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## **Bridging the Gap between African-American Families and School Personnel: Effective Home-School Partnerships in Urban Schools**

Danita D. Webb

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Danita D. Webb

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

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Bridging the Gap Between African-American Families and School Personnel:  
Effective Home-School Partnerships in Urban Schools

Danita D. Webb

Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in  
Instructional Leadership

Belle B. Booker-Zorigian, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

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Concordia University–Portland

2019

## **Abstract**

Parent involvement is a known strategy for school improvement and student success. However, there is a lack of parental involvement in urban schools and among African-American families. The purpose of this qualitative study case study was to explore parent and school personnel voice in an urban school, as it related to their perspectives of parental involvement. Through focus groups and interviews, school personnel and African-American parents shared their lived experiences with parental involvement. Participants discussed their perspectives of their roles, revealing the importance of relationship building, communicating, and the support of students at home and school. In addition, the role of race in parental involvement efforts was discussed, revealing the need for cultural proficiency training to build the capacity of all staff to work effectively with students and families. The study also highlighted the need to challenge colorblindness ideation and incorporate race conversations into capacity-building initiatives for cultural proficiency. Five major themes emerged from the data, indicating building the capacity of school personnel and parents in the following areas could have a positive impact on parental involvement efforts: (a) create a positive culture built on relationships, (b) use multiple modes of communication, (c) parents supporting students at school and home, (d) disconnect between parents and school personnel, and (e) R.A.C.E. (Respectful and Culturally-Competent Educators) has a role. Parental involvement can move from theory to action with the intentionality of dual capacity-building for relationships, communication, parent roles, and cultural competency. Implications for capacity-building is discussed and suggestions for future research.

*Keywords:* parent involvement, urban schools, high-poverty, capacity-building, school personnel, African-American parents, critical race theory, cultural proficiency, relationships, communication

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to my first love, the one who gave the greatest sacrifice for my life. My Lord and Savior for through whom all things are made possible, including accomplishing this great achievement. This achievement did not come without strenuous trials and tribulations. However, God said “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). So, as I battled stage 4 breast cancer, experienced my sister suffer a traumatic stroke, grieved the loss of loved ones, and grew tired at times, God gave me peace that surpassed all understanding. I did not accomplish this on my own strength, so I thank God for his grace and mercy, for without him I am nothing and none of this would be possible.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my family. My God-fearing husband, Richard Webb, you are the epitome of a loving and supportive husband. You lead our family as you allow God to be the head of your life. You believed in me and showed me faith in action. Your encouragement made it impossible to give up. You love selflessly, and you sacrificed so much to allow me to become Dr. Danita Webb. Also, to my precious children: Jaiyda, Jayohna, Jay, and Jai'Lynn. I pray that I have set an example that reflects the importance of seeking knowledge and continuous learning. Education is the key to success! Finally, to my mother, Annetta Isom, and father, Sam White who instilled the value of education into me, as well as my four sisters (Dorotha, Darnisha, Sherita, and Beverly). I am humbled, blessed, and grateful!

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Introduction to the Problem**

The mission of any school district is sure to focus on the success for all students; however, there are disproportionate rates for achievement for African-American students and those living in poverty (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Stormont, Herman, Reinke, David, & Goel, 2013). The opportunity and resources for students should not be contingent upon demography. If school districts envision the success for all students, there is a need to eliminate the achievement gap for minority students. In efforts to increase student academic outcomes, school districts across the country are expected to expend countless hours providing professional development to enhance pedagogy and instructional best practices for teachers (Hirsh & Killion, 2009). Professional development focused solely on academic strategies seems to disregard the need for increased parental involvement for academic success. There is a broad consensus that parental involvement is an effective strategy for increased academic outcomes; however, parental involvement remains low among African-American, high-poverty families (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Xaba et al., 2015). It is impossible to address the achievement gap without addressing the gap in parental involvement.

While families and educators both value parental involvement, there is an obvious need for systematic reform that builds capacity for effective parental involvement implementation (Epstein, 2005). As Darling-Hammond (2010) stated, “We cannot just bail ourselves out of this crisis. We must teach our way out” (p. 3). Teaching is precisely what this study sought to achieve, by focusing on capacity-building for effective home-school partnerships. This qualitative study explored parent involvement at an urban, high-poverty elementary school, capturing the voice of African-American parents and school personnel through a capacity-building and cultural lens.



## **Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem**

Despite the backlash for the overzealous focus on standardized testing, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 recognized the importance of strong home-school partnerships. Epstein (2005) highlighted the parent involvement efforts of the former education policy, as the law mandated, “Every school that receives Title I funds must implement a program to involve all parents in ways that support students’ achievement and success in school” (p. 180). Researchers who have studied parent involvement in urban schools have found that reform efforts, such as NCLB place a strong emphasis on parent involvement without a practical framework to involve all parents (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009; Mapp, 2003; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001; Xaba et al., 2015). Reform efforts through Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) require parent involvement and accountability measures to assess implementation (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2016). Such reform efforts reinforce the importance of parent involvement but lacks the guidance to build the capacity of school personnel and parents. Educators are prepared to cultivate a learning environment to teach students math, writing, and reading, but they lack the confidence to build relationships with adults. According to Keyser (2006), many teachers struggle when it comes to working with parents, and parents do not feel a sense of belonging to partner with teachers.

School personnel and teachers need support to increase their knowledge and skills when it comes to parent involvement and building effective home-school partnerships. The dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) is the conceptual framework for this study. Although this is a relatively new framework, recent case studies (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) highlight the efforts in urban schools and districts to build the capacity of both families and educators to build effective home-school partnerships and increase parent involvement. The urban schools in the case studies created systematic change to parent involvement by creating structures within the school and district to teach families and school

personnel how to work together. "While each case looks at a different level of organization—school, district, or county—they all speak to one another, and together they offer a sense of the breadth of possibilities inherent in the Framework" (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013, p. 13). This dual capacity-building framework includes an involvement continuum, which allows schools to build the capacity of all stakeholders to work together effectively. Also, critical race theory (CRT) (Ladson-billings & Tate, 2000) was used as the theoretical framework to specifically examine race and cultural divides, which often creates disconnect among parents and school personnel. Past parent involvement studies have used CRT and were able to unveil the feeling of isolation among African-American families in urban schools and the role of race in their involvement, or lack thereof (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Yull, Blitz, Thompson, & Murray, 2014). Counter-storytelling will be applied to capture the stories of African-American parents, as it relates to parent involvement. The concept of counter-storytelling is to provide a voice to those who are often silenced by capturing the experience of those from the nondominant culture (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Positive student outcomes link to parental involvement, but many urban schools struggle to involve African-American families. There seems to be disconnect as school personnel marginalize African-American families, often labeling them as uneducated, lazy, and uninterested in their child's education (Goldfarb, 2010); however, Christenson, Godber, and Anderson (2005) credited a lack of involvement to lack of resources and knowledge to build the capacity of families for increased involvement. It is time to bridge the gap between African-American families and school personnel, for effective home-school partnerships in urban schools.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this case study is to capture the parental involvement experiences of school personnel and African-American parents at one urban, high-poverty elementary school. Also, the case study will identify opportunities for capacity-building, to inform education policy for increased parental involvement. Findings from this study should provide insightful implications for policy reform and recommendations for future research. Therefore, it is imperative to capture the voice of African-American parents and school personnel to uncover both aligned and unaligned perspectives. Aligned perspectives among participants are the shared beliefs, which will reveal a more accurate story of the current state of parental involvement at the study site. Unaligned perspectives, those in which the perceptions differ among participants will reveal opportunities for growth and capacity-building for effective home-school partnerships. A case study research design will be used to examine parental involvement in an urban, high-poverty elementary school. More specifically, this study will observe the level of involvement and training occurring at the study site. The study will collect data on the following aspects of parent involvement: parent and teacher beliefs, roles, and relationships. Focus groups, individual interviews, observations of school events, and review of school documents will collect data to gain a deeper understanding of parent and school personnel perspectives regarding the current state of their parental involvement program. This research design was chosen to provide informative suggestions for continued efforts to improve parental involvement at the urban, high-poverty elementary school.

## **Research Questions**

In efforts to contribute to the improvement of the home-school partnership at the study site, the study will address following overarching central question: How can the urban, high-poverty elementary school build the capacity of parents and school personnel for effective home-school partnerships? The sub-questions to the central research questions include:

1. What are the perspectives of parents and school personnel at the urban, high-poverty school, regarding their role in parent involvement?
2. What are the perspectives of parents and school personnel at the urban, high-poverty school, regarding the challenges/barriers to parent involvement?
3. What role does race play in developing effective home-school partnerships at the urban, high-poverty school?
4. How well, if at all, are parents' and school personnel's perspectives aligned regarding their role in parent involvement?
5. How well, if at all, are parents' and school personnel's perspectives aligned regarding the challenges/barriers to parent involvement?
6. How well, if at all, are parents' and school personnel's perspectives aligned regarding the role race plays in developing effective home-school partnerships?

### **Rational, Relevance, and Significance of the Study**

There is a dire need to transform education for the United States, which should entail combating the opportunity gap to eliminate the achievement gap. Times are changing; however, the United States appears to be at a standstill when it comes to equitable education for all. The opportunity gap for African-Americans began with slavery, continued with Jim Crow, and unfortunately did not end with *Brown v. Board of Education* (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Addressing the elephant in the room of unequaled learning environments often faced by African-American students provides hope in eliminating the opportunity gap. These disparities include "the accumulated differences in access to key educational resources—expert teachers, personalized attention, high-quality curriculum opportunities, good educational materials, and plentiful information resources—that support learning at home and at school" (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 28). Parental involvement is also a significant disparity in urban schools for minority and high-

poverty families. Existing parental involvement research highlights the benefits of creating the right atmosphere for active parental involvement (Auerbach, 2009; Giles, 2006; Swanson, Raab, & Dunst, 2011), which suggests focusing on rebuilding the culture of the school, the role of parents and school personnel, and how they work together.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Parent involvement.** Culturally sensitive programs that bridge the gap between school personnel and all parents to increase positive student outcomes defines parent involvement (Grant & Ray, 2015; Keyser, 2006).

**Parent.** In this study, the term parent is not limited to the traditional family of a biological mother and father. Instead, the term parent will refer to any individual serving the role as a parent, including but not limited to: single parents, stepparents, foster parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, or adoptive parents (Christenson et al., 2005; Decker & Decker, 2003).

**School personnel.** School personnel is the identifier in this study for the principal, classroom teachers, and parent liaison. According to Merriam-Webster (Gove, 2002), personnel refers to a group of people employed by an organization.

**Family-school partnerships.** Family-school partnerships are an authentic relationship between parents and school personnel where power is equally distributed (Keyser, 2006).

**Effective parental involvement practices.** Effective parental involvement practices are those which view parents as necessary assets to the school and allocates substantial time for building relationships to form partnerships (Grant & Ray, 2015).

**High-poverty school.** High-poverty as it relates to class and socioeconomic status is defined by the families' eligibility for the free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL) status. A school is considered high-poverty if at least 70% of families are eligible for the FRPL program (NCES, n.d.).

**High-minority school.** In this study, schools are considered high-minority if they have or exceed a population of 50% of families who identify as nonwhite (NCES, n.d.)

**Dual capacity-building.** Dual capacity-building is the process of building the capacity of school personnel and families to develop effective parent involvement strategies, programs and policies (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).

### **Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations**

It is assumed that the study participants will be open and candid in their responses to the focus group and interview questions. Another assumption is that all participants have experienced parent involvement at the study site. According to Lunenburg and Irby (2008) delimitations are “self-imposed boundaries set by the researcher on the purpose and scope of the study” (p. 136). The study is delimited to an urban Title I elementary school in the midwestern region. The method of data collection will be delimited to focus group sessions and interviews conducted in person. Additionally, focus groups delimited participants to two sessions each during the 2018-2019 school year. The sample will include six African-American parents, three African-American school personnel, and three non-minority school personnel. The sampling process was intentional with the use of purposive sampling to deliberately recruit school personnel who fit the criteria (Krathwohl, 1998). Purposive sampling was followed by snowball sampling to recruit parents, which is limited to study participants recommending others to be studied (McMillan, 2012). The findings from the individual interviews will be limited to the comfortability of participants to share their experiences with parent involvement. The findings are limited to informing the research site, as a case study research method does not lend to broad generalizations.

### **Summary**

Chapter 1 captured the background and historical context of parental involvement, which also includes a statement of the problem. Chapter 1 explained the purpose of the study along with

delimitations and limitations. Terms that are specific to the study are defined, and chapter 1 presented research questions. Chapter 2 provides a literature review of synthesized research, highlighting common themes and methodological approaches. Chapter 3 defines the research design. Additionally, the chapter outlined sample, instrumentation, and data collection procedures. Chapter 4 presents the results and analysis of the data. Chapter 5 will suggest major findings, implications, and recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

School improvement in urban schools is often centered on the goal of decreasing and eventually eliminating the opportunity gap, as inequity continues to create a great disparity for African-American children and those living in poverty (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Parental involvement is a critical piece to the school improvement puzzle; unfortunately, there is an opportunity gap for families who lack the time, financial resources, and educational attainment to meet parental involvement expectations often set by schools (Hartas, 2011). This gap is constructed by the inadequate opportunities for success that exist for one or more subgroups in comparison to the majority. For example, as educators in America are teaching in urban and poor rural districts with high numbers of African-American children and those living in poverty, there is a great likelihood that the experiences of the teacher will differ vastly from that of the students and their families (Jensen, 2009). Without proper cultural proficiency training for educators to navigate cultural, racial, and economic differences, it is difficult to create effective home-school partnerships for increased parental involvement (Auerbach, 2011).

Parental involvement programs fail to close the opportunity gap in schools when they fail to provide support, time and resources to ensure both parents and school personnel have the capacity to implement the program with fidelity. Receiving a label as a Persistently Low Achieving School (PLAS) will not change the circumstances, however, “When proper support is provided, failing schools can become exceptional schools” (Blankstein & Noguera, 2012, para 6). Positive results were found when teachers extended personal invitations for parent involvement (Anderson & Minke, 2007), this valuable information could lead to better support for teachers in understanding how to reach parents for increased involvement.



This lack of parent involvement for urban schools leads to increased frustrations. Teachers often blame parents and students' home environment for lack of involvement and parents shift blame on the school (DeCastro-Ambrosetti, & Cho, 2005; Watson & Bogotch, 2015; Yull et al., 2014). However, most parents want the best for their children regardless of race or socioeconomic status (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Gutman & McLoyd, 2000). Rather than placing blame, school personnel and families would benefit from relationship and capacity-building to effectively implement parent involvement initiatives. According to Mapp (2003), "Many school programs place their emphasis on the programming portion of their family involvement initiative and not the process of building relationships between home and school" (p. 60). There is an obvious need for systematic reform that builds capacity and relationships for effective parental involvement implementation.

While there seem to be no objections regarding the positive impacts parental involvement has on academic success, many studies address the lack of parental involvement in urban schools (Bower, & Griffin, 2011; Xaba et al., 2015). Having uninvolved parents can be an opportunity gap for African-American children and poverty-stricken families. According to many school personnel, the definition of parental involvement is heavily reliant on traditional activities and does not consider the demographics of the community served. According to Bower and Griffin (2011), schools that implement parent involvement activities based on Epstein's six typologies: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community, often promote involvement through Open House, classroom volunteering, attending Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, and other activities. When schools implement these traditional activities, parents are disengaged not by choice, but due to conflicting work schedules and lack of resources such as transportation (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, & De Pedro, 2011).

**Study topic.** This case study will examine parental involvement at an urban, high-poverty elementary school by studying both parent and school personnel perspectives. More specifically, the study will observe the level of involvement and the training or lack thereof for all stakeholders to move beyond traditional involvement activities to increase parental involvement at the study site. Parent involvement is often labeled low or non-existent for high-poverty and African-American families in urban schools (Boro, 2015; Lee & Bowen, 2006). Through the lens of parents, this can be credited to lack of connection with school personnel (Howard & Reynolds, 2008). Therefore, this study will also seek to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives of African-American families as it relates to parent involvement in comparison to school personnel perspectives. It is imperative to address the gap in current parent involvement research and capture the voice of parents and school personnel to grasp a better understanding regarding the state of parent involvement at the urban elementary school.

**The context.** Researchers who have studied parent involvement in high-poverty schools have found that many of America's reform efforts have fallen short when it comes to providing these schools with the necessary tools to achieve effective results (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009; Mapp, 2003; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001; Xaba et al., 2015). In President Barack Obama's education speech, he commended No Child Left Behind for focusing on education for all students, and the importance of excellent teachers. However, he followed with his frustrations when it comes to high accountability and higher standards:

But I'll tell you what's wrong with No Child Left Behind. Forcing our teachers, our principals and our schools to accomplish all of this without the resources they need is wrong. Promising high-quality teachers in every classroom and then leaving the support and the pay for those teachers behind is wrong. Labeling a school and its students as

failures one day and then throwing your hands up and walking away from them the next is wrong (Obama, 2008).

These same frustrations can be tied to parent involvement efforts, as schools need the right supports to effectively implement parent involvement, especially urban schools.

This study is situated in the context of the dual capacity-building framework (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013), which will be used as a conceptual framework. In addition, critical race theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2000) is used as the theoretical framework to specifically examine race and cultural divides, which often creates disconnect among parents and school personnel. The dual capacity-building framework for Family-School Partnerships is an ideal support structure that has been shown to yield increased knowledge and skills for all stakeholders, rather than expecting involvement to increase with program implementation alone (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). According to Giles (2006), “Capacity-building is defined in terms of the personal, interpersonal, and organizational learning needed to bring about sustainable renewal” (p. 260). Education reform efforts place urgency on parental involvement, but involvement has yet to be institutionalized because of the conflicting perspectives of the school personnel and those of parents (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). Beliefs are shaped by personal experiences; therefore, varied experiences create different truths. Critical race theory examines the lived experiences from people of color and seeks to offer “transformative solutions to racial, gender, and class subordination in our societal and institutional structures” (Creswell, 2007, p. 20). To strengthen the home-school partnership, there is a need to address both explicit and implicit biases that are often harbored about African-American families and those living in poverty (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; McKay, Atkins, Hawkins, Brown, & Lynn, 2003; Yull et al., 2014).

**The significance.** Many reform efforts have come and gone in efforts to improve the state of public education, especially for high-poverty schools. Federally funding grants have attempted

to provide schools additional resources for dramatic turnarounds (Lachlan-Haché, Naik, & Casserly, 2012). Research continues to show that successful school turnarounds have built relationships with parents and the community (Blankstein & Noguera, 2012). This research study will benefit the field of education by adding to the overall body of parent involvement literature. Rather than focusing on the benefits of parent involvement or the barriers, the study will examine how to incorporate capacity-building for all stakeholders. The concept of dual capacity-building (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) provides a useful framework for policymakers to create reform efforts that explicitly outline strategies to shift parent involvement programs from ineffective to effective. Focusing on the capacity-building will benefit students, parents, teachers, and school leaders as they become better equipped to work together, providing a more conducive environment for students to succeed.

When it comes to educational reform, policymakers have relied on quick fixes. This tends to worsen the state of educational reform by recklessly applying research, in hopes of improving student achievement. Teachers are bombarded with standardized test data to drive school improvement, which neglects the whole child approach. Schools should know and understand the demographic composition of the school community to plan purposeful home-school partnerships (Sanders, 2005). As urban districts continue to strive to raise student achievement, there is an alarming disproportion of achievement rates among middle-class students and students living in poverty (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). It is not uncommon for students in large urban districts to face unfortunate circumstances outside the classroom. Unfortunately, the current post-secondary system does not prepare educators to teach the students they will face (Darling-Hammond, 2010). This is what creates barriers for African-American students and those living in poverty. The fate of a child should not be determined by their race, zip code or their socio-economic status.

Within a learning community, there is a common goal, which is to ensure the success of every learner. All stakeholders should be involved in a shared process to achieve this goal. It is vital for educational leaders to know and understand the demographics of those they serve, to help create a shared vision. In today's diverse society there is a need for cultural competency, "Taking the time to understand another culture is critical to building a permanent bridge" (Rosen, 2003, p. 175). Knowing and understanding community demographics allows educators to develop robust school improvement plans, with the whole child in mind. The study site is an urban, high-poverty elementary school, where most of the city's constituents are White. Based upon the 2010-2014 American Community Survey, out of the estimated city population of 531,057 approximately 79% are White, 11% are African-American, and 12% are Hispanic or Latino (United States Department of Commerce, 2012). These numbers support the need for multicultural education for everyone. Multicultural education should enhance one's knowledge about cultures, giving them an in-depth look at similarities and differences (Leonardo, 2009).

Too often low poverty schools are taught by teachers who choose to play the blame game, rather than educate all students regardless of their socioeconomic status. According to Jensen (2009), this has created a disconnect in schools because educators operate under negative perspectives of poverty-stricken students, families, and communities. School improvement planning extends beyond instructional focuses. It is important to know that parental partnerships are an integral component of the school improvement process; however, success is contingent upon "how thoughtfully they are planned and with whose input" (Sanders, 2005, p. 15).

**The problem statement.** Under the former No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (Behind, N.C.L., 2002), accountability became the main tool for school improvement and increased parent involvement. However, in many cases, accountability measures often resulted in compliance; rather than creativity, commitment, and collaboration (Epstein, 2005). When schools focus on

compliance, implementation of required reform strategies is a simple check in the box; lacking intensive, purposeful planning. The reauthorization of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides an excellent opportunity for Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to begin shifting the paradigm from compliance to change for schools (Ujifusa & Tully, 2016). A change that requires support from all stakeholders, including parents.

Parental involvement is a fundamental component of school improvement; however, effective implementation of parental involvement strategies is a challenge in urban school districts (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). For example, Reglin, Cameron, and Losike-Sedimo, (2012) conducted a study at an inner-city school amongst 7th-grade students who lacked parental support and performed poorly in reading. To increase parental involvement and raise the reading scores of students, the researchers implemented a 12-week parent support reading (PSR) intervention workshop. Their findings revealed a positive correlation between parent engagement and student performance, which suggests that students with parents who are actively involved in home and school activities are more likely to experience academic success. Furthermore, a case study at an urban elementary school highlighted the collaborative process of soliciting input from parents, educators, and community in defining parental involvement (Smith, 2006). Defining parental involvement based on the dynamics of the school community led to increased engagement in intentional parental activities, beyond traditional school events. According to Smith (2006), the benefits mentioned by study participants have improved student outcomes and a strong belief that the parents developed greater self-confidence through engagement.

Effective parental involvement programs are those that help parents support their child(ren) at home and school (Epstein, 1995). Implementing effective programs and providing support to parents from low socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds does not come easy. For example, several studies have focused on school personnel (i.e. principals, assistant principals, teachers, etc.)

perspectives regarding parent involvement in inner-city schools, reveals barriers such as parent work schedules and lack of awareness (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009; DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2005; Sanders, 2008; Williams & Sanchez, 2013). However, few studies capture parent voice as they do not include interviews and conversations with parents (Bower & Griffin, 2011). The purpose of this study is to explore the perspectives of school personnel and African-American parents at an urban, high-poverty elementary school, regarding their perceived role, the challenges/barriers to parent involvement, and the role of race in effective home-school partnerships. Epstein (2005) contends, "Districts must provide professional development to build educators' and parents' capacities to understand partnerships and help schools develop goal-oriented partnerships" (p. 179). Therefore, the study is examined through a capacity-building framework.

**The organization.** This chapter provides a lens to investigate parental involvement through the conceptual framework. The literature review also captures preceding parent involvement research as well as the various methodological approaches. In addition to the methodological approaches, this chapter carefully reviews the strengths and weakness of these various approaches. The research findings are then synthesized to highlight common themes and ideas among the literature. The literature review concludes with a critique of previous research and summary of the chapter.

### **Conceptual Framework**

There is a plethora of research that supports the perceived benefits of parent involvement. So much so that it has become the buzz word in policy reform efforts. Mapp and Kuttner (2013) see the policy expectations as problematic:

Yet these mandates are often predicated on a fundamental assumption: that the educators and families charged with developing effective partnerships between home and school

already possess the requisite skills, knowledge, confidence, and belief systems—in other words, the collective capacity—to successfully implement and sustain these important home-school relationships. (p. 5)

This type of assumption only adds to the barriers faced by many urban, high-poverty schools when it comes to effective and sustained parent involvement. The following are the four components that comprise the dual capacity-building framework (see Figure 1): the challenge, opportunity conditions, policy and program goals, and staff and family partnership outcomes. Through this framework what was once a challenge becomes an opportunity for shared learning and processes, to create the best conditions for successful family-school partnerships. The dual capacity-building framework for Family-School Partnerships was developed to guide schools along the involvement continuum, from ineffective partnerships to effective partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013).





