

THE PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN PARENTS CONCERNING THEIR RESPONSIBILITY AND  
DEGREE OF INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

by

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## **Abstract**

This descriptive survey study explored African American parents/guardians of children in grades K-6 concerning their perceptions of responsibility and involvement in their children's education in Flint, Michigan. The study used a one-shot case study research design utilizing one survey with three sections: 1) sixty-three Likert –type scale questions, 2) three open-ended response questions, and ten demographic questions. The final survey questions were adapted and modified from multiple surveys and piloted tested with a subgroup of the population. The major subcategories within the survey consisted of: School Involvement Factors, 2) Educational Standards, 3) Home Based Involvement, 4) Home-Schooling Conferencing, 5) Parent Factors that Prevent Involvement, 6) School Help and 7) Opinions about School Assistance.

The parents reported they strongly agreed they were aware of their children's' academic strengths and weakness, and the schools assessment process, especially the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP). The parent(s) strongly agreed they provided strong home-based student support while also indicating a need for stronger communication between the school and home. The parent(s) agreed the school staff's awareness of students' culture and family concerns can help form good communication bonds with all stakeholders in the school system along with other findings.

Recommendations from the study included strengthening and diversifying the modes of communication between schools and parents/ guardians and providing

additional school supports for parents to help their children; to reinforce the traditional and create new methods of communication between parent(s) and the school/teacher parents. Additional recommendations are also explored within the complete document.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Student educational success is associated with a variety of factors including parents, schools, teachers, school support, roles models and other factors. (Heritage Foundation, 2011; Jeynes, 2005; Junttils, Vauras, and Laakkonen, 2007) Research consistently reveals that parents are primarily the motivational sources for the children concerning academic success in school (Stewart, 2006; Windle, 2009). In particular, educational support is extremely important for African American youth that have high rates of all of the following factors: crime, youth incarceration, grade level retention, school expulsion, and higher costs to society in terms of social support. Additionally, African American students have low levels in all of the following areas including: participating rates in attending school, lower achievement in reading and math, and vague educational career goals. (U. S. Department of Education as cited in Hiatt-Michael, 2008). Many of these unfavorable outcomes are associated with a lack of proper educational support and parent involvement.

According to Salinas (as cited in *The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement*, 2006) time and language barriers contribute to many parents' reluctance to become involved in school. For the most part, "parents feel that they are

not welcome....They often have had less-than-satisfactory experiences with their own schooling, and so they don't feel like [being involved] is guaranteed to be a good experience" (Salinas, as cited in *The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement*, 2006, p. 2)

According to Davis, Brown, Bantz, and Manno (as cited in Brown, and Brandon, 2007) there is a weak connection between African American parents and the school system. Trotman (as cited in Brown, and Brandon, 2007) asserts that "many of these parents encounter personal, cultural, and structural barriers that may cause them to be isolated or alienated from the school system" (p. 116). There are several reasons that may hinder parents from participating or being involved in their children's education.

Equally important, according to U. S. Department of Health (2008) is that when boys feel they have emotional support and guidance from their teachers, adult school leaders, parents, and especially their fathers (even if the father does not reside in the student's home) who have high expectations; boys perform better in school, have better social skills and, therefore, are less prone to drop out of school. "Since 1995, dropout rates for boys have declined, but in 2004, 57% of all youth ages 16 to 24 who dropped out of high school were boys and young men. Consistently, dropout rates have been higher for minority youth than for White youth. In 2005, six percent of Whites ages 16 to 24 were dropouts compared with 11% of African Americans and 23% Hispanics".

According to O'Bryan, Braddock, and Dawkins (2006), African American student participation in extracurricular activities and parental educational involvement factors can bridge the gap for involving parents in school. A study entitled: *A Plan to close the*

*Achievement Gap for African American Students* (The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2008) “found that students with involved parents, no matter what their economic, racial/ethnic and educational background, were more likely to: earn high grades..., be promoted..., attend school regularly..., have better social skills... and graduate...” (p. 23). Consequently, the Washington school system devised a plan to close the achievement gap for African American students. Hoyle and Collier (2006) focused on strategies that may help dropout prevention. They identified 38 dropout prevention strategies, in which one of the recommended strategies included increasing parent involvement.

After a thorough review of the literature, no studies were found that specifically investigated the perceptions of African American parents’ involvement and responsibility in their children’s education in Flint, Michigan.

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this study was to determine African American parents’ perceptions of their responsibility and involvement in their children’s early education (kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade) in select public schools in Flint, Michigan.

**Sub questions:**

1. What are the demographics of respondents in the study?
2. What are the parents’ perceived roles in their children’s education?
3. What are the obstacles parents’ encounter related to their participation in school?

**Research Questions: This was designed to answer the following questions which represented a gap in the research.**

1. What is the relationship of the participant's demographics to specific responses?
2. What is the parents' awareness of the state grade level standards?
3. What is the level of parents' participation in select school activities?
4. What are the parents' perceptions related to school help at home?
5. What do parents' perceive as their responsibility and involvement on select communication items when communicating and collaborating with their child's teacher?
6. What is the parents' perception of the school's staff in relation to responding to their concerns about their children?
7. What type of life experiences are the parents' engaged?
8. What are the parents' perceptions related to the school assistance in regards to providing them with ideals that could accommodate them with supporting their child's education?
9. Identify parents' suggestions on how to improve the connection between parents and the school.

### **Definition of Terms:**

For the purpose of this study the following terms are used to add precision to the research:

1. **African Americans:** The self-reported ethnicity as being of African American heritage. Ethnicity for this study is depended on the participant's self-reported ethnicity.
2. **Parents:** An adult or primary care giver who is responsible for the upbringing of a child.
3. **Perceptions:** Subjective awareness of a person's experiences or his/her belief system. (Life Sciences & Allied Applications / Zoology)" the process by which an organism detects and interprets information from the external world by means of the sensory receptors." (The Free Dictionary by Farlex, [www.thefreedictionary.com/perceptions](http://www.thefreedictionary.com/perceptions))
4. **Self- Efficacy:** The parents' feeling about their ability to make a difference. A parent with a high level of self-efficacy feel he/she can make a difference in the life of the children. Self- efficacy is sometimes viewed "as a person's judgment of his or her capabilities based on mastery criteria; a sense of a person's competence within a specific framework, focusing on the person's assessment of his/her abilities to perform specific tasks in relation to goals and standards rather than in comparison with others' capabilities" (The Free Dictionary by Farlex, [www.freedictionary.com/self+efficacy](http://www.freedictionary.com/self+efficacy))

5. **Cognition:** The way an individual mentally processes information. “The mental process of knowing, including aspects such as awareness, perception, reasoning, and judgment” (The Free Dictionary by Farlex, [www.thefreedictionary.com/cognition](http://www.thefreedictionary.com/cognition))
6. **Guidance:** Emotional, social, and intellectual support given to children to help them identify their strengths, weaknesses, and regulate these in the proper direction. “Leadership, instruction, or direction. Counseling or advice on educational, vocational, or psychological matters” (The Free Dictionary by Farlex, [www.thefreedictionary.com/guidance](http://www.thefreedictionary.com/guidance))
7. **Recidivism:** The rate at which a prisoner returns to prison after being initially incarcerated. “A repeated relapse into criminal or delinquent behavior” (The Free Dictionary by Farlex, [www.thefreedictionary.com/recidivism](http://www.thefreedictionary.com/recidivism))
8. **Public Schools:** These are schools that are regulated, monitored and supported by state and federal government.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are three major themes of knowledge related to parent involvement studies and one closely related theoretical model. These areas include 1) the history of education and the role of citizens or parents and the community; 2) African American parent's involvement in schools; and 3) parent involvement studies. These areas are discussed to provide background for the reader to understand and appreciate the historical context and prior research related to this topic along with an introduction to the Hoover Dempsey and Model of Parental Involvement.

This study's theoretical framework includes the *Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's Model of Parental Involvement* (revised model) of the parental involvement process. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) believed that self-efficacy was one of the important determining factors for how parents viewed their role of parenting and involvement; and that this also influences the parent's perception of involvement. This model supports a connection between parents' perceptions of their involvement in their children's education and what they perceive as their roles. Also, both perceptions and roles seem to be strongly influenced by the parents' sense of self-efficacy.



**Table 1.0**

The Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler Model of Parental Involvement (2005)

Parent Involvement Forms, e.g.:							
Values, Goals, Expectations, Aspirations		Involvement Activities at Home		Parent/Teacher/School Communications		Involvement Activities at School	
↑							
<b>Level 1</b>							
Personal Motivators		Parents' Perception of Contextual Invitations to Involvement			School/Program Responsiveness to Family Life Context Variables		
Parental Role Construction for Involvement	Parental Efficacy for Helping the Student Succeed	General Invitations from School/Program	Specific Invitations from Teacher	Specific Invitations from Student	Parental Knowledge and Skills	Parental Time and Energy	Family Culture

Note: The table was on the following web site: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/peabody/family-model.htm>

In addition, the parents' roles have a significant influence in regards to their children's aspirations towards attending college or becoming college bound when it comes to conflicts and challenges throughout the school years and parent involvement (Auerbach, 2007).

There are many obstacles that affect the perceptions of parent involvement. The general purpose for conducting this literature review was to investigate African American parents' perceptions of their responsibility and involvement in their children's education, the parent's roles, and obstacles to participation. Does parental involvement in their children's education determine the fate of their children's future? The dropout rate is high and is climbing especially among African American students. Factors that

usually follow this are high crime, low goals, high taxes, etc... Research conducted by Elliot, Wilson, Huizinga, Sampson; MacLeod; and Wilson (as cited in Ardelt & Eccles, 2001) found that communities that have a high amount of violence, drug use, and unemployment, create a situation where children have a limited productive life and early death.

According to Kramer (2000), a multitude of the violence committed is contributed to youths between the age of fifteen and twenty-four, in which he reports, is due to many factors including: poverty, economic inequality, and social exclusion.

See Table 2.0.

Table 2.0

*Annual Criminal Activity by Persons Aged 20*

Category of Crime Statistics	Murder	Rape	Violent Crime	Property Crime	Drug Offenses
Total arrests	602	868	17,522	53,686	75,054
Arrests per high school dropout	0.000482	0.000694	0.014018	0.042949	0.060043
Crime/arrest ratio	1.7	3.5	2.3	6.5	10.0
Crimes per high school dropout	0.000819	0.002430	0.032240	0.279167	0.600432
Average sentence per arrest (months)	233	157	78	52	56
Average parole time per arrest (months)	90	48	35	23	48
Impact per new expected high school grad	-19.6%	-19.6%	-19.6%	-10.4%	-11.5%

*Note.* Violent crime includes robbery and aggravated assault. Property crime includes burglary, larceny-theft, arson, and motor vehicle theft. The share of total arrests by high school dropouts is 0.48, based on incarceration rates. Data are from Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice, 2004 (Tables 39, 42, 43a), adjusted for under survey; the *National Crime Victimization Survey* (U.S. Department of Justice, National Archive of Criminal Justice Data, 2003); Harlow, 2003; Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice, 2004 (Table 1). Details of the calculations can be found in Levin, Belfield, Muennig, and Rouse, 2006 (pp. 43–49). Impact figures are from Lochner and Moretti, 2004, adjusting for effects of college progression rates (1.27 for some college and 1.64 for B.A. degree holders) and assuming effects of rape equivalent to those of violent crime. (table from page 14, *The Economic Payoff to Investing in Educational Justice.* Table 2.0 was reported in the article, *The Payne of Addressing Race and Poverty in Public Education: Utopian Accountability and Deficit Assumptions of Middle-Class America*, 2010, p. 14.

Reports from the *Luxembourg Income Study* revealed that many Americans in the urban “underclass are at a disadvantage because of a vast percentage of the population is unemployed or does not make enough money to cover their expenses, leaving them in poverty” (p. 125). Cullen (as cited in Kramer, 2000) asserts:

This deprivation and social exclusion are related to the high rates of violence found in the United States. . . .The way in which poverty, inequality and social exclusion act to produce violent crime by young people is through lack of social support and social control. This leads to the infliction of social and psychic pain on young people and the development of negative attitudes and emotions that can easily lead to violence. . . .The less social support there is in a community and communities that are characterized by family disruption, weak friendship networks, and low participation in local voluntary organizations, the higher the crime rate will be. . . .Parents are the best sources of support...In some cases parents are absent or abusive. In many cases parents strive to be good parents, but lack the capacity or opportunity to be so. All three of these structural factors may not be an absolute where producing crime is concerned; they are important items to keep in mind because of how they can influence the well being of family, the school and the community (pp. 125-128).

Based on the review of the literature, the following three areas were related to this research topic: A) African American's parents' perception of their responsibility, involvement, and roles, in their children's education, B) African American parents' obstacles they may encounter, C) How the sense of self efficacy (which determines beliefs, motivational, aspiration level, and possible degree of religious or spiritual beliefs) influences parents' perception of their roles for involvement.

## **History of Education and the Role of Parents and the Community**

Parents have always been viewed as the child's first teacher, even before the establishment of education and schools. Student goals were a reflection of the parent's self-efficacy, which in turn determined their aspirations and motivations. Historically, parents have regulated their children's educational goals which usually coincided with the social roles parents held in society such as the trades, agriculture, and the mercantile. Furthermore, the education of children was accomplished within the family home (Hiatt-Michael, 2008). These educational goals were determined by the aspirations and motivations held by parents, which, in turn was influenced by their self-efficacy.

Religious leaders established many of the initial schools. Parents were more or less concerned with the activities related to discipline, basic skills, work skills, ethics, and instilling values. Parents influenced their children's education by deciding how the schools were organized, who their teachers were, discerning school religious leaders and endorsing the curriculum. In essence, the school board members of these schools consisted of parents from the communities. The schools reflected the parents' particular religious beliefs and social status. The parents focus was mainly on reading and writing.

There were also schools that segregated students according to social class and were financed partly by parents and families. Parents who could not afford to pay fees for higher level schools were referred to charity schools, yet still in these schools,

parents were in control of the selection of teachers, curriculum, and religion preference (Hiatt-Michael, 2008).

The middle 1600's brought a change in the way schools were viewed and represented the beginning of public schooling in the United States. The *Law of 1647* (also referred to as the *Old Deluder Satan Act*) passed in Massachusetts, was incorporated from the realization that some families were not teaching their children how to read, write, and understand the scripture to avoid the ways of the devil. Ignorance was considered a satanic illness. This act required all towns that consisted of 50 families or more to employ someone to teach and pay the teacher through community funds (Hiatt-Michael, 2008).

Concurrently, other educational establishments were being formed, including the first Boston Latin School, which was mainly for those families whose sons were from a particular social class and were destined to be leaders in the church, state, or courts. The establishment and opening of the first "free school" in Virginia relied upon parents and/or tutors to home school their children in the south (American Educational History, 2010).

