

Emerging Lenses: Perspectives of Parents of Black Students on School Success

BY

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THESIS

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And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. (Philippians 4:13)

Wouldn't take nothing for my journey now. (Fannie Lou Hamer, civil rights activist)

I give thanks to my Creator, who bestowed upon me the breath of life through my parents. They toiled to lay the foundation for me and my sisters so that we might have access to a world bigger than our own in which to live and learn.

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It is my hope that my dissertation, which is but a small contribution to the increasing body of work in our ever-evolving field of education, will prove a quality resource that inspires others' thought about what we must do to meet well the needs of those whom we are charged to serve. I appreciate the Department of Educational Policy at UIC for their willingness to allow me to continue to grow through the richness of their scholarly work and teachings. I look forward to contributing to the field of education through future research, publications, and practice in educational leadership and academe.

CCA

PERSONAL PREFACE

This dissertation is the culmination of an amazing educational journey, one that has consumed many years of my life, enriching me, challenging me, and at times frustrating me. I have grown through doing this work, step by step, personally, professionally, and academically. While pursuing my doctorate I have had to wear multiple hats: that of a teacher, principal, and district administrator; that of a spouse; and, in my most heartfelt role, that of a mother to a growing son. I continue to carry the greater responsibility of being a role model and mentor to thousands of other people's children, those whom I am charged with serving as an educator and leader. This degree is the capstone of my mission to achieve a credential that represents my personal best and the God-given fruit of my labor. It is a valuable tool that I intend to use to enhance my ability to advance research and policy development in the fields of teacher development and educational leadership.

My first step on this road began early in my career, when I was a new teacher in Chicago Public Schools and my then-principal, Mr. James P. Menconi (now Dr. Menconi), planted a seed in my head and my heart. Mr. Menconi had hired me two years prior to be a sixth-grade teacher in the Logan Square community. I had previously worked in the East Village neighborhood for one year when I was displaced from my position as an eighth-grade teacher due to budget cuts. My former principal had phoned Mr. Menconi and told him about me. Mr. Menconi interviewed me one afternoon when I, saddened and unclear about my future, arrived at his office after finding out that I had been cut from my previous position. I was blessed in my sorrow when he told me that he wanted me to join his staff. I remember walking, one week later, into a bustling class of 35 sixth graders, most of whom spoke English as a second language. They were racially and culturally different from me, yet I would play an instrumental role in helping them form their

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views of themselves and the world around them. What I did not know, but anxiously sought to discover, was how they would impact my understanding of myself as a teacher, them as my students, and their families. I was confident that we would all grow through this union. School had already been in session for over a month; I arrived on a trial basis, with a group of rambunctious preteens serving as my jury. It was year of great cultural and social discovery, culminating in achievement: I learned much, and so did they.

I happily remained with Mr. Menconi for four years. Room 324 served as the laboratory in which I made discoveries about myself and my students every day before I left to assume my first administrative position as a suburban assistant principal. Mr. Menconi had seen my next steps even before I had. He positioned me to lead, placing me in charge of various school initiatives and sending me to events to represent the school. He cultivated the qualities he saw in me and defined my ability not by the number of years I had taught but by what he believed I was doing for children each and every day. He built my capacity and expanded my presence. I became comfortable standing alone if doing so was in the interest of what students needed to succeed and what teachers needed to serve students.

One evening, several hours after the students had gone home, I was still busy, as on so many other evenings, doing what a dedicated teacher does: arranging my room, preparing material, and reflecting on the endless list of other tasks that needed to be completed before the next day. On that evening, Mr. Menconi and I met in the hallway and stopped to talk. He was in my wing, surveying the halls of his building, ensuring that his school would be ready for the 1,300 vibrant young people who would walk through the doors a few short hours in the future. “Ms. Ayanlaja,” he called to me from the stairs, “you should think about getting your Type 75.

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You have done a good job here. If you can teach 35 teachers to do what you have done with the 35 kids in your class, then you will make a great difference. Go into administration. You will work well with adults.” I remember thanking Mr. Menconi for his affirming support.

A lifelong learner, I had already begun to investigate leadership programs but had not been sure that the time was right or that I had “paid my dues” as a classroom teacher. I knew that I thought deeply every day about education, the curriculum I taught, which children learned and which children didn’t, and, most importantly, how I could affect these kids and their families individually. I sometimes wondered, however, if what I did as an impassioned teacher was limited by what the larger system let me do. There was no doubt that, in Chicago, the school board shaped educational policies and controlled the way schools worked. Everyone knew that this unpredictable entity held the purse strings and charted the school system’s course.

Somewhere deep within, I believed that if I could get to the decision makers and somehow shape the decisions that were being made, I might be that insignificant voice that became significant—significant enough, at least, to advocate for the voiceless, those who couldn’t speak for themselves or were not sure what to say. Every day, I thought intently about the sea of faces in my class, ranging in complexion from ebony to ivory, who were facing a future in which they would have to overcome hurdles they had not created. They were nameless, faceless low-income kids, many with brown and black skin and last names that were “funny” to much of the world; in their parents’ eyes, however, these youths were the greatest gifts they could offer the world. For me these children were my mirrors. I was as good as they were, and they were as good as I was. We had a special bond.

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I quickly realized that, like me, many other teachers needed to be equipped to do more for the young people who rely on us to give them the wings to fly. I wanted to prepare myself to enter an arena in which action nourished the roots of change—a venue that lay far beyond the walls of the classroom. By pursuing my doctorate, I believed, I could earn the right to participate in the tremendously important, extraordinarily intricate chess game called public education, in which children’s lives are moved from position to position, to life-changing ends, with each policy and curriculum decision made. It is my goal, as an advocate for equitable educational policy, to continue pressing for and shaping positive change in this complex world of public education, so that each child and his or her parents have a chance to triumph.