*Figure 1.* The dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013, p. 8)

The challenge that often leads to ineffective family-school partnerships is the lack of training and development for both school personnel and parents to develop the skill set necessary for collaboration (Bartel, 2010; Hindin, 2010; Sanders, 2008). Bartel’s (2010) further explained, “Teachers and school administrators can institute more effective parental involvement strategies;

however, time, resources, and the knowledge and understanding required to change school culture and to develop different paths for access takes effort and diligence” (p. 220). A qualitative study conducted in a suburban district revealed effective involvement strategies when parent liaisons received adequate training (Sanders, 2008). Even after addressing the challenge for effective family-school partnerships, there is more work to be done.

For sustainability in partnership efforts, the right conditions must exist. In other words, there is a need to focus on building trusting relationships and adequate resources for support (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Studies have highlighted the difference between implementing parental involvement activities and developing a school culture for authentic involvement. Smith (2006) conducted interviews with low-income families which revealed opportunity conditions for family-school partnerships in an urban school because the study site went through a process to know and understand their families and collectively develop a foundation for parental involvement. This included seeking input from families and the community, as well as developing a parent center for sustained resources.

The dual capacity-building framework (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) shifts the paradigm of parent involvement from a list of activities to a systematic process for effective family-school partnerships. All stakeholders need the opportunity to learn and develop through shared spaces, including teacher collaboration and parent networks (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002; Smith, 2006). Rather than focusing on failed policy goals and traditional involvement initiatives, “this framework builds on existing research suggesting that partnerships between home and school can only develop and thrive if both families and staff have the requisite collective capacity to engage in partnership” (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013, p. 10). Research indicates there are some administrators and teachers with positive beliefs and values regarding the involvement of low-income families (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002; Smith et al., 2011); unfortunately, disconnect

found between parents' perspectives indicates a knowledge gap for school personnel (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). Increased knowledge and skills lead to increased outcomes for family and staff capacity (Quezada, 2014).

A recent study of three urban schools in southern California highlighted the positive impact capacity-building had on the schools' parent engagement program. According to Quezada (2014) capacity-building in urban schools is beneficial for parents and staff. In this study, parents, teachers, and school leadership received training, which created parent leaders and improved staff perspectives of parents. The study deployed components from Mapp and Kuttner's (2013) dual capacity-building framework and findings revealed a transformation from traditional parent involvement to collaborative structures with engaged parents and school personnel. Quezada (2014) explained how this framework was used in challenging urban schools serving many families from diverse racial and economic backgrounds, yet they were able to transform the role of parents from traditional roles to advocates, decision-makers, and much more.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Increased outcomes for family-school partnership should not be determined by race or socioeconomic status. The critical race theory (CRT) (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2000) provides a lens to valuable insight on the often-disproportionate representation of African-American families in the school-family partnership. CRT is useful in such regard, for it sheds light on how racism, inadvertently or overtly, impedes upon the lived realities of people of color (Brown & Jackson, 2013; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT was developed in the 1970s by legal scholars to address the impact of race and racism in the U.S. judicial system (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004). CRT was developed in the 1970s by legal scholars to address the impact of race and racism in the U.S. judicial system (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004). DeCuir and Dixon (2004) highlighted the following five major tenets of CRT for education research: (a) counter-storytelling; (b) the

permanence of racism; (c) whiteness as property; (d) interest convergence; and (e) critique of liberalism.

The goal of CRT is equity regardless of race or ethnicity (Parker, 1998). To achieve this goal there is a need for further research to include both parent and teacher perspectives when it comes to identifying how race plays a role in developing effective home-school partnerships. In this study, a central tenet of CRT was applied, that of counter-storytelling. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) define counter-storytelling stories as “a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are often not told (i.e., those on the margins of the stories)” (p. 32). Through counter-storytelling, there is great opportunity to create a shared understanding and debunk myths (Delgado, 1989).

## **Review of Research Literature**

### **Introduction**

This chapter offers a review of literature based on the construct of parental involvement in urban schools. An interesting development in the empirical literature on parent involvement centers on the practice in urban schools (Gutman & McLoyd, 2000; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Smrekar, & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). The following articles were organized in a literature matrix and synthesized according to findings, warrants, data, and methodology. The research design for most of the studies presented here is a case study, whereby the researchers explore parental involvement at a more in-depth level. During the review of this literature several themes emerged:

1. Parental Involvement and the Opportunity Gap
2. Beyond Traditional Involvement Strategies
3. Barriers to Parental Involvement
4. The Role of School Leadership
5. Capacity-building for Effective Involvement

There are many benefits when it comes to parental involvement. Longstanding research supports the positive impact of parent involvement on student achievement; however, parent involvement is lacking for minority and low-income families. This disparity is presented in the first theme that emerged from the review of literature, Parental Involvement and the Opportunity Gap. The literature indicates there is a need to implement nontraditional parent involvement activities, such as workshops based on the needs of families. Beyond Traditional Involvement Opportunities was the second prevalent theme in the research literature. Scholars in education have sought out to examine the challenges to parental involvement for urban schools, which unveiled Barriers to Parental Involvement as the third theme. This quest continues to evolve the field of education and more specifically the area of parent involvement as study implications provide practical solutions for school leaders. The reviewed literature captured The Role of School Leadership as the fourth theme. Finally, Capacity-building for Effective Parent Involvement emerged as the fifth theme. This empirical review of parent involvement literature provides a synthesis of the perception of parent involvement efforts in schools.

**Theme 1: Parent involvement and the opportunity gap.** Reform efforts include programs for parental involvement because of the positive impact it has on student outcomes, yet according to decades of research, the achievement gap remains for African-American students and those living in poverty (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Smrekar, & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). Lee and Bowen (2006) conducted a study specifically focusing on parent involvement and the achievement gap. In this study, low-income, African-American parents with students in the third through fifth grade were surveyed and interviewed. The regression analysis with race, income level, and educational attainment as demographic variables revealed significant differences in the level of parental involvement and student achievement than parents who did not identify as low-income. In other

words, students of color who are living in poverty and have parents with limited post-secondary education are falling behind their White and middle-class counterparts academically.

In addition, Lee and Bowen (2006) cited lower levels of parental involvement at the school for these students. According to Goldfarb (2010) “It would be misguided to argue that racism, class bias, and the rages of poverty do not tear the fabric of such families and create profound problems for them” (p. 263). The literature reveals an opportunity gap that exists for marginalized families, which impacts parental involvement in urban schools. Gutman and McLoyd (2000) surveyed and interviewed African-American parents of high-achievers and low-achievers whom all were all living in poverty; yet parents of high-achievers deployed specific involvement activities to encourage academic success, compared to parents of low-achievers. For example, parents of high achievers were more open to a partnership with the school to ensure student success, but parents of low achievers voiced the need to be the sole disciplinary of their children. In addition, parents of high-achievers had high levels of involvement at the school compared to parents of low-achievers who mostly visited the school to address behavior issues. However, it is unknown if parental involvement for high-achievers is a result of their academic success, or if academic achievement is contributed to parental involvement.

In a more recent study (Kingston, Huang, Calzada, Dawson-McClure, & Brotman, 2013) based on teacher reports, researchers linked lack of family and neighborhood resources to the academic and social-emotional readiness level for four-year old early childhood students. According to this study, single-parent families residing in high-poverty, resource-deprived neighborhoods reap educational benefits for young children when there are increased levels of parent involvement. For example, regardless of family and neighborhood demographics increased parent involvement had a positive impact on children’s social-emotional development (Kingston et

al., 2013). These studies (Gutman and McLoyd, 2000; Kingston et al., 2013) revealed the negative impact family demographics can have on student outcomes.

**Theme 2: Beyond traditional involvement strategies.** Epstein's typologies for parental involvement (Epstein, 1995) are often utilized by schools as the framework for implementing parent involvement activities (Bartel, 2010; Boro, 2015; Cankar, Deutsch, & Sentocnik, 2012). The parental involvement framework includes six different types of involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 1995). However, a growing body of literature indicates a greater likelihood for positive results in urban schools when they change the status quo (Auerbach, 2009; Bower, H., & Griffin, 2011; Smith et al., 2011), such as providing families with necessary supports and resources to overcome barriers to parental involvement (Smith, 2006) and creating structures that engage parents beyond the traditional Parent Teacher Association (PTA) (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Giles, 2006). The empirical literature suggests a need to consider the reality of families to implement effective parental involvement strategies in urban settings. For example, Christianakis (2011) unveiled the parental involvement role "the helper" which requires time and flexibility for parents to visit the classroom and help. This type of involvement is best suited for White middle-class families as many of the parents at the inner-city schools have life circumstances that do not allow them to meet the demands (Auerbach, 2009; Bower, H., & Griffin, 2011; Christianakis, 2011; Giles, 2006; Smith, 2006; Smith et al., 2011).

There is much to be learned from urban schools that have implemented intentional strategies to transform parent involvement from lacking to thriving (Auerbach, 2009; Giles, 2006). Parent involvement researchers encouraged change in the status quo of parent involvement by suggesting more opportunities for training both parents and school personnel for increased engagement (Giles, 2006; Mapp, 2003; Smith, 2006; Watson, & Bogotch, 2015). Parents in urban

schools can face many barriers, so expecting parents to show up and know how to be involved without providing guidance is farfetched. Giles (2006) found traditional involvement activities such as conferences and open house were not well attended, but the implementation of learning celebrations had much success as they were created with the parent in mind. Mapp (2003) strategically identified an urban school with effective parent involvement programs to uncover the factors that contribute to high levels of parent involvement for traditionally marginalized families (i.e. African-American families, families living in poverty). In this study of a diverse group of 18 parents, findings revealed the need to move beyond traditional parent involvement activities. When it comes to at-home involvement, parents are involved in ways that are not traditionally recognized by the school (Smith, 2006; Watson & Bogotch, 2015), such as discussing the importance of education and encouraging their child to succeed (Mapp, 2003).

Moving beyond traditional involvement activities takes intentionality from the school (Giles, 2006; Jeynes, 2011; Smith, 2006; Watson & Bogotch, 2015). Smith (2006) indicated a broad definition of parental involvement evolved at an urban school, as educators, administrators, and support staff gained a better understanding of the families served. According to the school's principal, the tendency to blame parents shifted to an urge to assist as school personnel took the time to connect with families and established a better awareness of their life situations. Smith (2006) provided the following suggestion for educators in high-poverty schools, "In low-income schools, there is a need to acknowledge and encourage even the smallest efforts made by parents to support their children's education" (p. 54). This was recommended to help remove judgment and increase parental involvement. Jeynes (2011) examines the evolution of family structure over the years and the impact on parent involvement as the number of single-parent households continues to increase. Research findings indicate a need to replace the commonly used definition of parent



involvement with a broader definition to reflect the complex engagement of parents (Jeynes, 2011; Smith, 2006).

Reframing the perspective of school staff was also salient in the review of parental involvement at a high minority high school (Boro, 2015; Smith, 2006; Watson & Bogotch, 2015). Watson and Bogotch (2015) discussed the conditions of families at the study site, which often prevents parents from participating in school-centered activities. Rather than perceive language barriers or conflicting work schedules from a deficit lens, it is recommended that schools find the unseen assets of parents (Smith, 2006; Watson & Bogotch, 2015). Reframing parental involvement require action from school leaders to create meaningful relationships with students and parents. Through these relationships shared values are established and the home-school partnership can begin as teachers, administrators, and parents work collectively to reframe parent involvement. In urban settings parental involvement is less about parents addressing the needs of the school and more about how schools provide resources and networks to support families (Christianakis, 2011; Sanders, 2008; Smith, 2006; Watson & Bogotch, 2015) “Schools will continue to fail students of color if school leaders continue to discount their cultures and lived experiences and if they do not establish genuine relationships with their parents, families, and communities” (Watson and Bogotch, 2015, p. 259).

According to parental involvement research there are schools that have yet to reframe parent involvement and create a broad definition to meet the demands of the families served (Boro, 2015; Christianakis, 2011; Xaba et al., 2015). At 10 urban charter middle schools, administrators perceived parental involvement as participation in the traditional activities set by the school, such as, help with fundraising, attending meetings, and volunteering (Boro, 2015). In addition, the study participants understood involvement activities for families vary. However, the varying activities were reflective of the traditional home and school involvement activities. To enable

parental involvement and empower parents at the study site the charter schools mentioned plans to create space for a parent resource center. Sanders (2008) determined the role of parent liaisons for parent resource centers as vital to bridging the home-school partnership. It was suggested that parent liaisons help strengthen home-school partnerships by providing resources to at-risk families and supporting teachers in their efforts to reach out to families. Learning about the families was highlighted as an opportunity to dismiss assumptions tied to race and poverty. Boro (2015) shared increased involvement when site administrators used parent surveys to learn about families and seek their input to create relevant involvement activities.

**Theme 3: Barriers to parent involvement.** Lack of parent involvement is seldom by choice of the parent or the school, but rather barriers that prevent or limit the home-school partnership. When schools have a high number of families living in poverty, low parent educational attainment and disconnected school culture, parent involvement levels are lower than their well-off counterparts (Hartas, 2011; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Park & Holloway, 2013). Williams and Sanchez (2013) studied barriers to parental involvement at an inner-city school. The study included interviews of both parents and teachers, which revealed conflicting perspectives. According to Williams and Sanchez (2013), teachers reported financial disparities as a barrier to involvement at a higher rate than parents. Teachers referenced the impact low income has on transportation, which makes it difficult for parents to get their children to school and come to the school for involvement activities. On the other hand, parents acknowledged their limited financial resources to pay school fees, but they believed the school did not welcome parents who were unable to pay requested fees. Their belief was validated by the assumption teachers held, assuming parents dodged school involvement to avoid financial responsibilities.

In addition to financial barriers, the lack of formal education for parents has also been noted as a barrier (Hartas, 2011; Jackson & Remillard, 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006). While the

education level of parents had no impact on homework help or time management, results of a hierarchical regression did reveal an impact on parents' involvement at school and educational expectations (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Parents with advanced post-secondary education are more likely to read to their children at home and set higher educational expectations. The outcomes for this level of involvement has resulted in higher academic achievement for students. Similar results were found when Hartas (2011) studied literacy and social outcomes of young children living in poverty. In this study, parents were interviewed when children were three years of age and again at five years of age. The study concluded, educational attainment plays a factor as children of mothers who have advanced education performed better than children whose mothers did not. Lack of educational attainment can lead to frustrations from parents. Through parent interviews Jackson and Remillard (2005) captured hindrances with homework help when parents need to seek outside help and do not have access to resources when they lack the necessary skills to help their children. A combination of qualitative and quantitative data highlights the increased student outcomes when parents have some advance education rather than none (Hartas, 2011; Jackson & Remillard, 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006).

Schools want increased parent involvement; however, the school culture is not always inviting to cultivate this partnership. School culture can be described as the day to day actions of the school to create an environment conducive to learning, built on relational trust among all stakeholders and high expectations for all students (Bartel, 2010; Boro, 2015; Giles, 2006). When schools fail to cultivate positive school culture it creates a disconnect in the parent-teacher partnership. In a study where perceptions of the school culture of both involved and uninvolved parents were captured through interviews (Lawson, 2003), "Parents say that as children, they were viewed by teachers as students ready to be taught, but they now believe that Garfield's staff regards children as objects needing to be controlled" (p. 95). A negative experience by a parent

will spread and have a negative effect on the children as it spreads throughout the community.

Lawson (2003) included involved and uninvolved parents, whose perspectives regarding parental involvement were similar. Both groups expressed concerns with distrust and negativity as the school failed to connect with the community.

This same disconnect surfaced in a study by Stormont et al. (2013) when a latent profile analysis with teachers in an urban setting revealed acceptance of low involvement when students were well-behaved and excelling, but there was a lack of parent contact and comfort with low-income families and students with behavior issues. Studies with both parent and teacher perceptions are beneficial in uncovering the perceived school culture and parent-teacher relationship. As stated by Stormont et al. (2013), “a fundamental barrier to overcome if parents of students with academic and behavior problems are to increase their participation in school is to reduce teacher perception of discomfort with these parents” (p. 205). Parents are faced with many barriers, but they want to get back to the notion that it takes a village to foster student success.

Minority and low-income parents are often labeled and have roles set by the school which limits their involvement (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001; Sanders, 2008). Minorities such as African-American parents are often perceived as uninvolved due to the lack of representation of their culturally distinct parenting techniques (Robert, 2011). Parent involvement has evolved to extend outside of the school walls such as visiting the library and helping with homework at home. Roberts (2011) explains how the efforts for a more comprehensive definition of parent involvement still creates barriers as there is a need to examine more culturally distinct parental involvement. An action research study employed focus groups with middle-class minority parents; capturing their experiences with culturally incompetent school staff, leaving parents feeling disengaged with lack of school support (Yull et al., 2014). Other parental involvement studies have utilized questionnaires with study participants (McKay et al., 2003; Watson & Bogotch,

2015), which revealed similar barriers of race and culture from middle-class families. Parents voiced concern with lack of opportunities to collaborate with other African-American families. Parents from this study believe they would benefit from networking with other families to share resources to help their children.

According to a grounded theory qualitative study utilizing focus groups (Howard & Reynolds, 2008), middle-class minority parents are struggling to find their voice in schools as they avoid advocating for their child because they believe school personnel does not value them as a resource. Despite the disconnect families expressed because of the school's lack of cultural competency, there was still a desire by parents to be involved. In the inner-city study by Williams and Sanchez (2013), it was cited by school personnel that parents are not always knowledgeable about what the school can and cannot do, which creates a strain on the home-school partnership. Some parents believe involvement is limited to monetary contributions because it seems as if expressing concern is frowned upon by school personnel. Negative perspectives of the school from parents create a divide and a barrier to involvement (Giles, 2006).

Effective communication is a necessary component for positive school culture, leading to increased parental involvement, especially with low-income families. Communication is an important factor for any relationship, so ineffective or lack of communication becomes a barrier for parent involvement. Ineffective communication is not conducive to a welcoming school environment, especially when phone calls from the school are viewed as negative because teachers mainly call home for negative behavior instead of finding a balance to communicate positives as well (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). According to Wyche (2010), parents reported that while parent involvement activities exist at the study site, the communication regarding activities is lacking. At an urban elementary school where many parents are constrained by the barrier of time,

ineffective communication to families regarding involvement activities makes it difficult to attend school events.

Research suggests that involvement opportunities exist; however, the mode of communication is often ineffective and unsuccessful (Kraft & Rogers, 2015; Lawson, 2003; Park & Holloway, 2013; Wyche, 2010). Parent involvement at school events is lacking when schools rely on flyers as the primary mode of communication. This primary use of communication is ineffective when the school is depending on the student to get the flyer in the hand of parents (Lawson, 2003). In a study by Park and Holloway (2013), African-American parents became more involved when schools communicated necessary information. This informative communication to parents includes ongoing updates on academic progress beyond report cards, communicating how to provide homework help, and overall ensuring parents understood their role in their child's education. Effective communication is imperative to increasing parent involvement because parents need to know how they can be involved.

**Theme 4: The role of school leadership.** Contrary to what some may believe, parents value education and want to be involved in their child's education (Lawson, 2003; Mendez, 2010; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). School improvement is multifaceted, and principals need to devote time to establishing a welcoming and collaborative environment for families, as much as they focus on instruction (Gardiner & Enomoto 2006; Giles, 2006). Fostering a positive environment is what three African-American principals at low-performing urban schools did to change negative mindsets of teachers and parents (Giles, 2006). What seemed to come naturally for these three principals (Giles, 2006) took some on the job learning for six Caucasian principals leading a diverse population (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). In this study (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006), the six principals were interviewed, in which they expressed the lack of preparation they received in the realm of multicultural education. However, devoting time to listen to families

allowed them to learn the needs of students and parents. Furthermore, principals increase parent involvement when they foster effective teacher-parent relationships (Auerbach, 2009; Auerbach, 2011).

This is not an easy task when the background of the principal is not reflective of the school population, and when multicultural education has not deemed a priority (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). Three Latino principals and one African-American assistant principal focused on strengthening the home-school partnership by building the capacity of teachers and engaging them as facilitators of parent workshops (Auerbach, 2009). While these various case studies cannot be generalized to populations, the findings provide practical strategies to help leaders in diverse settings create a positive school climate and improve school and family partnerships.

**Theme 5: capacity-building for effective parent involvement.** When it comes to changing the status quo for parental involvement and overcoming barriers, some studies have revealed the need for changed beliefs and perspectives (Grant & Ray, 2018; National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2011; Yull et al., 2014). These changed perspectives come through learning opportunities such as, cultural proficiency training (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). A growing body of literature highlights the benefits of capacity-building for effective parental involvement (Giles, 2006; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002; Watson & Bogotch, 2015; Xaba et al., 2015). Teachers can gain a better appreciation for parents when given the space and time to discuss parents' role in student education (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002). A case study involving three urban elementary schools (Giles, 2006) reported increased parental involvement after creating structures that allowed both parents and teachers to collaborate and learn together. According to the study, prior to restructuring for increased engagement, teachers blamed parents for students' misbehavior and parents faulted the school. Efforts to increase parental involvement are more successful when teachers harbor positive beliefs about parent

efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002), and when parents gain the skills to assist and serve on committees (Boro, 2015; Xaba et al., 2015).

According to Watson and Bogotch (2015) urban school principals perceive lack of involvement at the school as a deficit, but adequate professional development for leadership and staff can lead to better understanding of students and families. “Urban teachers often lack knowledge and respect of the ethnicities and cultures of the children they teach” (McDermott & Rothenburg, 2000, p. 4). Parents became intentionally uninvolved as they perceived racial bias from school staff. The study findings suggested strategies to help teachers develop skills for working with diverse families. Strategies in building relationships and effective communication were suggested (McDermott & Rothenburg, 2000). Some studies examine the impact of capacity-building through multiple baseline design. A study conducted with four caregivers of preschoolers utilized multiple baseline design to assess the impact of providing training to assist caregivers in implementing learning opportunities for their children (Swanson et al., 2011). The findings revealed large effect sizes for parent behavior and parent confidence.

### **Methodological Review**

According to Creswell (2011), “Research designs are the plans and the procedures for research that span the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis” (p. 3). In the review of the parent involvement literature, many researchers utilized qualitative design in their studies (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001; Quezada, 2014; Williams & Sanchez, 2013; Nelson & Guerra, 2014). Qualitative research allows for an in-depth study of a problem, in which the researcher gains understanding by interpreting participant perspectives (Creswell, 2007). There are several approaches a researcher could take in conducting a qualitative study. The following strategies are used to investigate the problem:



phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, case study, and narrative (Creswell, 2007). Case study and grounded theory were the main strategies employed to investigate parental involvement.

**Case study.** Through the case study strategy, researchers could thoroughly investigate parent involvement strategies (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Mapp, 2003; Smith, 2006). Case study design entails the study of an issue or concern through one or multiple cases to explain the issue (McMillan, 2012). The use of case study allows for dialogue between researcher and participants to gain a better understanding of the problem at hand. For example, in the study conducted by Smith (2006), interviews and observations revealed positive outcomes when committee meetings and shared discussions took place with parents, school, and community. This in-depth interaction led to the conclusion that schools should take the time to know and understand their families and collectively develop a foundation for parental involvement by seeking input from families and the community (Smith, 2006). Similarly, when parent voices were captured through an interview, Mapp (2003) found that cultural biases have negative impacts on effective parent-school partnerships. Abrams and Gibbs (2002) conducted individual interviews and focus groups with parents to investigate potential reform strategies to improve parental involvement amongst often marginalized families. Case studies are not generalized to populations, but the findings provide useful implications to other schools with like demographics and can inform continued parent involvement efforts.

Interviewing multiple stakeholder groups allows researchers to gain a better understanding of parental involvement perspectives. For example, Sanders (2008) studied four districts where semi-structured and focus-group interviews for school leadership, parent liaisons, family, and teachers were conducted. These stakeholders served on the school partnership team and findings revealed the critical role of parent liaisons for improved school-home partnerships. All stakeholders reported parent liaisons as the bridge for connecting the school and families.

According to Sanders (2008), parent liaisons help parents support their children's learning and provide guidance for teachers to improve outreach to diverse families. As one study took the liberty to interview involved and uninvolved parents and captured the perspective of teachers (Lawson, 2003), researchers could highlight the disconnect between home and school that often creates barriers for parent involvement. It is difficult to capture perspectives of uninvolved parents through survey method, as uninvolved parents typically have a low response rate.