In 1690, John Locke published the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. The article introduced his theory of the human mind as being a blank state at birth, and that knowledge comes from personal experience rather than inborn ideas. His theory stressed the importance that children are taught the love of learning by parents and teachers. His teaching advocated astronomy, geography, and anatomy; this reflects the

break from scientific humanism and introduced a more intuitive change in curriculum involving not only science but professional training.

In 1743, Benjamin Franklin emphasized secularism, science and human reason. This captured and changed influential colonist ways- of- thinking even though it opposed the traditional religious doctrine of that time (American Educational History Timeline, 2010). During the mid-1700's, some African Americans were allowed to be educated, the educational instruction was normally by religious means, eventually leading to primary schools for African Americans (Gale Encyclopedia of U.S. History, 2006). The Young Ladies Academy, which opened in 1787 in Philadelphia, was the first academy for girls in America (In American Educational History, 2010). In 1791, the Tenth Amendment to the Constitution states that powers not delegated to the federal government "are reserved to the States, respectively, or to the people" (American Educational History, 2010, p. 3). Thus, legislatively, education becomes the responsibility of the state rather than the federal government (American Educational History, 2010).

During the early part of the eighteenth century, the first permanent school for the deaf (e.g. the Connecticut Asylum at Hartford for the Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons) opened in Hartford, Connecticut, and the first school for children with visual disabilities (e.g. the New England Asylum for the Blind) opened in Massachusetts. During this time, a proposal was also introduced noting that state and federal taxes should be responsible for funding all elementary schools, particularly schools in Virginia. Thomas Jefferson emanated the importance of children being taught how to read and write and

to be skilled public speakers. Ultimately, this proposal did not sit well with the majority of the people in Virginia due to the financial costs, therefore some parents grappled with the option of whether their children should be placed in religious (private) schools.

In the middle part of the eighteenth century, Horace Mann and Henry Barnard campaigned for public education in the United States through the presentation of the “ideal school” making it assessable to the public, thus a public school system, which would provide education for children from less fortunate families. Hoarce Mann also advocated for funding for public schools and improved teacher training, and in 1837, was appointed Secretary of the newly formed Massachusetts State Board of Education (American Educational History Timeline, 2010). As a result, public schools were instituted in most states by 1860. In 1856, Wisconsin established the first kindergarten in the United States and paved the way for 1860’s first formal kindergarten (American Educational History, 2010). The Compulsory Education Law, which required children to go to school, began during this era but was incorporated by all states by 1918. In 1867, the federal Department of Education was created to assist states in establishing effective school systems (American Educational History, 2010).

In 1874, Kalamazoo, Michigan appropriated the right for a community to use tax dollars in order to provide for free high school education which set a precedent for similar rulings in other states. The concern of the community for education of all children seemed to be somewhat apparent in Kalamazoo and proved that other states felt the same because they established the same tax levy system, therefore, showing the same concerns and community support for free education in the United States. This



ruling helped ease the concern of parents and the community because this meant that high school was accessible to all children without having to pay for it monetarily (Cole, 2010).

In 1892, the concept of education for all students became more integrated into society. The desire for a wider knowledge base for the preparation of students for college was also explored. As a result, science and other subject areas were considered for inclusion in the curriculum. This was in direct relation to the formation of the “*Carnegie Unit*” for determining the amount of school work needed in order to obtain this goal. To resolve this issue, the *National Educational Association* formed a *Committee of Ten*. The mission of the committee was to determine the subject areas to be studied in high school, the amount of time that should be spent on each subject and how to teach and assess them (Sheppard and Robbins, 2007).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, parents, mostly mothers, wanted to have some type of close knit communication with teachers, the ability to collaborate with them and input their ideas on different issues, and to integrate within the school system. Thus, the *National Congress of Mothers* (NCM) was formed. In addition, as a result of the *NCM*, the *Parent/Teacher Association* was formed (Butts and Cremin as cited in (Hiatt-Michael, 2008).

Continuing into the nineteenth century, parenting concerns surrounding schools and their childrens’ overall education and development, especially where cognition was concerned, which is also assumed to be needed for success in school, increased (Schaub, 2010). Around 1904, Mary Bethune, an African American educator, set up the *Daytona*

*Educational and Industrial Training School* for Negro girls in Florida. Through her leadership, African American women realized the importance of being involved in their childrens' education. Before this time, African American parents' major concern was one of survival for the family. An African American child's education was not seen as a viable option after family survival. Mary Bethune was a role model for arousing confidence and awareness that African Americans could and should be educated. According to Rashid (2009), Bethune saw education as a tool, for integrating individuals into society. Her curriculum would transform throughout the years. Between 1904 and early the 1930's, she started helping African American women perfect survival skills and later her curriculum evolved into classes that would enable African Americans to acquire technical skills; mostly related to auto mechanics and business. Through the struggles in acquiring a survival level of education, African Americans developed a new way of thinking that included inspiration, motivation and aspirations for and about education.

By 1918, compulsory education and child labor laws were upheld by all states. Through the encouragement of John Dewey, community education (public education) was also favored along with the late Thomas Jefferson's ideal of education i.e. universal education for all children, including the poor, minority and immigrants. In 1919, state laws provided funds for children's' school transportation (American Educational History, 2010). During the 1940's, parents of all social classes were invited to be present at Parent Teacher Associations meetings (Davies, as cited in Hiatt-Michael, 2008).

Some parents felt threatened by both local and state levels of the bureaucracy because it was felt that the formation of this “hierarchical organization of an institution with defined procedures, roles, and functions of personnel” (Hiatt-Michael, 2008, p. 49) narrowed their control from having input about issues in the public schools and their children (Davies, as cited in Hiatt-Michael, 2008). In addition to the previously mentioned theories, laws, and overall changes in education, this era has also brought about several court cases. Some of these included the *McCollum v. Board of Education*, *Engel v. Vitale*, and the infamous *Brown v. Board of Education*. Parents wanted equal learning opportunities for their children in several areas (Wirt and Kirst, as cited in Hiatt-Michael, 2008). In The *McCollum v. Board of Education* court case, the Supreme Court ruled against religious education or classes being taught in public schools. Along this same ideal, in the case of *Engel v. Vitale*, the Supreme Court outlawed New York’s Regents prayer because it breaches the First Amendment to the U. S. Constitution. Therefore, the ability of state officials making requirements for prayers to be recited in the public school system was banned.

Another landmark case is the *Brown v. Board of Education, 1954 of Topeka, Kansas*. The result of this case (May 17, 1954) rendered that separate but equal state established schools were in fact, not equal, and therefore, did not comply with the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment of the Constitution. This ruling was in reference to the segregated schools for African American and White students.

In the case of the *Brown v. Board of Education, 1954 of Topeka, Kansas*, “African Americans wanted smaller classes, a sturdier, extensive curriculum, better paid and

qualified teachers, more and enhanced instructional materials, newer and improved facilities, quality school buses, and most important, better opportunities to prepare themselves for life beyond elementary and secondary levels” (Lyons & Chesley, 2004, p. 304). As previously mentioned, the ruling of this case was in reference to segregated schools for African American and White students. Although it was ruled that the state established schools were not equal and did not comply with that of the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment of the constitution, action was not taken, especially in southern states, to move onto the Supreme Court desegregation decision until subsequent cases were filed. One of these cases was the *Swann vs. Charlotte-Board of Education* (1971). The ruling of the Supreme Court was that school districts were to “eliminate invidious racial distinctions and . . . produce schools of like quality, facilities, and staff” (Lyons & Chesley, 2004, p. 303) and make the district courts responsible for following up on the ruling and the bussing of children to different schools in order to make integration a reality. President Eisenhower demanded that several African American students have a police escort to attend a high school in Little Rock, Arkansas. The benefits of the process of segregation were slowly becoming a reality in Arkansas. Many scholars and countless others often investigate whether the *Board of Education v. Topeka* benefited African Americans.

This is an important topic because it relates to the history of the African Americans experience with education and shows that there has traditionally been a difference between the experiences of Whites and African American children and parents. Furthermore, the history of education is a good reminder of the struggles to

acquire an education. The details and costs of an education brought out in the historical court case are in many ways the same issues that are still affecting the academic achievement of African Americans today. According to Hale, 2001; Jackson, 2001, Reglin, 1995, and Roscigno, 1998 (as cited in Watkins, 2006) after *Brown v. Board of Education*, society, through ability grouping, tracking and many times special education designations, the system has used different tactics that often provide African Americans with a second- class education. In addition, according to Franklin (as cited in Watkins, 2006, History and Context section, para. 4) “unequal funding, different curricula, under-prepared teachers, out dated books and facilities are still being used to deny Blacks educational equity” . . . .

In order to bridge the achievement gap between African Americans and White students, these issues upheld in the *Board of Education v. Topeka*, and other court cases, need to be resolved and adhered to with further action taken that will allow and increase opportunities for African American students to progress and feel a part of and comfortable in the American educational system.

In a related and supportive study on the *Board of Education v. Topeka* effects, interviews and a questionnaire were developed and given to 25 African American high school principals in two southern states (Alabama and North Carolina) that were divided into two groups, one retired and the other actively employed. The interview questions centered on the advantages and disadvantages of the *Brown v. Education of Topeka* ruling and specifically how the ruling fared for African American students and staff. The

interview topics derived from Lyons and Chesley (2004) pertained to the following questions and statements:

1. Their beliefs upon African American students being able to have a fair as well as equal chance to serve in leadership roles today, responses—half of them felt that the opportunity was available.
2. Whether it is the norm for African American students in integrated situations to inquire or request for leadership roles, responses— some African American students will most likely need to be persuaded to run for these positions because of their doubt of winning; this fear of rejection often results from never having previously attended a predominantly White school and not having enough time to gain popularity or becoming aware of their value within their predominately White environment.
3. What are the organizations and clubs that African American students prefer where leadership roles are concerned, responses—were those that consist of predominately their race, ones that do not make race a determining factor for participation, and those that do not make them feel ostracized from their peers.
4. What are the student organizations and clubs that African American students lack participation, responses—Honor Societies, subject related clubs such as math, science and Spanish, school newspaper, debating team, baseball, golf and soccer

5. What student organizations and clubs do African American students participate in more frequently, responses—they participated in band, basketball, and football and along with being members of organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Black History Club, and choir (if predominately African American).
6. Are African American students chosen to participate in cheerleading squads, where beauty, size, and charm are factors, response—the student desire is evident, but there are several barriers preventing them from being successful at making the team through the selection process which includes hair styles, figure, appearance of African Americans, and not being able to afford the supplies and necessities that comes with cheerleading. (pp. 306-309)

An overview of the questions and the 36 respondent's answers from the questionnaires and 12 interviewed are as follows:

All of the participants felt that the *Brown v. Board of Education* court decision has in some ways helped African American students, yet still, some respondents felt that there were things that were sacrificed because of it.

Ultimately, the responses of the participants from Alabama and North Carolina were further analyzed when it came to more questions that pertained to factors that affected staff. These included: 1) whether both states believed that there should be more African American teachers teaching in the schools, response— (both states strongly agreed); 2) if the curriculum today adequately addresses the history, culture, and experiences of African Americans, response—

(both states strongly agreed that it does not); 3) if all students benefited from having African American teachers, response— (both states strongly agreed); 4) if it is a good policy to assign African American students to schools that serve primarily poor students, response— (both states strongly agreed that it is not a good policy); 5) if African American principals have special challenges when they supervise a staff of predominately White teachers in schools that enroll mostly African American students, response—(both states strongly agreed that they do); 6) if there is a shortage of African American teachers, response—k (both states strongly agreed); 7) if African American students generally have equal educational opportunities today, response— (both states moderately agreed); 8) and if an acceptable number of African American school staff members are employed to serve as positive role models for African American students response, (on a 1 to 5 scale, 1—not at all and 5—absolutely, the retired principals’ ratings were 2.0 in North Carolina and 3.24 by Alabama participants), which was the one area that the participants from the two different states differed. Other African Americans as a whole are concerned about the likelihood of African American students being placed in unchallenging environments or in classes where the curriculum is low and thus does not prepare them for college nor high social, economic, or political statuses, and there is a disproportion of Black males that are placed in special education where the services are inadequate. (Lyons, and Chesley, 2004, p. 307)



Ironically, The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University reported that in the last ten years, there is some desire to revert to segregation. For example, the *Dowell v. Oklahoma City* Supreme Court Case rendered the decision for neighborhood schools that allowed students to become segregated (Orfield and Lee as cited in Lyons, J.E. & Chesley, J, 2004).

The *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) was passed, with the strong support of President Lyndon B. Johnson, which allows low-income students to take advantage of educational programs such as Title 1 and funds for Bilingual education. This led to the *Bilingual Education Act* (1968) becoming a law (but is later replaced in 2001 by the *No Child Left Behind Act* which required schools to provide proof of student yearly achievement, or else the school will receive monetary penalties). In 1968, the state of Washington opened the first magnet school as a partial answer to the desegregation issue. In 1971, the federal court ruled that students with mental retardation are entitled to a free public education. In 1973, the *Rehabilitation Act* was passed; section 504 of the Act gives students with disabilities accommodations in schools even if they are not in special education. In 1975, the *Education of All Handicapped Children Act* became federal law providing for a free, suitable public education that is fitting to a student's individual needs, in the least restrictive setting.

Meanwhile, the education system continued to evolve and ultimately improve in the twentieth century. Schools started to improve the environmental conditions for students with disabilities and provide more enriched programs for children from low opportunity communities. In addition, greater emphasis was put on the parent's

involvement in their children's education, especially focusing on cognitive processes and issues. Parental involvement was advocated more to the point where parents were putting themselves more in the role of sharing the responsibility as being a teacher. The parents started to become more involved with preparing children for school preparing before kindergarten by making them familiar with their numbers, letters, and words, and other fun activities that would stimulate their cognition. This trend lasted for approximately a period of 50 years, from 1951 to 2001, and became commonplace, which suggests that schools can influence the role of parents which in turn, puts emphasis on students being able to develop their self-thinking abilities. According to a research conducted by Schaub (2010), the trend in parent involvement changed with large families, for boys less than girls, and African American and Hispanic families with working parents.

In the meantime, the 21st century brought about new challenges for students and educators. Global competition for jobs and new skills requirements sparked a need to revamp the curriculum and instruction to match these needs (Lynch, 2000). It is imperative that students be well-rounded academically in many areas including basic academic skills in reading, writing, math, science, history, civics, geography, and a foreign language. Equally important was critical thinking and problem solving skills that include analyzing information, applying ideas to new situations, and developing computer knowledge. Students need to master social skills and work ethics including communication skills, personal responsibility, and getting along with others from varied backgrounds (Rothstein, Wilder, and Jacobsen, 2007)

## **PARENT INVOLVEMENT STUDIES**

There are several researchers that uphold the need for family support and involvement in a child's early and primary education, including in-school help, out-of-school help, extra curriculum activities, and enrichment programs. These programs help to elicit positive and healthy outcomes for a well-rounded student. All of the parent activities help to strengthen a child's social, communication and comprehension skills, cognitive and literacy development, expressive language and positive engagement with peers, adults, and learning (Weiss, Caspe, and Lopez, 2006; Anderson and Minke, 2007). The more interested parties are involved in the students' education, the more favorable the results for a students' academic success. School and families create strong building blocks for a child's educational foundation (Pianta, La Paro, Payne, Cox, and Bradley, 2002). Although there is a multitude of parental involvement factors that affect the academic achievement of students, research supports that parental involvement usually assures successful student achievement in school.