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SUMMARY

This study used existing data derived from interviews with parents of Black students who had participated in the Suburban School Achievement Study (SSAS) to explore what parents think about schooling, the schooling experiences of their children, and how they respond to their children's experiences and level of access to opportunities. A descriptive and exploratory inquiry, the study reinforced the assertion that parents' understandings of their children's experiences create an important link between families and school.

This study highlighted the relationship parents have with their children's schooling in the context of race and culture by acknowledging the unique and significant space that Black students and their parents occupy in what some describe as America's "postracial" society. It describes the significance of social networks and details parents' perceptions of the social and cultural capital sources operative for their children. Focusing on the ways in which and the extent to which race continues to matter to parents, the study acknowledges the existence of the cultural wealth of Black families and explores parents' perspectives on how schools react to them and their children and how they are able to navigate schools in their best interests of their children.

The primary theoretical frameworks that guided the study emphasized social capital and networks, as well as their operation both institutionally and among families. Stanton-Salazar's (1997) network-analytic approach provided a conceptual underpinning that places a great deal of importance on the formation of supportive ties or relationships with various types of institutional agents, gatekeepers, and informal mentors; these ties are considered critical for the success of minority and working-class youth. Coleman's (1988) theory of intergenerational closure established the concept of network support among families as a means to propel student success. To embed the ideology of Black cultural capital and funds of knowledge, the study references the

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work of Prudence Carter (2005) and Luis Moll (1992). Additionally, Ogbu's (2003) anthropologically based argument offered a compelling counter-explanation for why Black American students have been less successful in American schools than immigrant Black students. His controversial argument prompted thinking about the impact of culture as it relates to school success and was relevant to this study, which included both immigrant and nonimmigrant Black parents in the sample. Additional literature supporting the study examined research on race, ethnicity, parent involvement, and resilience.

This researcher approached the data analysis through an interpretive/constructivist paradigm. Several major findings emerged. Parents believed that their children experienced racial discrimination and that the school was uncommunicative with them. Parents also perceived that the school did not initiate an effective means to get information to them and involve them in school. Additionally, they did not form strong networks with peer parents that transmitted school information. Parents had a sense that social capital existed but felt that it seldom affected school matters and did not use it to maximize advocacy and support parental connections with the school.

Based on the study's findings, the researcher formulated recommendations for school personnel, community policymakers, parents, and students. School personnel were advised to create opportunities for parent involvement and school–family goodwill development that build on families' individual strengths and take into account barriers that limit participation at school, including parent work schedules; such activities might include weekend and evening activities in which school personnel and parents can interact outside of school hours. Teachers were advised to maximize the effectiveness of parent–teacher conferences with Black parents by engaging in

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dialogue that focuses on the children's positive attributes as well as their weaknesses and identifying ways in which parents might assist their children at home. The researcher also suggested that teachers and administrators support parental in-home involvement by creating websites and parent learning packets containing parent-friendly exercises aligning with student assignments. Outgoing call systems transmitting parent announcements would also benefit parental involvement. Schools should also embrace opportunities for critical conversations about cultural diversity and participate in cultural-competency training to expose myths and falsehoods, stimulate thought, and influence practice. As well, school leaders were advised to create opportunities for staff to deconstruct and discuss their own feelings about race, gender, class, and culture in order to identify any prejudices that could impede their ability to teach diverse populations of learners effectively.

Community policymakers were advised to develop neighborhood-enhancement programs that promote the creation of strong parent-to-parent and parent-to-community informational networks, including social programs that take into account the dynamics of diverse neighborhoods by promoting positive interactions between residents and schools in the community. Policymakers should work with community stakeholders to identify key obstacles facing families in the community that limit these families' ability to identify success-oriented options for their children. They should also establish community centers that offer opportunities for interaction and collaboration among parents and school professionals.

Students were advised to identify proactively the individuals available at school, at home, or in the community to serve as school advocates for them and to seek mentorship from African-

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American college students or young professionals in order to learn and observe success-oriented practices and coping techniques.

Parents were advised to identify existing opportunities for engagement in developmentally appropriate representations of involvement in order to support, motivate, monitor, and discuss the progress of their adolescents. They should also communicate frequently and deliberately with schools to keep the academic needs of their children at the forefront and keep themselves informed about school practices. As well, parents were advised to empower themselves by engaging in current opportunities for school involvement and leveraging social capital by enlisting support from one another and the community to increase their influence upon schools.

The study reinforces the importance of parent perceptions as a lens through which schools view their institutional practices. It identifies how schools expand or limit opportunities for Black parents to connect positively with schools in order to support the academic success of their children.

1. INTRODUCTION

Although schools often think of themselves as neutral cultural environments . . . and even as embracing cultural diversity, American schools operate with implicit and explicit assumptions and a specific world view . . . they are embedded in the larger, mainstream American culture. Differences and similarities in worldviews and experiences between families and school personnel shape the effectiveness of interactions. (Hill and Chao, 2009)

1.1 **Background**

More than 100 years after Dubois predicted in 1903 that race would emerge as a key social problem, its power to shape the lives of those living in the United States remains. Today the color line is less overt, but it is more covert and complex. Despite the changing meanings and divisions of race and racial boundaries, the historical practice of depicting and organizing American society along racial lines continues to promote inequality.