**Grounded theory.** Another qualitative strategy that was often used by researchers is grounded theory. Grounded theory is defined by Creswell (2011) as "a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher derives a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of the participants" (p. 13). Grounded theory studies do not provide generalizations; however, recommendations are noted to inform the field and future research (McMillan, 2012). It was found most common among the body of literature for researchers to utilize grounded theory to study how culture and race impact parental involvement. For example, Howard and Reynolds (2008) captured parental involvement experiences of middle-class African-American mothers to determine if there is a difference among experiences between more successful parents of color and those less affluent. Nelson and Guerra (2014) employed a constructivist approach which focuses on the perspective of participants and changed mindsets (McMillan, 2012). Through the grounded theory method, Nelson and Guerra (2014) captured a lack of cultural awareness for teachers and leaders and suggested the need for adequate training and support to transform the cultural lens of educators. Just as case studies are not generalized, grounded theory provides informative suggestions and a theory of action for continued efforts to improve parental involvement. For example, Young, Austin, and Growe (2013) applied grounded theory to their study of defining parent involvement from principals' perspectives and generated a theory that a system-wide

definition not based on individual definitions but created with input from all stakeholders is needed if schools wish to have parents actively involved.

**Credibility.** Regardless of the strategy selected to investigate in qualitative studies, it is critical to evaluate the study based on the credibility (McMillan, 2012). Triangulation of data, which is the use of multiple data sources such as interviews, observations, and review of documents allows researchers to ensure accurate findings (Creswell, 2007). Specifically, a few studies used triangulation for the accuracy of research findings. Rather than solely relying on teacher and parent interviews Lawson (2003) reviewed school documents and a survey. Similarly, Giles (2006) investigated parental involvement through the role of leadership at three urban schools and several secondary documents such as meeting minutes and school documents from the State Department of Education to validate findings. Although qualitative studies allow researchers to gain a more in-depth understanding from participants, triangulation is necessary to fact check what they gathered from interviews. For example, Auerbach (2009) conducted interviews with principals to determine how leaders promote parental involvement in schools, however, observations were conducted during meetings and events to triangulate the interview data with the addition of reviewing school documents such as newsletters, websites, and other school-related materials.

In addition to triangulation, member checking is also used for accuracy. According to McMillan (2012), “Member checking is completed when the researcher asks the participants to review interpretations and conclusions, and the participants confirm the findings” (p. 303). Triangulation was followed by member checking when Auerbach (2009) allowed study participants to review the findings to confirm the researcher’s conclusions. Outside researchers can also be used for member checking. For example, to increase validity Howard and Reynolds (2008) had participants as well as research assistants review transcripts for accuracy.

Credibility is also increased when the researcher has a close relationship with study participants, which is often created through prolonged engagement (McMillan, 2012). Prolonged engagement is beneficial for eliminating researcher bias as the researcher develops a relationship with participants and spends an extensive amount of time at the study site. Researchers run the risk of researcher bias when interviews are conducted to investigate, which could limit findings (McMillan, 2012). Bower and Griffin (2011), conducted a parental involvement study where only staff perspective were collected through interview, however spending three years at the study site allowed researchers to gain a better understanding of the school's parental involvement program compared to what staff perceived. Prolonged engagement allows participants to become comfortable with the researcher and lends itself to open and honest interview responses. Specifically, studies where teachers are asked to provide input on current conditions at the study site and their perspectives of parent involvement it is imperative that researchers build trust (Williams & Sanchez, 2013) for teachers to have a level of comfort to express freely without repercussion.

**Study site and participants.** Interview, observation, and document review are common procedures used for data collection in qualitative research, however selecting the study site and participants must come first (McMillan, 2012). Studies that sought out to examine effective parental involvement strategies for families of color and those living in poverty selected participants and the study site based on diversity (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2005; Mapp, 2003; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001; Williams & Sanchez, 2013). The sample size in these studies represented a diverse population by racial and ethnic background, and income level. The family dynamics of the participants ranged from married, single mothers, and parents with special needs children. Being intentional in selecting the study site is also important. Some studies examined effective parental involvement strategies in urban schools, in efforts to provide practical examples

for urban schools with low parental involvement (Auerbach, 2009; Sanders, 2013; Smith et al., 2011). Therefore, study sites were selected based on high levels of parental engagement.

### **Methodological Issues**

**Study participants.** The extensive body of parental involvement literature documents efforts to better understand the state of parent involvement in urban schools. Multiple studies conducted case study methodology to gain an in-depth understanding. While findings could not be generalized to populations, there were missed opportunities to include a broader representation and multiple perspectives. For example, in some studies, principals or school staff were the only participants interviewed, which excluded the value of parent voice (Barnyak, & McNelly, 2009; Bower & Griffin, 2011; DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2005; Gordon & Louis, 2009; Sanders, 2008).

**Triangulation.** Secondary sources are vital in qualitative studies for data collection and analysis, as they increase credibility with triangulation (Creswell, 2007). Mapp (2003) relied solely on interviews and observations for data collection. According to McMillan (2012), “Most observations result in notes about who, what, where, how and why something happened” (p. 298). It is important that these notes are trustworthy for credibility. Collecting records, documents, and artifacts would enhance credibility through the triangulation technique of using multiple sources. An in-depth understanding of the case is required, therefore extensive data collection is needed.

**Data analysis.** In addition to data collection, data analysis plays an important role in the research process. However, a case study where inclusion and exclusion of parents were examined, researchers neglected to explain the data analysis process (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002). This is problematic because according to McMillan (2012), “A thorough analysis requires three steps: organization of the data, summarizing the data as codes, and then interpreting the data to search for patterns” (p. 297). Abrams and Gibbs (2002) thoroughly explained the data collection process and

then transitioned straight to the findings, without an analysis description. It is unknown if coding was used to identify common themes from parent interviews.

**Prolonged engagement.** Creswell (2007) explained the urgency of utilizing validation strategies to strengthen qualitative research. "Substantive validation means understanding one's own understandings of the topic, understandings derived from other sources, and the documentation of this process in the written study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 206). Prolonged engagement is an example of a validation strategy, where researchers spend an extensive amount of time in the field to help dismiss biases and participants become more comfortable and open to sharing (Creswell, 2011; McMillan, 2012). It is not always easy to establish rapport with participants (McMillan, 2012). Out of the vast body of parental involvement research, only a few studies identified prolonged engagement at the study site to build relationships and gain the trust of participants (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Bower & Griffin, 2011; Lawson, 2003; Williams & Sanchez, 2013). Qualitative researchers are encouraged to use multiple validation strategies in any given study (Creswell, 2011).

**Member checking.** Member checking is another popular and cost-effective validation strategy, which "involves taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account" (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). However, during the review and synthesis of parent involvement studies, several researchers did not include member checking as a strategy for validation (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Cankar et al., 2012; Gutman & McLoyd, 2000; Young et al, 2013). All of which utilized interviews for the data collection tool and while there are many benefits to interviews there are also weaknesses. According to McMillan (2012), interviewer bias can affect findings and the lack of comfort on the part of participants. Member checking addresses the possible weaknesses and will be used in the current study.

## **Synthesis of Research Findings**

Barriers and benefits of parental involvement have been thoroughly explored through decades of research. Findings from these studies continue to add valuable implications for implementation, as well as the suggestion for further research. Conducting interviews and focus groups with different stakeholder groups provides researchers with a greater understanding based on the lived experiences of participants. Researchers develop common themes as they analyze data and deploy strategies to enhance validity.

Some studies found culture to be a barrier to effective parental involvement in urban schools (McKay et al., 2003; Watson & Bogotch, 2015; Yull et al., 2014). Equity in education has been an issue since the beginning of time dating back to Plessy v. Ferguson (1896), and unfortunately, it did not end with Brown v. Education (1954). The current study will use a lens of critical race theory (Ladson-billings & Tate, 2000) to address racial and cultural barriers to parental involvement according to the perspectives of both school personnel and parents. In the reviewed literature, researchers uncovered racial disparities as they used the lens of CRT to examine parental involvement. For example, utilizing the CRT lens, Watson and Bogotch (2015) highlights the lack of empathy leaders have for non-English speaking families and through this discovery researchers suggest the need for schools to embrace cultural diversity by encouraging and celebrating language and culture, rather than forcing parents to assimilate (Watson & Bogotch, 2015).

In another study utilizing CRT, middle-class families were interviewed and expressed the role of race when it comes to parent involvement (Howard & Reynolds, 2008). More specifically, African-American parents expressed the need to be involved in their child's education, because their White counterparts often label them as uninvolved and uninterested in their child's education (Howard & Reynolds, 2008). On the other hand, the researchers also noted that some parents

decided to take less involved roles as they believed being an advocate was not accepted by school personnel. Examining parental involvement through the lens of critical race theory (Ladson-billings & Tate, 2000) in urban schools and middle-class families reveals race as a constant factor when it comes to parental involvement, even in the absence of poverty. This supports the first CRT tenet, “the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination” (Solórzano, 1997), which explains racism as part of the societal norm.

While families and educators both value parental involvement (Lawson, 2003; Mendez, 2010; Smith et al., 2011; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001), there seems to be a need for systematic reform that builds the capacity for effective parental involvement implementation. The common findings reveal a breakdown in capacity-building for successful parental involvement programs, as educators and families do not receive the necessary supports to effectively implement parent involvement initiatives. Mapp (2003) studied why and how parents are involved, as well as factors that influence involvement. The study findings revealed, "Many school programs place their emphasis on the programming portion of their family involvement initiative and not the process of building relationships between home and school" (Mapp, 2003, p. 60). While much of the literature focuses on identifying barriers and effective strategies for parental involvement (Gutman & McLoyd, 2000; Smith et al., 2011), there is an obvious gap in the literature to address these barriers and implement effective strategies through the dual capacity-building framework (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). This framework for family-school partnerships is best defined as a continuum for schools to move from ineffective partnership to more (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Through this framework, barriers to successful involvement become opportunities for all stakeholders to work together, participating in shared learning and developing processes to create the best conditions for home-school partnerships. Further research will add to the limited existing research that addresses capacity-building for effective involvement (Bartel, 2010; Boro, 2015; & Smith, 2006).



In the empirical literature on parent involvement, both families and educators provide their experiences and perspectives (Stormont et al., 2013; Xaba et al., 2015; Young et al., 2013), but the disconnect between the two and the inconsistent success of parent involvement in urban schools, calls into question how urban schools build the capacity of stakeholders for impactful parental involvement. Among the vast body of literature, it is evident that various studies examine parental involvement. While much research has utilized case studies, interviews, and focus groups, far less work has sampled school personnel and parents to capture their voices through a capacity-building and cultural lens in efforts to create effective home-school partnerships.

Capacity-building for effective parental involvement is captured in a variety of ways in the literature. However, there is a need for future research to include more interviews or focus groups with both parents and school personnel, to identify similarities and differences in their perspectives for capacity-building opportunities. While the literature clearly identifies the apparent racial and class divide that often exists between school personnel and families, especially in the urban setting, there is a need to further examine how to change the status quo and to better equip middle-class leaders and teachers to include rather than exclude low-income, African-American families.

### **Critique of Previous Research**

Qualitative research methods allow extensive interaction with participants to build relationships and construct meaning from the in-depth interviews. For example, Watson and Bogotch (2015) employed dialogue with empirical evidence "to challenge the fixed and socially constructed 'realities' created by dominant discourses" (p. 263). However, interviewing school personnel limits the findings by not capturing parent perspectives. There were also several studies that only interviewed parents (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Bower & Griffin, 2011; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001; Xaba et al., 2015) limiting findings without investigating school personnel perspectives. This is a general trend in the research as researchers examine parent involvement

strategies and barriers without an inclusive investigation including the critical stakeholders, parents, and school personnel.

Although the body of parent involvement literature includes parent perspectives, voices of uninvolved parents are lacking, as most of the study participants were involved parents. When studies select participants through volunteer participation and sending forms home with students, it is highly unlikely that uninvolved parents will be included in the sample. Also, utilizing surveys to collect data could exclude uninvolved parents, because survey completion could be viewed as an involvement activity (Anderson & Minke, 2007). Participants were also usually mothers or guardians who were women, which neglects to capture parent involvement from a father's perspective.

Another trend in the research was limited investigation of effective parental involvement programs. Much of the qualitative research examined parent involvement from a deficit standpoint, highlighting the barriers and ineffective strategies for involvement (Lawson, 2003; Williams & Sanchez, 2013; Wyche, 2010). Although case studies are not generalized to entire populations, there are implications that will continue to refine and improve the state of parent involvement in urban schools. There are some urban schools that have successful parent involvement programs (Smith et al., 2011), and if researchers conducted more studies on what these schools do differently and the processes in place to build comradery among all stakeholders, suggestions could inform parent involvement policy and reform efforts.

Further research is needed to contribute to the field of education as it specifically relates to parent involvement in urban settings. Being aware of the findings and missed opportunities in existing parent involvement research allowed deployment of research strategies that addressed the gaps within the literature. In hopes to contribute to school improvement, the current qualitative

study was employed through case study design, to contribute to the efforts of increasing effective parental involvement through capacity-building at an urban school.

### **Summary**

Although there are many components to parental involvement, an effective parental involvement program is one created with parents and not for parents. Too often, schools set their agendas for parental involvement without ensuring parents have the tools and resources for effective involvement. A large portion of the parent involvement literature revealed failed attempts for involvement with the implementation of traditional activities. Through interviews and focus groups, researchers uncovered beliefs and experiences of parents and teachers when it came to family-school partnerships. It appeared that lack of time and resources for parents in high-poverty schools are often viewed as lack of interest by teachers and school personnel. There appears to be a cultural and economic barrier between parents and teachers that could contribute to low parent involvement. There is ample parent involvement research; however, there is a need to address the gap in the literature and examine parent involvement through a capacity-building and cultural lens to improve home-school partnerships.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

Researchers study parental involvement from many perspectives. It is common to study parent perspectives or school personnel perspectives as it relates to parental involvement (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Mendez, 2010); rarely are perspectives from both stakeholders captured in one study. The purpose of this study was to capture parental involvement perspectives of key stakeholders, to reach a greater understanding of capacity-building opportunities for increased parental involvement in urban schools. The study uses a case study design to examine parental involvement at an urban school through the lens of Karen Mapp's dual capacity-building framework (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) and critical race theory (CRT) (Ladson-billings & Tate, 2000). In the vast body of parental involvement research, both parent and school personnel interviews revealed the need for training and capacity building (Bartel, 2010; Boro, 2015; Mapp, 2003). It is essential to focus on the process of creating shared structures for effective parental involvement, rather than the programming alone (Mapp, 2003).

Parental involvement studies in urban settings often use CRT (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2000) to explore the experiences of African-American parents, specifically exploring the role of race and the impact it has on their children's school experience and educational outcomes (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Watson & Bogotch, 2015; Yull et al., 2014). This parental involvement study used the CRT lens to qualitatively define the role of race in the home-school partnership for African-American parents. The goal of CRT is equity regardless of race or ethnicity (Parker, 1998). Critical race theory is useful in such regard, for it highlights and gives credence to how racism impinges upon the lived realities of people of color (Brown & Jackson, 2013; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

In-depth dialogue with participants explored the perspectives of African-American parents and school personnel to gain a better understanding of parental involvement efforts at the urban school. The study conducted observations of school events and a review of school documents, as well as, facilitation of focus group sessions and interviews to examine the opportunity to build the capacity for parental involvement at the study site. The study also sought to gain a deeper understanding for capacity-building opportunities and identify key resources to overcome those barriers to create effective home-school partnerships. The use of counter-storytelling allowed the non-dominant group, African-American parents, to share their stories that might not be told otherwise (Dixon & Rousseau, 2005). In addition, Dixon and Rousseau (2005) suggested:

The educational experiences revealed through those stories must then be subject to deeper analysis using the CRT lens. Furthermore, CRT mandates that social activism be a part of any CRT project. To that end, the stories must move us to action and the qualitative and material improvement of the educational experiences of people of color (p. 13).

This chapter carefully details the research design, targeted population, and the sampling method, as well as a description of the research procedures for collecting and analyzing data. This chapter also addresses the limitations of the research design and the expected findings.

### **Purpose and Design of Study**

The purpose of the study was to articulate the perspectives of African-American parents and school personnel when it comes to parental involvement at an urban, high-poverty elementary school. Additionally, the study sought to unveil capacity building opportunities for parents and school personnel for effective home-school partnerships. The study also depicted the similarities and differences between the perspectives of parents and school personnel. The compared perspectives of parents and school personnel will help educators, school districts, and policymakers select practical training opportunities to create synergy for impactful home-school

partnerships. Similar parent involvement studies sought to identify the level of involvement in urban schools and strategies used for increased involvement (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Mendez, 2010). However, many studies neglected to capture the perspectives of both parents and school personnel.

In this study, a qualitative research design was implemented to identify and explore parental involvement perspectives of African-American families and school personnel at an urban, high-poverty elementary school. Yin (2011) explains qualitative research design as a research method used to capture the perspectives of participants regarding real-world concepts to interpret and explain these constructs through established or developing notions. This methodology was selected because it allowed participants to communicate their perspectives through open response and candid dialogue openly. Qualitative research was used to gain a greater understanding of specific circumstances faced by participants (Creswell, 2007). In other words, qualitative research design for this study explored how both parents and school personnel perceived parental involvement at the urban, high-poverty school.

Studying parental involvement through a case study approach was significant to the study site to provide recommendations to assist their parental involvement efforts and provide guidance with developing processes and structures for effective home-school partnerships. Through focus group sessions, semi-structured interviews and observations, experiences of parents and school personnel were captured. It is essential to have rapport with participants (Creswell, 2011); therefore, the researcher assumed the role of participant observer and captured field notes during parent involvement activities while also participating in the activities. Data were collected, transcribed, coded, analyzed, and interpreted to unveil themes. This qualitative study followed a case study approach to explore at an in-depth level (Creswell, 2007) of parent involvement perception of parents and school personnel.

## **Research Questions**

The following overarching central question of the study has addressed evolving the home-school partnership at the study site: how can the urban, high-poverty school, build the capacity of parents and school personnel for effective home-school partnerships? The sub-questions to the central research questions include:

1. What are the perspectives of parents and school personnel at the urban, high-poverty school, regarding their role in parent involvement?
2. What are the perspectives of parents and school personnel at the urban, high-poverty school, regarding the challenges/barriers to parent involvement?
3. What role does race play in developing effective home-school partnerships at the urban, high-poverty school?
4. How well, if at all, are parents' and school personnel's perspectives aligned regarding their role in parent involvement?
5. How well, if at all, are parents' and school personnel's perspectives aligned regarding the challenges/barriers to parent involvement?
6. How well, if at all, are parents' and school personnel's perspectives aligned regarding the role race plays in developing effective home-school partnerships?

## **Population**

The urban, high-poverty elementary school in this case study, is a struggling Title I school with persistently low achievement scores. The study site was recently awarded a federal grant in efforts to turnaround the low-achieving status. One of the requirements of the grant was to develop action steps to improve school climate and address the social-emotional needs of students. According to the grant application, these action steps included: replace the principal and at least

50% of classroom teachers, hire a Behavior Coach, engage parents in advisory councils, and establish a Parent Resource Center with the addition of a Parent Liaison to run the center. The study site spent the last three years implementing these reform efforts to turnaround the culture of the school and collaborate with families to develop partnerships for effective school improvement.

According to the United States Department of Education, African-American students are achieving at lower levels than their White counterparts in this midwestern region. The State achievement data for the 2015-2016 school year revealed 55% of African-American 4th-grade students proficient at math compared to 85% of White 4th-grade students. In recent years, the State reading achievement data revealed similar disparities with significantly lower proficiency for African-American 4th-grade students, compared to White 4<sup>th</sup>-grade students (NCES, n.d.). The study site is not exempt from this type of achievement data. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, n.d.), the total enrollment for the 2015-2016 school year was over 300 students. The population served is high minority with over 50% African-American families and more than 80% participation in the Free and Reduced-Price Lunch (FRPL) program.

### **Sample**

Participants in the study were parents and school personnel from an urban, high-poverty elementary school. The sample consisted of African-American parents with children who attended school at the study site before or during the implementation of the 2015-2016 reform efforts. According to State assessment data, African-American students are marginalized when it comes to academics (NCES, n.d.). Therefore, this study focused on the stories of African-American parents. The sample also included school personnel who began working at the study site before and at the start of reform efforts in 2015-2016. Including participants who had direct experiences with parental involvement at the study site provided the most in-depth data (Polkinhorne, 2005). The sample for this study included K-5 parents ( $n=6$ ) and school personnel: principal ( $n=1$ ), parent



liaison ( $n=1$ ), and teachers ( $n=4$ ). Qualitative studies have a smaller number of participants compared to quantitative studies (Richards & Morse, 2007).

Research suggests that it is more important to obtain a range of strong and rich data, therefore focusing on the experiences of participants was crucial (Creswell, 2003; Richards & Morse, 2007). The study selected a small sample of poverty-stricken African-American families and African-American and Caucasian school personnel, to capture the experience of parental involvement in an urban setting. High-poverty was defined by free and reduced lunch status, which is an indicator of poverty. The study population reflected the sample with 84% of students receiving free and reduced lunch and 85% of students identified as a minority.

### **Sampling Procedures**

School personnel was selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling procedure, which is deliberate in selecting participants to gather detailed and relevant data as it pertains to the research questions (Krathwohl, 1998). A recruitment email was sent to school personnel to invite participants. After recruiting school personnel for participation, snowball sampling was used to identify parent participants. Snowball sampling relies on study participants to recommend others to be studied (McMillan, 2012). School personnel offered great insights in identifying prospective parent participants for the research study. The parent liaison was able to recruit parents whose children qualified for free/reduced lunch and attended the school before reform efforts. Once participants were identified the researcher used the contact information provided on the recruitment form to contact participants by phone and e-mail. Consent forms were completed by participants at the focus group sessions. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of participants, and a table summarizing the demographics of each participant was included. Each participant was assigned a fictitious name for their pseudonym.

## **Instrumentation**

Data for this study was collected through face to face focus groups, and as a follow up to the focus groups, there were in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the principal, teachers, parent liaison, and parents. The use of focus groups and interviews for data collection allowed in-depth dialogue between researcher and participants. The focus group and interview questions were not leading. Instead, they were open-ended allowing participants to expand upon their own lived experiences. This was important to allow for probing and asking clarifying questions to gather enough details for thorough data analysis (Creswell, 2012). The interview tool was developed by the researcher, having four sections (see Appendix F). The first section was composed of open-ended questions that will explore the current state of parent involvement at the study site. This section allowed participants to describe their experiences and interactions at the study site. Also, some questions allowed participants to identify any barriers that make parent involvement challenging. The second section of the interview tool included open-ended interview questions developed to explore participants' definition of parent involvement and their role. The third section was composed of open-ended questions sought to explore participants' beliefs regarding the role of race in establishing a positive home-school partnership. In the final section, participants shared demographic information, including race, gender, and years at the study site.

Conducting focus group sessions and interviewing school personnel and parents provided a voice from both stakeholder groups, which is needed for effective involvement. The interview sessions used an interview guide, and participants received the same set of interview questions to ensure dependability (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The interview guide "is a form designed by the researcher that contains instructions for the process of the interview, the questions to be asked, and space to take notes of responses from the interviewee" (Creswell, 2007, p. 226). There was also a guide for the focus group sessions and dependability was ensured by closely

aligning the questions for parents to the questions for school personnel. The study used prolonged engagement. According to McMillan (2012), prolonged engagement is beneficial for eliminating researcher bias as the researcher develops a relationship with participants and spends an extensive amount of time at the study site.

### **Data Collection**

Participants received an invitation to a scheduled focus group session at a public location in the school community. Participants were notified by phone and by a letter through e-mail. In addition, all 12 participants scheduled their interview after the conclusion of the focus group sessions. There was a total of two 60-minute focus group sessions. One session included parents, and the other session included school personnel. The interviews were conducted individually with each participant at their home or a location of their choice. The interviews lasted an hour to an hour and a half long. Each interview began with a brief explanation of the study and participant permission to audio record was obtained. The collection of demographic data, such as race, gender, number of years at the study site, and school role (parent, teacher, family liaison, principal) also occurred.

Data collection also included observations of two events at the study site: The Back to School Night and a Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) meeting. The Parent Resource Center was also observed, which is a room at the school where the parent liaison encourages parent involvement, to which all families are welcome. In addition, school documents were reviewed. For credibility, a journal was used to record field notes during observations. In addition, the interviews were transcribed within 24 hours and member-checking occurred, so the participants were able to critique the findings (Creswell, 2007). Interview data were triangulated to increase the accuracy of the findings. The secondary sources included observations conducted during meetings and events, and review of school documents. The interview tool was piloted with a

principal, a parent, and a teacher from an urban, Title I school. The tool was then revised based on the results of the pilot study, including revision of interview questions based on the feedback from the pilot study.