The findings presented by the Heritage Foundation (2011, Brief # 28) on family facts stated that preparation for school where preschoolers and parents are involved, with them gives parents more insight and knowledge about how to prepare their children with the basic skills needed for school. Some of the basic skills instruction included academic, social and behavioral aspects which provided for less behavior problems and good progress academically in kindergarten and middle school years of school. Parents, who are involved with their children before and during their school

years and have high expectations for them, overall increase the likelihood of high school graduation and completion of core courses (mathematics, science and English).

Minority students, when parents were involved, profited more in areas such as standardized test scores, teachers' reports and overall academics. This is especially true for African American males whose parents were authoritarian and familiarized them with their cultural heritage. Furthermore, parents who encouraged math and science through having high regards for it and providing educational products that helped enhanced their knowledge about these subjects; their children were more likely to study those subjects.

In addition, the Heritage Foundation, (2011 Brief #16) research identified additional factors that could strengthen children's success in school. It appeared that when students reported having:

1. Role models, the student had better grades and black males had higher grade point average and less truancy. Black female students who identified a brother rather than their father as their role model were more likely to use alcohol and exhibit violent behavior than peers with parental role models.
2. Math and reading scores were better for children from two parent families over time and regardless of fathers' involvement, teenagers living in single-father homes tended to have lower grades than peers in two-parent households.
3. When variables such as social and financial capital were taken into account, home environment, the number of hour's mothers worked, and social problems within the school were still related to children's math proficiency. The home

environment was measured by its physical condition, the presence of cognitive stimulation in the home, and mother's affect and disciplinary style. School social problems ranged from gang activity and drug use to tardiness and measures of inadequate nutrition and clothing.

4. Every unit increase in an adolescents' family satisfaction corresponds to a three to 12 percent decline in their odds of having problems in school.
5. Religious adolescents tend to spend more time on homework and are less likely to be truant.
6. The students who frequently participated in structured non-school activities are more likely to join school clubs and groups, prepare for class, and feel more optimistic about their future and have higher math and science achievement than students who participated less in structured after-school activities.
7. After controlling for ethnic and group factors, individuals who lived in communities with high religious densities had, on average, more years of education than those who lived with lower religious densities as measured by church attendance.
8. As far as educational attainment was concerned, individuals who watched more hours of weekday television during childhood and adolescence have, on average, lower educational attainment. They were less likely to have earned a university degree by age 26 when compared to peers who watched less weekday television. (Brief #16)

Jeynes (2005) performed a meta-study on parental involvement and K-12 students' academic achievement. He determined the extent to which certain expressions of parental involvement are beneficial to children. Seventy-seven studies were reviewed which included a total of three 300,000 students. Thirty-six data analysis were based on secondary schools, 25 from elementary schools and 16 from both elementary and secondary schools. There were 5 major questions asked that produced the following answers:

1. How does the academic achievement of students whose parents are actively involved in their education compare to that of their counterparts whose parents are not involved? Results indicated that parental involvement is associated with higher student achievement outcomes, including grades, standardized test scores and a variety of other measures.
2. What is the particular influence of specific aspects of parental involvement? Facets of parental involvement were a large investment of time, such as reading and communication with one's child. The more subtle aspects of parental involvement were parental style and expectations which were more influential than demonstrative aspects of parental involvement, such as having household rules, and parental attendance and participation at school functions.

3. Which aspect of parental involvement has the greatest impact on academic achievement? Parental expectations had the largest effect sizes that emerged. Parental style and reading with one's child had very consistent influences across the studies.
4. Do the effects of parental involvement hold for racial minority children? Studies with 100% minority students indicated that the effect sizes were statistically significant for all three of the minority groups studied. The effects of parental involvement tended to be larger for African American and Latino children than they were for Asian American children.
5. Do parental involvement programs work? On average, they do work but they do not have a greater influence of parental involvement as a whole. This is thought to be the case because parents already enthusiastic about supporting the educational progress of their children will, on average, tend to help their children more than parents whose participation is fostered by the presence of a particular program.

DeTorres (2010) investigated parental involvement while at Piney Point Elementary School located in a small rural area in Texas. In the classroom she conducted a study on was 1st grade with seventeen students, 2 of which had individualized Education Plans and 4 of which were in the reduced lunch program. Questionnaires were distributed to parents of students in the classroom and teachers that consisted of open-ended questions about the most and least popular school

sponsored activities. The results indicated that teachers opinionated that even though parents do not appear in the classroom, they still were involved in their children's education. Conversely, parents felt that they were not involved because they were not actually in the classroom. Parents voiced ideas for programs that they would like to participate in including homework and drills, foreign language classes, workshops for parenting, workshops that tutor parents about ideas utilized in the classroom, workshops familiarizing parents about the Internet and about what contributions parents could give to enhance educational activities after school. Parents mentioned that they wanted to see their children succeed in school and by involving themselves. Hopefully their children would get the message that school was important and, therefore, wanted programs that reflect such, while the vice principal viewed activities that were centered on student, would be more successful.

Another research study performed by Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, and Sandler (2007) probed parents' motivational beliefs, perceptions of invitations for involvement from others, and perceived life context concerning parental motivations for involvement and how these motivations influence specific involvement decisions. The researchers used students' parents in order to understand what prompts parents' home-based and school-based involvement. The predictability of parents involvement in the home was based upon their perception of how their children's invitations, self-efficacy and what they thought about how time and energy allowed them to be involved. Results of the study revealed that self-efficacy related to parents being more involved in the home. Furthermore, the more communication students had with their



parents and teachers motivated parental involvement, as opposed to social economic status. However, elementary school parent's involvement in the home was evolved through how much their children aspired to want their parent's involvement, the parents' sense of self- efficacy and perceived roles, and time restraints and energy possessed by the parent. These findings are consistent with previous findings; parental involvement decreased as children grew older.

## **AFRICAN AMERICAN PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS**

Most of the research on parental involvement reveals that parents are an important factor in student performance. The parent's self-efficacy is regarded as one of the better determinants of how parents will assist their children, as well as, how well and to what degree parents think of themselves as being able to juggle all of the necessary engagements in order to provide for their child's school success (Junttila, Vauras, & Laakkonen, 2007).

Religious factors have been also found to boost and promote a more positive parent self-efficacy. This positive self-efficacy may be in direct relation to parents' perception of being involved in their children's education which can also be the vehicle for creating higher motivation and aspiration in parents for their children.

One question to ask is: why are children failing and uninterested in school to the point they drop out? Some of the answers may become more apparent from the research.

Presently, in Michigan, there are identified grade level expectations that are used to evaluate student progress to a specific standard and assess whether a student will be ready for the next grade. These standards are contained in the Michigan Grade Level Content Expectations (GLCEs), which "have been developed based on national standards to provide schools, teachers and parents with detailed information about what students are expected to know and be able to do at the end of each grade", even though this does not "represent the entire richness of a district curriculum. Parents can

utilize this guide” (GLECs) to review what their children should know at the end of each grade level; communicate with their children’s teacher about their progress; think of ways to help their children learn at school and outside of school; “understand Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP) test results” and other important factors about helping their children in school (Ann Arbor Public Schools, n.d., p. 2). Students that are behind during the school year can be helped through multiple interventions given by family members, parents, tutors and others that are willing to keep the student up on their course work. Often, those students, who are not caught up on their course work, are left behind and as a result, grades drop and they lose interest in school.

According to McWayne and Owsianik (2004), parent involvement, as far as low-income children were concerned, was correlated with positive student development. While most people use the framework of parent involvement established by Epstein, to look at connections between different aspects of parent involvement and successful outcomes of children, McWayne and Owsianik (2004) views Fantuzzo and his colleagues’ study as a more appropriate source. Fantuzzo, Tighe, McWayne, Davis, and Childs (as cited in McWayne and Owsianik, 2004) devised a forty item, *Parent Involvement in Children’s Education Scale*, to determine how much a specific involvement behavior occurs pertaining to supportive home learning environment (behaviors that parents’ used to help educate their children at home), direct school contact (parents involvement in school-based activities and direct communications with school personnel), and inhibited involvement (factors that interfere with parents’ involvement in their children’s education). This construct was used to enable McWayne and

Owsianik (2004) to look at parent involvement in kindergarten and use the results to compare the extent of parent involvement samples of an ethnic minority, low-income sample with a preschool identified in a demographically similar sample. The population consisted of minority children, 95 percent African American from urban schools. Results indicated that parents who provided home learning activities and reinforced what was taught in school, had children with higher levels of social skills and seemed to have more self-control as well as were socially inclined in both home and at school. The students were also more motivated towards learning and progressed in the subjects of reading and mathematics.

While several factors can be included concerning the academic performance of students, there is one that is usually not taken into account, i.e. the effect of parental involvement and how it is connected with a student's peer influence grouped with how students behave in school. Consequently, this relationship may shed light on the student's social skills, and the types of relationships they acquire with teachers and other adults and how well they perform in school as well as committing to graduate.

Windle (2009) conducted a study that examined how much influence behavior, parenting, and school connectedness moderated the association between peer deviancy in the beginning stages of adolescence and externalizing problems in early adolescence. The participants were mostly 5th grade African American students, both boys and girls. The socioeconomic status varied, but most of the families were from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Parenting practices were reported by parents and children revealed their school connectedness and externalizing behaviors (misconduct and

substance use) during their early adolescence. The results of the study disclosed that parents of preadolescents that reported little behavior problems by their children and low-levels of negative parenting practices, peer deviancy was not a predictor of externalizing behavior or misconduct and substance use by early adolescence. By contrast, children who had behavior problems before preadolescence or were in an environment of negative parenting, choosing violent and disruptive peers as their friends was related to higher levels of externalizing behaviors (misconduct and substance abuse) over time. Gender, ethnicity, and school connectedness were not factors concerning the relationship between peer deviancies and externalizing behavior.

According to Diamond, Wang, and Gomez (2006), research on parent involvement emphasizes the role of middle class status in providing access to dominant forms of cultural and social capital which was one of the bases of their study. African American communities often utilize the church members and prayer as a valued source of capital. Diamond, Wang and Gomez (2006) compared African American and Chinese American forms of involvement and their ways of supporting their participation through the use of interviews and surveys. Working middle class African American and Chinese American parents were the participants. The main focus of the study was to investigate the parents' perceptions of the school's value, their communication experiences with school staff and resources, both personal and community based, that they utilize to give them support with their educational participation. The results uncovered that both group's aspirations were alike; however, the strategies were different when it came to involvement. In particular, African American parents strongly upheld the importance of

home and school-based involvement and would try to help by being involved in the school. On the other hand, Chinese American parents were less likely to attempt school-based involvement but viewed home-based involvement as very important and had their own family and community resources to cover whatever the school did not provide. For example, Chinese Americans created schools that provided services that the whole family could profit from, such as, workshops, financial management, books and magazines. The classes were taught by Chinese professionals in different fields. Both African American and Chinese Americans have access to and utilize community based social capital to fill in the void when other forms of capital do not meet their needs.

Another study similar to the previous study by Engerman and Bailey (2006), “examined family decision-making style, peer group affiliation, and prior academic achievement as predictors of academic achievement of African American students” (p. 443). They discovered that the primary people that the adolescence students socializes with are parents, friends and their peers, therefore, a lot of attitudes, morals and values that adolescence absorb come from these same people and this have impact on their academic achievement. The participants of the study were 10th graders that the researchers had followed up through the 12th grade.

Fuligini and Eccles (as cited in Engerman, and Bailey, 2006) research revealed that as adolescences seek autonomy, peer pressure challenges parental authority. As a result, adolescence is a critical social period of development. “Ethnic groups have distinct child-rearing beliefs and practices, and socioeconomic status that profoundly

affects family functioning” (Berk, as cited in Engerman and Bailey, 2006, p. 443). For instance, African Americans tend to be more authoritarian than Whites; and families with high SES tend to be less authoritarian (Smetana, as cited in Engerman, and Bailey, 2006). The styles depicted were those of Baumrind’s (as cited in Engerman, and Bailey, 2006) which included authoritarian “(parents control their children and set strict standards of conduct, little personal freedom, and expect absolute obedience); authoritative (the environment this creates is one of support and consistency while respecting their child’s individuality), and permissive (parenting style fails to define appropriate limits and standards of acceptable behavior, consequently parents exercise minimal control and authority over their children)” (p. 444).

As far as academic achievement in the classroom was concerned, a positive relationship with parents was correlated with academic motivation (Razzino et al., as cited in Engerman and Bailey, 2006). “Studies have found that academic achievement was positively impacted by authoritative parenting style and negatively impacted by authoritarian and permissive parenting styles. Adolescents whose families were classified as permissive, earned significantly lower grades than adolescents from authoritative homes” (Glasgow, Dornbush, Troyer, Steinberg, and Ritter; Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, and Fraleigh; Steinberg, Elmen, and Mounts, as cited in Engerman and Bailey, 2006, p. 444).

“Peer groups are formed on the basis of perceived intelligence, extracurricular activities, socioeconomic status, race, and school achievement....Adolescents’ relationships with peers were outcomes of family decision-making styles”(pp. 444, 445).

Razzino et al. (as cited in Engerman and Bailey, 2006) “found that relationships with parents correlated with adolescents’ affiliation with learning or delinquent oriented peers” (p. 445). Peer orientation during high school was looked at from a study conducted by Fuligini, Eccles, Barber, and Clements (as cited in Engerman and Bailey, 2006). They found that “those adolescents who affiliated with delinquent-oriented peers in 7th and 10th grade had lower academic achievement in 12th grade. Moreover, adolescents who affiliated with delinquent-oriented peers in 10th grade had less learning-oriented peers in 12th grade. However, this is a lower predictor of academic achievement” (p. 445).

The authors above conducted a study of 8th graders whom were tracked through high school and further until they reached a place of employment. The first sets of students were tracked up to the 10th grade and the second set to the twelfth grade. The participants were predominately White, but the results could be generally related to African Americans. Results of this study indicated that children who had friends who were considered high learners in the 10th grade did not correlate to how the child would advance in academics. The way in which African Americans made decisions in the home had nothing to do with how well a child would progress academically. If an African American student was struggling with his/her lessons in the 10th grade, then odds were that they would also struggle with his/her lessons in the 12th grade. Students that came from families with high social economic status, more than likely were not being deprived of materials needed to enhance their academic



achievement such as the provision of computers in the home and other educational materials.