The racialization that explicitly shaped United States social policy at the beginning of the 20th century lingers in today's purportedly "postracial" climate. The term, which has taken on a life of its own, suggests that American society has moved beyond racism to what some describe as a colorless society. This researcher, however, contends that "race matters" and that the ethnic and color lines in this country continue to create barriers to common experience. In schools, race and social class remain closely linked to children's educational outcomes and attainment. Data indicate that children of African-American families continue to experience significant school-achievement challenges not experienced by children from middle- and upper-middle-class White households (Coleman et al., 1966; Kalmijn and Kraay-Kamp, 1996, cited in Diamond and Gomez, 2004).

In theory, education is the key to social progress in the United States. As part of the American Dream, the public school system is expected to provide all children, regardless of their racial, ethnic, social, or linguistic backgrounds, with an equal opportunity to gain the knowledge,

skills, and credentials that will enable them to enter the workforce, obtain good jobs, and grow economically and socially based on their own merit (Ogbu, 2003). For Black Americans, the belief that they can achieve the American Dream through education and hard work is an abstract concept more akin to wishful thinking than to empirical reality. Unlike many White Americans, whose belief in the American Dream is concrete because they have found it possible to fulfill it through the support of the educational system, Black Americans have historically faced discrimination in the United States educational system (Mickelson, 1990, cited in Ogbu, 2003). A façade exists that suggests that schools are neutral institutions when in fact they are places in which the social hierarchy shapes the academic hierarchy (MacLeod, 1995). Examining the ways in which race and culture are constructed within the American educational system is therefore key to understanding African-American educational achievement (Diamond et al., 2007).

African-American students may continue to face magnified challenges impeding their ability to reach the educational goals that would award them upward social mobility because they and their families do not possess the set of dispositions considered necessary for status attainment. The educational opportunities, outcomes, economic resources, social connections, perceived status, and knowledge of the primary cultural values and mores that dominate society are impacted by the level of cultural capital that families possess. Cultural experiences in the home differentially facilitate children's adjustment to school and academic achievement. Bourdieu (1977), in describing his concept of cultural capital, asserted that individuals could develop the skills to acquire social status even if they were not born into families whose knowledge and characteristics were deemed desirable. He maintained that formal schooling could offer the set of social skills and academic principles valued by the dominant culture. In this

regard, the aim of the schooling effort is to fill students up with the knowledge deemed worthy by the dominant society (Garcia and Guerra, 2004).

Every family possesses cultural capital, but the degree to which it is beneficial depends on the degree of alignment between the family's background and the values and practices of the educational system with which the child and family interact (Robbins, 2000). Put in racial terms, Black Americans are expected to mimic the cultural, linguistic, and economic practices that have historically been affiliated with European Americans (Fordham, 2008). Because of the racial hierarchy ever present in our society, "students with more valuable social and cultural capital fare better in school than do their otherwise comparable peers with less valuable social and cultural capital" (Bourdieu, cited in Lareau and Horvat, 1999).

Because schools reflect the social and cultural capital most dominant in the society in which they are situated, they overgeneralize about the family backgrounds of students of color and lack understanding of how culture and experience shape individual ideas about education (Yosso, 2005). They are unfamiliar with nondominant cultural capital, which consists in part of the set of tastes, appreciations, and understandings that Black students and their families possess that reinforce their membership and experiences in their own communities (Carter, 2005). Schools do not understand that parents of different backgrounds display different levels of involvement with the school because their cultural experiences and expectations differ from the schools' predispositions, behavior, and attitudes (Grenfell and James, 1998). A dynamic relationship exists between students' knowledge and skills, what the school expects of its students, and the negotiations between the family and school (Lareau and Weininger, 2003). Modern schools' limited knowledge of how Black parents view their children's school experiences in the context of their own sets of experiences with schools and their children

impacts schools' ability to serve students from those families. Understanding how diverse populations of families support students' school learning is critical to productive family–school relationships (Hill and Chao, 2009).

1.2 **Purpose of the Study**

This study describes and analyzes the perspectives of parents of Black students attending a primarily White middle-class suburban high school. The study focuses on what parents think about the academic processes of the school, the degree to which the school makes them feel welcomed and involved, and their understanding of the factors affecting their children's upward mobility in school and society. Elucidating the racism that has shaped the educational experience of Black students, the study illuminates parents' perspectives on their opportunity to “bond” and “bridge” social capital (Putnam, 2000) by exploring to what extent they link with other parents who are alike racially or socially and how they link with the school, which cuts across various lines of social hierarchy to access opportunity for their children. This researcher approaches this study on how race impacts the experience of Black families with the realization that race as a sociological construct impacts the condition of communities in a way that is layered, complex, and nuanced. The experience of Black families is unique and can be described as ingrained in a pattern of Black exceptionalism that has lingered for centuries.

Lee (2011) noted that despite the United States' new racial and ethnic diversity, immigration cannot be studied without understanding race, but race also cannot be studied without understanding immigration and the unique historical experiences of non-White minority groups, both immigrant and nonimmigrant. She described the impact of Asian and Latino biological parentage on the biracial offspring of mixed unions with Whites, contrasting it with the impact of Black ancestry on the biracial offspring of mixed Black–White unions. For the

former children, identification as Asian or Latino takes on a “symbolic” meaning because it is voluntary, optional, and costless, as European ethnicity is for White Americans. In contrast, Lee asserted, the biracial offspring of Blacks and Whites primarily identify as Black, not only because they choose not to deny their blackness in order to attempt to be accepted by Whites, a group that has legally excluded and oppressed them, but because they face clear social restraints on their ability to identify as anything other than Black. She noted that between 75 and 90% of African-Americans are ancestrally multiracial, yet only 7% acknowledge their mixed ancestry.