### **Identification of Attributes**

In qualitative research, constructs are attributes that are not quantified, however, they are measured through qualitative methods (Creswell, 2012). Attributes are used to outline the qualitative case study. The attributes for this study are measured through focus groups and interviews, as well as observations. The following constructs were identified as important, as the current study examined parental involvement through a capacity-building and cultural lens.

**Parent involvement.** Parent involvement is traditionally defined as school and home activities that involve all parents in a variety of ways to support the academic success of students (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Epstein, 2005). Schools often utilize Epstein's (1995) typologies for parental involvement as the framework for implementing parent involvement activities. Epstein highlighted a research-based framework that included six different types of involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. According to several studies, urban schools serving high-minority and high-poverty families often struggle to increase parental involvement under this framework (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Brown & Jackson, 2013; Smith et al., 2011; Williams & Sanchez, 2013). Parental involvement efforts seem to be heavily lopsided with school personnel making most of the decisions and expecting parents to just show up. Existing parent involvement research suggested the need to redefine parental involvement to allow for more inclusive programs, especially for marginalized families (Boro, 2015; Smith, 2006; Young et al., 2013). Therefore, in this study, parent involvement was defined as culturally sensitive programs that bridge the gap between school personnel and all parents to increase positive student outcomes (Grant & Ray, 2015).

**Dual capacity-building.** School reform efforts have mandated more than compliance for effective involvement; instead, districts are expected to build the capacity of all stakeholders to develop strong partnerships. This study provided the opportunity to focus on the process of creating shared structures and capacity building for effective parental involvement in urban settings, rather than focusing on programming alone (Mapp, 2003). According to Mapp and Kuttner (2013), dual capacity-building is when an intentional process is implemented to build the capacity of school personnel and families to develop effective parent involvement strategies, programs, and policies.

**Critical race theory.** Critical race theory (CRT) (Ladson-billings & Tate, 2000) is a vital attribute in the study. The lens of CRT examined parental involvement for critical analysis. Critical race theory is "a framework and a tool of analysis for examining educational practices and structures that continue to subordinate groups of people" (Brown-Jeffrey & Cooper 2011, p. 71).

**Counter-storytelling.** As this study sought to capture the voice of African-American parents, counter-storytelling was deployed. Counter-storytelling allowed for rich data collection as parents are encouraged to share their experiences that often go untold (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Counter-storytelling provided an opportunity to create a shared understanding through this critical analysis (Delgado, 1989).

## **Data Analysis**

Following data collection, the data was organized for thorough analysis. First, the audio responses from the focus groups and interviews, and field notes from observations were transcribed into a Word document and then organized and coded. Organizing the data is central to the data analysis process due to the overwhelming amount of information gathered (Creswell, 2011). The researcher transcribed the interviews within 24 hours and organized into a Word

document. The data was organized by research question and by the participant. Interview responses from parents were kept separate from school personnel responses.

Next, the data was thoroughly analyzed to develop codes, categories, and themes inductively, rather than imposing predetermined classifications on the data. In addition, the data was analyzed to determine comparison among codes. A large poster board facilitated this cross-referencing with codes written on moveable tags for easy movement and arrangement within categories. There was a comparison between coded responses of parents and school personnel. The codes were examined and reduced to discover the common themes. These themes were compared to the literature. Descriptors for each participant was provided. The descriptors included the following demographic data, race, gender, number of years at the study site, and school role (parent or school personnel). Finally, the research findings were presented in figures and tables and interpreted in Chapter 5.

As a parent and educator, the researcher studied a very familiar construct, which could have been detrimental to the study (Berger, 2015). The researcher has a child who attended school at the study site, so it was imperative not to allow the shared experiences to create biases or assumptions when it came to the stories of the participants. A reflexivity analysis was done through a deliberate process of separating one's own beliefs from the stories shared by participants, through ongoing self-reflection and awareness. Participants reviewed the transcripts before coding, to achieve the accuracy and integrity of the data. Triangulation was also used for accuracy in the data analysis. The triangulation of data included utilizing focus groups, interviews, and observations with a review of school documents for data collection. Analyzing secondary documents and field notes from observations helped avoid bias and validate conclusions.

## **Credibility**

For credibility, the interviews were transcribed within 24 hours of data collection. To confirm accurate findings the transcripts were emailed to participants for member-checking, so the participants were able to critique the findings (Creswell, 2007). Member checking is a process where the researcher invites participants to review the data analysis to confirm the findings (McMillan, 2012) accurately. Multiple data sources were collected for triangulation. Some of the secondary sources included observations conducted during meetings and events, review of school documents such as newsletters, school improvement plans, and other school-related materials. Rich descriptions were included in the field notes.

To ensure dependability, all participants were asked the same set of interview questions (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Prolonged engagement addressed researcher bias, which allowed the researcher to develop a relationship with participants and spend an extensive amount of time at the study site (McMillan, 2012). Prolonged engagement also helped with the credibility of findings, as participants appeared to be more comfortable during interviewing and shared open and honest responses.

## **Limitations**

The purpose of the qualitative study was to explore parent and school personnel voice at an urban, high-poverty school, as it related to their perspectives of parental involvement. There were possible limitations to consider when interpreting the findings. The primary focus was on specific perspectives impacted by specific experiences of parents and school personnel. The use of case study for the research method does not lend to broad generalizations of findings. Findings are limited to the involvement level of parents and their point of view. The small sample size limited these perspectives. Although prolonged engagement was used, the findings are limited to the

comfort level of participants and the degree to which they provided honest responses during the interviews.

While the findings contributed to the understanding of parent and school personnel perspectives to identify capacity-building opportunities, the results were specific to only these participants. For example, because all parent participants are African-American, there was a missed opportunity to examine the perspectives of other minority groups who are served in urban settings. The researcher selected African-American parents for the parent participants to extend on the existing parent involvement literature examining African-American families (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Park & Holloway, 2013; Yull et al., 2014). This case study did not include cross-cultural comparison due to time constraints and accessibility.

### **Expected Findings**

In exploring parental involvement experiences and perspectives of African-American parents and school personnel, it was expected that findings would reveal similarities and differences. It was predicted that the shared experiences from participants would reveal disconnect between African-American parents and school personnel. Furthermore, the findings collected regarding the perspectives of White middle-class educators might suggest the lack of cultural awareness, revealing that dual capacity-building is needed to help educators work with a diverse group of families. Existing research has revealed many problematic barriers to parental involvement by conducting school personnel interviews or parent interviews. However, few studies gather perspectives of both parents and school personnel (Hartas, 2011; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Park & Holloway, 2013). By doing so in this study, it was predicted that findings would reveal opportunities to build the capacity of both stakeholder groups for an effective home-school partnership. Although the data analysis was expected to reveal disconnect among parents and



school personnel, the analysis was also anticipated to find a collective agreement that parental involvement is essential for student success.

### **Ethical Issues of the Study**

The researcher in this study is the principal investigator and has a unique connection to the study site. As a parent with a child who formerly attended school at the study site and former school personnel, in the role of Project Manager for the federal grant at the study site, there was a possibility that the researcher may know the participants on a personal level. The personal connection worked as an advantage, as well as a disadvantage. While it was possible participants felt more comfortable to share their perspectives because they knew the researcher, there was also the possibility that participants were reluctant to share personal information out of fear of judgment and use of the shared information.

The researcher appropriated necessary precautions to minimize risk and maximize benefits for all parties. For example, to maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for all participants and the study site was not identified. All participants received a consent form before the interview, which detailed important information regarding the study to ensure participants were comfortable with participating. Some of the information that was explained in the consent form included the purpose and use of the study, storage of data collected from the study, how to withdraw from the study, and what to do if the participant should experience research related adverse effects. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions before signing the consent form. Also, participants were invited to review and comment on the themes that developed during data analysis, and all affirmed the findings resonated with their experiences. Member checking helped address any bias on the part of the researcher.

## **Summary**

This study provided information specific to parent involvement at an urban elementary school, examining parental involvement through the perspectives of parents and school personnel to identify opportunities for capacity building to create effective home-school partnerships. Chapter three outlined the research methods used in the study. The research design was presented, along with a detailed explanation of the interview tool. Through in-depth dialogue with participants, theory can turn to action, as the researcher explored the perspectives of parents and school personnel, gaining a better understanding of parent involvement efforts at the urban school. This chapter described the population and sampling procedures. Step-by-step data collection methods and analysis are provided. To ensure a practical and ethical study, researcher bias and study limitations were addressed, as well as reliability and credibility procedures. The research findings are discussed in chapter four.

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results**

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview of the research findings. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of both parents and school personnel, as it relates to parental involvement at the study site. Furthermore, the study sought to help evolve the home-school partnership at the study site by identifying opportunities for capacity building and unveiling cultural barriers. Research suggests the need for training and capacity building for effective parental involvement in schools (Bartel, 2010; Boro, 2015; Mapp, 2003). The literature reviewed supported the use of the dual capacity-building framework (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). for the study's conceptual framework, which suggested challenges can become an opportunity for building collective capacity, to create the best conditions for parental involvement

In addition, critical race theory (CRT) (Ladson-billings & Tate, 2000) was used as a theoretical framework for a deep analysis of the lived experiences shared through the tenant of the theory, counter-storytelling (Dixon & Rousseau, 2005). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) defined counter-storytelling as “a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told” (p. 26). As the purpose of the study focused on bridging the gap between African-American parents and school personnel, the use of CRT created a lens to valuable insight on the often-disproportionate representation of African-American families in the school-family partnership. The use of the CRT tenant, counter-storytelling, provided a great opportunity for shared understanding to uncover any unconscious biases (Delgado, 1989). The theoretical framework connected the lived experiences of the study participants to the dual capacity-building Framework (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) for investigation and analyses of the research rationale.

During the summer and fall of 2018, parental involvement at an urban, high-poverty school was examined. This was done by capturing the experiences of school personnel and parents

through a case study design with focus group sessions, one on one interviews, and on-site observations. Experiences of the participants were explored to understand the current state of parental involvement at the study site, identify any barriers that make parental involvement challenging, and define participants' beliefs regarding their role in parental involvement. A case study approach was used to understand the participants' perspectives relating to parental involvement at the study site. This research design was chosen to gather rich and descriptive data to support continued efforts to improve parental involvement at the urban, high-poverty elementary school.

When exploring a topic such as effective parental involvement in urban schools a qualitative approach is beneficial, so participants are not limited to statistical data. Instead, they are empowered to have their voices heard (Creswell, 2018). According to Yin (2003), a case study design should be considered when seeking to answer 'how' or 'why' questions. Through the case study design, the in-depth dialogue and observations afforded rich data to address the following central research question: How can high-poverty, urban elementary schools, build the capacity of parents and school personnel for effective home-school partnerships? There are six related sub-questions, which include: (a) How do parents and school personnel at the urban, high-poverty school, perceive their role in parent involvement? (b) How do parents and school personnel at the urban, high-poverty school, perceive the challenges/barriers to parent involvement? (c) How do parents and school personnel at the urban, high-poverty school, perceive the role of race in developing effective home-school partnerships at the urban, high-poverty school? (d) How well, if at all, are parents' and school personnel's perceptions aligned regarding their role in parent involvement? (e) How well, if at all, are parents' and school personnel's perceptions aligned regarding the challenges/barriers to parent involvement? (f) How well, if at all, are parents' and

school personnel's perceptions aligned regarding the role race plays in developing effective home-school partnerships?

Data was collected by facilitating focus group sessions and one on one interviews. The role of participant observer was taken by the researcher to establish rapport and ensure the comfortability of participants. Each focus group session and interview were transcribed and analyzed to unveil themes. This chapter provides a description of the sample, explanation of methodology and analysis, a summary of identified themes, presentation of data and results, and concludes with a chapter summary.

### **Description of the Sample**

**Population demographics.** The study's population was in an urban community in the Midwest region of the United States of America. The study site was selected based upon accessibility and the recent implementation of reform efforts to improve parental involvement at the urban Title I elementary school. At the end of the 2014–2015 school year, the study site experienced high turnover with only four returning classroom teachers, out of 15. In addition, the principal who served as the leader of the study site for more than a decade, retired. In 2015, the urban Title I school started to focus on rebuilding the school culture through the establishment of a Parent Resource Center and hiring a parent liaison to assist with parental involvement efforts. During the 2017–2018 school year, there was approximately 400 students enrolled at the study site. More than 50% of families at the study site were minority or identify as African-American, compared to 90% of school personnel who identified as White. In addition, school personnel at the selected study site were majority female without any males serving in the role of principal, classroom teacher, or parent liaison.

**Sampling techniques.** Study participants were selected deliberately by the researcher, for inclusion purposes to represent the following roles: principal ( $n = 1$ ), teacher ( $n = 4$ ), and parent

liaison ( $n = 1$ ). Purposive sampling method was utilized to obtain thorough and pertinent data as it relates to the research questions (Krathwohl, 1998). This deliberate approach ensured representation of the school leader, four teachers, and parent liaison. The recruitment email was sent to four teachers to include two African-American and two White teachers. The four teachers were also selected based upon their years of experience at the study site. Two of the teachers were selected because they had been working at the study site prior to the recent reform efforts. Parent participants were identified through snowball sampling, which relied on school personnel to recommend parents to be studied (McMillian, 2012). Snowball sampling was necessary to recruit six parents who were African-American with a child or children who began attending school at the study site prior to the 2015-2016 school year when reform efforts were implemented. It was also necessary for school personnel to identify the prospective parent participants, for access to student information to select parents within the parameters mentioned above. The researcher could not access student information, due to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

**Sample demographics.** The sample for the study included school personnel and parents, with a sample size of 12. Table 1 represents a summary of participant demographics. All school personnel participants were female, and half identified as African-American ( $n = 3$ ) and the other half as Caucasian ( $n = 3$ ). The average years of experience at the study site for school personnel were six years. Out of the six participants, four began working at the study site prior to the 2015–2016 school year. Parent participants were all African-American and had a child or children at the study site for an average of six and a half years. The roles of parent participants included mother ( $n = 4$ ), father ( $n = 1$ ) and grandmother ( $n = 1$ ). All study participants were assigned a pseudonym.

Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

Pseudonym	Number of years at the study site	Race
Ms. Frazier	3	Caucasian
Ms. Nelson	6 months	Caucasian
Ms. Davis	12	Caucasian
Ms. Hill	8	African-American
Ms. Edwards	4	African-American
Ms. Thompson	4	African-American
Mr. Franklin	8	African-American
Ms. Carter	4	African-American
Ms. Washington	4	African-American
Ms. Adams	8	African-American
Ms. Patterson	10	African-American
Ms. Clarkson	5	African-American

**Research Methodology and Analysis**

**Research approval.** After receiving IRB approval from Concordia University–Portland, an application to conduct research at the study site was submitted to the school district. In May 2018, the school district granted permission to conduct research. The name of the school district and study site remained anonymous to protect the identity of participants. Once permission was granted, the recruitment of school personnel started (see Appendix D), followed by recruitment of parent participants (see Appendix B). Each participant completed a consent form prior to data collection (see Appendix A).

**Focus group and interviews.** Data collection began with two focus group sessions. To ensure comfortability of the participants to provide candid responses, school personnel and parents had separate focus group sessions. The focus group date and time for school personnel were determined via Doodle poll. The poll was emailed to school personnel participants and the most

convenient date and time was selected. The parent focus group session was scheduled based upon availability noted by parents on the recruitment flyer (see Appendix C). Parent participants were notified and asked to confirm their attendance for the focus group via text message. The school personnel focus group session was held for 90 minutes and the parent focus group was held for 60 minutes. Both focus group sessions took place in a private conference room at a local coffee shop. A focus group guide was created with an explanation of the focus group protocol and eight focus group questions (see Appendix E). Within 48 hours, these sessions were followed by one-on-one interviews for each participant. At the end of the focus group sessions, participants scheduled their one-on-one interview. Participants had the choice of conducting the interview at their home or at a public facility with private space to respect confidentiality.

The average duration for one-on-one interviews was 60 minutes for a total of 12 questions. There were two sets of open-ended questions created for the focus groups and interviews. One set was for school personnel and the other for parents (see Appendix E & F). Open-ended questions were created to explore participants' perspectives regarding parent involvement at the study site, to address the research questions. The focus group and interview questions allowed participants to describe their experiences and interactions with parental involvement at the urban, high-poverty Title I school. The questions were posed to capture participants' perspectives regarding their role, the role of race, and the barriers to parental involvement. The perspectives of school personnel and parents were examined for capacity building opportunities. Participants were able to share examples and personal stories through the open-ended format. With participant consent, focus group sessions and interviews were recorded using a battery-operated audio recorder and personal laptop. The laptop served as a backup to ensure all participant responses were captured. The audio recorder was checked for technical difficulties immediately following the interviews; after verification of successful recording, the audio on the personal laptop was deleted.



**Observations.** In addition to the focus groups and one-on-one interviews, observations and the review of school documents was conducted. During the fall of 2018, field notes were collected during the observation of the Back to School Night at the study site and a Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) meeting. The Back to School Night was held at the study site in August of 2018 from 5pm to 6pm. As participant observer, the researcher was greeted at the main entrance and collected a passport that included destinations to visit during the event. The observation included a visit to the Parent Resource Center, a 4th-grade classroom, and kindergarten classroom. During the observation of the Back to School Night, an observation guide was completed (see Appendix G). The observation guide detailed what to observe, to answer the research questions (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). The guide focused the observation on the roles of school personnel and families. There was also a section to provide field notes regarding the interactions between school personnel and families. This included observing interactions, listening to conversations and being attentive to body language. The PTO meeting was also held at the study site on a Thursday evening, from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. During the duration of the meeting, the researcher participated in the opening icebreaker and completed the PTO meeting observation guide during the duration of the meeting (see Appendix H).

**Data analysis.** Following the focus groups and one-on-one interviews, the recordings were organized for thorough data analysis. The individual interviews began within 48 hours of the focus group sessions and were scheduled back to back. The tight schedule made it difficult to analyze the focus group data prior to conducting the interviews. According to Yin (2011), the first step in the data analysis process is to create a database where data are stored and well organized for thorough analysis. Audio from the parent and school personnel focus group sessions were kept separate and organized into two files. One file was labeled Parent Participants and the other was labeled School Personnel Participants. The audio from individual interviews was also separated by

school personnel and parent participants. Two files were created to store the six school personnel interviews and the six parent interviews. One file was labeled School Personnel Interviews and the other was labeled Parent Interviews. Each interview was saved by participant pseudonyms.

The focus group sessions and 12 interviews were transcribed within 24 hours of conducting the interview. They were transcribed into a Word document and reviewed for accuracy. Transcripts were shared with participants via email for member checking. Member checking is a process where participants are invited to review the data analysis to accurately confirm the findings (McMillan, 2012). There were no discrepancies or revisions noted by participants. After the transcripts were validated, the recordings were deleted, and the data analysis process began. Data analysis began with the focus group sessions. The focus group transcripts were read in their entirety to gain familiarity with the data. All transcripts were read three to four times, followed by line by line coding to develop in Vivo codes. This detailed coding process chunks the data and a code is applied to summarize the thoughts of the participant (Saldaña, 2011). The in Vivo codes were typed in red throughout the transcripts. There were 115 in Vivo codes developed from the school personnel focus group data and 50 in Vivo codes from the parent focus group data. For code reduction, similar codes were highlighted within the Word document and color-coded before transferring the codes to coordinated sticky notes. The codes were placed on a large poster board to determine comparison among codes for each transcript. The transcripts were reread to interrogate the content while reviewing the grouped codes for connections. The codes captured the research story and were combined under similar concepts to develop connecting categories (Saldaña, 2013). The codes for the parent focus group were reduced to 9 category codes and the school personnel focus group was reduced to 15 (Table 2).

The 12 remaining individual interview transcripts were analyzed, following the same process. The interviews were analyzed simultaneously with data collection. This process started

with the individual parent interviews. The interviews were analyzed in chronological order based upon interview date. Each interview transcript was read in its entirety multiple times. Next, line by line in Vivo coding occurred. There was a total of 181 in Vivo codes created amongst the six parent interview transcripts. After the transcripts were coded, several codes were combined to reduce and create new codes, which were highlighted and color-coded. The codes were transferred to coordinated sticky notes. The sticky notes were grouped by color on a large poster board and reviewed to determine connecting categories. As a result, the category codes were created. This process was replicated with the individual school personnel interview transcripts. The initial number of in Vivo codes was 382 for all six of the school personnel transcripts. Once the codes were color coded by the likeness of concept and condensed to avoid redundancy (Table 2), they were transferred to coordinating sticky notes and analyzed to form 25 category codes.

Table 2

*Coding Process*

Data collection tool	In Vivo codes	Code reduction	Category codes	Central themes
Parent Focus Group	50	—	9	5
School Personnel Focus Group	115	—	15	
Parent Interviews	181	45	10	
School Personnel Interviews	382	94	25	

**Constant comparison analysis.** The comparison between data from the focus groups and 12 participant interviews yielded several matching codes. For example, 10 participants had a color code for “Making Assumptions”, this specific code was also identified in the focus groups. The 15 categories were examined for patterns and common themes began to emerge. The categories constructed from the focus group transcripts were examined to determine what was most important. Between the two focus group transcripts, there were nine common categories. The themes were identified by the number of participant responses, the categories with the greatest number of responses became themes. The analysis concluded with five central themes (see Table

3) connected to the central research question: How can the urban, high-poverty school build the capacity of parents and school personnel for effective home-school partnerships?

Table 3

*Emerged Central Themes*

Central themes
1. Create a positive culture built on relationships
2. Use multiple modes of communication
3. Support students at school and home
4. Disconnect between parents and school personnel

**Review of documents.** To increase the credibility of analysis, data from the focus groups and interviews were triangulated with observations and the review of school documents (Saldaña, 2011). The field notes from the Back to School Night and PTO observations were examined for commonalities, as well as discrepancies as it related to the findings. The following documents were collected and reviewed for analysis: School Improvement Plan (2014-2018), Family Engagement Policy (2015-2018), Learning Compact (2017), Parent Resource Center Newsletter (2017). The parent liaison provided these documents used by the study site as a part of their parental involvement process.

To begin, the following five attributes were created to look for during the review: (a) Professional Development for Effective Home-School Partnerships (Giles, 2006; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002; Xaba et al., 2015), (b) Effective Communication (Lawson, 2003; Park & Holloway, 2013; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001; Wyche, 2010), (c) Opportunities for Involvement (Bartel, 2010; Boro, 2015; Cankar et al., 2012), (d) Defined roles in the Home-School Partnership (Sanders, 2008; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001), (e) Schoolwide definition of Parent Involvement (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Brown & Jackson, 2013; Smith et al., 2011; Williams & Sanchez, 2013).

These attributes were based on the themes that emerged from the focus groups and individual interviews, as well as the research questions and conceptual framework. A color code was applied to each attribute to code the documents during the review. The codes from each document were sorted by color and each cluster was compared to the five themes that emerged during the initial analysis. Data excerpts were noted for evidence to support the findings (Yin, 2013).

### **Summary of Findings**

The completion of analysis from the school personnel and parent focus groups, individual interviews, observations, and review of school documents, uncovered five central themes. The themes that emerged from the conversations with school personnel and parents, regarding their lived experiences with parental involvement at the study site are presented in table 3. The first three themes developed from participants' perspectives of their role with parental involvement. School personnel and parents shared their lived experiences, which resulted in comparable perspectives for the role of school personnel (create a positive culture built on relationships and use multiple modes of communication) and parents (supporting students at school and home). In addition, the data collection also led to unveiling the perceived challenge to parental involvement (disconnect between parents and school personnel) and the role of race (R.A.C.E. [Respectful and Culturally-Competent Educators] has a role). The acronym R.A.C.E. was created by the researcher to highlight the participants' perceived role of race, as school personnel and parents emphasized the need for staff to exhibit respect and cultural-competence to work effectively with diverse populations.

The separate focus group sessions for school personnel and parents provided insight into the alignment or lack thereof between the perceived efforts with parental involvement at the study site. Each focus group session resulted in comparable findings regarding the participants' perspectives of parental involvement at the urban, high-poverty Title I school. The one-on-one

interviews supported these findings. Both school personnel and parents were open and willing to share their personal stories and experiences with parental involvement. Using Critical Race theory (CRT) (Ladson-billings & Tate, 2000), the feeling of inadequate cultural awareness for school personnel among African-American families was divulged from counter-storytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In addition, the onsite observations revealed a general consistency between participants' perceived experiences with parental involvement at the study site and what occurred during the Back to School Night and PTO meeting. The findings of the observations related to the emerged themes are summarized in table 4. The five central themes are discussed in detail in the following section.