Additional research on parental involvement revealed the following:

1) Through research Epstein; Stevenson and Baker; Zill & Nord (as cited in O'Bryan, et al., 2006) found that as the child advanced to higher grades, parental involvement lessened. However, whenever involvement does occur, in comparison to other ethnic groups, on average, African American students profit more.

2) "In a study which examined the effects of extra-curricular activities on drop-out rates, McNeal (as cited in O'Bryan, et al., 2006) found that participation in athletics and fine arts significantly reduced a student's likelihood chance of dropping out of high school" (p. 404).

The educational involvement of parents of African American high school seniors was the focus of study performed by O'Bryan, et al. (2006). The author's purpose of the study was to investigate how participation in school activities and, other types of extracurricular school activities were taken into account. They examined students' responses from 1990 and 1992 with results emphasizing African Americans of both genders even though other ethnic groups were involved in the study. The results revealed that varsity sports participation was significantly linked to parent-involvement but not other extra curriculum activities. Involvement included parents initiating the line of communication with school staff for African American males and females. Except with females, the communication process was not as profound as with males.

There can be several strategies set into place to motivate and close the achievement gap for African American students. A strategy incorporated by Washington's Superintendent of Public Instruction (2008) was examined. Several studies that revealed students with involved parents, no matter what their economic, racial or ethnic and educational background, were more likely to "earn high grades and test scores, and enroll in higher level programs; be promoted, pass their classes, and earn credits; attend school regularly; have better social skills and adapt well to school; graduate and go on to post-secondary education" (p. 23).

In this research superintendents and colleagues were informed about schools that succeeded in involving families from different types of backgrounds and cultures, and found they had three things in common: 1) trusting collaborative relationships among teachers, families and community members, 2) recognizing, respecting and addressing families' needs, 3) a philosophy of partnership where power and responsibility are shared. (p. 23).

While there is little or no doubt that parental involvement contributes to positive results for children as far as education is concerned, additional factors such as engagement and motivation, parents' sense of self-efficacy may strongly influence their perception; and religion in turn can influence and/or raise the level of their self-efficacy (Martin, 2009).

According to Bandura (as cited in Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997; Ardelt, and Eccles, 2001) self efficacy is defined as "an individual's belief about their abilities to exercise and maintain some level of control over events that affect their lives....If

individuals have strong self-efficacy beliefs, they will tend to put forth even greater effort in response to difficulty or less than satisfactory performance on their part; they approach difficulties as challenges to be mastered rather than threats to be avoided” (p. 17-18). It has been also explained as self-referent estimations of competence in the parental role or as parents’ perceptions of their ability to positively influence the behavior and development of their children (Coleman, and Darraker, 2000). Hoover-Dempsey et al. (as cited in Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997) perceives self efficacy, as it relates to parents and helping children succeed in school and in relation to parent involvement as “beliefs about their general ability to influence their child’s developmental and educational outcomes, about their specific effectiveness in influencing the child’s school learning, and about their own influence relative to that of peers and the child’s teacher” (p. 19). Bandura (as sited in Junttila, Vauras, and Laakkonen, 2007) reveals that parental self-efficacy beliefs have also been connected to the child’s motivation to learn. The more motivated the child is to learn, usually, the more they are able to acquire the skills needed to decode, read with comprehension, and do mathematical problems and other school elementary subjects.

As previously mentioned, religious instruction was the first basis of education for African Americans. Religious instruction was meant to divert the African American slaves’ heathen ways through the teachings of Christianity. Churches took on the responsibility of conversion via teaching the gospel to slaves that resided on the plantation either through pastors, missionaries, or sometimes it was their masters’ responsibility to provide this religious instruction (Gale Encyclopedia of U. S. History,

2006). Throughout history, Christianity or most denominations, for those who still hold to the principles, has kept African Americans a resilient culture. Swatos (1998) found the following:

Scholars from a variety of disciplines have recognized the central significance of religion in African American culture. Scholarly studies on African American religion in the United States can be traced to W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Negro Church* (1903). In addition to exemplifying the richness of the African American experience, black religion provides us with significant insights into the social condition of black people in U.S. society. E. Franklin Frazier (1974) argues that African American religion historically has functioned as a "refuge in a hostile white world." At another level, however, it has served as a form of cultural identity and resistance to a white-dominated society. The development of African American religion, particularly during the twentieth century, took a multiplicity of interrelated streams, which makes it a variegated phenomenon that has only begun to be more fully explored in recent decades (Nelsen et al. 1971, Murphy et al. 1993). (Web version, introduction)

The report indicated that those who have a high-level of self-reported Christianity (or devoted to a denomination) and adhere to the principles of the Bible, brings them into some type of relationship with God through the scriptures in the Bible which in turn builds on their inner strength. For example, in Mark 10:27 (Light of the World), Jesus said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible" (p. 822). Parents may share these same principles with their children. Consequently, faith, through affiliation with the principles of their denomination

became the governance for their perceptions, conscience or awareness. Martin Luther King was a pastor who was governed by these same denominational principals. In his “I Have a Dream” speech, he advocated non-violence in order to attain equality for African Americans which helped the realization of deleting separation of Whites and African American students in schools (nobelprize.org, 2007). Several social scientists think that religion whether through schooling or personally instilled, helps African American adolescents cope with the different negative encounters that they meet, ultimately, providing an avenue for them to excel academically and socially (Jeynes, 2003; Jeynes, 2007; Fagan, 2006; Dollahite, 2005). Also, Smith (as cited in Dollahite, 2005) found that “religious parents have significantly higher moral expectations for and exercised more supervision over their adolescent children” (p. 8).

Research conducted by Hendricks, Hendricks, and Kauffman (2004) found relationships between literacy, criminal activity and recidivism. “Recidivism is defined as the rate at which released prisoners return to jail or prison . . .?” (Hendricks et al. 2004, p. 5). The research revealed a direct correlation between reading difficulties and problems with academic achievement resulting in a high rate of students dropping-out of school. In short, research reveals that approximately 15 percent of students in the United States dropped-out of school because of not being able to keep up academically and therefore lost interest in school and the hope of ever catching-up (Adult Basic Education, as cited in Hendricks, et al. 2004).

Lieb (as cited in Hendricks, et al, 2004) pinpointed poor educational performance as a key predictor of misconduct among our country’s youth. Also, Hodges, Giuliotti and

Porpotage (as cited in Hendricks, et al., 2004, p. 1) assert that “one recognized characteristic of juveniles incarcerated in correctional and detention facilities is their poor experience with elementary and secondary education”.

Hendricks, et al. (2004) and Steurer (1996), found that when the reading and writing skills of prisoners and non-prisoners were compared, those who had poor literacy skills, on average, were more prone to higher recidivism rates.

In another study conducted in Genesee County, Michigan on prison inmates, an educational program was started in the Genesee County Jail called Project LEAD (Life Enrichment and Development), Williams (1996, as cited in Hendricks et al.) investigated the mental and social status of those inmates that had reading and writing problems. The program consisted of courses in life skills and vocational instruction and was modified to fit the personal needs and interests of the inmates involved in the program. The inmates received a minimum of 15 weekly hours of instruction that included assistance with computers, life-skills, classroom, and tutoring on an individual level. The recidivism rate of inmates participating in the program was reduced dramatically.

## **AFRICAN AMERICAN PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS**

### **Roles of Parents Concerning Involvement**

Another factor of parental involvement includes the roles of parents that can be viewed from the conceptualizations of what parents perceive their involvement entails (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997). What parents think their role is sets precedence for what they actually strive to put into action as far as participating in their children's education. According to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) the role is a reflection of what parents think they should implement when it comes to their children's education and helping them be successful educationally. This in turn, comes from a number of sources, including the parents' beliefs about a developing child; at home support for education and how they should bring up or care for their children. Views of how a parent defines their role of involvement in education is at home may differ from involvement at school according on the life-style of the parents. For example, some parents feel that if they have disciplined, clean, well-fed, children that are sent to school every day, and on-time, that this satisfies their role of involvement, even though they might intervene whenever there is a problem at school. These factors define both the parents' role at home and school. Whereas, other parents may do the same as the previous parents but also take on the responsibility of initiating contacting the teacher to make sure their child is academically progressing, visiting the classroom to monitor

their behavior, or take time to find out if they can be of any assistance to the teacher (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997).

In Flint, Michigan, crime has risen to the point that the city has one of the highest homicide rates in the country in the year of 2010. The area where most of the homicides were committed was mostly populated by African Americans (Raymer, 2010)

According to Dillon (2009):

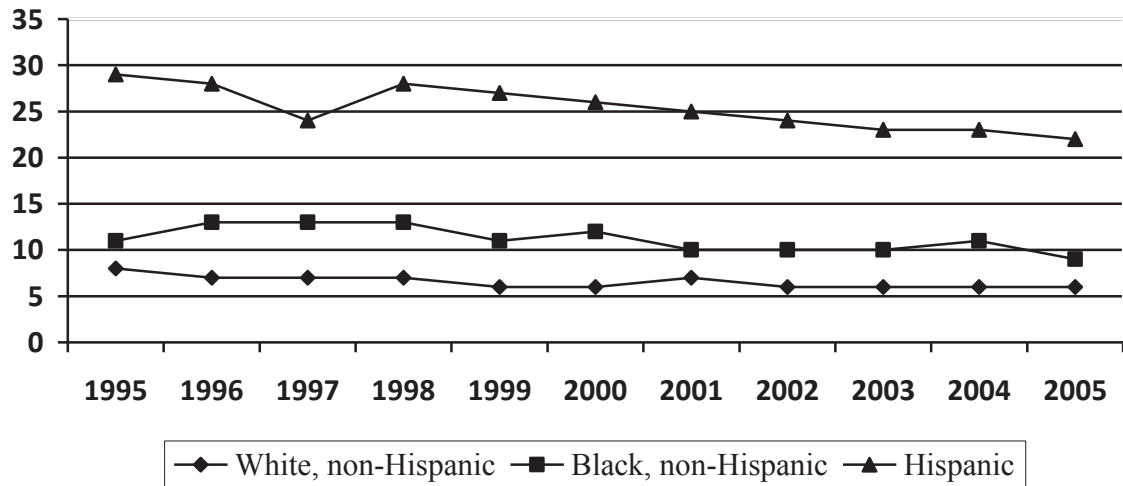
On any given day, about one in every 10 young male high school dropouts is in jail or juvenile detention, compared with one in 35 young male high school graduates, according to a new study of the effects of dropping out of school in America. The picture is even bleaker for African Americans, with dropouts incarcerated or otherwise institutionalized on an average day, the study said. That compares with about one in 14 young, male, white, Asian or Hispanic dropouts. Researchers at Northeastern University used census and other government data to carry out the study, which tracks the employment, workplace, parenting and criminal justice experiences of young high school dropouts.

See Table 3.0



Table 3.0

*Dropout Rates of Youth, Ages 16 to 24, by Race and Hispanic Origin (%)*



Source: This table in its original form and used here as a .jpg, was as cited by U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008 was reported in the article, *What Challenges are Boys Facing, and What Opportunities Exist to Address Those Challenges?*

Studies conducted at Northeastern University and U. S. Census data revealed that the number of school dropouts is related to a greater need for more jails that cost Americans at least \$292,000 over the working lifetime of each dropout through cost of food stamps, jail costs and other support services (Morial, as cited in Dillon, 2009). Morial (as cited in Dillon, 2009), president of the National Urban League asserts, “This report makes it clear that every American pays a cost when a young person leaves school without a diploma” (Dillon, 2009). See Table 4.

Table 4.0

*Total Lifetime Public Savings per Expected High School Graduate in Present Values at Age 20*

Population Group	Extra Tax Revenues	Health Savings	Crime Savings	Welfare Savings	Total
Average	\$139,100	\$40,500	\$26,600	\$3,000	\$209,100
Male					
White	\$202,700	\$27,900	\$30,200	\$1,200	\$262,100
Black	\$157,600	\$52,100	\$55,500	\$3,300	\$268,500
Hispanic	\$119,000	\$37,800	\$38,300	\$1,200	\$196,300
Other	\$168,600	\$39,000	\$30,200	\$1,200	\$239,000
Female					
White	\$109,100	\$39,600	\$8,300	\$5,000	\$162,000
Black	\$94,300	\$62,700	\$8,600	\$9,000	\$174,600
Hispanic	\$85,000	\$46,500	\$8,300	\$3,100	\$143,000
Other	\$96,700	\$49,200	\$8,300	\$3,100	\$157,300

*Note.* An expected high school graduate is one who probabilistically terminates education after graduation, completes some college, or completes a B.A. degree. Gender- and race-specific probabilities are applied. Benefits are gross; that is, they do not count for additional educational costs. Discount rate is 3.5% (see endnote6). Numbers are rounded to the nearest \$100. (p. 15 same as above) This table was reported in the article *The Payne of Addressing Race and Poverty in Public Education: Utopian Accountability and Deficit Assumptions of Middle-Class America*, 2010, p. 15.

## **AFRICAN AMERICAN PARENTS INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS**

### **OBSTACLES PARENTS MAY ENCOUNTER**

Although parents know their roles, this does not necessarily mean that it is possible to put them into action or endure them because of impeding obstacles encountered. For example, African American parents who work, have aspirations for their children to do well in school and graduate with enough knowledge to attend college. Unfortunately, these parents have obstacles they have to deal with, while at the same time have fewer resources to help them deal with these obstacles. For example, many parents are not familiar with the educational system (Auerbach, 2007).

Equally important, obstacles can interfere with parents' involvement in their children's education because of single parent families being employed or attending school themselves which can lead to diminished financial resources, less time with children to teach or monitor behavior, lessens time to create or perfect relationships with their children, help with school work and time to be involved with outside school activities with their children, and creates more stressors. Parents may not have the education themselves needed to help their children with homework, and or social skills. The lack of finances may hinder parents from being able to provide their children with educational materials, transportation to school events or outside of school activities (i.e. lessening their information on school related topics to talk with their children about). This can be seen in a study conducted by Stewart (2006) which found that parents have

a lot to do with encouraging their children's academic achievement by the kind of educational environment they provide in the home (Lee, JS., & Bowen, N. K., 2006; Jeynes, W. H., 2003).