Lee (2010) described the stigma of the “one-drop rule” regarding Black ancestry, which was first implemented during the era of slavery. Under this rule, any children born to a White male slave owner and a Black female slave would be legally identified as Black, and, as a result, have no rights to the property or the other wealth holdings of their White father, ensuring the preservation of a system of economic and social stratification based on race. Though the United States abolished slavery, southern states such as Tennessee and Louisiana legalized the rule of hypodescent in 1910, and other states soon followed suit. By 1925, nearly every state in the country had institutionalized the practice into law, and the 1930 census classified all mixed-race persons who had Black blood as “Negroes.” The aftermath of chattel slavery left an indelible stain on the American social order that lingers today. United States society is attuned to identifying Black ancestry in a very distinct way. West Indian immigrants of primarily African descent who emigrate to the United States often encounter ingrained American racism and find themselves affected socially, educationally, and economically by historical stigmatization. In their native country they may not have seen themselves as members of a particular race because in many regions of the world from which Black and Afro-Hispanic individuals emigrate, categories of race are less defined and more fluid (Patterson, 2005, cited in Waters and Vang,

2005). Yet in America, the longstanding race code shapes the experiences and lifestyles of these immigrants.

This study acknowledges that racial inequality has permeated American society through orchestrated pathways that operate both consciously and subconsciously. Institutions have not escaped the influence of a hierarchy built on race and culture. Recognizing that multiple layers and perspectives grow out of the dynamics of race and class, this researcher approaches this study with the understanding that both race and class are fluid concepts with permeable boundaries that cannot be delineated with clearly drawn lines. This study is but a glimpse into how race and class operate for families in their attempts to connect with their child's education. It is a descriptive inquiry that establishes parents as important stakeholders in the educational attainment of Black youth. It emphasizes the importance of individual students and their families in attaining school achievement and maximizing the students' chances for upward mobility. The study reveals that parents' understandings of their children's educational experiences form an important link between families and school.

1.3 **Questions Guiding the Study**

1. How are decisions made about students' academic programs? Does the school involve the parents of Black students in making those decisions? How do the parents of Black students feel about measures of academic performance?
2. What do the parents of Black students believe about their role in the educational lives of their children at home and at school?
3. Do the parents of Black students believe that specific indicators—including race, gender, and social and cultural capital—shape their children's chances for success in school and life? To what degree do they believe these factors affect their child?

4. Does the school create access networks for Black students and their families that improve children's chances for success? What are the sources of these networks and how do they operate for both children and parents?

1.4 **The Importance of Parent Perspectives**

Parents' perceptions and perspectives matter because parents play a critical role in their children's schooling experiences. As heads of the family unit, they provide social and cultural capital, funds of knowledge, and support for their children in developing resilience. Social and cultural capital are important to student success in school because of the support it provides.

As members of networks, parents deliver messages to their children about school and reinforce attitudes about achievement. They have the ability to facilitate their child's educational and social growth through strategic contact with the school and other parents (Ream and Palardy, 2008). Based on the relationship parents are able to forge with the school, they have the capacity to activate—or not activate—their social resources on behalf of their children (Lareau, 2000).

Parents play an important part in facilitating or impeding their children's negotiation of the educational process (Bourdieu, cited in Lareau, 1987). Based on what they believe about their children's schools, parents can act—or fail to act—as advocates for their children beyond the immediate family and within the school system. Parents' network configuration—the people whom they know and with whom they interact—affects student educational outcomes (Coleman, 1988). Additionally, parents' upbringings, past relationships, and experiences in school and community institutions, support networks, and social networks (i.e., their social capital), together with other circumstances inside and outside the home, affect their ability to support their children's success in school (Clark, 1983).

1.5 **The Importance of Black Parents' Perspectives**

A legacy of racial stratification has instilled social, economic, and political oppression in schools that has led to cultural racism (Ogbu, 2003). Everyday practices in society constitute a social order in which subordinated groups in a racialized society are impacted by the prejudices and stereotypes of the dominant group (Reay, 1995). As a result of racial stratification, the social and cultural capital that Black students and their families possess and offer is often viewed as negative and weak compared to the social and cultural capital of the dominant racial group.

Black parents' perspectives are important because their children's ability to adjust to school and expectations for academic achievement are affected by the cultural values and experiences they encounter at home. When the cultural capital of children has been perceived as less valuable in society, there is a tendency for them to clash with the reigning rules of the institution; as a result, their learned modes of interaction are read as inappropriate or illegitimate (Delpit, 1988). It has been suggested that parents' racial experiences and understanding of how schools respond to their children because of their race mediate their ability to comply with or negotiate successfully with educators (Lareau and Horvat, 1999).

Understanding what Black parents think about their children's schooling experiences is important in helping these parents connect successfully with the school in the interest of their child. Race influences how Black students think about and behave in school, as well as their parents' efforts to influence their children's educational outcome (O'Connor et al., 2007). Further, the ability of Black families and their children to develop the cultural capital dominant in schools and convert it into educational resources and academic success is affected by their subordinated racial status (Roscigno and Ainsworth, 1999). Public schools have not made the most of the assets of Black parents and possess a limited understanding of how to involve them

as partners with the school in their children's education (Koonce, 2005). If school personnel cannot see or recognize the ways in which a school is systematically serving or failing to serve certain children, then they cannot address their practices productively (Lewis, 2003).

1.6 **The Importance of the Perspectives of Parents of Black High School Students**

How parents view the schooling experiences of Black high school students is important because these parents' perspectives can inform high schools about how their practices may negate or undermine the positive academic behaviors and attitudes that Black students develop as a result of their extrascholastic networks (Phelan et al., 1998). Black adolescents are influenced by three worlds: school, family, and peers. The ways in which these worlds influence students may be mutually supportive, ambivalent, or hostile (Phelan et al., 1998). For minority students, these worlds may lack congruence because of the different messages embedded in each.