Table 4

*Summary of Observation Findings*

Central themes	Back to school night	PTO meeting
1. Create a positive culture build on relationships	X	X
2. Use multiple modes of communication	X	X
3. Support students at school and home	X	X
4. Disconnect between parents and school personnel	NA	NA
5. R.A.C.E (Respectful and Culturally-Competent Educators) has a role	NA	NA

*Note.* X was added if the theme was observed and NA is added if the theme was not observed.

**Presentation of Data and Results**

The data from school personnel and parent participants were collected, organized, transcribed, coded, and analyzed. Each transcript was analyzed separately and then compared to uncover aligned and unaligned perspectives. Participants' responses during the focus groups and interviews, along with observations and the document review yielded essential findings. Data and results were presented in this section by participant groups as they related to the six research

questions and emerged themes (Table 5). The name of the study site was not disclosed, and participant names are pseudonyms to maintain anonymity.

Table 5

*Emerg ed Themes Related to Research Questions*

Research sub-questions	Theme	Alignment of perceptions			
		<i>Focus groups</i>		<i>Interviews</i>	
		SP	P	SP	P
1. How do parents and school personnel at the urban, high-poverty school, perceive their role in parent involvement?	1) <i>Create a Positive Culture Built on Relationships</i>	X	X	6	0
	2) <i>Effective Modes of Communication</i>	X	X	5	4
	3) <i>Parents Supporting Students at School and Home</i>			6	6
2. How do parents and school personnel at the urban, high-poverty school, perceive challenges/barriers to parent involvement	4) <i>Disconnect between parents and school personnel</i>	X	X	6	4

3. How do parents and school personnel at the urban, high-poverty school, perceive their role of race developing effective home-school partnerships at the urban, high-poverty school?	5) <i>R.A.C.E. (Respectful and Culturally-Competent Educators) has a role</i>	X	X	4	6
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*Note.* The alignment of perceptions for school personnel and parents are reflective of research questions 4, 5, and 6. SP= School Personnel and P= Parent.

## The Role of School Personnel and Parents

**Theme 1: Create a positive culture built on relationships.** The first emerged theme was to create a positive culture built on relationships. All participants provided their perceptions regarding their role in parent involvement. During the one-on-one school personnel interviews, all six participants acknowledged their role as important when it comes to cultivating a positive school culture and building relationships with parents. This role was also mentioned during the school personnel focus group session. Many of the school personnel participants did not have to think twice about the importance of relationships for parental involvement. During the interview, Ms. Hill sat up and leaned in as she explained her perspective of her role in her students' schooling:

That relationship is the most important thing for me and I have to, I have to build upon that. I have to build relationships. I'm like, I need the student to see the relationship with me and the parent or the Guardian or whoever it is to understand that it's a whole village



concept. Create a partnership with parent for students to see it's not just your teacher when you're here telling you to do whatever, it is the whole village here and it's going to take that whole village. So, I'm really big on relationships.

Ms. Nelson perceived relationship building as a role that brings comfortability for families to be involved at the school. For example, Ms. Nelson explained her role in action with the following details:

I try really hard to get to know parents on a first name basis, be able to greet them by name. I like helping to get kids into cars after school, just to be able to put a face to kids' parents or caretakers, or whoever's picking them up just to be able to say, hi, how are you? Have a great night. What are you guys doing tonight? This helps to build relationships with families, which then I hope helps to make them feel more comfortable as they come into our school.

Collectively, school personnel shared that they believed relationship building was the prerequisite to parental involvement. One of the focus group questions asked, what do teachers do to promote high levels of parental involvement in their students' education? The response build relationships were blurted out by one participant and then echoed throughout the room as other participants chimed in with their perspectives. Ms. Davis added, "So, definitely I think the relationship is a huge key and especially like I heard Ms. Hill say, start off with that. And really just letting the parents know that you obviously are there for their child or children."

Over the course of this study, the importance of relationship building as a role for school personnel regarding parental involvement was referred to multiple times. During the one-on-one interviews, all six participants shared the importance of positive relationships with parents.

Ms. Davis added more about cultivating a positive climate built on relationships:

Building that relationship is very important and I'd like to start that right away, you know... even just introducing myself before school even starts. Establish relationship early, I think that sets it off on a positive note... you never want the first interaction to be negative.

Similar perspectives were communicated by Ms. Edwards. She believed it was her responsibility to ensure parents and students are left with a positive experience. According to Ms. Edwards, "I view my role as very important to be there and connecting with them [parents]. I want them [parents] to remember their child's teacher, and I want that memory to be something positive." The important role of creating a positive environment and building relationships was a repeated response from school personnel. The parent liaison echoed this important role:

It's a very important role. Be someone to reach out to parents and where parents can come in a feel relaxed and feel welcomed into the school. I believe it changes the dynamic of the parent's relationship with the school. We are able to learn what parents expect from the school and they learn what the school expects from parents.

This perceived role for school personnel was not mentioned during the individual parent interviews. However, it was revealed during their focus group session.

The six parent participants were asked about the role of school personnel in promoting high levels of parent involvement. Immediately the parents began to reflect on their experiences with the past and current principals of the school. According to Mr. Franklin, "I know that the first one [principal] did a great job. Engaged with the community and built relationships with families." After this statement, more parents began to share their experience with the principal who led the school for more than 15 years, prior to the implementation of the 2015-2016 reform efforts. For example, Ms. Patterson added:

Well, I've been there for three principals as well and I got to give the first principal a standing ovation for me. Even when I see him now that he's retired, when I see him, he is still showing me the same love as if we're in the school building. He's always positive and cares enough to ask about me and my kids.

**Field notes.** During observations of parental involvement events at the study site, school personnel were seen building relationships with families. On August 13, 2018, the Back to School Night was observed at the study site. Families and students filled the school to meet their teacher for the school year. The principal was seen greeting families at the front entrance and making rounds throughout the building to interact with families and students. In one 4th-grade classroom, the teacher greeted families as they entered the classroom and instructed students to find their desk. Aside from the required district paperwork for student contact and census information, there was a welcome packet on each desk. The packet included a welcome letter from the classroom teacher. The letter provided information about the teacher including family structure and pets, teaching experience and philosophy, and classroom expectations. Teachers asked parents to complete a survey to help the teacher get to know the parent and their child. On the other side of the school building, relationships were being formed in a kindergarten classroom. Similar to the 4th-grade teacher, this teacher greeted families with smiles and welcomed them into the classroom. There was a professional photographer there to capture family pictures. A bulletin board display was inside the classroom. The board had a large empty space with the title "We are Family" in the middle. The teacher told students and families, "in this classroom we are family, and I can't wait to learn more about all of you." She also explained that the pictures would be printed and displayed on the bulletin board.

In addition to the Back to School Night, a PTO meeting was observed at the study site. There were four parents, the school social worker, the parent liaison, and four teachers in

attendance. This was the first PTO meeting of the 2018-2019 school year. Parents interacted with one another and with school personnel. It was apparent that school personnel had established relationships with parents as one parent was eager to get over to one of the teachers. The parent greeted this teacher with a hug and said, “I’m so glad you’re back!” The parent was referring to the teacher relocating and teaching in a different city the previous school year. The teacher smiled and replied, “I am glad to be back!” The meeting was facilitated by the parent liaison and it started with introductions and an icebreaker. The following icebreaker activity was an example of the level of importance of relationship building, placed by school personnel. The parent liaison shared the superhero theme with attendees and started the icebreaker activity:

Welcome to the superhero headquarters, I’m sure you can just look around and figure out our theme for the school year (points to a large cutout display of Superman). Think of yourselves as heroes, because our theme is superheroes. Teachers went through superhero boot camp and we can’t do this without you. Think of your superhero name and your superpower.

Attendees laughed with each other as they began to think of their superpowers and what their superhero name would be. One parent volunteered to share first. She stood up tall and said, “I am Uber Mom and my superpower is being at all my kids’ activities at one time.” Other attendees started to whisper to one another about how that would be the best superpower. Next, a teacher shared her superhero name and superpower, “Hi everyone, I am Spy Teacher and I have the powers to teleport parents into the classroom, and the best part is, students cannot see them.” Parents clapped in approval of this superpower and one parent gave the teacher a high five.

**Theme 2: Use multiple modes of communication.** The second theme is use multiple modes of communication. School personnel participants believed it was their responsibility to effectively communicate with parents for parental involvement to occur. Based on school

personnel responses during the focus group session, this is done by multiple modes of communication from. For example, Ms. Fraizer stated:

My biggest part of trying to increase parental involvement is communication, whether it's through phone calls or face to face contact or email or Class Dojo, you connect with the parent to let them know that you and that parent together are there for their child and to let them know that you are invested in making sure their child succeeds."

Class Dojo is an app for positive behavior reinforcement, and it allows teachers to communicate with parents through information sharing (Kaldor, 2014). With this communication tool, parents receive instant messages from teachers through text messaging or email. Ms. Nelson explained the use of Class Dojo as a schoolwide communication strategy to increase parental involvement:

I would say at our school, well I can't speak to prior to November, but I would say after December we had what I feel like an increased level of at least parent awareness of what was happening in our building through the use Class Dojo. Use communication tools to increase parent awareness like an app where we could connect with peers and teachers were proactive about posting pictures of what was happening in their classrooms to help parents be able to have conversations with kids about what was happening at school and then also to be able to communicate with teachers immediately about whatever it was, how a student's day went really well or they needed some support at home with this, or they're not going to ride the bus home tonight or whatever that was.

The other four participants nodded their heads in agreement as Ms. Nelson explained the use of the Class Dojo by teachers as a communication tool for parental involvement.

In addition, during the individual school personnel interviews, five out of six participants identified using multiple modes of communication as their role in parental involvement. Some of the different modes included communication apps, as well as in-person contacts. During the one-

on-one interviews, participants were asked to define parental involvement. While defining parental involvement, many identified their role within the definition. For example, Ms. Hill's definition of parental involvement included communication between the teacher and parent. She detailed her role in this communication:

I use Class Dojo all the time and that's my communication piece. I also have a website that my parents would go to all the time. If you don't get the homework, if you don't look in that backpack you can go on that website and get the homework. I leave you with no excuses. You pull up that website and you pull up that homework because it's right there.

The other participants' perceptions were aligned with Ms. Hill's belief about her role and communication. Ms. Davis explained her role in communicating with parents:

Communication with parents is important because they're the experts on their kids. Who better to go to if there's questions or concerns or even for celebrations? They [parents] have been with them from the start, I mean the ones who were their very first teachers. I try to communicate with families in the mode that works best for them. It has been phone calls, emails, newsletters, notes home and messages through Class Dojo.

Similarly, the focus group session for parent participants revealed communication as an important role for school personnel, including using multiple modes of communication. This was also the same for the one-on-one parent interviews. Compared to the five school personnel participants, four of the six parent participants shared this perspective during their interviews.

During the parent focus group, parents expressed gratitude for the open-door policy created by teachers for communicating. According to Mr. Franklin, "teachers set up the Class Dojo and also communicate through emails. I would always feel like there was an open-door policy that you can always go and talk to the teacher. I love it!" He began to reflect on what communication

consisted of over the years his children have attended school at the study site. Mr. Franklin continued:

For as long as I can remember, even with my son who has graduated, they [teachers] would always give me a syllabus, introducing who they were, what they were going to do, and how I could get in contact with them. Then, you know, they would have a page on the back, you know, send that back to them so they can stay in contact with me.

During the focus group, session parents were asked to finish this sentence, when I think about being a partner with my child's teacher, I feel. This prompt led Ms. Adams to discuss the role of communication, "I feel better about them [my children] learning because this teacher is communicating with me, so we could communicate together to teach this one child, that shows me that this teacher got the best interest for this child." When Ms. Clarkson defined parental involvement during the one-on-one interview she stated, "involvement is teachers communicating. We communicate via text and Class Dojo. Teachers can also call and email." Parent participants believed it was the role of teachers to use multiple modes of communication to share student progress. According to Ms. Carter, "the teacher will text, call, or email me to let me know how my granddaughter is doing." This data was triangulated with the on-site observations.

**Field notes.** The observations of the Back to School Night and PTO meeting at the study site confirmed this theme. In front of the school, there is a large marquee near the main road. The marquee is double-sided, which made it possible to see the sign whether families are headed East or West. The study site used the marquee as a communication tool to share upcoming events with parents and the community. The marquee contained pertinent and up to date information. At the PTO meeting, the parent liaison provided a September calendar for parents. The calendar detailed all school events for parents' knowledge and convenience. Communication emerged during the review of school documents as well. There were multiple newsletters from the parent liaison. The

study site sends home monthly newsletters with information from the Parent Resource Center. The newsletters contained upcoming school and community events. There was also a section on the newsletter that shared contact information for the parent liaison and available resources in the Parent Resource Center.

**Theme 3: Parents supporting students at school and home.** Although the focus group data revealed the role of school personnel, the role of parents was determined from the individual interviews. According to the perspectives of school personnel and parents, the third theme that emerged was parents supporting students at school and home. All 12 participants included the role of parents in their definition of parental involvement. Participants were asked to define parental involvement and all responses revealed the importance of parents being present to help their child be successful. The six school personnel participants perceived the role of parents as being active in their child's education and more than visibility at the school. Ms. Nelson stated:

I think it [parental involvement] could run a range of levels of involvement for some parents. Involvement means having to be at work at times when other parents might be at school. It's [parental involvement] just being a follower on social media and paying attention to what's happening in school and supporting kids with homework or making sure that they're in bed on time and prepared for school.

Ms. Hill also viewed the role of parents beyond being visible at school. In her definition of parental involvement, she said, "it's not necessarily seeing the parents, but it's the environment that they have with the child. This could include helping with homework." The common perception shared by school personnel suggested parents as supporters of their child(ren) at school and home. Ms. Thompson also shared her perspective:

Parents are involved in their kid's life, not just a school, but also at home. With homework, communicating with the teachers, and being at the school having a presence at



the school. Also wanting to know what's going on in the school and how they can be a better parent or better help kids with their homework.

The theme of parents supporting students at school and home emerged from the parent interviews as well. The six parent participants shared their lived experiences as parents being involved in their child(ren)'s education. Parents were asked to define parental involvement, which revealed their perceived role. Ms. Carter shared, "involvement is being active with the teachers, communicating with the teachers. Going into the school more and being hands-on to see what they actually is teaching the kids and doing with the kids. I also reinforce the importance of education at home." Another parent, Ms. Washington, defined parental involvement as "being aware of like your children's grades, who their teacher is and how they're doing academically and behaviorally. Making sure they have good study habits at home." This theme is also supported by the data that emerged from the interview question about the role of parents. During the one-on-one interviews, parents were asked how they view their role. Ms. Clarkson described her responsibilities as being the enforcer at home. She explained her role as, "following through with some type of work at home, whether it's the 20 minutes of reading a night or trying to keep the screen time down." Ms. Adams expressed her desire to be more involved by being at the school, she shared that it was her role to support her children and she knew she needed to get better with her role:

My role is critical. I need to be there to boost my child's confidence. I promised my baby girl last year that she will see me way more. In 2018, I wanted to do more things with my children, be more present, more visible.

There was an agreement among parent participants that the role of parents in parental involvement entails supporting their child(ren) at school and home.

When asked to explain what support at home and school support looks like, many of the parent participants provided both traditional and nontraditional involvement activities. Homework

help was a common traditional at home involvement activity. All six participants mentioned homework help to support their child(ren) at home. Two parents discussed at home involvement in a more nontraditional way. For example, Ms. Adams stated, “it’s my role to monitor the whereabouts of my children and teach them responsibility and how to make good choices. Let me see your phone. Let me know who you talking to you, where you go and who was this.” Volunteering at school and attending PTO meetings was mentioned by all parent participants. Ms. Carter explained her traditional role at school as, “volunteering at the school to help with whatever they [the school] need and participate in PTO meetings.” Three of the parents discussed their involvement at the school to support all students. They mentioned the African Proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child.” When Mr. Franklin explained his involvement at the school he stated:

I see my role as much needed and important, not only for my child but also to be a positive role model for all students when I come into the building. There are a lot of single moms raising kids and they may not have a positive male in their life, so I can be an influence because it takes a village.

Parental involvement at school extended beyond the support of their own child(ren). Ms. Patterson mentioned the importance of her role to network and build relationships with other parents:

I am hands on with all the kids, even the ones that are not mine. Me and some of the other parents have a relationship. They know sometimes I’m in the classroom and if they don’t mind I will look after their child, you know, I’m not stepping on no toes. I’m not trying to take mom role, but I’m here to help the village.

**Field notes.** The observations of parental involvement activities at the school site provided evidence to support the perceptions of the traditional and nontraditional role of parents. Parents attending the Back to School Night and PTO meeting aligned with the perspective of parents participating in involvement activities at the school. In addition, while observing a kindergarten

classroom during the Back to School Night a parent inquired about homework. The parent asked the teacher if students would receive homework. She inquired, “my other kids bring home a homework packet on Mondays and it’s due on Thursdays, will you do something like this?” Networking and supporting the village perspective was supported by the interactions between parents during these events. While observing the Back to School Night many parents were seen greeting one another throughout the building. Some parents shared their child’s classroom number to see if their children were assigned to the same classroom. One parent decided to help a child who came to the event without their parent. After asking the child where his mom was and learning that she had to work, the parent insisted on taking the child to visit his teacher, “your mom should have called me, she knows you could’ve rode with us. Come on I’ll take you to visit your teacher.” Parents were observed in their role as a supporter of students at school and home. The theme supporting students at home and school emerged during the review of school documents as well. The study site has a learning compact that states it was jointly developed with parents. The compact outlines the role of the teacher, parent, and students in the home-school partnership. The compact included traditional roles for the parents, such as volunteering in the classroom, attending involvement activities, and homework help at home.

### **Challenges/Barriers**

**Theme 4: The disconnect between parents and school personnel.** Data revealed a disconnect between parents and school personnel as the fourth theme. This theme related to the second research question, how do parents and school personnel at the urban, high-poverty school, perceive challenges/barriers to parent involvement? To answer this question, participants were asked several questions about the challenges and barriers to parental involvement. Data revealed 10 out of 12 participants’ experiences reflected a divide between school personnel and parents. The school personnel and parent focus group sessions revealed similar findings.

During the focus group sessions, participants were asked to identify challenges for parents, principals, and teachers when it comes to increasing parental involvement. Both school personnel and parents shared challenges/barriers that involved a perceived gap in the home-school partnership. Participants in the school personnel focus group shared their lived experiences with parental involvement at the study site to communicate perceived barriers. School personnel believed challenges for parents came from teachers assuming parents do not want to be involved and then deciding not to involve parents. For example, Ms. Hill stated:

I've heard conversations at our school. We have parents have to work because they're taking care of the children, so salt and sugar looks the same, so it can look one way to you, but you have to learn more to know what it is. That goes back to that relationship. You have to know parents to know their barriers. You have to know what's really going on. I've heard this conversation too many times. I'm not going to send home homework because they're not going to do it, but we have to know that the parents in our community are working sometimes two and three jobs, so take all that into consideration before we make these irrational judgments of who they are and how much they're willing to contribute to their child's education.

Data from the parent focus group supported this statement. Ms. Adams shared conflicting work schedules as a challenge for parents. When asked what the challenges of parental involvement were for parents, she replied, "it's the scheduling. Sometimes some of the hours that we work, it's not always easy to get off work and be there." The other parents agreed with the challenge of work schedules making it difficult to be involved. None of the participants mentioned parents refusing to help students with homework as a challenge during the focus group. However, one school personnel participant mentioned parents choosing not to be involved as a challenge during her one-on-one interview. Ms. Frazier stated, "I think the biggest challenge is parents out there

that aren't as involved, and they could be, and they should be and they're not, you know? That's a challenge and that's sad. That's heartbreaking." This was followed by a probing question; do you know why those parents aren't involved? Ms. Frazier replied:

It could be their upbringing, or maybe they just don't want to. Maybe they just choose not to. Maybe there's not really a real concrete reason for it, other than they just choose not to be involved. I mean I'm sure they have their own reasons, but I don't know.

This perspective aligned with the school personnel focus group finding. Although teachers do not know why some parents are not involved, they assume it is a choice.

Data from the remaining four school personnel individual interviews was like the focus group. The participants discussed the challenge of teachers assuming lack of involvement was a parent choice. For example, Ms. Nelson shared:

It's a challenge when there's no relationship between the teacher and parent, it is easy to assume an absent parent is not involved. If you look on any given night at my own kids' basketball games or you know, things like that, I myself may or may not be there, but that doesn't mean that I don't care or that I don't want to be there. It means I might have something else going on and I can't be there, but it doesn't mean that I don't come home and ask them about it or want to know about it or that I'm not texting about how it's going.

Ms. Edwards stated:

I think the greatest challenge is making assumptions without finding out the true reason. I think a lot of times they [teachers] feel like the parents don't want to be involved, don't need to be involved and don't care to be involved; versus finding out why this parent not involved. Find out what involvement looks like for them, even if they can only come to the two parent-teacher conferences...maybe that's a large step forward mixed with that parent.

Ms. Hill also shared the challenge of teachers assuming parents do not care:

Parent involvement is a challenge when some teachers feel like their time is wasted. Some teachers say why are we going to be up here for math night because nobody's coming. If parents don't come there's a reason why, so be here for the ones that do show up. When teachers assume parents don't care they [teachers] don't go the extra mile.

Ms. Thompson shared her experience:

A lot of teachers say that parents don't call back. Teachers call, they [parents] don't return their call. Teachers send things home and they don't get a response back from parents. And my thing is just keep trying, you know. Just because they didn't answer the phone a couple times, just keep trying. If you see parents dropping students off, like hey, introduce yourself. Because a lot of parents feel intimidated by teachers, you know, or they don't know how to come to the teacher with a child when they have a concern about their child. Parental involvement is difficult when a lot of teachers or staff think that parents don't care, but they [parents] do care.

Four out of the six parent interviews revealed similar findings. According to Ms. Clarkson:

Trying to find ways to connect the parents and the school can be challenging. Some of the teachers don't really know what to do or what to expect as far as our culture and the demographics that they're dealing with. Everything from how people show up to things... Are they on time? Do they bring the whole family? Do we need to order more food? Are parents going to RSVP? Knowing what parents are interested in, which that doesn't have to be so much of culture, it's just having a relationship and knowing what interests them.

Like the school personnel interviews, Mr. Franklin shared a challenge of parents not being involved:

Some parents choose not to [be involved] because they only hear from the school when it's something negative. If they had positive calls or some updates on how they can support the teachers in the school, I think you would have a lot more parent involvement and a lot more positive interactions with the parents and the schools.

Lack of involvement from some parents was also mentioned by Ms. Adams. She stated, "it can be challenging when there are parents who are hands-on and some who just aren't." Likewise, Ms. Patterson stated, "just not having the same parents all the time. We got to figure out how to get other parents involved and get other parents engaged. That's the challenge." The perceptions detailed above demonstrated most participants believed the challenge with parental involvement was the disconnect between school personnel and parents.

Furthermore, during individual interviews school personnel participants were asked if they visited the homes of families, why or why not? Home visits are a research-based strategy for effective home-school connections (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). All most all school personnel admitted to not visiting homes of the families at the study site. Ms. Edwards expressed her willingness to visit homes, but due to her lack of knowledge for the structure of home visits she had not done so. She went on to explain her reasoning for not visiting homes and why she would be willing to visit homes in the future:

For one I just felt like, um... it's not necessarily for me, but for them [parents]. I felt like it's more of a neutral type of atmosphere. They're [parents] in their comfort place versus them coming to the school type thing. On top of the fact that it opens it up to a personal aspect, you know, so that's my main reasoning behind it and to be able to get to know and meet the parents.

Three more participants shared their perspectives on home visits as they were willing to visit homes but chose not to because it was not a requirement. For example, Ms. Davis shared:

I'm absolutely willing to. I think I actually wish that it would almost be a requirement because your home life speaks so much to who you are as a person. Home visits should be required. It can just tell so much about who you are and maybe why you do things. I learn more about the student and family. Oh my God, that would be awesome! But it also gives you a different perspective because you're in their environment and them in their environment is usually very different from what you see in the school and events.

The remaining two participants shared their experiences with visiting homes and the structure and purpose were quite different. Ms. Nelson never went inside the homes of families, but she made mention of picking up students from their home to get them to school or provide rides from school to home. On the other hand, Ms. Hill would not have it any other way. Home visits were a necessity for Ms. Hill. A huge grin with a look of satisfaction appeared on her face as she began talking about her home visits:

Oh, I need... I need for them to understand that, that I'm okay coming into your home, that I don't have a problem with where you live because I'm part of the community that I actually teach in. I do home visits to show I'm connected to the community. You know, my mom is right up the street from the school, so I was raised in that community. But I think any community that I would teach in I would want to do those home visits. Let them [families] know I'm part of this too, so we're all together. I'm not afraid to come to your house.