An additional compliably factor is that more mothers are being forced to obtain jobs outside of the home. In 1999, 60 % of women were working outside of the home, up from just 43% in 1970 (U. S. department of Labor, as cited in Weiss, et al., 2007). These studies reveal that the availability to tend to the needs of their child becomes lessened because it is shared with job obligations and consequently, is a barrier for parents who have to work (Newman and Chin, Weiss, et al.). The study involved thirty-seven percent African Americans 36% White, and 24 % Latino parents of twenty families. Mothers who worked was positively related to involvement, although the mothers with less than 30 hours of work were more involved than those who worked 30 hours or more and those mothers who did not work at all were involved less than both. See Table 5.0

Table 5.0

Factors Impacting Parental Participation

Factor	Description
<b>Cultural and linguistic diversity</b>	<p>Differences between the culture and/or language of the home and the school may lead to parental isolation. School customs, expectations, and experiences often do not reflect the backgrounds of the neighborhood families (Calabrese)</p> <p>Some parents do not participate in school activities because they believe it is the school's sole responsibility to educate their child (Epstein)</p>
<b>Economics</b>	<p>Parents living in poverty are less likely to become involved in their child's education than is middle-and upper-class parents (Coots)</p> <p>Parents' economic status is more likely to affect school-based involvement than home-based involvement (Coots, McDermott &amp; Rothenberg)</p> <p>Parents' living in poverty often expresses doubts about their own educational abilities and abdicates the education of their child to the teacher (Sojourner and Kushner)</p> <p>Parents living in poverty often are focused on the immediate needs of their family and do not have time to assist their child in school (Smalley and Reyes-Blanes)</p> <p>Some teachers believe that families of low income do not value education and assume the parents do not have anything to contribute to the education of their children (Bloom)</p>
<b>Family composition</b>	<p>Schools with a high population of single parents often experience less parental involvement. There is decreased school involvement and support from the noncustodial parent in single parent families (Bloom)</p>
<b>Parental education level</b>	<p>Schools with a high population of single parents often experience less parental involvement. There is decreased school involvement and support from the noncustodial parent in single parent families (Bloom)</p>
<b>School communication</b>	<p>Often, a weak communication system exists among the school, African American families, and the community (Morris and Thompson)</p>
<b>Interaction with the school</b>	<p>African American parents have experienced institutional barriers (e.g., personal, cultural, and structural; negative teacher and administration attitudes) that keep them from actively participating in their child's education (Thompson)</p>
<b>School success of children</b>	<p>Many African American parents see their child attending under-resourced and overcrowded schools (Brown) and believe that this has a direct impact on their child's educational achievement (Epstein)</p>
<b>Personal constraints</b>	<p>Personal factors involve (a) lack of time, (b) lack of transportation, (c) lack of child care, (d) scheduling conflicts, and (e) lack of understanding of educational jargon (Coots, Harry, Pena, Smalley, and Reyes-Blanes)</p> <p>Parents' own negative school experiences can result in their feeling intimidated by the educational system (Thompson)</p>

Note: This table was reported in the article, African American Parents: Improving Connections with Their Child's Educational Environment, 2007, p. 117.

## **SUMMARY**

Without doubt, research has conveyed the message that a diploma and college degree is not only a passport to a job, but also can be linked to social and economic outcomes. Parents can utilize connections (employment, social status, financial, leadership, community, self efficacy, aspirations, and motivations) available to them in order to promote academic and social skills for their children's future development into adults. Schools also play a role in shaping the child, therefore, parents need to communicate with school as well as participate with school in order to strengthen the chances of producing a successful, well rounded student.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction/Study Design**

This descriptive study focused on African American parents' perceptions of their responsibilities and involvement in their children's education, roles, and the obstacles they may have encountered.

This study was classified as a one-shot case study, survey design as described by Campbell and Stanley (1966) since it involved investigating naturally occurring treatment without manipulation of the independent variable by the researcher.

#### **Population**

According to the latest census figures for Flint, Michigan, African Americans represent just over 50% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, as cited in the Flint Journal, 2011). The participants in this study were African American parents with children in kindergarten through 6th grade.

The target population was African American parents who have children in the Flint Public Schools, in grades kindergarten to 6th grades. The population of Flint, Michigan as of 2010 as recorded by the U. S. Census Bureau (as cited in the Flint Journal, 2011) was 102,943. Approximately 25% of the population has children under age 18 and under the direct care of women and approximately ten percent is under the direct care of men, both genders do not have a partner present in the home hence, approximately 35% of the population has children under the age of 18 with no partner

present. In terms of student performance in 2011, the Flint city school district rank 502<sup>nd</sup> of 572 Michigan school districts. Select school regions from Flint were of particular interest for this study. For example, according to School Digger (n.d.), an on-line database Carpenter Road Elementary, a Flint School is on the north side of Flint and has approximately 300 students. Ninety-nine percent of the students received free or reduced lunch (Flint, MI Elementary Schools, n. d.). As of 2010, the student racial population consisted of 243 African Americans 32 Whites, two Hispanics, three Asians and one American Indian. The school ranks 1,300th of 1,360 Michigan public elementary schools; while the Flint City School District ranks 502<sup>nd</sup> of 572 Michigan school districts. "Rank is determined by adding each school's average MEAP Math score with the average MEAP Reading score to form a combined average score. The school with the highest combined score is ranked # 1" (School Digger, n. d.).

### **Sample Selection**

A non-probability convenience sample of parents that have a child or children attending Flint community schools of kindergarten sixth grade students in Flint Michigan were surveyed. The target sample was on African American parents living in neighborhoods with high levels of public assistance. The researcher collected 50 fully completed and usable surveys.

### **Instrumentation**

The survey was developed and adapted from surveys used in prior research including, *Exploratory Factor Analysis and Confirmatory Custer Structures for Family Involvement Questionnaire* Factors (Fantuzzo, Tighe, and Childs, 2000, p. 370) and select



items in the *Questionnaire Factors as a Function of Demographic Data* (Fantuzzo, et al., 2000). Also, items from an on-line school survey was used from the article, Some questions that have appeared on parent Surveys (p. 2); Life Experiences survey (Lamb-Parker, et al., 2001, p 44) and the Demographic Characteristics of *Participating Mothers* (Lamb-Parker, et al., p.42); School help statements from 2009 *Family Involvement Survey* (Ohio Department of Education, under the heading *2009 Family Involvement Survey*); and the Open ended-fill-in blank questions on the Evaluation of *Parent Involvement Opportunities* (Irving Independent School District, 2011, Spring).

The survey was pilot tested with a subgroup of similar individuals from the population. Suggestions for improvement were made to the final survey instrument. The survey consist of three general sections: 1. Demographics, 2) Family Involvement Questions, and Life Experiences and Possible Barriers. The demographics section contains questions pertaining to personal data about the parents. The Family Involvement Questions were broken up into three categories that included school-based involvement questions and question formulated regarding awareness about Michigan educational standards, home based involvement questions regarding home school conferencing. There are life experiences and possible barriers questions pertaining to the obstacles that parents may experience that keep them from being involved in certain aspects of their childrens' education.

The survey contained 75 questions pertaining to parents' opinion of what the schools and teachers could do to improve communication and relationships between

parents and the family as well as what information parents' think that teachers could give them in order to become involved.

### **Validity**

The face and content validity of the survey was assessed by a panel of experts having knowledge of the population and the Flint School system and a review of the literature of similar surveys. Particular focus was aimed at the readability and understandability of the survey instrument to the nature of the target population. After the survey was pilot tested with a subsample of the target population, additional changes were made to the final survey instrument

### **Data Collection**

The survey data collection period ran from December 1, 2011 and February 15, 2012. The survey was administered to elementary school parent populations outside of the confines of the school building in Flint, Michigan. More specifically, the survey was distributed to parents with children in kindergarten through 6th grade in the Flint Community Schools – a public school system. Surveys were used to gather information from the population in an attempt to discover the different perceptions of what parents consider responsibility and involvement covers and based on survey questions pertaining to roles for involvement in school, as well as outside of school and the obstacles that prevent them from participating.

Data was collected through surveys provided to African American parents. Through informal networks, such as, neighborhood leaders, churches, service

businesses, and social networks. Researchers also canvassed the public assistance housing on the south and north sides of Flint for those African American parents who have children in kindergarten through 6th grade, in the attempt to reach the students who attend schools located on the north and south sides of Flint. . The survey along with the research proposal was submitted to the Institution Review Board in September, 2011 and approved on November 4<sup>th</sup> 2011.

### **Data Analysis**

Demographic information was tabulated and reported in charts and tables with descriptive data analysis. Descriptive statistic and thematic analysis was used to reduce the open ended question responses.

This data was analyzed to examine the opinions of the parent population and certain characteristics that revealed themes within the data.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Results**

African American parents/guardians with children in the Flint Community Schools were surveyed from January 2012 to March 2012. The following is a general description of the survey respondents' demographics followed by the responses to the main survey questions. The sample consisted of a total of 50 African Americans of which 100% had children in kindergarten through 6th grades. Of the respondents, 88% were female, 12% were males, and 4% self-reported as multi-racial (in which was included in the African American ethnic group). The dominant language used in the household was English in 100% of the African American households. The respondents indicated that 52% of the households typically contained three to four members living in the home. The African American female respondents indicated that 88% did not have a partner at home. On the other hand, only 33% of the male respondents indicated they did not have a partner in the home. Twenty-seven percent of both female and male respondents worked outside of the household 40 hours or more. Twenty-two percent of the African American respondents had completed Bachelors degrees. Sixty-four percent of the respondents indicated a religious affiliation with a denomination and 60% considered themselves as being moderately religious. There were a total of 56 males and 35 female students in kindergarten through sixth grades living in the homes of African American parent/guardians who responded to the survey.

### Results of the Personal Demographics of Respondents

The survey contained several detailed questions related to the respondent’s demographics. These ranged from ethnicity to their gender amongst other questions.

The following is a complete breakdown of the results of the demographic questions:

**Gender**—the respondents were asked: *Gender of children who are in kindergarten through 6th grade in the home?* The choices were a) male and their ages, and b) female and their ages.

Table 6.0

*Total Amount of Female and Male Students in the Homes in K-6*

Options	Number/ Amount of students
Female	35 (38%)
Male	56 (62%)

Survey Question: *Your gender?* The choices were a) Female, and b) Male.

Table 7.0

*Gender of Parent/Guardian*

Options	Respondents (50)
Female	44 (86%)
Male	6 (14%)

**Ethnicity**—the respondents were asked: *What is your ethnicity?* The choices were a) African American, b) White, c) Hispanic, d) Multi-Racial (Mixed), and e) Other.

Table 8.0

*Parent/Guardian Ethnicity*

Options	Number/ Amount Out of 50 Participants
African American	48 (96%)
White	0 (0%)
Hispanic	0 (0%)
Multi-Racial/ (Mixed)	2 (4%)
Other	0 (0%)

**Language**—the respondents were asked: *What is the dominant language used in the home?* The choices were a) English, b) Spanish, and c) Other.

Table 9.0

*Dominant Language used in Parent/Guardian Home*

Options	Number/ Amount Out of 50 Participants
English	50 (100%)
Spanish	0 (0%)
Other	0 (0%)

**Education Level**—the respondents were asked: *Your highest education level?* The choices were a) less than high school, b) high school/GED, c) Some credits after high school, d) Associate degree, e) Bachelor degree, f) Masters or higher, and g) other.

Table 10.0

*Education Level of Parent/Guardian*

Options	Number/ Amount Out of 50 Participants
Less Than High School	3 (6%)
High School/GED	9 (18%)
Some Credits After High School	15 (30%)
Associates Degree	9 (18%)
Bachelor Degree	11 (22%)
Master's Degree or Higher	2 (4%)
Other	1 (2%)

**Employment Status**—the respondents were asked: *Parent employment status outside of home?* The choices were a) 0-20 hours b) 20-30 hours c) 30-40 d) 40 hours e) More than 40 hours and f) Not presently employed.

Table 11.0

*Employment Status of Parent/Guardian Outside of Home*

Options	Number/ Amount Out of 48 Respondents
0—20 Hours	9 (19%)
20—30 Hours	8 (17%)
30—40 Hours	3 (6%)
40 Hours	8 (17%)
More Than 40 Hours	13 (27%)
Not Presently Employed	7 (15%)

**Religion**—the respondents were asked: *Do you affiliate with any religious denomination?* The choices were a) yes, and b) no

Table 12.0

*Does Parent/Guardian Affiliate With any Religious Denomination?*

Options	Number/ Amount Out of 50 Participants
Yes	32 (64%)
No	18 (36%)



*Do you consider yourself a religious person?*

Table 13.0

*Parent/Guardian Consider Themselves Religious Person*

Options	Number/ Amount Out of 50 Participants
Extremely	13 (26%)
Moderately	30 (60%)
Not at All	7 (14%)

**People Living in Household**—the respondents were asked: *Number of people living in the household?* The choices were a) 1 to 2, b) 3 to 4, c) 5 to 6, and d) 6 or more.

Table 14.0

*People in the Household*

Options	Number/ Amount Out of 50 Participants
1 to 2	10 (20%)
3 to 4	26 (52%)
5 to 6	8 (16%)
6 or More	6 (12%)

**Partner in the home**—the respondents were asked: *Do you have a partner at home?*

The choices were a) yes, and b) no.

Table 15.0

*Parent/Guardian has Partner in the Home*

Options	Number/ Amount Out of 50 Participants
Yes	18 (36%)
No	32 (64%)

## Results of the Main Research Questions

Table 16.0

### *School Involvement Factors:*

Questions:	M	SD
1. I volunteer in my child's classroom	3.96	1.07
2. I participate in school family social activities	3.92	.94
3. I go on class trips with my child	4.04	1.01
4. I participate in fundraising for my child's school	3.68	1.16
5. I am aware of my child's academic strengths and weaknesses	4.62	.64
<u>Additional Comments:</u> A) I think that parents who are more involved in their children's education are more successful. I participate as much as possible. B) The rating does not go with the questions. C) School needs more field trips. D) I am part of the planning.	N/A	N/A

In section I, of the survey, the questions concerning “school involvement factors” were developed to generally assess the degree to which parents or guardians are involved in their children’s school. The questions included parents’ level of agreement to their participation in the classroom, social activities, fundraising, class trips, and the student’s academic strengths and weaknesses. The mean response of the parents/guardians perceptions to their level of agreement for all of the five questions was a mean of 4.0 (agree). The individual means and standard deviations are reported

in the table for this section. It should be noted that the highest level of agreement was a mean of 4.62 for the following question: I am aware of my child’s academic strengths and weaknesses; and the lowest mean for this section was the question: I participate in fundraising for my child’s school; with a mean of 3.68. Generally, this indicated parents thought being involved in their children’s education would assist, encourage and motivate children to excel to their highest potential in all of their school endeavors.