In some cases, Black students' peer groups interject values that are different from those of both the parents and the school. Black teenagers may begin to internalize negative stereotypes, messages, and images of Black culture and people (Scott, 2003). They may come to espouse the belief that performing well lessens their acceptance by Black peers (Ogbu, 2003). Students' competence in navigating among the expectations and perspectives of their school, their friends, and their parents matters tremendously for both their quality of life and their ability to use the educational system as a stepping stone to higher education, fulfilling work, and a meaningful adult life. Often adolescents must navigate such transitions among these worlds without direct assistance from the school (Phelan et al., 1991).

Parents, on the other hand, are well situated to support adolescents in making decisions about life choices. They can have frequent discussions about academic issues at home, a practice that contributes to student achievement (Martin, 2000, cited in Walker, 2006). African-American

parents often find that they must prepare their adolescents to cope with and understand discriminatory experiences while maintaining their sense of self and their commitment to the value of education (Hughes et al., 2006; Stevenson et al., 2001). Because Black teens face the stressor of racism in both school and society, they and their parents tend to engage in interactive and communicative processes whereby decisions concerning their cultural heritage and how to navigate American society are made (Scott, 2003). It is of critical importance to understand the ways in which parents' personal experiences with education influence their beliefs about and behaviors toward schools (Hill and Chao, 2009).

1.7 **Expected Contributions of the Study**

Examining the perspectives of Black students' parents regarding their children's schooling process is integral to understanding how race and culture impact schooling experience. This study informs educational policy by emphasizing the critical link between home, school, and community in the context of racial, social, and cultural conditions. It explores what parents identify and operationalize as sources of cultural and social capital in their lives to support their children's academic and social success.

The study uncovers the ways in which parents advocate on behalf of their children and the networks with which they identify in order to address the needs of their children and families. The study analyzes the perspectives of these parents not only in the context of how their race and the race of their children impact these children's experiences but also through multiple lenses that examine the participating families' diversity, including socioeconomic class, family composition, ethnicity, and student academic levels. It is anticipated that the study's findings will apprise teachers, administrators, and policymakers of parents' assessments of the ways in which schools embrace or impede opportunities for increased collaboration between home and school

that offer social resources capable of improving Black children's academic and life outcomes. Schools need to be more parent-friendly in order to optimize students' academic experiences, and the responsibility lies with both parents and educators (Jeynes, 2005). This study aims to uncover and suggest ways in which both parties can support Black students' academic and social success in the face of multiple and competing sources of social and environmental pressure.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Framework

The theoretical frameworks that guided this study offer significant ideological structure regarding the juncture between families and schools. They present modes of thinking that seek to explain the factors impacting the crucial interplay between home and school and its effect on student success. This section will describe the frameworks relevant to this study.

John Ogbu's (2003) cultural ecological theory (CET) elucidates a link between Black parents' perceptions of schooling, their interactions with school agents, and children's educational outcomes. CET contextualizes race, culture, and education with one another, focusing on how they interrelate to shape academic and social success for Black students. Over the past 25 years, Ogbu's theory has held a prominent place in the discussion about why Black students do not achieve levels of educational success comparable to those of White students. The theory identifies two sets of factors influencing the academic achievement of minority students in a primarily White high school environment: societal and school factors (the system) and community factors (the family and peers).

A notable study despite its limitations, Ogbu's groundbreaking "Black Students in an Affluent Suburb: A Study of Academic Disengagement" (2003) detailed the schooling experiences of Black high school students in Shaker Heights, Ohio, a middle-class suburb outside of Cleveland. It sought to discern the source of the racial achievement gap existing there. Ogbu asserted that Black Americans as a cultural group inhibit their ability to succeed in school through an inability to adapt. He argued that the minority achievement gap affects middle-income Black American students as well as lower-income Black American students. He also

indicated that the discrepancy between the class status and academic performance of Black students was evident at the time of his study in Shaker Heights, a relatively affluent suburb in which the social classes of both White and Black residents were comparable. Ogbu argued that Black American students, regardless of social class, were in a state of “enduring conflict” with White Americans. Ogbu maintained that, as a result, “they [Black Americans] are more concerned with how they are treated or represented in the curriculum and with whether school and teachers ‘care for them’ than with teachers’ expertise in knowledge, skills, and language” (2003, p. 53).

This theory, charged as it is with the notion of enduring racial conflict and its suggestion that the responsibility for responding to challenges to the achievement of Black students lies with the Black population, raised the specter of a potential conflict between “being” (that is, “acting” and “thinking”) Black and doing well in school (O’Connor et al., cited in Horvat and O’Connor, 2006). Distinguishing clearly between immigrant and nonimmigrant Blacks, Ogbu (2003) painted a picture that categorized Black Americans as oppositional to American schooling. As his theory evolved, he asserted that Blacks identify schooling as a White domain requiring Blacks to compromise their own racial identity and lose affiliation with the Black community for the sake of academic success.

Prudence Carter’s (2005) work on academic success among Black and Latino youth complicated Ogbu’s stark assessment. In her analysis of Black and Latino students’ responses to questions about their culture and heritage, their expectations of other persons of their heritage, the social and cultural behaviors related to their backgrounds, and their thoughts about their experiences in American society, Carter identified three types of ideological profiles in her

respondents. She categorized the student types as *cultural mainstreamers*, *noncompliant believers*, and *cultural straddlers*.