## **The Role of Race**

**Theme 5: R.A.C.E (Respectful and Culturally-Competent Educators) has a role.** The final theme is R.A.C.E. (Respectful and Culturally-Competent Educators) has a role, which illustrated the participants' experiences as an African-American and with African-Americans at the study site. Regardless of race, 10 participants communicated the importance of respect and



cultural awareness to develop effective-home school partnerships. This importance was also communicated during the focus group sessions. During the school personnel focus group session, participants were asked if they thought it was necessary to hire staff who were culturally competent and from the community where they will be working with parents. Overall, participants believed effectiveness was dependent on the background and upbringing of school personnel; therefore, cultural proficiency training was necessary. Ms. Nelson stated:

I think it's all in the way that you talk to each other and they know that you're open to things. More about respecting each other. I've had several parents say to me like, I was worried about having a White person here, but you're the right person for the job.

Ms. Fraizer added:

I think that having classes or trainings help people to understand each other. I haven't walked a mile in your shoes and you haven't walked a mile in mine. I was not from this community, but it has been a learning experience having the opportunity to work in this community since 2000.

Ms. Hill also reflected on her experience:

I've had several teachers in the building tell me that I can say certain things because I'm Black, and I tell them I can say that because I have a relationship. People assume my race allows me to say certain things but it's my relationship, it has nothing to do with my race. I can say that because I have a relationship with whoever I'm talking to at the time. I bet if you had a relationship you could say the same thing.

Ms. Thompson confirmed:

I think it all comes down to relationships that you create and it's creating an environment where people learn to understand what their biases are. Be aware of how to appreciate and learn about the people they are around and people that maybe are different than them.

Ms. Davis agreed, "I do think that we need to provide cultural competency training for people and it's just about how to understand our world better and the people that maybe weren't raised like you were." School personnel even offered suggestions for effective training. Ms. Frazier suggested:

Cultural proficiency training should be a building-wide requirement, because not everybody is selecting to go to the district offerings and those are the people maybe that don't want to change or don't want to admit that they do have certain glasses they look through or just don't know or just are not aware of their biases.

Ms. Edwards also believed cultural competency training was important, but she had a different view on the role of race. She explained:

I think it needs to be a ton of training to address biases. I think it's a Black and White thing. The majority of the teachers in the school, including the principal, are White and the majority of the kids and families in the school are Black. Due to stereotypes and the

way that society is today, there's that tension between the two. Race contributes to the fear teachers have of parents and parents have of teachers.

Despite this one blatant perception of an issue between Blacks and Whites, the parent focus group session revealed similar results as the common perspectives from the school personnel focus group. The parents agreed that teachers did not have to be reflective of the school population in their race but should be culturally competent and willing to build relationships. For example, Mr. Franklin stated:

I think they [teachers] should be culturally competent and your heart has to be in it. My whole thing is you can be African-American or whatever race, but if your heart's not in it, don't do it because if you're there for just for a check, our kids get the short end of the stick.

After probing, Mr. Franklin explained what he meant by the short end of the stick, "their [students] learning could be impeded due to teachers who are not culturally competent. When your heart is in it, it is shown through respect and forming relationships." He also shared his compassion for teachers:

I think that there is a lot that needs to be improved on and there's a lot of areas that has fallen short and a lot of it is not in the teacher's control because I've talked to a lot of teachers that grew up in rural areas within riverbed and never exposed to black neighborhoods or in that environment. And then you expect them to go out there on an island without training.

The other participants nodded in agreement.

The individual interviews revealed similar perspectives regarding the role of race. Based on the results of the data all participants referenced the need for some sort of cultural awareness for educators who work in diverse settings, and 10 out of 12 participants expressed the need for continuous learning. Six school personnel participants were asked do you believe you are effective

in working with families of diverse cultural backgrounds? This question was associated with their perceptions of the cultural competencies of school personnel at the study site. Only two participants replied with a definite yes, while all others mentioned the capability of being effective with training. After Ms. Frazier answered the question with “I do,” the question was followed with a probe to further understand her response. The probe asked what makes you say yes? Can you give me an example of a time that you were effective in working with a family of diverse cultural backgrounds? Ms. Frazier added:

I think it’s just my own background. Um, growing up in diversity, I lived with or in and around and went to school with many different cultures. I was exposed to different cultures at an early age, so I think that to me everybody’s a friend and I see everyone as a friend. It’s just the way I was brought up, so I didn’t ever have any preconceived notions about any culture or ethnic group ever. Never had biases towards certain groups, and I think that’s my trump card because I don’t have any filters to get through. I don’t have anything to fix.

There was no example provided for a time where Ms. Frazier was effective working with a family of diverse cultural background. Ms. Hill also replied yes, but she provided an example of her effectiveness:

Yes, those that understand me I do. I go to the house and knock on the door. There was a family who didn’t speak English, and I bought the baby a bouncy seat. I did not have a translator, but I say your smile is universal and love is universal, and we just smiled our way through it. I’m like baby seat (made a gesture with arms like rocking a baby) and that’s about it. So yeah, I have relationships with my ELL (English Language Learners) students because we have a universal language. Everybody understands it. One time I had a student, and her mom didn’t understand English to fill out paperwork. I sat down with

her and we just went through it. Baby, I was trying to speak Spanish. It's important to communicate with everyone. So, I might not be successful with everybody, but overall, yes, I believe I am. Being kind and showing respect is a universal language. And you need that relationship. You build that early on, you smile, hug, you love their kids.

The remaining four school personnel participants were modest in their response and perceived their effectiveness as a continuous learning opportunity. For example, Ms. Davis replied, "I think so." During the probe she mentioned an experience when she had a student who was interested in dance, so she attended the student's cultural dance performance and learned about the different types of dances. Ms. Davis concluded:

I always bring it back to relationship because this is a relationship building piece, but it's also learning. Building relationships and learning; I want to know about your culture. I want to know about your beliefs. I want to know about your interests and what do you do outside of school. I mean me being usually the minority in the classroom that I'm teaching, it's important to know. I don't want to not show respect or be ignorant ever.

Another example was Ms. Thompson, she stated:

I think I'm getting there, I think I'm learning. So, this is like going on the third year [in the position], and then just learning each year. I've just been aware of the different cultures that we have at our school to get them more involved.

In addition, Ms. Edwards stated:

I have to say I believe there's always new things to learn. I wouldn't say, you know, I'm capable of working with children who fall under my same race status. I wouldn't say that's necessarily true because there are so many different avenues within everybody's culture. So, one thing I try to do is understand, and ask if I don't know. It doesn't

necessarily mean I have to agree with everything, but it is my responsibility to be respectful of whatever values or culture.

Finally, Ms. Nelson shared:

So, I think that I am effective in creating relationships with families of diverse cultural backgrounds. I always say I feel like I can get along with anyone no matter what culture they come from, just because I think that's what makes our world go around and I love that. I love learning about all different people and I have such respect for people of all different walks of life because I just think it takes such strength to be in so many people's shoes. I like that, and I feel like that's the way I approach relationships with anyone that I need, and so that has helped me to be successful in building relationships with families. I feel like from that standpoint I've been successful. I can say that just from the feedback that I've got from almost all of the families that I've interacted with have made a comment about, 'I'm so glad you're here,' or 'you're way different than what we've had before.' Do I think I can do a better job of understanding what our families would want or need for sure? Yes.

The theme R.A.C.E. (Respectful and Culturally-Competent Educators) has a role, emerged from the parent interviews as well. All parent participants discussed the need to understand the demographics served. This was not limited to a race, but rather the perception that school personnel in general, should learn, understand, and be aware of various cultures. Six parent participants were asked do you believe staff are effective in working with families of diverse cultural backgrounds? Ms. Washington stated:

I feel like some teachers are, and I feel like the ones that are not maybe need a little bit of training. More training is needed, because I feel like if you not really used to dealing with this kind of dynamic, then you not gonna have the skills to deal with that dynamic.

Training and awareness were mentioned by Ms. Clarkson:

They are doing their jobs as far as teaching. Some are missing the connection, but maybe they can attend some cultural awareness workshops. Cultural awareness workshop or maybe someone one on ones with the parents. Learn from parents. The teachers are doing a pretty good job teaching black children because I would hate to say that just because teachers are a different race they can't teach black kids. I think it's important for everyone to know how to connect and be aware of the culture around them.

This was supported by Ms. Carter's perception. She stated, "I believe a lot of them don't try to interact with the parents or communicate with the parents. Sometimes they try to take matters into their own hands with the kids and parents see this as lack of respect." Like the perceptions of school personnel, parents believed staff are capable of effectively working with diverse families when properly trained. For example, Mr. Franklin stated:

I think there's a lot of people who try hard and they care. They try, but I think that there is a lot that needs to be improved on and there's a lot of areas that has fallen short and a lot of it is not in the teacher's control. The poor training, poor diversity, and cultural sensitivity ends up affecting the partnership.

Ms. Adams stated:

I'd say they are very capable. More training can be helpful, but very capable, very doable. It can be done with training. There are some who already had that training, that had that knowledge, that understand and know, and there's some that still need that, but it's doable. It's capable, you just gotta want to do it.

Ms. Patterson had a unique perspective regarding the ability of staff to effectively work with diverse families. She passionately compared her experience between principals:

It depends on who's over the school. I got to say that the first principal that I had, I seen the structure. I saw the beliefs. I saw the improvement. I saw the respecting your input. When I went to PTO meetings back then, you know, they got my input and didn't set it to the side, you. They would help me communicate my input and reword it. I'm like I didn't think about wording it like that because I'm just a blunt person. The first principal allowed parent voice, even if I wasn't the most professional. I don't mean no harm, don't take it the wrong way, but this is how I feel, and this is maybe using the wrong word, but don't wring me by the neck for that. This was effective because it made me be more engaged. Then when that principal left, the new principal came in, and it was shut down (Ms. Patterson slammed her fist on the table). We [parents] did not feel like we could give input. The principal was up there, while parents were beneath. We became disengaged and did not want to do PTO. Certain teachers pulled us back in and respected us. It feels like a family.

**Field notes.** The review of school documents yielded similar findings regarding the level of implementation for cultural competency training. The 2017-2018 school improvement plan included parent and community involvement as the school climate goal. The strategy to achieve this goal was provide opportunities for parents and community members to volunteer and be a part of the following programs at the study site: Mobile Food Pantry, Parent Workshops, Family Nights, Parent Resource Center (Parent Room), Interventions/Tutoring support, Energy Bus, Book Trust. The study site depended on increased activities for parents to improve parent involvement. In addition, the 2017-2018 professional development plan did not include any cultural awareness workshops or training to help implement parental involvement.



## **Summary**

Chapter four provided an overview of the participants in the study and the data collection process, with a detailed explanation of the data analysis process. The findings were revealed with the emerged themes in narrative form. This study sought to answer a central research question and six sub-questions, which focused on perspectives of parental involvement at an urban, high-poverty Title I elementary school, and the alignment or lack thereof of their lived experiences. The dual capacity-building framework (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) provided a continuum for shared learning to develop effective parental involvement programs: the challenge, opportunity conditions, policy and program goals, and family and staff capacity outcomes. The conceptual framework is used in chapter 5 to discuss the five central themes and share conclusions. Chapter 5 also includes recommendations for future research, as this study addressed the gap in research related to the dual capacity-building for parents and school personnel for effective home-school partnerships.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to unveil capacity-building opportunities for parental involvement. The study sought to capture the parental involvement experiences of school personnel and African-American parents in one urban, high-poverty elementary school. Decades of research highlights the benefits of parental involvement for both students and parents (Makgopa & Mokhele, 2013; Tran, 2014; Watson, Sanders-Lawson, & McNeal, 2012; Wilder, 2014).

Existing parental involvement research highlights the benefits of cultivating an environment that thrives on positive interactions and trusting relationships (Auerbach, 2009; Fiore, 2016; Malone, 2015; Swanson et al., 2011).

Due to the benefits of parental involvement, education reform efforts continue to push the parental involvement agenda. Schools are tasked with the role of implementing parental involvement programs to bring about student success. However, schools are struggling to advance the parental involvement agenda because working with parents is not an easy task for teachers (Edwards, 2016). There are known benefits of parental involvement; therefore, research suggests the need to focus on building the capacity of stakeholders to form successful partnerships.

According to Glueck and Reschly (2014) “the influence of and rationale for schools partnering with families is well established, and scholars are increasingly calling for a shift in research focus from the question of ‘why’ to more process-related questions of ‘how’ and ‘what’ works” (p. 298). This chapter summarized and discussed the results of the study. The discussion of the results will include an overview of the relationship to the conceptual framework and parental involvement literature. Followed by the limitations of the study and the implications of new knowledge. This chapter will conclude with recommendations for further research and a concise conclusion.

## **Summary of the Results**

Through this qualitative case study, parental involvement experiences of school personnel and African-American parents led to the identification of opportunities for capacity-building, to increase parental involvement. Mapp and Kuttner's (2013) dual capacity-building conceptual framework played a critical role for the school personnel and parents because each component tied into their perceived roles, challenges, and perception race, all necessary for successful capacity-building. This qualitative case study examined the perceptions of school personnel and parents regarding their lived experiences with parental involvement at the study site. A growing body of research identified culture to be a barrier to effective parental involvement in urban schools (Grant & Ray, 2018; Watson & Bogotch, 2015; Yull et al., 2014). This research was conducted at an urban, high-poverty elementary school. The study site and participants were purposefully selected. Most of the school's population was African-American. The study's sample included 12 participants, including six African American parents and six school personnel (principal  $n=1$ , teachers  $n=4$ , parent liaison  $n=1$ ). The qualitative case study design employed an in-depth dialogue, revealing perceptions of school personnel and parents.

The data collection occurred through focus groups, one-on-one interviews, observations, and review of school documents. As detailed in chapter 4, findings from the collected data, the triangulation of data sources, and data analysis process led to five emergent themes: create a positive culture built on relationships, use multiple modes of communication, parents supporting students at school and home, disconnect between school personnel and parents, and R.A.C.E. (Respectful and Culturally-Competent Educators) has a role. The term R.A.C.E. is an acronym that was developed by the researcher to communicate the role of race based on the perspectives of participants. The study's data was interpreted through the lens of Mapp and Kuttner's (2013) dual

capacity-building conceptual framework to answer the central research question and six sub-questions. The themes addressed the research questions as they reflected the roles of school personnel and parents, challenges and barriers, and the role of race as it related to parental involvement at the study site. The identified roles for school personnel included: create a positive school culture built on relationships and use multiple modes of communication. Parents supporting students at school and home was highlighted as a role for parents as participants defined parental involvement and parents shared their beliefs regarding their role. Participants also shared the belief that a disconnect between parents and school personnel is a challenge for parental involvement. Concerning the role of race, school personnel and parents placed great emphasis on the need for school personnel to respect the beliefs and values of all families and participate in training to enhance their cultural competencies.

## **Discussion of the Results**

The central research question asked: *How can the urban, high-poverty elementary school build the capacity of parents and school personnel for effective home-school partnerships?* Five central themes emerged from the focus groups, individual interviews, observations, and review of school documents. The emergent themes indicated an opportunity for capacity-building in the areas of school culture and relationships, communication, at home and at school involvement activities, parent and school personnel disconnect, and cultural proficiency. Listed below in Table 6 are the five central themes and descriptions. This section discusses the five themes in relation to the research sub-questions.

Table 6

*Description of the Five Central Themes*

5 Central themes and descriptions					
Themes	Create a positive culture built on relationships	Use multiple modes of communication	Parents supporting students at school and home	Disconnect between parents and school personnel	R.A.C.E. (Respectful and Culturally-Competent Educators) has a role
Aligned research question	RQ1	RQ1	RQ1	RQ2	RQ3
Description of theme	Participants' experience with interactions between school personnel and parents at the study site and the perceived role of school personnel for increased involvement	Participants' experience with communication at the study site and the perceived role of school personnel for increased involvement	Participants' definition of parental involvement and the perceived role of parents for increased involvement	Participants' reflections of their experiences with challenges/barriers to increased parental involvement	Participants' personal beliefs regarding the role of race in developing an effective home-school partnership

**Theme 1: Create a positive culture built on relationships.** Create a positive culture built on relationships was the first theme that emerged. Both school personnel and parent participants identified this theme during the focus group sessions, and again during one-on-one interviews with six school personnel. The theme emerged from the participants' as they explained the role of school personnel in parental involvement. Participants believed it was essential to create positive interactions for parents to feel comfortable and welcomed when visiting the school. When school personnel discussed the role of creating a positive culture built on relationships, it was not limited

to a specific position. The principal, teachers, and parent liaison perceived this theme to be their role in parental involvement.

On the other hand, parent participants identified this role as a role for the school principal based on their experience at the study site. These lived experiences shared by parents captured their perceptions regarding the role of school personnel with parental involvement. During the focus group session with parents, they were asked to explain what teachers and principals do to promote parental involvement. When discussing the actions of principals, participants shared their experiences with the former principal who spent time nurturing relationships with families and students. It appeared that parent participants cherished the relationship they established between the former principal who was in leadership at the study site before the implementation of the 2015-2016 school improvement reform efforts. Multiple parents shared examples of engagement and relationship building when explaining the former principal's efforts to promote parental involvement. The parents credited their involvement to the positive and caring interactions with the principal at the study site. The observations of parental involvement events at the study site confirmed the perspectives of creating a positive culture built on relationships is the role of school personnel, as the principal, teachers, and parent liaison were observed having positive interactions with families and being intentional about relationship building.

According to the findings, the perspectives of school personnel and parents aligned as it relates to the role of school personnel at the study site, although parents emphasized the role of the principal. These findings suggested an opportunity for ongoing capacity-building for the role of school personnel. "Capacity building implies that people take the opportunity to do things differently, to learn new skills and to generate more effective practice" (Harris, 2011, p. 627). Capacity-building for positive school culture and home-school partnerships should consist of more

positive interactions and team building activities between school personnel and parents during involvement activities, like the interactions observed during the PTO meeting. Capacity-building for positive relationships should be integrated throughout the day to day business of the school. With this level of intentionality, the study site would build the capacity for a welcoming environment and establish relationships with families to increase involvement as teachers and parents become more comfortable to interact with one another.

**Theme 2: Use multiple modes of communication.** Use multiple modes of communication was the second theme identified by participants. Most participants perceived the use of multiple modes of communication as a school personnel role. Both focus group sessions captured this theme. School personnel and parents alike discussed how multiple modes of communication was used by school personnel to promote parental involvement. During the individual interviews, five school personnel shared their beliefs that communicating with families was included in their role, and four parents also viewed communication as a school personnel role. Although parents were not asked to explain the role of school personnel during the one-on-one interviews, defining parental involvement exposed their perceptions regarding roles. Parent participants defined parental involvement as teachers communicating with parents through a variety of modes. When explaining the communication role, school personnel and parent participants mentioned more than one utilized communication method. While communication was perceived as an essential role for school personnel, the emphasis on the multiple modes was apparent. For example, Ms. Davis considered parents as the experts of their children and believed it was important to stay in constant communication to work together for the success of the student. At the study site, school personnel were intentional about learning the preferred methods of communication for parents. During the Back to School Night, classroom teachers were observed

providing parents an opportunity to share the mode or modes of communication that works best for them.

According to school personnel in the study, the following communication tools are used to communicate with parents: in-person meetings, phone calls, emails, newsletters, notes home, and Class Dojo. The findings revealed the use of multiple modes of communication as a role for school personnel, in which parents perceived as an open door to communicate with teachers. The findings showed that the study site implemented school-wide communication use and school personnel had the capacity to use multiple modes of communication effectively. Furthermore, the findings suggested capacity-building for school personnel and parents in communication was implemented systematically for increased parental involvement as all school personnel utilized the same multiple modes of communication. In addition, parents also made mention of the same modes of communication. Furthermore, they showed their awareness of the communication tools and the ability to use the tools as they explained their experiences with different modes of communication. This finding reveals the likelihood that some level of training occurred for parents to learn how to access and use communication tools, such as Class Dojo.

**Theme 3: Parents supporting students at school and home.** As a result of the data analysis procedures, parents supporting students at school and home emerged as the third theme. Participants were asked to define parental involvement and what they believed their role was. All 12 participants identified the role of parents in their definition of parental involvement. Most of the school personnel's perspectives of this role for parents included more traditional parental involvement activities at school and home, such as visiting the school for parent-teacher conferences and family nights and helping with homework at home. Overall, school personnel expected parents to have a presence at the school, communicate with teachers, seek parenting tips, and provide homework help.



Contrary to this, some of the parent participants included nontraditional involvement activities for school and home. Some examples of nontraditional activities include teaching children responsibility, closely monitoring their children, and visiting classrooms to help all children. The findings revealed alignment among the perspectives of school personnel and parents for the role of parents with parental involvement. However, there was a discrepancy between what the involvement activities could entail.

The review of school documents provided evidence for this perceived discrepancy. A learning compact was reviewed, which served as an agreement for parents, students, and school personnel, concerning their roles in the home-school partnership. The learning compact recognized traditional activities, such as volunteering at the school, attending parent involvement events, and homework help at home. None of the parent roles included nontraditional activities (i.e., monitoring the whereabouts of students at home, creating networks of support and developing relationships with other parents, taking an interest in the success of all students). These findings showed school personnel perceived the role of parents from a more traditional perception, and these traditional perceptions did not capture the nontraditional roles described by parents. In this study, the parent liaison perceived her role to be important in bridging the gap between the school and families as school personnel and parents learn expectations from one another; however, the discrepancy between participants understanding of parental involvement suggests the need to develop the parent liaison further. Developing the parent liaison role would include capacity-building for the parent liaison to in turn help enhance the skills and knowledge of school personnel and parents for true collaboration. This capacity-building could be in the form of district-provided training held monthly or quarterly with cohorts of other parent liaisons in the district. Investing in the parent liaison with training would provide greater insight and perspective when it comes to partnering with families.

**Theme 4: The disconnect between parents and school personnel.** The disconnect between parents and school personnel emerged as the fourth theme. This theme developed as school personnel and parents shared their lived experiences with challenges and barriers to parental involvement at the study site. During the individual interviews, 10 participants credited challenges and barriers as a divide between parents and school personnel. Six school personnel and four parent interviews reinforced this theme. Experiences shared during the focus group sessions supported this perceived division. School personnel shared stories about some of their colleagues making a conscious decision to not involve parents in their child(ren)'s education, because of their assumption that parents will not participate in involvement activities or their misconception that parents do not care to be involved. A personal experience from school personnel confirmed these assumptions made by teachers. Ms. Frazier shared her frustrations with parents who are not involved, as she attempted to understand what causes their lack of involvement. She admitted to not knowing the reason to some parents' lack of involvement but assumed learned behavior from their parents could be a cause. The disconnect became apparent as parents shared their experiences with challenges and barriers to parental involvement. Out of the four parents whose lived experiences revealed this theme, none of which communicated lack of involvement as a choice on their end. The four participants shared challenges to involvement caused by conflicting work schedules and negative interactions with the school. What appeared to be without having to give much thought, Ms. Adams shared her inability to get off work to attend school events as a challenge to her involvement.

The findings exposed a perceived disconnect between parents and school personnel, as Mr. Franklin's perception emphasized the need for positive school culture and relationships. During his interview, he suggested parents choose not to be involved, not because they do not care but rather school personnel's lack of care. Mr. Franklin made a plea for the school to initiate more

positive interactions with families for parents to be more involved. These findings supported the need for relational capacity-building to foster positive teacher-parent relationships. Relational capacity-building entails the study site providing more opportunity for school personnel and parents to work together in a way that removes barriers and stigmas for true partnerships to form. For relational capacity-building, these opportunities would not be the traditional math night held at the school. Instead, activities such as home visits and story circles are recommended.

**Theme 5: R.A.C.E (Respectful and Culturally-Competent Educators) has a role.** The fifth theme that emerged was R.A.C.E (Respectful and Culturally-Competent Educators) has a role. The theme developed by exploring participant perspective regarding the role of race in parental involvement. According to the data analysis, 10 participants perceived respectful and culturally-competent educators as a role in developing effective home-school partnerships, rather than race alone. The focus group sessions also revealed this theme. Parents placed an emphasis on cultural awareness for teachers at the study site; it was more so their ability to connect with and care for all students. Findings from the parent focus group showed that parents believed culturally-competent teachers were vital. According to Mr. Franklin, students are at a disadvantage when they are taught by teachers who are not culturally competent and fail to connect with students in a caring way.