Table 17.0

*Educational Standards:*

Questions	M	SD
1. I am aware of the state grade level standards	3.54	1.27
2. I am aware of the state grade level standards because the school has informed me of them	3.36	1.35
3. I do not need to know about the state grade level standards because I trust the school to teach my child	2.20	1.35
4. It does not matter if I know about the state grade level standards because it is my child’s responsibility to learn	1.82	1.20
5. I am aware of the MEAP testing	4.27	.95
6. I know what my child is being tested on in the school	3.80	1.18
<u>Additional Comments:</u> A) I’m not familiar with the state grade level requirements but I know about the MEAP test. I do trust the school as far as the standards. If the parent, child and teacher work together, the child will excel. B) Statistics show that Black males have been labeled since I can remember...It shows that boys are slower learners than girls. Girls learn from K-4 and boys start their learning processes at grades 2-4 so their already 3 levels behind. C) Need to provide more information to parents about this.	N/A	N/A

Section II, the questions about “educational standards”, the participants rated their level of agreement to the following statements or questions: if parents/guardians are aware of the state grade-level standards and if they are, did the school inform them; if they felt that they did not need to know because of the trust they held in the school to teach them to their children and if it just did not matter if they were not familiar with the grade level standards because it was their children’s responsibility; if they were aware of the MEAP testing; and if they knew what their child is being tested on in the school. The mean response of the parents/guardians’ perceptions to their level of agreement for all of the six questions was a mean of 3.2 (agree). The individual means and standard deviations are reported in the table for this section. It should be noted that the highest level of agreement was a mean of 4.27 for the following question: I am aware of the MEAP testing; and the lowest mean for this section was the question: It does not matter if I know about the state grade level standards because it is my child’s responsibility to learn, with a mean of 1.82. The opened-ended comments included: not really knowing what the state grade level standards neither are nor mean but depended on the school to take care of this factor, also some thought the school should provide information about both the MEAP testing and the state grade level standards. There was also a concern about Black males being labeled for many years and how they start out the education process behind other students because of the labeling. Generally, the results indicated parents/guardians were not familiar with the state grade level standards but were familiar with only a few aspects of the MEAP test. They

were concerned about the school providing more information about these two different issues. Also, Black males needed more attention and from school staff and the obstacles they face within the school system addressed, hopefully, decreasing the likelihood of starting their education at a disadvantage.

Table 18.0

*Home-Based Involvement:*

Questions	M	SD
1. I talk with the teacher about how my child gets along with his/her classmates at school	4.53	.65
2. I bring home learning materials for my child	4.14	1.04
3. I spend time working with my child on creative activities	4.24	.89
4. I share stories with my child about when I was in school	4.64	.63
5. I see that my child has a place for books and materials	4.51	.77
6. I take my child to places in the community to learn special things (i.e. library, museums, career fairs, cultural events, etc.)	4.33	.83
7. I maintain clear rules at home that my child should obey	4.68	.47
8. I praise my child's learning efforts	4.72	.50
9. I review my child's school work regularly	4.52	.74
10. I keep a regular morning and bedtime schedule for my child	4.00	1.28
11. The homework my child brings home is confusing to me	2.52	1.43
<u>Additional Comments:</u> A) I make sure she gets enough sleep. B) It's not so much the homework that be confusing, it's the way they go about teaching it to them...not all children learn the same. C) Although my child's bedtime is set, it also varies on outside activities such as sports and church. D) Some of the homework, not all.	N/A	N/A

Section III, of the survey dealt with questions concerning “home-based involvement”. The 11 questions were developed to assess the degree to which parents/guardians assisted their children at home with their education. The questions included those such as, talking with the teacher about how their children gets along with their classmates; if the parent/guardian brings home learning materials, spend time on creative activities, share stories with their child about their learning experience, take their child to places in the community to learn (library, cultural events, museums, etc.), maintain rules at home, praise their child about learning, have a daily schedule for their child; and if the parent/guardian thinks that their child brings home homework that they think is confusing. The mean response of the parents/guardians perceptions to their level of agreement for all of the 11 questions was 4.3 (agree). The individual means and standard deviations are reported in the table for this section. It should be noted that the highest level of agreement was a mean of 4.72 the question: I praise my child’s learning efforts. The lowest mean for this section was 2.52 for the question: the homework my child brings home is confusing to me. The open-ended comments for this selection included: the different ways that teachers teach the lessons are confusing. Generally, this indicated parents/guardians were concerned about how they learned the subject that their child brings home for homework was taught different than the way they were taught and it is difficult to help them when it is now taught very different.

Table 19.0

Home-School Conferencing:

Questions	M	SD
1. I talk with my child's classroom teacher about classroom rules	4.14	.98
2. I talk with my child's teacher about my child's difficulties at school	4.54	.79
3. I talk with my child's teacher about school work to practice at home	4.54	.71
4. I talk to my child's teacher about my child's accomplishments	4.54	.71
5. I talk to my child's teacher about my child's daily routine	4.32	.79
6. I attend parent conferences with the teacher to talk about my child's learning or behavior	4.60	.61
7. The teacher and I write notes about my child or school activities	3.51	1.16
8. I talk with school principals and others about problems or to gain information	3.65	1.13
9. I talk with my child's teacher on the telephone, text, e-mail, or other methods of communication	3.77	1.29
<u>Additional Comments:</u> A) I attend all conferences I pop up to teachers and principals about concerns. The teacher does send home a weekly progress report. B) Most of the time when a teacher is calling it is not on a good note. It's mainly something to tell you something he/she hasn't done correctly or don't completely understand. It's never on a good note. C) I talk to my child's teacher in person.	N/A	N/A



Section IV, contained questions pertaining to “home school conferencing”. The nine questions were developed to generally assess the degree to which parents/guardians are conversing with the teacher and/or staff about how their children are doing in school. The questions included parents’ level of agreement to communicating with their child’s teacher about classroom rules, work to practice at home; their child’s accomplishments, difficulties at home, daily routine, learning or behavior; if they communicate through writing notes concerning school activities; talk with the school principal and others about how to gain information; and if they communicate through methods such as, texting, telephone, e-mail, and any other methods of communication. The mean response of the parents/guardians perceptions to their level of agreement for all of the nine questions was 4.2 (agree). The individual means and standard deviations are reported in the table for this section. It should be noted that the highest level of agreement was a mean of 4.60 for the following question: I attend parent conferences with the teacher to talk about my child’s learning or behavior. The lowest mean was 3.51 for the question: The teacher and I write notes about my child or school activities. The open-ended comments for this section included: the teacher usually calls them only when there child is doing something that is not acceptable in school or bad behavior and not when they do something good. Generally the open-ended comments indicated parents would like to hear about how their child is progressing or something about what their child could do in order to achieve higher standards in school.

Table 20.0

Parent factors that prevent you from being involved:

Questions	M	SD
1. I have a baby or toddler at home	3.46	1.59
2. I have a schedule that conflicts with many of my child's school activities	3.33	1.21
3. I'm working or going to school during the day	3.71	1.29
4. I have one or more children with a special need	2.45	1.43
5. I have inflexible work or school hours	3.36	1.17
6. I have one or more children with a major health problems during the school year	2.23	1.36
7. I do not have dependable and or convenient child care	2.51	1.39
8. I moved during the school year	2.15	1.18
9. One or more adults at home have a schedule that interferes with school activities	3.10	1.38
10. I sometimes feel uncomfortable with school staff	2.34	1.29
11. I have family and friends that help support the education of my child	3.84	1.16
12. I feel family and friends are more of a drain than help	2.31	1.16
13. I do not have reliable and convenient transportation	2.41	1.30
<u>Additional Comments:</u> A) I'm a single mom with a toddler and a flexible work schedule but there is no excuse for being involved. B) I believe that if you truly love your children you will find a way to help do what is necessary when it comes to their education... C) Family and friends help with transportation and to oversee my child on school trips when I can't be there. D) Full time student.	N/A	N/A

Section V, had questions about those factors that prevent involvement. The 13 questions involved factors that 'prevented involvement' and were developed to generally assess the degree to which parents/guardians involvement is hindered in their childrens' school. The questions included: parents level of agreement to having a baby or toddler at home, a schedule that conflicts with the child's school activities, working or going to school during school hours, having a child that has a major health problem, moving, feeling uncomfortable with school staff, family are more of a drain than a help, and not having reliable transportation. The mean response of the parents/guardians perceptions to their level of agreement for all of the 13 questions was 2.9 (agree). The individual means and standard deviations are reported in the table for this section. It should be noted that the highest level of agreement was a mean of 3.84 for the following question: I have family and friends that help support the education of my child; and the lowest mean for this section was question eight: I moved during the school year; with a mean of 2.15. The open-ended comments for this section included: things that agreed with the idea of involvement as being a help, and that most of the time, school involvement should be put in parents/guardians schedule regardless of their situation. Generally, the open-ended comments indicated parents/guardians were aware that their involvement makes a difference in their children's progress at school.

Table 21.0

School Help:

Questions	M	SD
1. I talk with my child's teacher face to face at least once a year to talk about how my child is doing	4.40	.81
2. When I have a question, concern or comment about my child, the teacher, principal or guidance counselor gets back to me right away	3.88	1.10
3. I receive regular updates from the teacher on my child's progress	4.02	1.06
4. My child's teachers' adjust their teaching styles to meet the academic needs of my child	3.04	1.21
5. I believe my child is challenged by the school's academic curriculum	3.44	1.25
6. My child's teachers hold high expectations for my child	3.88	.87
7. My child receives the academic support needed to meet his/her individual needs	3.86	.88
8. I am given information services to support my child's behavior and learning needs	3.65	1.10
9. My child's school is a safe place to learn	3.90	.91
<u>Additional Comments:</u> A) Via e-mail on a weekly basis educational assistance is available. B) As far as safety and support I agree but I do pay tuition also. C) Although I work for a school district, my children attend another school district. My children a predominantly White school and in my opinion most of the teachers only care about their own race while the other half of the teachers although they mean well they tend to do more harm because they try label the children or have them placed on some type of medicine...when truly their missing the fact that they're children and they all learn differently...	N/A	N/A

Section VI, involved questions that pertained to school help or what the school does to help students learn and thrive. The nine 'school help' questions were developed to generally assess the degree to which parents/guardians think that the school provides help to their children in school. The questions (in the form of statements) included parents/guardians level of agreement to factors such as: does the teachers ask to meet with them at least once a year to discuss their child; does the teacher, principal or guidance counselor get back to you in a timely manner when you have a question or concern; if the teacher keeps the parent up-dated on the progress of their child; if their child's learning style is taken into consideration when the teacher teaches a lesson; is your child being challenged academically; do the teacher hold high expectations for their child; do the teacher give academic support to your child; do the school give information about services that may help you child meet their academic and behavior needs; and is the school a safe place to learn. The mean response of the parents/guardians perceptions to their level of agreement for all of the nine questions was 3.8 (agree). The individual means and standard deviations are reported in the table for this section. It should be noted that the highest level of agreement was 4.40 for the following question: my child's teacher asks to meet with me face to face at least once a year to talk about how my child is doing; and the lowest mean for this section was 3.04 for the question: my child's teacher(s) adjust their teaching styles to meet the academic needs of my child. The open-ended comments for this section included: the teacher

should utilize more ways to contact and communicate with parents/guardians and contact them more often about the concerns they have about their children. Generally, the open-ended comments indicated parents were concerned about the progress of their children on a more constant basis through other means than just the phone and the dependence of the student bringing home notes.

Table 22.0

Parent Opinion about school assistance:

Questions:	M	SD
1. Should the school provide information about how to help students do his/her best in school?	4.70	.46
2. Should the school provide parents with information for being involved with students school work?	4.58	.73
3. Should the school provide parents with information about the academic curriculum, the testing programs and how students performed of state assessments?	4.73	.45
4. Should the school post the school's vision and mission statement in readable format in school?	4.64	.60
5. Should the school provide a parent resource center?	4.47	.65
6. Should the school provide a library for parents to check out books, videos, and other materials, or for using the computer?	4.12	.95
7. Should the school provide an orientation to the school setting for new families?	4.48	.61
8. Should the school provide information to family members to enhance the social, emotional, physical and cognitive development of your child (e.g., cultural, and community events)?	4.48	.68
9. Should the school provide an opportunity for parents to input important decisions about the school?	4.67	.47
Additional Comments: No comments	N/A	N/A

Section VII, contained nine questions pertaining to parents/guardians opinions about school assistance. These questions were developed to generally assess the degree to what parents/guardians thoughts were about: whether the school should provide them with information about helping students to do their best in school, being involved with student's school work, the academic curriculum including testing programs and student's performance on state assessment, a parent resource center, access to a library that will allow them to check out items and use the computer, an orientation to the school setting (especially for new families), to families that would help their child with the social, emotional, physical and cognitive (e.g., cultural, and community events); and should the school post the school's vision. The mean response of the parents/guardians perception to their level of agreement for all of the nine questions was 4.5 (agree). The individual means and standard deviations are reported in the table for this section. It should be noted that the highest level of agreement was 4.73 for the following question: should the school provide parents with information about the academic curriculum, the testing programs and student's performance on state assessments. The lowest mean for this section was 4.12 for the question: should the school provide a library for parents to check out books, videos, and other materials, or for using the computer. There were not any open-ended comments for this section.

The next section gave parents/guardians a chance to write their personal opinions on three subjects: what the school could do to help parents to be involved with helping their child achieve in school; if they had suggestions for improving the communication between school and home; and to comment on anything related to parent involvement that was not asked. The open-ended opinions were:



Table 23.0

Open-Ended Opinions to: What Can the School Do to Help Parents/Guardians Be More Involved With Helping Their Child Achieve In School?

- 
1. By keeping them informed about the child's progress, notify parents when students have missing assignments.
  2. I think it's more of the lack of involvement some parents don't know that their child is not doing well until it's too late.
  3. They can have classes on parenting because often parents don't know how to be a good parent.
  4. Giving homework assignments where the parent has to sign it every night.
  5. The teachers should ask for help in other areas than just snacks and fieldtrips...
  6. Give parents a guide to the lessons being taught to our kids. We have not been in school for a while and cannot remember or know the new ways to do some work.
  7. Teachers need to be more willing to accept parent involvement on any level. They should make parents aware of any behavioral or academic challenges. Offer strategies that parents can practice at home.
  8. Parents need to be motivated or desire to helping their child achieve in school.
  9. Let the parents know of any new information, or technology to help their child to excel, and also teach the parents new ideas for the household.
  10. Weekly progress report of child's school work, test and assignments.
  11. Explain to parents what the child has trouble with and what is being taught.
  12. Continue communication with parents encourage the importance of parent involvement.
  13. Stay involved.
  14. Provide a help guide for parents for whatever homework the child has. Some children are being raised by grandparents.
  15. Send home stuff.
  16. Send home progress reports more frequently.
  17. Update them on stuff.
  18. Make them have homework and ask the parents to get involved.
  19. Have a "Bring your parent to school" day.
  20. They can send newsletters home.
-

Table 23.0 continued. . .

Open-Ended Opinions to: What Can the School Do to Help Parents/Guardians Be More Involved With Helping Their Child Achieve In School?

- 
21. Open lines of communication and e-mails.
  22. Hold meetings to get ideas and work around people's schedules.
  23. Have more contact with parents; let them know what's going on.
  24. Keep parents updated on child's progress.
  25. E-mails sent out, hold PTA meetings.
  26. Update on what the school needs help with.
  27. Provide more take home exercises and materials. Home workshops about helping with homework the new math and when are getting ready to have state tests let us know.
  28. Well my problem is that I am a stay at home dad and I am unable to attend certain activities with my child because the baby can't go.
  29. Set reachable goals.
  30. Help with a lot of work they need help with.
  31. The school could have some of the parent meetings in the evening for parents who work all day.
  32. Provide meetings where parents are involved in the decision making and enforce some decisions.
  33. Teachers need to interact with parents more and let them know what is going on.
  34. Set aside a day or two weeks just for parents and teachers.
  35. Be more direct and open to what parents want to also learn.
  36. Home work needs to be sent home with better instructions.
  37. Be flexible for the working parent.
  38. Teachers should make it a point to make projects and make it mandatory for parents to be involved at least once a year especially 5th and sixth grade. If they don't come, then no grade will be given. Letting parents know.
-

Table 24.0

Do you have suggestions for improving the communication between school and home?