Cultural mainstreamers adhere to assimilationist practices and accept the ideology that the nondominant minority group should be culturally, socially, economically, and politically similar to the dominant majority. Cultural mainstreamers aim to “fit in” (Carter, 2005, p. 29). Instead of rejecting the notion of acting White, cultural mainstreamers embrace the characteristics that Carter defined as “White.” In contrast to this approach, noncompliant believers, while knowledgeable about the cultural behaviors leading to academic, social, and economic success, prefer to identify with their own cultural styles and act “Black” or “Puerto Rican,” exhibiting and utilizing nondominant (what Carter calls “Black”) cultural capital. Cultural straddlers have bicultural perspectives and “play the game,” accepting the cultural codes operating both at school and in their communities in order to participate successfully in both worlds (Carter, 2005).

This study also employs Ricardo Stanton-Salazar’s (1997) network-analytic framework (NAF), which illuminates the nature of social capital and networks as well as their operation both institutionally and among families. NAF offers a relevant model for this study because it suggests that the institutional linkages existing in schools either propel or impede Black parents’ ability to serve as positive support channels for their children (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Based in the assertion that schools sustain a racial and social hierarchy favoring White middle-class students, NAF argues that for Black students and their families to navigate the system successfully and develop social capital with schools, educational institutions must make deliberate efforts to provide support within the organization in order to empower and support Black youth and bridge the gap between schools and families. The network-analytic approach to

the socialization of children and adolescents emphasizes the importance of forming supportive ties and relationships with various types of institutional agents, gatekeepers, and informal mentors, particularly in the school setting. Stanton-Salazar (1997) insisted that the paths to privilege and opportunity that propel network formation for middle-class White children are structurally constrained for minority and working-class youth. In addition, Stanton-Salazar (1997) noted that protective agents—principally parents and other relatives—appear in all social classes; however, personal and reliable access to committed institutional agents does not exist across all groups. Stanton-Salazar identified social capital and supportive relationships as instrumental factors in network formation. These instrumental factors served as the primary units of his analysis. He identified five overlapping problems that are institutionalized in society and stunt minority children's accumulation of the social capital embedded in quality institutional networks:

1. The differential value accorded children and youth in contemporary society depending upon their social class, ethnicity, and gender;
2. The barriers and entrapments that render participation in mainstream settings an uncomfortable experience for minority youth;
3. The use of evaluation and recruitment procedures by which school-based agents evaluate and select minority students to whom they offer above-baseline support and sponsorship that are based on the organization's perception of the students' ability to adopt the cultural capital of the dominant group;
4. The acceptance of a climate of distrust and detachment in the school, which impedes the development of social capital for minority students; and

5. Ideological instruments that hinder minority students from seeking help and deter the school from giving help (Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

Stanton-Salazar recognized that social networks are grounded in racial, ethnic, gender, and class hierarchies. Although minority groups possess social capital (that is, friendship networks and support networks), this social capital does not necessarily afford minority group members opportunities for social mobility. Developing the shared understanding that permits minority and low-income youth to develop the support networks that allow them to participate effectively in mainstream institutions (e.g., schools) requires that these youth enter a social setting different from the ones they inhabit at other times—that is, the family or neighborhood environment. The rules and requirements necessary for participating in White middle-class society can cause stress for minority youth because they must “cross borders” (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 22) to learn about these rules.

These borders are not only social but also physical; racial inequalities in employment, education, income, and wealth are inscribed in space. Black poverty disproportionately affects the residential experience of Black middle-class families, especially youth (Patillo McCoy, 1999). Boykin (cited in Stanton-Salazar) stressed that Black psychological functioning creates modes of behavior and cultural style that allow Blacks to succeed in Black communities but not in White middle-class communities. Blacks and other minorities’ modes of behavior and experience have been categorized as “the minority experience.” To inhabit other cultural spheres successfully, they must develop techniques to adjust and cope as members of the mainstream culture—techniques that may challenge their ideological foundations and upbringing. These border-crossing coping strategies and their deployment do not come without cost, as minority individuals often feel fragmented by such cultural divisions. Valenzuela (1999) pointed out, for

example, that the *Mexicandad* (Mexican-ness) of Mexican youth is not only neglected but perceived as a divergent faction by mainstream America. Valenzuela contended that the schooling process aims to divest youth of their culture, thrusting them into subtractive cultural assimilation so that they can adapt to American schools. Earlier, Woodson (1930) noted the destructive potential of this approach, asserting that Black communities and individuals are not well-served by the imposition of outside values, even with the aim of community improvement. Leaders and policymakers seeking to better their Black constituencies' situations should appreciate and develop the gifts unique to those communities rather than attempting to overlay the behaviors and values of the dominant White culture onto them. Otherwise, the minority communities—and the individuals within them—remain stigmatized, isolated, and disempowered (Woodson, 1930).

Race, class, and gender all affect individuals' potential to develop supportive social ties. "The discontinuities between home and school generated by race, social class, and linguistic differences are not merely issues of culture, but also of power" (Lewis and Forman, 2002, p. 3). The factors Stanton-Salazar outlined that prevent the formation of positive social capital for minority youth in schools are neither coincidences nor one-time glitches in the system. Instead, they are mechanisms present in White middle-class schools, which have historically served the cultural and racial mainstream and have therefore at times been complicit with attempts to maintain a racialized social system in which Black and other ethnic minority groups face inequality that limits opportunity both in school and in the larger social world (Forman, 2004). Valenzuela (1999) declared that "the systematic undervaluing of people and things . . . erodes relations among students as well as between teachers and students. Cultural distance produces social distance, which in turn reinforces cultural distance."