There was an overwhelming agreement amongst school personnel as they perceived respect and cultural proficiency training was necessary to address biases and develop culturally-competent educators. Several school personnel shared their concerns with the current cultural proficiency professional development that is offered for staff. Cultural proficiency training for the school site is offered through the school district and is not a requirement for all staff to attend. School personnel believed the offerings are a step in the right direction but would be most effective when implemented in every school with all staff. During the focus group, Ms. Frazier shared her worries

that optional cultural proficiency training does not adequately address biases because they allow teachers the choice to not learn or change, by not participating.

The individual interviews supported the school personnel's recommendation of developing culturally-competent educators. Out of six school personnel, only two believed they were effective at working with families from diverse backgrounds, and out of the two, only one was able to share an example of how they are effective. This inconsistency confirmed the need for required training, as some school personnel could believe they are already culturally-competent and choose not to attend training. On the other hand, the remaining four school personnel communicated a need for ongoing learning to know and understand the different cultures throughout the study site, regardless of race. Ms. Edwards believed it was her responsibility to learn about cultures to respect everyone's values continually. As an African-American teaching African-American child, she believed she was not exempt from learning new things to understand her students and their families better. However, she also believed racial tensions exists between school personnel and families due to the difference in race. Ms. Edwards suggested cultural proficiency training to address biases and stereotypes.

Parents' perspectives were closely aligned with school personnel, as parents believed educators could be effective in working with families and students no matter if their race was different. Parents did not believe school personnel was racists. Instead, parents credited the ineffectiveness to lack of cultural awareness. For example, Ms. Clarkson noted the inability of some school personnel to relate to the demographics served. She suggested cultural proficiency training and the opportunity for teachers to learn from parents as a solution. The study site has a unique opportunity to address the lack of cultural awareness through schoolwide initiatives. The school would embed cultural proficiency in the school improvement and professional development plan. Findings revealed, the study site recently added parental involvement as a goal in the school

improvement plan; however, the professional development plan which supports the school improvement plan for effective implementation did not include any cultural proficiency workshops or training. This evidence supports the recommendation of revisions to the school improvement and professional development plan to include a comprehensive plan for building capacity in cultural competency at the study site.

### **Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Frameworks and Literature**

Prior to data collection for the current study, a review of parent involvement literature was conducted. The plethora of available research suggested efforts to involve minority families in their child's education comes with many challenges (Bartel, 2010; Boro, 2015; Cankar et al., 2012; Kingston, et al., 2013; Mapp, 2003; Robert, 2011), but there is hope when schools are intentional in the development and implementation of parent involvement initiatives (Auerbach, 2009, 2011; Giles, 2006; Sanders, 2008). The current research study was designed to address the gap in the literature by capturing the voice of school personnel and parents to examine parental involvement through a cultural and capacity-building lens. The purpose of the current study focused on bridging the gap between African-American parents and school personnel, the use of CRT (Ladson-billings & Tate, 2000) created a lens to valuable insight on the often-disproportionate representation of African-American families in the school-family partnership. In addition, examining the perspectives of school personnel and parents at the high-poverty, urban school unveiled several capacity building opportunities, which reflected the conceptual framework and literature. A discussion of the results in relation to the frameworks and literature is presented.

**Critical race theory.** Critical race theory (CRT) (Ladson-billings & Tate, 2000) served as the theoretical framework of the study. CRT is often used to explore the experiences of African-American parents in urban studies, in efforts to define the role of race and the impact it has on the school experience and educational outcomes of minority students (Howard & Reynolds, 2008;

Watson & Bogotch, 2015; Yull et al., 2014). “Critical Race Theory is based significantly on culture; its adherents not only recognize this but emphasize it” (Calmore, 1995, p. 324). Culture was significant in this study as findings highlighted the lack of cultural proficiency training for school personnel.

As the current study examined parental involvement through the CRT (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2000) lens, R.A.C.E. (Respectful and Culturally-Competent Educators) has a role emerged as the final theme. Through this discovery, there is need for the study site to engage in capacity-building to enhance cultural awareness for school personnel to work effectively with diverse cultures without enforcing a colorblindness perspective. Colorblindness perspectives are counterproductive to the work of CRT (Ladson-billings & Tate, 2000) as cultural competency tends to overshadow the implication of racism in society (Abrams & Moio, 2009). Capacity-building for cultural competencies should include the revelation that cultural biases stem from comparisons to the standard of White America (Auerbach, 2011; Calmore, 1995). One could argue that some traditional parental involvement activities are culturally bias, as the study findings revealed school personnel limits parent involvement to traditional roles. In addition, the literature explained how minority families are often involved in ways not recognized by the school (Boro, 2015; Jackson & Remillard, 2005; Lawson, 2003; Watson & Bogotch, 2015). The rich data from parent voices in the current study mirrored the concept of parents marginalized by traditional parental involvement roles.

***Counter-storytelling.*** The use of the counter-storytelling tenant of CRT (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2000) allowed minority participants to share their lived experiences, in comparison to the dominant stories, also known as narratives shared by non-minorities (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). According to Dixon and Rousseau (2005), "one of the functions of a ‘counter-story’ is to provide a means to counteract or challenge the dominant story" (p. 11). One-on-one interviews provided a

space for open dialogue. During these interviews African-American school personnel shared remarks made by their White counterparts that often-labeled parents and prevented involvement. It was also suggested that race had a negative impact on parent-teacher partnerships. One African-American teacher stated during the interview, “race contributes to the fear teachers have of parents and parents have of teachers.” This teacher’s perspective was a result of her lived experiences. Through counter-storytelling the teacher shared the racism her family endured as she attended a predominately White school in the 1960’s. Fear caused by race was also referenced as one school personnel shared how families doubted her effectiveness because she was White.

Overall, participants were reluctant to suggest race was a dependent factor for building home-school partnerships. For example, one parent immediately avoided suggesting the need for predominately African-American schools to have teachers who reflect the school’s demographics. She stated, “The teachers are doing a pretty good job teaching Black children because I would hate to say that just because teachers are a different race they can’t teach Black kids.” Another parent shared a story about a teacher who provided misinformation during a lesson of Malcolm X, only sharing negative narratives about the prominent Black figure. This parent did not blame the teacher but deferred to the lack of training. The parent explained, some teachers are from rural areas with little exposure to Black communities and they do not receive training to work with diverse families. The perspectives of participants indicate an implicit reference to race as being salient in parental involvement, though such was understood in their belief in cultural competency.

Cultural competency seemed to be consistent with existing research in parental involvement using CRT (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2000) as the theoretical framework and the tenant counter-storytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), parents voiced concerns with disproportionate suspension rates for African-American students and suggested the need for cultural competency (Howard, 2008; Watson & Bogotch, 2015; Yull, et al., 2014). According to

the findings of the current study, it is advised to challenge the ideation of colorblindness and incorporate race conversations into capacity-building initiatives for cultural competency. While participants only suggested the need for cultural competency training for the study site, their counter-stories revealed their concerns with racism. Racism is a mixture of individual, institutional, and cultural aspects (Calmore, 1995). School personnel were not perceived as racist at the study site; however, the literature (Howard, 2008; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Watson & Bogotch, 2015; Yull, et al., 2014) and participant voices revealed institutional racism as prevalent in the dominant culture. Examining parental involvement through the CRT tenant, counter-storytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), captured the lived experiences of African-American parents and school personnel unveiling the need to build capacity for cultural competency without dismissing the role of race.

**Dual capacity-building framework.** The dual capacity-building framework (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) guided this qualitative case study. The dual capacity-building framework for Family-School Partnerships is an ideal support structure that has been shown to yield increased knowledge and skills for all stakeholders, rather than expecting involvement to increase with program implementation alone (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Through this framework parental involvement challenges become opportunities for shared learning and processes, to create the best conditions for successful family-school partnerships. The following are the four components that comprise the dual capacity-building framework: the challenge, opportunity conditions, policy and program goals, and staff and family partnership outcomes.

***The challenge.*** The Challenge is the first component in the dual capacity-building framework, which refers to the struggle many schools face in supporting positive home-school partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). As seen in figure 1, parental involvement efforts are ineffective at The Challenge stage of the framework. The struggle stems from the lack of capacity-



building opportunities for school personnel and parents. The study revealed the following challenges: unaligned parental involvement expectations for the role of parents (Parents Supporting Students at School and Home), school personnel not understanding the barriers parents face for involvement (Disconnect between School Personnel and Parents), and lack of cultural proficiency training for all school personnel (R.A.C.E. has a role).

***Opportunity conditions.*** Opportunity conditions are the second component of the framework, which addresses the available opportunities for capacity-building. This component is not one size fits all, instead "opportunities must be tailored to the particular contexts for which they are developed" (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013, p. 9). In addition, there is a need to consider the effectiveness of capacity-building to ensure participants learn and walk away with new knowledge because of capacity-building and structures are in place for sustainability. The study uncovered five themes, also known as opportunity conditions. The themes are noted in the next section with the necessary conditions for effectiveness as detailed in the conceptual framework.

***Process conditions.*** Process conditions detail what parental involvement initiatives must include to build the capacity of school personnel and parents effectively. Mapp and Kuttner (2013) outlined five process conditions and the themes from this study highlighted two of the five. The theme of Parents Supporting Students at School and Home was an opportunity condition for capacity-building. For promising results, developmental process conditions are necessary as the study site implements capacity-building for the parent liaison. The developmental process conditions exhort resources to the training and growth of stakeholders to enhance their skill set and confidence level to transform parental involvement. Sanders (2008) highlighted the benefits of using trained parent liaisons to assist schools with developing involvement activities most relevant to parents.

The other theme that emphasized a process condition was Disconnect between School Personnel and Parents. According to the study, not all school personnel at the study site understand the perceived barriers of parents as it relates to their involvement in their child(ren)'s education. This unawareness revealed a capacity-building opportunity to address the disconnect between school and home. Research suggests capacity-building with relational conditions, such as home visits and parent workshops with story sharing (Auerbach, 2009; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). According to the study findings, school personnel are willing to make home visits. More specifically, they understand the potential the home visit strategy has for changing perspectives. Strategies like this would allow parents to view school personnel as an equal rather than viewing them as judgmental. Besides, teachers would gain a better understanding of the challenges and barriers parents face to replace assumptions with solutions and increase parental involvement (Christianakis, 2011; Sanders, 2008; Smith, 2006; Watson & Bogotch, 2015). Relational conditions allow participants to develop a positive and trusting relationship for effective capacity-building to occur.

*Organizational conditions.* Organizational conditions are deemed necessary for schools to achieve fidelity and sustainability. The theme Create Positive Culture Built on Relationships presented an opportunity for ongoing capacity building for positive home-school partnerships. All participants in this study expressed the importance of a welcoming climate with trusting and positive relationships among school personnel and parents. The process condition for this capacity-building opportunity is integrated, where the initiative is not implemented in isolation but integrated into all aspects of parental involvement initiatives. According to Mapp and Kuttner (2013) initiatives must be integrated, meaning "capacity-building efforts are embedded into structures and processes such as training and professional development, teaching and learning, curriculum, and community collaboration" (p. 10). One researcher suggested the use of workshops

facilitated by school personnel where parents and school personnel learn about one another through story sharing and teambuilding activities (Auerbach, 2009). Creating a positive school culture comes from the intentionality of the school principal to create a shared vision with school personnel that reflects the importance of collaboration with parents and not limiting the involvement of parents to a helper role (Auerbach, 2011; Christianakis, 2011).

One cannot expect the collaboration to occur without building the skill set of school personnel and parents for relational partnerships. Capacity-building for positive school culture built on relationships should be integrated. It will not come in the form of training on how to be positive or friendly and should not be an add on to school initiatives. For example, past studies have highlighted the implementation of transition programs as successful strategies for bridging the home-school connection and creating a welcoming school climate (Boro, 2015; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013; Xaba et al., 2015). Ongoing workshops with team building opportunities are ideal capacity-building strategies for schools to build positive home-school partnerships.

The following themes (opportunity conditions) shared the same organizational condition: Use Multiple Modes of Communication and R.A.C.E. has a Role. Systematic is the shared organizational condition for these two identified themes. Capacity-building must occur across the board to make a difference (Sharrat & Fullan, 2009) meaning all school personnel at the study site needed to learn the importance of communicating with families and develop their skill set to use multiple modes of communication. New ideas are not enough to create school-wide change (Harris, 2011), without systematic capacity-building effective communication would be done in pockets, not allowing a system change for parental involvement (Boro, 2015). Using multiple modes of communication through a systematic organizational condition was supported by a grounded theory study where findings suggested the need for a system-wide definition of parental

involvement, involving all stakeholders if schools wished to have parents actively involved (Young et al., 2013).

As the research confirms, communication is often a challenge for parental involvement. During the data collection of this study, participants shared different modes of communication used by school personnel to interact with parents and keep them informed. The shared modes of communication were closely aligned, and the principal shared the decision to implement Class Dojo as a schoolwide communication initiative. In a study by Park and Holloway (2013), African-American parents became more involved when schools communicated necessary information. The results of the current study revealed the involvement of parents because of a systematic approach to building the capacity of school personnel and parents to use multiple modes of communication. A systematic communication initiative was implemented in a high school credit recovery program resulting in decreased dropout rates and increased parent involvement (Kraft & Rogers, 2015).

There is an excellent opportunity for the study site to implement systematic capacity-building for cultural proficiency to develop respectful and culturally-competent educators. In this study, school personnel and parents did not shy away from the discussion of culture and the ability of staff to work with diverse families. Most participants were open to implementing cultural proficiency training at the study site, as school personnel was adamant about a schoolwide initiative. This openness is not always the case as noted by Giles (2006) the school leader was reluctant about schoolwide cultural proficiency initiatives and reverted to cultural awareness needs on an individual basis. Another researcher explained the reluctance of teachers to implement cultural competencies as they questioned the need (Cleveland et al., 2011). The study site should include cultural proficiency training for all stakeholders in the professional development plan to help achieve the parental involvement school improvement goal.

***Policy and program goals.*** Most of the study's findings on the topic of capacity-building to increase parental involvement at the urban, high-poverty elementary school, reinforces the policy and program goals of the conceptual framework and extends the reviewed literature. The policy and program goals focus on building the capacity of school personnel and parents in the areas of capabilities, connections, cognition, and confidence. According to Mapp and Kuttner (2013):

Many schools and district family engagement initiatives focus solely on providing workshops and seminars for families on how to engage more effectively in their children's education. This focus on families alone often results in increased tension between families and school staff: families are trained to be more active in their children's schools, only to be met by an unreceptive and unwelcoming school climate and resistance from the district and school staff to their efforts for more active engagement. have a role in developing the home-school partnership.

The emerged themes support the concept of policy and program goals for effective partnerships.

***Capabilities.*** Capabilities enhance skills and knowledge for trusting teacher-parent relationships through cultural competency for school personnel to connect to the community where they work (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). The current research study sought to close the gap between school personnel and African-American families for increased parental engagement. The results confirmed findings from existing literature. For example, researchers suggest strengthening the home-school partnership, by addressing both explicit and implicit biases that are often harbored about African-American families and those living in poverty (Grant & Ray, 2018; National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2011; Yull et al., 2014).

According to the current study, these biases are addressed through Respectful and Culturally-Competent Educators (R.A.C.E.). This study found that the race of school personnel

was significant in bridging the gap as participants perceived a need for cultural competency, in which Calmore (1995) identifies culture as significant to critical race theory. During data collection, school personnel and parents shared the belief that educators do not have to be African-American to work with diverse families effectively but should receive adequate training to address cultural biases. When educators lack cultural knowledge, there is a significant risk that deficit thinking will be reinforced (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). This showed the capacity-building framework was supported for all school personnel to enhance capabilities in cultural proficiency to develop effective home-school partnerships.

Capabilities addresses capacity-building as parents need enhanced skills for supporting their child (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). The role of parents emerged as participants defined parental involvement. There was a great consensus that the role of parents is to support students at school and home. During the in-depth semi-structured interviews of both school personnel and parents, participants shared their perspectives on involvement activities. The data analysis process revealed a discrepancy between what school personnel and parents perceived. Parents explained involvement with nontraditional activities, which were not reflected by school personnel. According to the literature review, when it comes to at-home involvement, parents are involved in ways that are not traditionally recognized by the school as involvement, such as discussing the importance of education and encouraging their child to succeed (Mapp, 2003). This was illustrated in the current research study when parents perceived at home involvement as knowing the whereabouts of their child and knowing what they are involved in outside of school. Contrary to the perceptions of school personnel, which included homework help and reading at home as involvement activities. Jeynes (2011) suggested low-income families are involved in more subtle ways and it is crucial for schools to acknowledge the way economically disadvantaged parents support their children.

There is a need for capacity-building to identify and honor the parental involvement roles of parents. Existing research suggests, minority and low-income parents are often labeled and have roles set by the school which limits their involvement (Roberts, 2011; Sanders, 2008). This supports the findings of this qualitative study that developmental initiatives are necessary to build the capacity of school personnel and parents so that they can gain a better understanding of parent roles in parental involvement.

*Connections.* Connections reinforce the need to build respectful and trusting teacher-parent relationships as it focuses on enhancing essential relationships, including parent-parent (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). Relationship building is a critical role for schools to implement parental involvement (Auerbach, 2009; Blankstein & Noguera, 2012; Kuperminc, Darnell, & Alvarez-Jimenez, 2008; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). After interviewing the parents at the study site, the findings revealed there were more principal-parent relationships perceived than teacher-parent. As parents shared their perspectives regarding the roles of school personnel, they accredited relationship building to the principal. This study produced evidence that aligned with existing parental involvement research that principals increase parent involvement when they create a welcoming environment for families and help foster positive teacher-parent relationships (Auerbach, 2009; Gardiner & Enomoto 2006; Giles, 2006). This study provided insight based on the perspectives of school personnel and parents that positive culture and relationships can increase parental involvement. It is suggested that teacher-parent relationships strengthen when principals provide capacity-building opportunities for teachers.

Research conducted by Auerbach (2009), indicated that home-school partnerships are strengthened by principals who build the capacity of teachers and engage them as facilitators of parental involvement activities. The parent liaison in the current research study was observed facilitating a Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) meeting and engaging both teachers and parents.

This observation supports connections as the study site was intentional in using school personnel to foster relationships between staff and parents, as well as parent-parent relationships.

Communication is a crucial piece to relationships and was another role identified by participants in this research as the role of school personnel. This theme ties to the connection component of the conceptual framework for dual capacity-building as both parents and school personnel learn to interact through multiple modes of communication. The perspectives of school personnel and parents showed agreement that using multiple modes of communication was the role of school personnel. Research suggests that involvement opportunities exist; however, the mode of communication is often ineffective and unsuccessful (Kraft & Rogers, 2015; Park & Holloway, 2013; Wyche, 2010). School personnel was responsible for cultivating parental involvement through effective communication.

*Confidence.* Confidence relates to the need for school personnel and parents to have a level of comfortability and self-efficacy for effective partnerships among diverse individuals (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). As noted before, examining the study through the lens of this framework supports the need for a welcoming school environment for positive school-parent relationships and cultural proficiency training to understand diverse backgrounds (Christianakis, 2011; Sanders, 2008; Smith, 2006; Watson & Bogotch, 2015). The study results highlighted the importance of relationships for school personnel and parents to comfortably participate in shared learning opportunities that would enhance their confidence.

*Cognition.* Cognition addresses assumptions and beliefs to help school personnel and parents commit to a partnership (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). The study results were captured through this viewpoint of cognition as participants revealed a disconnect between school personnel and parents as a challenge for parental involvement. Parents shared their lived experiences regarding their perceptions of what makes it challenging for them to be involved, which unveiled a



disconnect between parents and school personnel. Parents explained work schedules and negative interactions as barriers to their involvement, whereas some school personnel believed lack of involvement is a choice made by parents. The literature review also suggested this disconnect as school personnel marginalized African-American families, often labeling them as uneducated, lazy, and uninterested in their child's education (Goldfarb, 2010). Cognition also emphasizes the need for parents to understand the multiple roles they play in this partnership. This supports the findings previously shared, where capacity-building for parent roles is necessary to inform parents and school personnel. Seeing families as equal partners helps diminish the disconnect. Goldfarb (2010) suggested training to help educators learn to work with parents and not on them.

***Family and staff capacity outcomes.*** Family and staff capacity outcomes are not where the framework stops, instead Mapp and Kuttner (2013) explained this component as the positive results that come from implementing the necessary components for capacity-building. There is evidence that the study site is headed in the right direction to achieve family and staff capacity outcomes. The five emergent themes are essential components for effective home-school partnerships, and with the application of the dual capacity-building framework, the study site can implement capacity-building for school personnel and parents to shift parental involvement efforts from ineffective to effective.

***Conclusion.*** Parental involvement is a great disparity in urban schools for minority and high-poverty families. Existing parental involvement research highlights the benefits of creating the right atmosphere for effective parental involvement (Auerbach, 2009; Swanson et al., 2011), which suggests focusing on rebuilding the culture of the school, the role of parents and school personnel, and how they work together. The current qualitative case study was designed to add to the existing research on parental involvement in urban, high-poverty elementary schools through the experiences of both school personnel and African-American parents. Furthermore, the study

addressed gaps in the current parental involvement literature examining urban settings. Urban, high-poverty Title I schools are mandated to implement parental involvement programs met with challenges that make implementation difficult. A concept map was adapted from the dual capacity-building framework (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) as a guide for building the capacity of stakeholders, for parental involvement initiatives at the study site (see figure 2). Establishing the right conditions to implement parental involvement initiatives that address capabilities, connections, cognition, and confidence provide an opportunity for sustained practices as school personnel and parents enhance knowledge and skills.

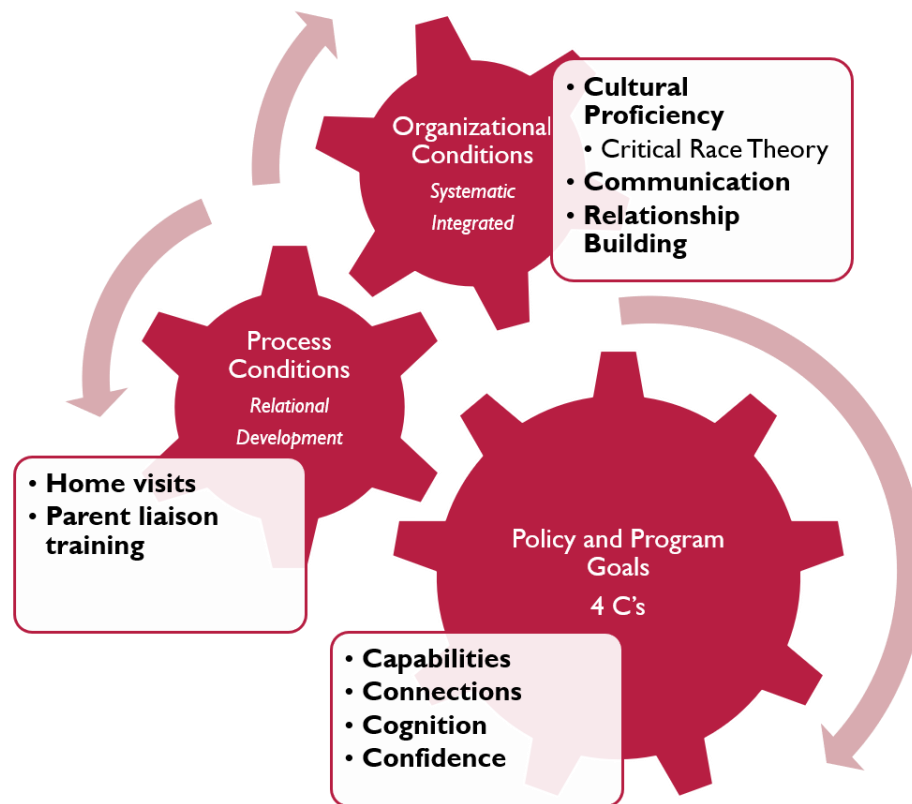


Figure 2. Capacity-building Guide for Parental Involvement, adapted from Mapp and Kuttner, 2013

## **Limitations**

This section provides possible limitations, also known as factors outside of the control of the researcher (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). The study was limited to one urban, high-poverty elementary school with a sample size of 12 participants, which included six school personnel and six parents. Due to the small sample size, findings could not be generalized to a larger population. In additions, the findings are limited to informing the research site, a case study as a research method does not lend to broad generalizations. The findings from the focus groups and individual interviews are limited to the comfortability of participants to share their experiences with parent involvement. Time constraints created limitations, as the data collection occurred during the summer and many participants had vacation plans. The researcher had to schedule the focus group sessions and interviews back to back to avoid scheduling conflicts. This limitation did not allow data analysis for the focus group sessions to coincide as the data collection with one-on-one interviews for reflexivity purposes. The data collection tools limited the study. Some of the interview questions, which related to the conceptual framework could have been rewritten to encourage more dialogue focused on the central research question. Furthermore, the role of parents was not captured during the focus group sessions, as the questions did not provide an opportunity for participants to share their perceptions of the role of parents. The focus group questions only asked participants to explain the role of school personnel with parental involvement.