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1. Keep updating the parents with the information.
  2. Continue to send information by e-mail and at parent teacher conferences.
  3. First of all the schools need to make sure they can contact the parents have working phone numbers and correct addresses and the parents need to periodically check on their child's behavior.
  4. School should make sure that they have a website and e-mail capabilities. Everyone does not have computers so it is important to write notes also. The schools already use e-mail, paper mail, and line as well as cellular phones and letters sent home about the student. So, no I do not...
  5. Newsletters, keep websites up to date.
  6. They need to make time to talk to each individual parent stressing any concerns or acknowledging strengths.
  7. Schools calls home or have a better system to inform parents. Always tell the parents what's going on at school, it's a big deal or not keep something always to talk about.
  8. Monthly parent and teacher interaction.
  9. E-mails, letters or phone calls.
  10. Still provide mail and email and phone calls.
  11. Have the school call home or e-mail.
  12. Keep teachers involved with providing information on how each child is doing to the parents.
  13. Send letters in the mail every month explaining what is going on, and what their learning.
  14. Parent teacher conference, telephone, conference calls between parent and teacher.
  15. E-mail, mailing papers more often.
-

Table 24.0 continued. . . .

Do you have suggestions for improving the communication between school and home?

- 
16. E-mail parents when needed and phone calls home to parents.
  17. Home school should contact the parents more often.
  18. Set up weekly automated grade e-mails.
  19. Text, face- book, dinner.
  20. Maybe the teacher could visit the child's home.
  21. More parent teacher conferences and not just report card pick up.
  22. Weekly or bi- week's meetings with teachers and parents.
  23. Yes, keep parents informed on goals and short comings.
  24. I have good communication with my child's teacher and the principal at the school.
  25. The school should call home.
  26. Technology has advanced public school should e-mail and text parents.
  27. Take time with your child.
  28. Knock on parents doors to stress importance of involvement.
  29. Getting the teacher's information.
-

Table 25.0

Please Comment On Anything Related To Parent Involvement That We Have Not Asked.

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1. I am a substitute teacher as well as a parent so I see things from both ends. Allow parents to have input regarding the volume of math homework problems. Allow it to vary based on the student, for example, our ADHD diagnosed child was routinely given 30 Algebra problems per week night. That was too many problems.
  2. Let us know what our kids are learning.
  3. Parents need to be more involved to pass state test not just to pick up cards because they act like they don't have time (teachers).
  4. Need a lot of staff help with the kids.
  5. The meals at the schools need to improve their nutrition value.
  6. Have state or city wide PTA at least once a month. Set up incentives for them to come and activities to do there and giveaways.
- 

Generally, the open-ended opinions indicated parents/guardians, if not involved as much as they could or want to be, do desire to be involved in their children's education. Parents/guardians would appreciate it if the school suggested ways that they could be more involved in their children's education. Communication seems to be a huge concern of parents/guardians, both with teachers and other school staff, particularly with initiating it; and utilizing the many different types and ways that are available for the communication process. For example, phone calls at home and cell, Facebook, texting, visiting the home, meeting at a neutral place and taking in consideration times that would be convenient for parents/guardians who work.

Parents/guardian's wanted to know about their children's progress (tests, classwork, homework and behavior, etc.) well before they are in the danger of receiving a poor grade; and in time enough to correct this problem, in order to increase the chances of them knowing or understanding the next phase of the same subject. For example, knowing addition and subtraction before attempting multiplication and division will increase the probability of mastering them both. Parents/guardians welcomed the idea of their children bringing homework home but were concerned about knowing how to help them with it and wanted the school to be of assistance. Some parents/guardians thought it would be great if teachers and other staff members would create more strategies geared toward getting more parents/guardians to attend PTA meetings and even making certain rules that would make it mandatory that they attend. Parents/guardians wanted to be more involved in the decision making process. They also mentioned the desire to be taught and/or updated on different types of technologies,

The third question included comments on items related to the subject but have not been mentioned; raised a few ideas that indicated again, the interest in meeting with teachers but stressed getting more parents/guardians to attend PTA meetings through giving them incentives and making the PTA meetings cover a larger part of the community, or even including several schools to meet at the same time. Another comment addressed the meals that were given at school. They thought that they did not have much nutritional value. Also, there was a comment that dealt with special education and how the lessons should be geared more towards the student's learning

style, capability. Also, lessons should be tailored to those students with ADHD and other impairments.

### **Limitations and Implications**

Due to the low number of respondents in this study, the results cannot be generalized to the entire population of African American parents in Flint, Michigan. Also, some of the participants may have not fully or honestly disclosed information or took the time to include everything they really felt because of fear that it would affect their children in the school in some way or another. Some of the questions may not have been fully understood, therefore, participants may have just put anything for an answer. Many of the respondents put all of the children's ages that resided in the home instead of just those children that were in kindergarten through sixth grades, therefore, the 12 year-old children could have been in the seventh grade and not the sixth; and this would make the number of children recorded as being in kindergarten through sixth grade slightly off. Also, there is no way to tell if the 12 year-olds were retained in the sixth grade. A large majority of women filled out the survey; therefore, the comments reflected women's' opinions. There were few African American males that took the survey and were single parent/guardians; therefore, further research could be done about the perceptions of African American males pertaining to their involvement in their children's education. Many of the parents/guardians were concerned about the communication and collaboration process of parents and school, particularly teachers. Teachers need to take in account that parents work and cannot be involved like they

want to and therefore make amendments for meeting and communicating with parents/guardians; also consider using several different ways to contact parents/guardians and even set up a site where parents can go to in order to keep in contact with them. The timing of contacting parents about their children's progress and other concerns the school may have; and suggestions of what parents/guardians can do to help their children seems to be of great concern because this may help with their children's grades and behavior problems. Religion or being part of a denomination does not seem to be as important as it was in the generations before this one. Just because parents/guardians were religious is not indicative of how involved they are with religion.



## **Chapter V**

### **Conclusions**

### **Recommendations**

Although family involvement in their children's lifetime of learning takes place across many different settings, the school setting is the one of particular interest in this study. Effective communication and collaboration skills are the key to producing healthy relationships. It is apparent that the parents/guardians who participated in this survey wanted to be involved in their children's education and see them succeed in all aspects of the school environment (academically, behaviorally and socially). Most of the comments related to concerns about being able to communicate with school staff and their desires to build communication and collaboration steps with school staff in order to make this a reality. In most cases, in order to strengthen the possibility of students' well-roundedness in the school setting, the bridge of teacher-parent-student has to be in place. In this regard, both parents and teachers need to practice communication and collaboration skills.

There is a need to reinforce the traditional and create new methods of communication between parent(s) and the school/teacher. It is also important and recommended that leaders at all levels value communication to the extent that they practice or be conscience and have a working knowledge of the process of acquiring effective communication skills. This includes thinking beforehand about what exactly you want to convey and how you want the message to come across when

communicating with parents/guardians, knowing what message you want to get across, and what you want to transpire because of using these communication skills; all of which helps to open the pathway for ideas leading to change.

Trust is what bonds most healthy mutual and strong communal relationships and, in essence, assists with acceptable performance from all stakeholders involved. Therefore, when parents, students and school staff interact with each other often, it helps to bridge the gap amongst them and builds trusting relationships. Bunker, (as cited in Adams, Forsyth, and Mitchell, 2009) (p. 6). (Putnam as cited in Adams, Forsyth, and Mitchell, 2009, p. 8). (Lewis & Weigert, as cited in Adams, Forsyth, & Mitchell, 2009, p. 29) Staff can create a school climate for parents and students that encourage effective communicating which in turn may provide the opportunity for parents to be involved. (Family Engagement as a systemic, sustained, and integrated strategy to promote student achievement, Harvard Family Research Project, April 2010, [www.hfrp.org](http://www.hfrp.org)).

Many parents responded that they did not have a full understanding of what the Grade Level Content Expectations and MEAP tests entailed, therefore, a good starting point can be acquainting parents/guardians with the expectations teachers have for students with the hopes that they will acquire these same expectations for their children. Some of these expectations can be revealed at the beginning of school via a letter that introduces the teacher of the classroom, state what and why they will be learning the material given to them through familiarizing them with the Grade level

content expectations and MEAP tests, and how these goals will be achieved including what they mean.

Keeping parents/guardians informed of the progress of their children according to these state standards (meeting them, exceeding them or below them) will allow the parents to be aware of exactly where their children stand as far as this progress and invites them to think about questions they can ask the teacher in order to find out what needs to be done in order to intervene. As a result of this communication, teachers can suggest activities that parents can do at home to help their child and be the starting point for collaboration. This is vital because many parents reported that they do support student learning at home and these facts and other suggestions could help parents structure the intervention process for their children at home.

Grades alone may not reflect what the student is deficient in or necessarily inform parents/guardians the whole picture about how efficient (strengths and weaknesses) the student is in the subject. For example, an A in math does not tell the parent about the subtraction problems they incur when he/she is attempting to solve division problems, even though they understand the process of division and eventually get the problem solved correctly; or in English when they receive an A because they are graded on writing papers correctly but struggle with noticing when to capitalize some of the different proper nouns. This problem can be relayed to the parent/guardian through conversation and will allow for parents/guardians to have the chance to intervene and the teacher to give some suggestions of what they can do to intervene at home.

Some parents/guardians reported that they were not familiar with the new ways that certain subjects were taught. This is especially true, since in this society a lot of grandparents are stepping in to raise their grandchildren. Many times they feel they cannot help their children/grandchildren with homework and need to be informed on how the new process works or just minute parts of the process in order to be able to invent their own ways to explain or help with homework assignments. This is another method that teachers can reinforce the traditional and create new methods of communication between parent(s) and the school/teacher and programs.

Many times parents/guardians, a friend, or family member may have a computer or the parent/guardian may have access to the library, therefore, a suggestion for teachers is to create a website to use as a way of to transfer information about students and an avenue to communicate with parents.

Another suggestion is to have teachers and parents' conference more frequently. In the event that a working parent/guardian has a day off from work or extra-time, communication lines should be available to contact the teacher to conference with the parents/ guardians. Schools could send home progress reports more frequently and at specific times of the month. Sending communication on a regular-monthly basis will alert parents/guardians on when to expect communication from the school. These monthly messages can also be a plus for communicating with parents/guardians about school events related information and offer suggestions for helping students with homework. Additionally, texting can be used to contact parents/guardians who cannot answer phone calls at work or home.

Some additional programs for communicating with parents includes Math and Parent Partners (MAPPS)—allow parents/guardians to stress their concerns and give input about math subjects including, what they have or have not accomplished in a particular mathematical subject. “Math for Parents” is a part of this innovation whereas parents take courses on particular math subjects in order to gain a better understanding of what is taught their children in the classroom and gives opportunity for parents to better assist their children at home. Another program is “Families and School Together (FAST)” —the school staff assesses the difficulties that children possesses which allows inception of undesired behaviors and will hopefully increase in parent involvement and at the same time helps teachers engage parents in the mathematical process. Parent Institute for Quality Education is yet another program that is worth recommending. This program entails intense training (usually low-income parents/guardians) resulting in making them more knowledgeable and equips them with skills and arouses personal commitment in order to be more aware of the children’s school career and ways to perfect it and is available in different languages.

Some parents, sometimes indirectly, revealed that they did not feel comfortable talking with the teacher because they are not made to feel welcome and whenever the school staff called home or communicated in other ways it was to make negative reports about their child. As mentioned previously, teachers can reverse these feelings through using good communication skills which promotes the beginning of the social bond and trust between teacher and parent. Some recommendations could be to mail letters home often to inform parents about the good things that students accomplished

along with notes about good behavior (Increasing Parent/Family Involvement: Ten Ideas That Work, Hazel Loucks, NASSP Bulletin, 1992); instruct parents/guardians about activities that can be done at home such as disciplining, mentioning how to give their children time-outs and follow up on processes and reporting that teachers have to do as a part of state requirements. For example, inquiring about their absentees (why they didn't come) and about homework assignments. Teachers can ask parents for their opinion about what they think works at home as far as discipline is concerned and teachers can include parents when speaking about the goals they want and thoughts they have about the student in the classroom both social and academic. In addition, this communication allows parents/guardians to discuss topics that may not be directly related to specific school matters in order to initiate a reciprocal conversation. Another suggestion is to have parents follow their child for a day to allow the parent to experience what the child does at school.

Parents/guardians seem to perceive that school has the main responsibility to educate the child. A shared responsibility message might be discussed, although considering the social and economic pressures under which the parent(s) survive; this would be extremely difficult unless additional support/activities are created to address this need. Families can also put forth effort to make the communication process between school and home smoother. A good suggestion here is for parents/guardians to list different questions to ask teachers, information you want to convey about yourself and your child, and write down things that you might want to transpire—in order to initiate or share in the communication process when going to the school to

Speak with the teachers. Some questions could include a) plan a meeting or set a time to talk on the phone and talk about what you expect your child to learn, about child's schoolwork and behavior b) Ask teachers how do you find out what the school expects from you and share what you want for your child from school. This is important because families and teachers come from different cultures and backgrounds. c) How you can help your child at home, d) What you can tell your child's teacher about your child (interests, talents and challenges), e) How you can be helpful to the school, and f) How can you help educate teachers (learn to work as partners, parents/guardians joining the Parent Teacher Association).

In the meantime, it would be a good idea to take into account the factors that prevent parents/guardians from being involved which vary widely. Many of the factors revealed in the survey, including African American women do not have the same support raising young children, in terms of partner in the house, as other demographics groups. A statistic released by Newsone.com regarding this very issue found that one in four children in the United States are raised by a single parent and in the African American community 72% of African American children are raised in a single parent household. Also, the themes seem to be a lack of childcare, transportation issues, and issues at home. Some suggestions to alleviate these obstacles are offering a childcare option at the school during certain events (parent teacher conferences, etc.), taking up a collection amongst parents for gas/vehicle purposes and getting volunteers for picking up those parents that does not have transportation. Additionally, it is suggested that teachers get familiar with the different aspects of different cultures which could help

them to relay the message to families that they empathize with the difficulties they may encounter financially, demands on their time and family dynamics. A suggestion for teachers to get more acquainted with different families and their cultures is to have families come to the school for a gathering to learn about their cultures and their goals for their children. Parents and teachers will get a chance to help each other obtain more knowledge about what each value and how to better communicate with each other and closer to being on the same page. (Families and Teachers as Partners/Early Childhood Digests/Publications Series/Public...,<http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/publications-series/early-childhood-digests/fa...>). Using the Students Voice as a strategy for bridging family and school perspectives is something that could be put into place. Students share their opinions of problems and their potential solutions and address them in their school. Hopefully this will help teachers and administrators to understand the values, beliefs, and life experiences of their families. Also, it might pinpoint what and why students get disengaged, miss classes, and drop out of school and provide them with a stronger sense of ownership in their school while at the same time enhance teachers' awareness about where to start with the communication with the many different families and cultures they encounter within their classroom (Youth as a Bridge Between Family and School: Comparing Student Voice and Parent Involvement as Strategies for Change, Dana L. Mitra, Education and Urban Society, 2006). Teachers that have a good working knowledge about different cultures of students and their families they encounter in the school setting can show the kind of respect that families



appreciate and can provide better support that is needed for the student to grow.