The culture of distrust and detachment operating in schools hinders opportunities for developing middle-class mainstream discourses and decoding skills, according to Stanton-Salazar (1997). School personnel, teachers, and counselors act as exclusionary agents both consciously and unconsciously. They are limited in their ability to mentor or nurture individuals effectively because they operate under the strictures of bureaucratic policies and procedures designed to support organizational needs over individual student needs. In their role as representatives, school agents are protectors of scarce resources, union platforms, and a racialized social order that maintains class and gender inequality. As well, the construction of solidarity and inclusion in schools is hampered by the influence of longstanding power bases that have historically failed communities of color; often minorities feel locked out by the power bases (including school boards, city councils, businesses, and the media) embedded in schooling institutions. Because such exclusionary forces exist in public schools and operate to undermine the experiences of minority students, institutions' actions to support the progress of Black students within mainstream schools are critical to the success of these students. The degree to which youth learn to overcome exclusionary forces and accumulate valuable social capital is linked directly to their ability to develop networks that positively affect their success in school and beyond.

In his NAF, Stanton-Salazar introduced six key forms of institutional support that he considered essential for social integration and success within the school system and in other mainstream institutions (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 11):

1. the provision of beneficial funds of knowledge that propel students in the educational system by regulating communication, interaction, and exchange in institutions;

2. bridging and linking students to gatekeepers—social networks that explore “mainstream” institutions such as colleges;
3. advocacy and positive interventions;
4. role modeling;
5. availability of emotional and moral support; and
6. evaluative feedback, advice, and guidance.

Schools can equip students to develop valuable social-capital-building relationships by developing students’ knowledge of socially acceptable ways of communicating within the institution, subject areas, chain(s) of command, network development skills, technical support (including computer literacy), study and test-taking skills, job and educational opportunities beyond school, and problem-solving. These knowledge types work in conjunction with the bridging function initiated by staff members, who serve as human bridges and gatekeepers to social networks and post-secondary education and career opportunities.

In order for members of subordinate groups to access fully the above institutional knowledge forms and use them productively, they must “decode the system” and make sense of the dominant group’s logic. The degree to which parents of Black children are able to make sense of the system and maneuver within it is significant in the school life of the child.

According to Stanton-Salazar, schools rarely provide minority students with the necessary training for effective decoding of the system because to provide this information would “blow the schools’ ideological cover, thereby undermining the myth of meritocracy upon which the entire school system rests” (1997, p. 15). Yet working-class and minority students depend more heavily on nonfamilial institutional agents for various forms of institutional support than do middle-class and White students because, as members of a culturally subordinate group, the

cultural capital they possess through their home life may not mirror that of the mainstream-oriented school. In addition, race shapes the family–school dynamic, making the relationship between minority parents and schools potentially difficult: “Due to the historical legacy of racial discrimination, it is more difficult for Black parents than White parents to always have positive family/school relationships. Many Black parents cannot presume or trust that their children will be treated fairly in school” (Lareau and Horvat, 1999).

And yet “families and schools, and family–school relationships, are critical links in the process of social reproduction” (Lareau, 1987, p. 75); productive interplay between the home environment and the academic environment is crucial to preparing children for success not only in the classroom but also as members of society. This contradictory and self-reinforcing cycle, in which minority students benefit particularly from nonfamilial institutional support and family–school links yet possess fewer opportunities to attain them, led Stanton-Salazar to liken minority networks to social prisons. R. D. Putnam (2000) noted that more than one type of minority network exists and that some of these networks aid individuals in developing social capital relevant to the dominant culture more effectively than other types: “Dense networks in ethnic enclaves provide crucial social and psychological support for less fortunate members of the community. Bridging networks, by contrast, are better for linkage to external assets and for information dissemination.” Economic sociologist Mark Granovetter (1973) likewise pointed out that the “weak” ties linking individuals to distant acquaintances who move in different circles are actually more valuable in terms of opportunity availability than the strong ties that link individuals to relatives and intimate friends whose sociological niche is very much their own. Though Granovetter made his observation in the context of the job search process, his insight also applies to education.

The barriers impeding minority individuals' successful integration with mainstream institutions constitute restrictive borders, limiting the access minority youth have to social capital and institutional resources. Stanton-Salazar suggested that in order for minority and working-class group members to develop both effective socialization and successful coping skills, they must gain a "bicultural network orientation," becoming what Carter called "cultural straddlers" (2005, p. 25). This type of consciousness facilitates the crossing of cultural borders and the overcoming of barriers in institutional settings, enabling students to gain diversified social capital that can be converted into instrumental actions providing social support and funds of knowledge.

Stanton-Salazar (1997) asserted that obtaining the network orientation so critical for working-class and minority students necessitates the acknowledgement and utilization of what Moll called "funds of knowledge" (Moll, cited in Gonzalez et al., 2005). Moll's term refers to the knowledge formed through experiences in the households and everyday lives of students of color. Through these experiences, students develop the web of information that constitutes their conceptual fabric. These concepts are transformed through students' connection to the more systemic concepts promulgated in schools. When schools take a sincere interest in students' success, their personnel seek to learn about the students and their experiences, creating a solid student-educator relationship (Gonzalez et al., 2005, p. 6).

Building on Lev Vygotsky's work, Moll noted that learning is not only an intellectual but also a distinctly social process; scientific concepts grow every day in the domain of personal experiences, which both acquire and impart meaning, significance, consciousness, and awareness (Vygotsky, cited in Gonzalez et al., 2005, p. 258). Gonzalez et al.'s qualitative study of teachers and their capacity to engage students and improve their academic outcomes through the

activation of funds of knowledge noted that it is important for schools to embrace the necessity of culture; students must exercise some agency in their encounters with school (2005, p. 36). They asserted that mainstream culture's perception that working-class and minority neighborhoods are dysfunctional is misleading and exaggerated; rather, the dynamics of these neighborhoods do not answer to the same values as those espoused by the dominant (i.e., White) culture. Student learning is found within a larger contextual, historical, political, and ideological framework that shapes students' lives. Neglecting the uniqueness of that framework, as often happens to working-class and minority students who fall outside mainstream cultural values, therefore undermines a student's success in the classroom.