## **Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory**

**Practice.** According to the findings, this study has the following implications. Based on the results of the study, the participants' perspectives of their role were a result of their lived experiences. During the focus group and individual interviews, school personnel reflected on their interactions with families to create a welcoming environment and build positive relationships. The

six school personnel participants provided examples of their role, which uncovered their perceived responsibility to create a positive culture built on relationships. Warren, Hong, and Rubin (2009) suggested the need for relationship building between school personnel and parents as a critical foundational piece to parental involvement, as parents respond better to people whom they have grown to know and trust. This emphasis on school culture implied that principals play an essential role in creating a foundation for parental involvement. One case study noted improved teacher-parent relationships when school leaders called on teachers to engage with parents and facilitate workshops (Auerbach, 2009). If parental involvement includes parents visiting the school, principals need to be intentional about not only building relationships with families but serving the school community in a way that leaves parents feeling welcomed and valued.

All 12 participants believed it was the parent's role to support students at school and home. As participants shared examples of involvement activities, the data revealed a difference in the perceptions of parents and school personnel. Parents shared nontraditional involvement activities for home and school; whereas, the examples from school personnel were confined to traditional activities. Because of the unaligned parent expectations, action must be taken to help school personnel understand and recognize nontraditional involvement activities for parents. "Teachers are better placed to present a variety of ways in which parents can participate. It is important to create a sense of community and to understand family challenges" (LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011, p. 119). In doing so, parental involvement could increase as parents would not be limited to traditional activities and the school could begin to implement activities that also reflect the nontraditional roles shared by parents.

There were suggestions mentioned by school personnel that may help increase parental involvement for parents at the study site. According to the school personnel, some of their colleagues believe parents are not involved because they do not care, and they choose not to be

involved. When these assumptions are made, teachers do not attempt to involve parents. Negative assumptions are a barrier to parental involvement as parents need positive perceptions of teacher invitations, so they will want to be involved (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). School personnel suggested teachers take the time to learn about barriers that prohibit parents from being involved or make involvement difficult because contrary to what some may believe, parents, do care and want to be involved. The study also has a parent liaison who could assist in bridging this gap between school personnel and parents. Schools with parent liaisons should provide adequate training to benefit the home-school partnership.

This suggestion is supported by research highlighting the different barriers parents face (Smith et al., 2011; Watson & Bogotch, 2015; Yull et al., 2014) and the shared experiences of parent participants. For example, one parent expressed her desire to be more involved and shared a promise she made to her child to be more present. Another parent mentioned conflicting working schedule as a barrier to her involvement. The perspectives shared by parents implied that lack of involvement is not by choice, but usually a result of challenges and barriers in which the school needs the capacity to address. According to Williams and Sanchez (2011), time constraints often limit involvement for African-American families in urban schools. Therefore, rather than make assumptions, the study site needs to build capacity and listen to parents to uncover their challenges and address them for increased involvement.

**Policy.** Parental involvement policy emphasizes what to implement for increased involvement, but professional development is essential for policy to be transferred into practice (Razzaq and Forde, 2013). Reform efforts should be intentional about building the capacity of the principal and school personnel to cultivate a school climate that is positive, inviting, and built on relationships. The results of the study also revealed a need for parent involvement policy that includes cultural proficiency training for school personnel. School personnel and parent

participants did not explicitly state the need for school personnel to be African-American to work with families of diverse background effectively. Instead, the participants expressed the need for respectful and culturally-competent educators and race as a role was implied implicitly.

Most of the participants mentioned training and attending workshops for school personnel to be culturally competent. Some of the school personnel believed there was a need for an adjustment with the current cultural proficiency training. The findings suggested required cultural proficiency training for all school personnel at the study site, through a critical race theory lens. Culturally proficiency training could also be implemented in teacher preparation programs as research shows most programs do not provide an opportunity for aspiring teachers to gain cultural knowledge for the classroom (Byrd, Hlas, Watzke, & Valencia, 2011). This revelation implied that the participants believed with proper training in the areas of cultural awareness and proficiency, school personnel could build capacity to work with families from all backgrounds effectively.

**Theory.** Parent involvement policy with required cultural competency training should utilize critical race theory (Ladson-billings & Tate, 2000) in a systematic approach to develop R.A.C.E. in schools. As noted for policy implications, there is need for the study site to engage in capacity-building to enhance cultural awareness for school personnel to work effectively with diverse cultures. However, in theory, this should be done without enforcing a colorblindness perspective. Colorblindness perspectives are counterproductive to the work of CRT (Ladson-billings & Tate, 2000) as cultural competency tends to overshadow the implication of racism in society (Abrams & Moio, 2009).

The use of CRT in capacity-building for cultural competencies would provide insights to the revelation that cultural biases stem from comparisons to the standard of White America (Auerbach, 2011; Calmore, 1995). Individuals within the school may not be perceived as racist

but utilizing critical race theory would shed light on institutional racism. This would allow school personnel to recognize involvement activities reflective of the dominant culture and understand how they could be ineffective for minority families who are often involved in ways not recognized by the school (Boro, 2015; Jackson & Remillard, 2005; Lawson, 2003; Watson & Bogotch, 2015).

These implications added confirmation to Mapp and Kuttner's (2013) dual capacity-building framework. The framework revealed that if school personnel and families are given the opportunity to develop their knowledge and skills, parental involvement efforts can shift from ineffective to effective. Although the case study method does not lend itself to generalizability, findings may be transferred into practice. Therefore, the results of this study may contribute valuable information to the field of education, to increase parental involvement in urban settings by building the capacity of school personnel and families.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The following are recommendations for further research studies. Since the findings of the study were limited to one urban, high-poverty elementary school, the study should add additional schools to be explored. Adding additional schools would also increase the sample size to include more school personnel and parents to validate the findings of the study. It is recommended to extend observations of parental involvement activities. The observations should take place at the beginning of the school year and again towards the end of the school year to provide greater insights on how and if parental involvement is sustained. To further explore the impact of capacity-building a multi-year case study should be conducted. The data collection tools should include questions that allow participants to explain capacity-building initiatives. Observations should include the researcher as a participant observer, participating in capacity-building activities at the study site and observing the activities.

Furthermore, another recommendation is to utilize mixed-methods by adding a survey or questionnaire for data collection. Mixed-methods would be beneficial for further research to gain a statistical analysis of capacity-building for increased parental involvement. Further research should be conducted to extend this research at an urban school where school personnel receives cultural proficiency training. The study should focus on the impact of cultural proficiency training, specifically examining the impact on parent-teacher relationships and parental involvement efforts. Another extension to studying the role of race in parental involvement would be adding White parents as participants to compare their perspectives.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to capture the voice of school personnel and parents at an urban, high-poverty elementary school to explore parental involvement perspectives. The study was examined through the lens of the dual capacity-building conceptual framework (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) to answer the central research question: how can urban, high-poverty Title I schools build the capacity of parents and school personnel for effective home-school partnerships? Parent involvement is defined as culturally sensitive programs that bridge the gap between school personnel and all parents to increase student outcomes (Grant & Ray, 2015). Therefore, the study was situated in the counter-storytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) tenant of CRT (Ladson-billings & Tate, 2000) to capture the untold stories of African-American participants. I am grateful for the opportunity to engage in intimate discussions with school personnel and African-American parents, as they are responsible for bringing parental involvement to fruition. These candid discussions yielded findings that highlighted the perspectives of African-American parents and school personnel at an urban, high-poverty elementary school. The qualitative case study provided significant insights into the perspectives of school personnel and parents as they shared their lived experiences with parental involvement at the study site.



While findings suggest families and educators both value parental involvement, there is a need to build capacity for the unveiled themes: create a positive culture built on relationships, use multiple modes of communication, parents supporting students at school and home, disconnect between parents and school personnel, and R.A.C.E. (Respectful and Culturally-Competent Educators) has a role. The findings revealed a breakdown in capacity-building for successful parental involvement programs, as in some instances educators and families do not receive the necessary supports to implement parent involvement initiatives effectively. Parental involvement programs exist in theory; however, the study site could benefit from a compass that guides theory into practice. The dual capacity-building framework (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) is the compass that directs parental involvement from ineffective to effective. The components of the conceptual framework build the foundation for parental involvement through capacity-building for school personnel and parents to build respectful and trusting relationships (process condition-relational). Capacity-building should extend throughout the organization by developing stakeholders for enhanced knowledge, confidence, and skills to better understand their role in parental involvement and transform the school community to achieve the goal of student success (process condition-development).

Existing parental involvement research suggests a need for systematic reform that builds capacity and relationships for increased parental involvement (Mendez, 2010; Smith et al., 2011). This study yielded new knowledge of cultural proficiency and systematic reform. Rather than pawning cultural competencies off on individual staff within the school or questioning the need (Bustamante, Nelson, & Onwuegbuzie, 2009; Byrd et al., 2011; Cleveland, Chambers, Mainus, Powell, Skepple, Tyler, & Wood, 2011) there was an overwhelming consensus among participants that to effectively work with diverse populations all stakeholders need capacity-building to understand the students and families who are served. The dual capacity-building framework

(Mapp & Kuttner, 2013) not only builds the foundation for parental involvement and develops stakeholders, but it also sustains reform efforts through systematic implementation (organizational conditions-systematic). Schools can select reform efforts that focus on parental involvement, hire parent liaisons, have all the bells and whistles and willingness to promote parental involvement but schools risk a shortfall in parental involvement without capacity-building for foundational relationships, development of all stakeholders, and prioritized initiatives implemented across the school.

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## **Appendix A: Consent to Participate Form**

### **CONSENT FORM**

**Research Study Title:** Bridging the Gap between African-American Families and School

**Personnel:** Effective Home-School Partnerships in Urban Schools

**Principal Investigator:** Danita Webb

**Research Institution:** Concordia University–Portland

**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Belle Booker

#### **Purpose and what you will be doing:**

The purpose of this survey is to explore parental involvement at an urban, high-poverty Title I elementary school, from parents and school personnel perspectives. We expect approximately 12 volunteers. Participation in this study is voluntary, and no one will be paid. We will begin enrollment on May 14, 2018 and end enrollment on May 28, 2018. To be in the study, you will participate in a focus group session with five other participants. The focus group will last approximately 60 minutes. You will also participate in one on one interview of approximately 60 to 90 minutes in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location. The focus group and interview will be conducted on two separate days. With your permission, the interview will be tape-recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish.

#### **Risks:**

There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your information. However, we will protect your information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked inside a file cabinet at the researcher's home office. When we or any of our investigators look at the data, none of the data will have your name or identifying information. We will only use a secret code to analyze the data. We will not identify you in any publication or report. Your information will be kept private at all times and then all study documents will be destroyed 3 years after we conclude this study.

#### **Benefits:**

Information you provide will help with continued efforts to increase parental involvement at the urban elementary school. You could benefit this by increased parental involvement, improved home-school partnerships, and improved student outcomes.

#### **Confidentiality:**

This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

#### **Right to Withdraw:**



Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, we will stop asking you questions.

**Contact Information:**

You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Danita Webb at [email redacted]. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email [obranch@cu-portland.edu](mailto:obranch@cu-portland.edu) or call 503-493-6390).

**Your Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



Investigator: Danita Webb email: [email redacted]  
c/o: Professor Dr. Belle Booker  
Concordia University – Portland  
2811 NE Holman Street  
Portland, Oregon 97221

## **Appendix B: Request to School Principal for Parent Participants**

### **REQUEST TO SCHOOL PRINCIPAL FOR PARTICIPANTS**

To: Subject's Names, Principal

From: Danita D. Webb, Concordia University–Portland, Doctoral Graduate Student

Subject: Seeking Research Project Participants

Title of Research Study: Barriers to Family Involvement in School: Exploring the Voice of the Urban Family

I am a doctoral student from Concordia University conducting a research project investigating to what extent are capacity building opportunities provided for effective parent involvement. The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine parent involvement in an urban elementary school through the lens of parents and school personnel. The case study will identify effective parent involvement strategies and opportunities for capacity building, for not only increased parental involvement, but also effective home-school partnerships. The research results seek to contribute to current literature regarding increasing parent involvement in high-poverty, urban schools. This current research project is beneficial because schools need a better understanding of how to increase the capacity of school personnel and parents effective home-school partnerships. I am most interested in African-American parents who have had children attending the school since at least 2015-2016. Guardians/Parents agreeing to participate in this study will participate in a 60-minute focus group session with a total of 6 parents and talk one-on-one with the researcher (me) for about 60 to 90 minutes. The focus group and interview cover questions that explore the current state of parent involvement at the study site, experiences and interactions of participants at the study site, identify any barriers that make parent involvement challenging, and explore participants' definition of parent involvement and their role. Participants will be asked to give honest opinions which will remain anonymous. The interviews can take place at family/parent convenience in participants home or at mutually agreed upon location. The focus group session will be held at a local community room within the school community and refreshments will be provided.

Contact Information: Please feel free to contact me at [email redacted] or at [phone number redacted] with names of guardians/parents who are interested in participating in this research project. If guardians/parents prefer they can contact me directly.

## Appendix C: Parent Recruitment Flyer



Would you like to share your experience with parent involvement to help contribute to effective home-school partnerships?

You can be a part of a research project conducted by a Concordia University, Doctoral Graduate Student seeking to understand parent involvement efforts at your child's school and identify capacity building opportunities for school personnel and families to increase parent involvement.

Refreshments will be provided at the focus group session. It only requires 60 minutes of your time at your convenience. Then, there will be a follow up with an individual interview. The interview will last an hour to an hour and a half.

To participate you must be an African-American parent with a child(ren) who currently attends the school. Your child(ren) must have started attending the school prior to the 2015-2016 school year. If you are interested, please complete the bottom portion and return to your child's school.

### **Come and let your voice be heard:**

\*Share what you love about parent involvement

\*Share barriers to parent involvement

\*Share learning opportunities for increased parent involvement

\*Network with other parents

**Don't miss this unique opportunity to share your knowledge and experience**

**"PARENT INVOLVEMENT LEADS TO INCREASED STUDENT OUTCOMES"**

First and Last Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Best availability for focus group session (check all that apply)

☐ 9am-10am

☐ 5pm-6pm

☐ 12pm-1pm

☐ 6pm-7pm

## **Appendix D: School Personnel Recruitment**

### **REQUEST TO SCHOOL PERSONNEL FOR PARTICIPATION**

To: Subject's Names

From: Danita D. Webb, Concordia University–Portland, Doctoral Graduate Student

Subject: Seeking Research Project Participants

Title of Research Study: Barriers to Family Involvement in School: Exploring the Voice of the Urban Family

I am a doctoral student from Concordia University conducting a research project investigating to what extent are capacity building opportunities provided for effective parent involvement. The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine parent involvement in an urban elementary school through the lens of parents and school personnel. The case study will identify effective parent involvement strategies and opportunities for capacity building, for not only increased parental involvement, but also effective home-school partnerships. The research results seek to contribute to current literature regarding increasing parent involvement in high-poverty, urban schools. This current research project is beneficial because schools need a better understanding of how to increase the capacity of school personnel and parents effective home-school partnerships. I am most interested in the following school personnel: The Principal, 2 African-American teachers, 2 White teachers, and the Parent Liaison. The teachers will need to include at least 2 who were employed at the study site prior to 2015-2016. School personnel agreeing to participate in this study will participate in a 60-minute focus group session with a total of 6 school personnel and talk one-on-one with the researcher (me) for about 60 to 90 minutes. The focus group and interview cover questions that explore the current state of parent involvement at the study site, experiences and interactions of participants at the study site, identify any barriers that make parent involvement challenging, and explore participants' definition of parent involvement and their role. Participants will be asked to give honest opinions which will remain anonymous. The interviews can take place at school personnel convenience in participants home or at mutually agreed upon location. The focus group session will be held at a local community room within the school community and refreshments will be provided.

Contact Information: Please feel free to contact me at [email redacted] or at [phone number redacted] if you are interested in participating in this research project.

## **Appendix E: Focus Group Protocol**

### **Focus Group Guide (Parent)**

Thank you for participating in a research study examining parental involvement experiences of African-American parents and school personnel in a high-poverty, educational settings. This focus group session will take approximately 60-minutes. You will be assigned a pseudonym and no other identifiable information will be used within this study.

This focus group session will be recorded and the contents only accessible to myself, and my research committee. Please speak freely about your experiences. At any time, you may request to stop the recorder. You may also decline to answer any question or ask for clarification about a topic. If you request to be removed from the study at any time, I will not use any portion of your session within the study.

Do you have any questions or concerns before we get started?

1. What do teachers do to promote high levels of parent involvement in their children's education?
2. What does the principal do to promote high levels of parent involvement in their children's education?
3. What are the challenges for parents when it comes to increasing parent involvement?
4. What are the challenges for principals when it comes to increasing parent involvement?
5. What are the challenges for teachers when it comes to increasing parent involvement?
6. Complete this statement: When I think about being a partner with my child's teachers in their education, I feel...
7. Do you believe it is important for schools to hire or train staff who are culturally competent and preferably from within the community where they will be working with parents?  
If yes, why?  
If no, why not?
8. In your opinion, do families and staff have opportunities to learn together how to collaborate to improve student achievement? Probe: If the answer to #8 is yes, what are some examples of these collaborative learning opportunities? If the answer to #8 is no, what collaborative learning opportunities would you suggest for families and staff

## Focus Group Guide (School Personnel)

Thank you for participating in a research study examining parental involvement experiences of African-American parents and school personnel in a high-poverty, educational settings. This focus group session will take approximately 60-minutes. You will be assigned a pseudonym and no other identifiable information will be used within this study.

This focus group session will be recorded and the contents only accessible to myself, and my research committee. Please speak freely about your experiences. At any time, you may request to stop the recorder. You may also decline to answer any question or ask for clarification about a topic. If you request to be removed from the study at any time, I will not use any portion of your session within the study.

Do you have any questions or concerns before we get started?

1. What do teachers do to promote high levels of parent involvement in their children's education?
2. What does the principal do to promote high levels of parent involvement in their children's education?
3. What are the challenges for parents when it comes to increasing parent involvement?
4. What are the challenges for principals when it comes to increasing parent involvement?
5. What are the challenges for teachers when it comes to increasing parent involvement?
6. Complete this statement: When I think about being a partner with my students' families in their education, I feel...
7. Do you believe it is important for schools to hire or train staff who are culturally competent and preferably from within the community where they will be working with parents?  
If yes, why?  
If no, why not?
8. In your opinion, do families and staff have opportunities to learn together how to collaborate to improve student achievement? Probe: If the answer to #8 is yes, what are some examples of these collaborative learning opportunities? If the answer to #8 is no, what collaborative learning opportunities would you suggest for families and staff?

## **Appendix F: Interview Protocol**

### Interview Guide (Parent)

Thank you for participating in a research study examining parental involvement experiences of African-American parents and school personnel in a high-poverty, educational settings. The interview session will take approximately one hour to an hour and a half. You will be assigned a pseudonym and no other identifiable information will be used within this study.

Each interview session will be recorded and the contents only accessible to myself, and my research committee. Please speak freely about your experiences. At any time, you may request to stop the recorder. You may also decline to answer any question or ask for clarification about a topic. If you request to be removed from the study at any time, I will not use any portion of your session within the study.

Do you have any questions or concerns before we get started?

1. How do you define parental involvement?
2. What do you remember about your family's relationship with your teachers?
3. Did anyone in your family visit the school?  
Probe: What was that like for you?
4. Tell me about your relationship with your child's teacher.
5. How do you view your role in your child's schooling?  
Probe: Do you visit the school? Why or why not?
6. What makes parent involvement challenging for families?
7. What makes parent involvement challenging for staff?
8. What do you believe are the most common barriers for parent involvement at your school?
9. How does the school address these barriers?
10. Tell me about a time when your child's teacher or a staff member at the school met the interests or needs of your child.
11. How does your school reflect or ignore your family's values, beliefs, and structure?  
Probe: How do you feel about that?
12. Overall, do you believe staff are effective in working with families of diverse cultural backgrounds?

If the answer to #12 is yes, what makes you say yes? Can give an example of when a staff member was effective in working with a family of diverse cultural background?

If the answer is no to #12, what makes you say no? Can you give an example of when a staff member was ineffective in working with a family of diverse cultural background?

Demographics: Race: \_\_\_\_\_ Number of yrs. at the school: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: M or F

## Interview Guide (School Personnel)

Thank you for participating in a research study examining parental involvement experiences of African-American parents and school personnel in a high-poverty, educational settings. The interview session will take approximately one hour to an hour and a half. You will be assigned a pseudonym and no other identifiable information will be used within this study.

Each interview session will be recorded and the contents only accessible to myself, and my research committee. Please speak freely about your experiences. At any time, you may request to stop the recorder. You may also decline to answer any question or ask for clarification about a topic. If you request to be removed from the study at any time, I will not use any portion of your session within the study.

Do you have any questions or concerns before we get started?

1. How do you define parental involvement?
2. What do you remember about your family's relationship with your teachers?
3. Did anyone in your family visit the school?

Probe: What was that like for you?

4. Tell me about your relationship with your students' families.
5. How do you view your role in your students' schooling?

Probe: Do you visit the home? Why or why not?

6. What makes parent involvement challenging for families?
7. What makes parent involvement challenging for staff?
8. What do you believe are the most common barriers for parent involvement at your school?
9. How does the school address these barriers?
10. Tell me about a time when you or a staff member at the school met the interests or needs of a student.
11. How does your school reflect or ignore your students' family values, beliefs, and structure?  
Probe: How do you feel about that?
12. Overall, do you believe you are effective in working with families of diverse cultural backgrounds?

If the answer to #12 is yes, what makes you say yes? Can give an example of when you were effective in working with a family of diverse cultural background?

If the answer is no to #12, what makes you say no? Can you give an example of when you were ineffective in working with a family of diverse cultural background?

Demographics: Race: \_\_\_\_\_ Number of yrs. at the school: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: M or F



## Appendix G: Observation Guides

Back to School Night	
Attendance	
Role of School Personnel	
Role of Parents/Families	
Interactions of School Personnel and Parents/Families	

PTO Meeting	
Attendance	
Role of School Personnel	
Role of Parents/Families	
Interactions of School Personnel and Parents/Families	

## Appendix H: Review of School Documents Guide

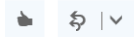
<i>Document Type</i>	<i>Professional Development for Effective Home-School Partnerships</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>School Personnel</i></li> <li><i>Parents</i></li> </ul>	<i>Effective Communication</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Classroom</i></li> <li><i>School-wide</i></li> </ul>	<i>School-wide definition of Parent Involvement</i>	<i>Defined roles in the Home-School Partnership</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>School Personnel</i></li> <li><i>Parents</i></li> </ul>	<i>Opportunities for involvement</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>School Personnel</i></li> <li><i>Parents</i></li> </ul>
----- <i>Culturally Relevant</i> -----					
Evidence/Comments					
<b>School Improvement Plan/PD Plan</b>					
<b>Title I Parent Involvement Plan/Compact</b>					
<b>Parent Room Newsletters</b>					

## Appendix I: Permission Request



Mapp, Karen <karen\_mapp@gse.harvard.edu>

Today, 12:29 PM



You have my permission as long as the work is properly cited.

Best,  
Prof. Mapp

Sent from my iPhone

...



Danita Webb

Today, 11:59 AM

karen\_mapp@gse.harvard.edu



 Report Phishing



Good Morning,

My name is Danita Webb and I am an educational leadership doctoral candidate at Concordia University in Portland. My dissertation topic is on creating effective home-school partnerships for African-American families in urban settings. I decided to use your dual capacity-building framework for the study's conceptual framework. As someone who has worked closely with parent involvement policy, I realize the lack of guidance and support provided to schools to effectively implement parent involvement initiatives. I believe my research provides valuable insights for urban, high-poverty school by studying parent involvement through a dual capacity-building lens.

On February 7th, I successfully defended my dissertation. I am currently in the process of publishing my research and would like your permission to use the graphic below, in my dissertation. The graphic provides a visual to help explain the dual capacity-building framework. Thank you for the continued work you are doing with parent involvement. Please let me know if I can be of any assistance to your endeavors.

Warm regards,

Danita Webb, Ed.D.  
402-213-8980



## **Appendix J: Statement of Original Work**

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously-researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

### **Statement of academic integrity.**

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

### **Explanations:**

#### ***What does “fraudulent” mean?***

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

#### ***What is “unauthorized” assistance?***

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

### Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*



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Digital Signature

Danita D. Webb

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Name (Typed)

February 14, 2019

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Date