(Cleary, 2009)

The church and religious beliefs are important in the African American community. This connection should be considered in promoting communication between the parents/guardians and the schools. There are currently a few churches that partnership with schools. They provide tutoring in math afterschool and at the church and visit classrooms to help students with their classroom work. They also canvass the community to speak with parents to talk about connecting the family. These churches have given low-income children school supplies, backpacks, coats and other supplies necessary for school. Another recommendation would be to have churches try to get more parents involved through in several other ways and events, including, 1) inviting them to meetings to discuss certain community events, parents' concerns about the community and education, and inform them about the importance of education 2) bring in resource speakers inform parents of the different networks they can use for support 3) Make parents aware of the available childcare programs in the neighborhood and give them information about qualifying for financial assistance towards payment for childcare 4) stress the importance and benefits of enriched pre-school programs 5) create daycare services to accommodate parents with children 6) make extra space in the church for a school that caters to special alternative students who have been suspended or expelled 7) ask some of the members in the congregation to volunteer in the school computer lab in order to help grandparents or senior citizens learn how to use the computer (Saturdays) 8) take up offering to purchase books for

children in the school or give them as Christmas presents 9) start an summer reading and 'fun with math' program in the church 10) relay the message that speaking positively about school teachers on a regular basis is a good thing 10) Speak and put in the bulletins about the school accomplishments of children in the congregation 11) remind parents how belonging to a denomination could help build their, and their children's self-efficacy, and at the same time may help their children in developing a conscience which assists in controlling undesired behavior 12) remind parents how the church has always been the center of African Americans lives and was the main reason for them being resilient, amongst other positive things and 13) keep up with issues about the school board and advocate for different causes. (United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries, <http://ucc.org/justice/public-education>).

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## APPENDIX A

## IRB Approval Letter

Ferris State University

*Institutional Review Board (FSU - IRB)*

Connie Meinholdt, Ph.D. - Chair  
820 Campus Drive  
Ferris State University  
Big Rapids, MI 49307  
(231) 591-2759  
IRB@ferris.edu

To: Dr. F. Mike Ennis & Ms. Christina Stevenson  
From: C. Meinholdt, IRB Chair  
Re: IRB Applications #110907 (The Perceptions of African American Parents Concerning Their Responsibility and Degree of Involvement in Public Schools)  
Date: November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011

The Ferris State University Institutional Review Board (IRB)\* has reviewed your application for using human subjects in the study, "The Perceptions of African American Parents Concerning Their Responsibility and Degree of Involvement in Public Schools" (#110907) and determined that it is exempt – 1C from committee review. This exemption/approval has an expiration date three years from the date of this letter. As such, you may collect data according to procedures in your application until November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2014. It is your obligation to inform the IRB of any changes in your research protocol that would substantially alter the methods and procedures reviewed and approved by the IRB in this application. Your application has been assigned a project number (#110907) which you may wish to refer to in future applications involving the same research procedure.

Finally, we wish to inform researchers that the IRB now requires follow-up reports for all research protocols as mandated by the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 45 for using human subjects in research. The new follow-up report form is available from the Ferris website (<http://www.ferris.edu/htmls/administration/academicaffairs/vpoffice/hsrc>). Thank you for your compliance with these guidelines and best wishes for a successful research endeavor. Thank you for your compliance with these guidelines and best wishes for a successful research endeavor. Please let me know if I can be of future assistance.

*\*The IRB has been previously called the Human Subjects Research Committee (HSRC)*

## APPENDIX B





# FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

## AUTHORIZATION TO DISCLOSE INFORMATION (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act)

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974, as amended, provide for the confidentiality of student education records. Institutions may not disclose information about students nor permit inspection of their records without their permission unless such action is covered by certain exceptions as stipulated in the Act.

THIS AUTHORIZATION MAY BE REVOKED AT ANY TIME.

Name of Student: Christina Stevenson Student Number: On file with chair of committee

I, Christina Stevenson, allow Ferris State University Administrators, Faculty and Staff to  
(name of student)

release my Capstone Portfolio, Project, and/or Thesis titled:

### THE PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN PARENTS CONCERNING THEIR RESPONSIBILITY AND DEGREE OF INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

to Ferris State University, for the purpose of placing an electronic copy of my Capstone Portfolio, Project, and/or Thesis on the Ferris State University website to promote human development by disseminating research knowledge to other scholars and the general public.

I understand further that (1) I have the right not to consent to the release of my education records; (2) I have the right to receive a copy of such records upon request; (3) and that this consent shall remain in effect until revoked by me, in writing and delivered to Ferris State University, but that any such revocation shall not affect disclosure previously made by Ferris State University prior to the receipt of any such written revocation.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student's Signature

Please return a copy of this form to:

College of Education and Human Services  
Ferris State University  
1349 Cramer Circle, BIS-611  
Big Rapids, MI 49307

## APPENDIX C

**Non-Exclusive License to Publish**

I, **Christina Stevenson**, grant Ferris State University a non-exclusive license to publish my Capstone Portfolio, Project, and/or Thesis in electronic format which will be available on Ferris State University’s website. I understand I have received an educational benefit by completing my Capstone Portfolio, Project, and/or Thesis, and that I will receive no monetary compensation.

I understand by granting Ferris State University a non-exclusive license to my Capstone Portfolio, Project, and/or Thesis; I am retaining the copyright to my work which means I can republish the work. If I republish the work, I must notify the second publisher that my Capstone Portfolio, Project, and/or Thesis has been previously published and the publication must include a note giving credit for the first publication to Ferris State University’s website.

I warrant that the Capstone Portfolio, Project and/or Thesis that I have submitted is an original work which has never been published and that it is not a copy, reproduction, or rendering of another person’s copyrighted work.

I further warrant that I have a copyright to the Capstone Portfolio, Project and/or Thesis that I submitted to Ferris State University and that I have the right to grant a license to my original work.

I agree to hold Ferris State University, its board, employees, and agents harmless for any losses, claims, damages, awards, penalties or injuries, including reasonable attorney fees, which arise from any claim by a third party of an alleged copyright infringement for the work submitted to the University for publication on Ferris State University’s website if a court of law determines that I do not have a copyright to that work I submitted to Ferris State University for publication.

Full Name (typed or printed):	Christina Stevenson		
Capstone Portfolio, Project or Thesis Title:	THE PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN PARENTS CONCERNING THEIR RESPONSIBILITY AND DEGREE OF INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS		
Date Completed:	May, 2013	Degree Sought:	Master of Education, Curriculum and Instruction: Special Education Option
Student Signature: _____	_____		Date: _____
Capstone Advisor Signature: _____	_____		Date: _____

Please return a copy of this form to: College of Education and Human Services  
Ferris State University  
1349 Cramer Circle, BIS-611  
Big Rapids, MI 49307

Individuals automatically receive a copyright upon the creation of an original work.

## APPENDIX D

**Statement of Authenticity**

The material contained in this thesis is my work.

Candidate's Name: Christina Stevenson \_\_\_\_\_  
(Printed Name)

Candidate's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Master of Education, Curriculum and Instruction: Special Education

Date: April 25, 2013

## APPENDIX E

## Survey

# Parent School Involvement Survey

**“The results of this study will assist school districts in designing a more welcome environment for parents and students.”**

The purpose of this survey is to identify issues related to parents’ participation in public schools. We are particularly interested in the opinion of parents of elementary K – 6<sup>th</sup> grade students in Flint, Michigan. This is a voluntary survey and your personal opinions will not be shared so as to identify yourself; only the researchers will know how you responded. The survey will take approximately 15 minutes. Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. The responses will be tabulated together as a group. Please complete this survey by answering all the following questions. Completing the survey indicates your voluntary agreement to participate in this study.

If you have any questions concerning this survey, please contact Ms. Christina Stevenson or Dr. Mike Ennis at Ferris State University, (810) 762-5156. Thank you for participating in this study. If you have any concerns or complaints about the survey please contact the Human Subjects Review Committee Chair, Dr. Connie Meinholdt at (231) 591-2759.

**Directions: Please rate your level of agreement to the following statements. Please do not include your name.**

### School Involvement Factors:

<b>Please rate your level of agreement to the following statements.</b>	Strongly Agree 5	Agree 4	Undecided 3	Disagree 2	Strongly Disagree 1	Does not apply
I volunteer in my child’s classroom						
I participate in school family social activities.						
I go on class trips with my child						
I participate in fundraising for my child’s school						
I am aware of my child’s academic strengths and weaknesses						

**Please provide any additional comments:**

**Educational Standards**

<b>Please rate your level of agreement to the following statements.</b>	Strongly Agree 5	Agree 4	Undecided 3	Disagree 2	Strongly Disagree 1	Does not apply
I am aware of the state grade level standards.						
I am aware of the state grade level standards because the school has informed me of them.						
I do not need to know about the state grade level standards because I trust the school to teach my child						
It does not matter if I know about the state grade level standards because it is my child's responsibility to learn						
I am aware of the MEAP Testing						
I know what my child is being tested on in the school						

**Please provide any additional comments:**



**Home-Based Involvement**

<b>Please rate your level of agreement to the following statements.</b>	Strongly Agree 5	Agree 4	Undecided 3	Disagree 2	Strongly Disagree 1	Does Not Apply
I talk with the teacher about how my child gets along with his/her classmates at school						
I bring home learning materials for my child						
I spend time working with my child on creative activities						
I share stories with my child about when I was in school						
I see that my child has a place for books and materials						
I take my child to places in the community to learn special things (i.e. library, museums, career fairs, cultural events, etc.)						
I maintain clear rules at home that my child should obey						
I praise my child's learning efforts						
I review my child's school work regularly						
I keep a regular morning and bedtime schedule for my child						
The homework my child brings home is confusing to me						

**Please provide any additional comments:**

### Home-School Conferencing

<b>Please rate your level of agreement to the following statements.</b>	Strongly Agree 5	Agree 4	Undecided 3	Disagree 2	Strongly Disagree 1	Does Not Apply
I talk with my child's classroom teacher about classroom rules						
I talk with my child's teacher about my child's difficulties at school						
I talk with my child's teacher about school work to practice at home						
I talk to my child's teacher about my child's accomplishments						
I talk to my child's teacher about my child's daily routine						
I attend parent conferences with the teacher to talk about my child's learning or behavior						
The teacher and I write notes about my child or school activities						
I talk with school principals and others about problems or to gain information						
I talk with my child's teacher on the telephone, text, email, or other method of communication						

**Please provide any additional comments:**

**Parent factors that prevent you from being involved.**

<b>Please rate your level of agreement to the following statements.</b>	Strongly Agree 5	Agree 4	Undecided 3	Disagree 2	Strongly Disagree 1	Does Not Apply
I have a baby or toddler at home						
I have a schedule that conflicts with many of my child's school activities						
I'm working or going to school during the day						
I have one or more children with a special need						
I have inflexible work or school hours						
I have one or more children with a major health problems during the school year						
I do not have dependable and or convenient child care						
I moved during the school year						
One or more adults at home have a schedule that interferes with school activities						
I sometimes feel uncomfortable with school staff						
I have family and friends that help support the education of my child						
I feel family and friends are more of a drain than a help						
I do not have reliable and convenient transportation						

**Please provide any additional comments:**

**School Help**

<b>Please rate your level of agreement to the following statements.</b>	Strongly Agree 5	Agree 4	Undecided 3	Disagree 2	Strongly Disagree 1	Does Not Apply
My child's teacher asks to meet with me face to face at least once a year to talk about how my child is doing						
When I have a question, concern or comment about my child, the teacher, principal or guidance counselor gets back to me right away						
I receive regular updates from the teacher on my child's progress						
My child's teacher(s) adjust their teaching styles to meet the academic needs of my child						
I believe my child is challenged by the school's academic curriculum						
My child's teacher(s) hold high expectations for my child						
My child receives the academic support needed to meet his/her individual needs						
I am given information about services to support my child's learning and behavior needs						
My child's school is a safe place to learn						

**Please provide any additional comments:**

## Parent Opinion about School Assistance

<b>Please rate your level of agreement to the following statements.</b>	Strongly Agree 5	Agree 4	Undecided 3	Disagree 2	Strongly Disagree 1	Does Not Apply
Should the school provide information about how to help students do his/her best in school						
Should the school provide parents with information for being involved with student's school work						
Should the school provide parents with information about the academic curriculum, the testing programs and how student's performed on state assessments						
Should the school post the school's vision and mission statement in readable format in school						
Should the school provide a Parent Resource Center						
Should the school provide a library for parents to check out books, videos, and other materials, or for using the computer						
Should the school provide an orientation to the school setting for new families						
Should the school provide information to family members to enhance the social, emotional, physical and cognitive development of your child (e.g., cultural, and community events)						
Should the school provide an opportunity for parents to input important decisions about the school						

**Please provide any additional comments:**

**Please give your opinion: (Please do not include your name)**

**Open-Ended Questions:**

1. What can the school do to help parents be involved with helping their child achieve in school?

---

---

2. Do you have suggestions for improving the communication between school and home?

---

---

3. Please comment on anything related to parent involvement that we have not asked.

---

---

**Demographic Questions:**

Please mark the **one** that apply to you.

**1. What is your Ethnicity?**

- African American
- White
- Hispanic
- Multi-Racial (Mixed)
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**2. What is dominant language used in the home?**

- English
- Spanish
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Number of people living in the household:**

- 1 to 2
- 3 to 4
- 5 to 6
- 6 or more

**4. Your Highest Education Level:**

- Less than high school
- High school/GED
- Some credits after high school
- Associate degree
- Bachelor degree
- Masters or higher
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Do you have a partner at home?**

- Yes
- No

**6. Parent Employment Status Outside of Home:**

- 0-20 hours
- 20-30 hours
- 30-40 hours
- 40 hours
- More than 40 hours
- Not presently employed

**7. Do you affiliate with any religious denomination?**

- YES
- NO

**8. Do you consider yourself a religious person?**

- Extremely
- Moderately
- Not at all

**9. Gender of children who are in kindergarten through sixth grade in the home:**

Male---Ages \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

Female--Ages \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Your gender:**

- Female
- Male