time during or after the interview will your identity be revealed to anyone. All information will remain confidential. The interview will last about one hour, and I will compensate your time with a $15 gift card as a token of my appreciation for your help in this important study.

I am confident that your input will help create meaningful partnerships between Latino families and the school system. If you have any questions of need further clarification about the research please contact me at ***_***_****.

Sincerely,

Mary Ellen Janeiro

Janeiro.me@husky.neu.edu
APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Part I: Demographics
Where were you born?
Where did you go to school?
How many children do you have?
What grades are they in?
How long have you lived in this town and what prompted you to move here?

Part II: The Motivation and Transition from Low-Performing Urban to High-Performing Suburban School Systems
What were your educational expectations for the suburban system prior to moving here?
Have any of your expectations changed in the time that you have lived here? If so, how?
In what ways is this suburban school system different from the urban system you moved from?
What has been positive in the move for your child/ren in an academic sense?
Have there been negative aspects or challenges academically for your child/ren?
Has the suburban school system been aware of any challenges and if so, have the teachers or administrators been helpful in addressing the academic challenges?
What has been positive in this suburban school system for your child/ren socially?
Have there been negative aspects or challenges socially for your child/ren?
Has the suburban school system been aware of any social needs and if so, have the teachers or administrators been helpful in addressing these challenges?

Part III: Parental Involvement and Perceptions of the School System
What do you think is the definition of parent involvement?
Have you been involved in your child/ren’s school activities?
Tell me about some of your experiences.
How were you involved?
How did you feel about this experience?
How do you think your child reacted to your involvement?
How do you think the teachers reacted?
Would you participate in that activity again? If so, why or why not?
What are other ways in which you are involved, as a parent, in your child’s education?
What do you think would be the ideal relationship between the school and the home?
What do you think the school system should do to include parents in the education of their children?
Have you had any experiences with the school personnel that you would consider to be unpleasant?
Do you think that school personnel treat all parents equally? Explain.
What do you want the school personnel to know about you, your child/ren, and your family?
How do you think they [school personnel] should accomplish this?
Do you have any questions for me?