Minority youth who develop a network orientation within the framework Stanton-Salazar presented, which includes their funds of knowledge, are more apt to negotiate successfully and cope as outsiders in multiple mainstream worlds. Stanton-Salazar emphasized that rules governing social advancement, particularly the idea of "having scholastic ability," have much to do with gaining and exhibiting mastery of dominant social interaction patterns. Clark (1991), in a similar vein, noted that interaction between Whites and Blacks in the form of interracial friendships and personal relationships improves Blacks' chances of success in a White-dominant society precisely because such cross-cultural relationships expose the culturally nondominant partner in the relationship to the behavioral patterns and expectations of the dominant culture. Salazar noted that middle-class White students begin learning the rules of institutional life early in their socialization experiences within the home and community (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). The same is not necessarily true of working-class and minority students because their early socialization experiences may not involve exposure to such environments in which these rules shape social discourse.

The parents and families of minority students can, however, enable these processes by equipping their youth with the skills needed to negotiate different sociocultural worlds successfully as well as acquire emotional and cultural resiliency and balance. According to Stanton-Salazar (1997), both lower-income and middle-income children and youth derive from family and community networks the skills involved in activating school support to assist them in asking the right questions and seeking appropriate sources of information to propel their success. Investigations into the developmental experiences of “resilient” children have revealed that a stable relationship with at least one person (specifically, another significant family or community member) is crucial to receiving guidance for constructive problem solving (Gargarino et al., 1992, p. 103, cited in Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Lower-income and minority children must obtain various forms of resources from nonfamily institutional arenas—resources important to the development of problem-solving competencies necessary to maneuver successfully in the educational system.

Developing such boundary-traversing skills, however, can prove challenging because of the very cultural disconnects that make such skills necessary in the first place. “Cultural discontinuities between the family and organization justify the need for parent involvement in schools, but this chasm makes home–school relationships more challenging” (Lewis and Forman, 2002). Magnifying the challenge is the fact that schools represent, embody, and wield cultural dominance; “an assumption exists that families will accommodate the school’s value system rather than the school accommodating the unique communities or populations that it serves” (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1995; Lightfoot, 1978; Nedler and McAfee, 1979, cited in Lewis and Forman, 2002). Meanwhile, as Prudence Carter (2005) explained, the gatekeepers of schools and different economic organizations uphold cultural expectations that do not mesh

well with Black and Latino youths' cultural practices. Cultural tastes, preferences, and symbols associated with the White middle class do not necessarily operate within communities of color. Black and Latino students exhibit a set of expressions and preferences that are significantly different from those of White students. These expressions and preferences denote group allegiance and include speech codes, dress styles, music choices, and gestures.

Carter (2005) emphasized that educators and parents often ignore the tension between the symbolic cultural boundaries established by racial and ethnic minorities, which have little to do with their desire for achievement and success, and the cultural markers used by educators to label students and categorize their level of intelligence. This divide causes, among other problems, limited attachment to school on the part of Black and Latino students (2005). Parents, who have a vested interest in their children's success in school, can mitigate this divide by assessing their children's schooling experiences based on their own schooling experiences and communicating well with their children and agents of the school. Both Stanton-Salazar (1997) and Carter (2005) emphasized the importance of relationships in facilitating success for minority students.

Coleman's theory of intergenerational closure (1988) also guided this study, specifically by revealing how the relationships among families and these families' interplay develop capital to support students and their academic progress. This theory asserts that parents receive important information that supports the school success of their children by bonding with other parents in the community. Through intergenerational closure, student peers and parents interact to support students' school success. Coleman contended that, just as financial, physical, and human capital facilitate productive activity, so too does social capital. According to Coleman (1988), at the community level, social capital for students exists in the norms, school networks,

and interpersonal interactions with both adults and peers that facilitate and support students' educational success. Social capital does not develop in isolation; it is instead the product of relationships (Coleman, 1988).

In discussing Coleman's work, Alejandro Portes (1998) described closure as "the existence of sufficient ties between a certain number of people to guarantee the observance of norms" (p. 14). Building on this more general concept, intergenerational closure in particular takes place when a child's friends and associates in school are known to the child's parents and are the children of friends and associates of the child's parents. In such a case, both parents and peers are available to reinforce positive norms and social values that concur with those of the child's parents and support educational attainment. Closure allows parents to monitor their children: "When parents and their children's friends' parents share the same values around education . . . these connections will improve the educational outcomes for students with high levels of closure. Closure impacts student achievement by influencing student effort" (Carbonaro, 1999, p. 682). When "parents know parents," (Santos, 2005) they are able to share knowledge about their children's activities and behavior and are thus able to collaborate in guiding their children through the school world (Ream and Palardy, 2008). Jaynes and Williams (1989) and Gay and Tate (1998) emphasized the importance of group identification and collaboration when they noted that individuals see their life chances as inextricably tied to the group as a whole; members of a group, whether that group is ethnic, gender-based, or founded on some other definition, identify with one another and with one another's life choices and outcomes. This sense of shared identity, or *linked fate*, arises from lived experiences in which members of a group feel close to others who identify with the group label (Jaynes and Williams, 1989; Gay and Tate, 1998).

Hallinan and Kubitschek (1999), however, questioned the assumption that intergenerational closure necessarily involves a sense of linked fate and works to inculcate norms supportive of school success. They asserted that parents can bond with other parents in the community without sharing those parents' norms. Intergenerational closure is, therefore, not necessarily characterized by shared parental norms regarding academic interests and concerns. In addition, they pointed out that parents and students in socially closed networks may value norms unrelated, favorable, or hostile to school norms and practices (Hallinan and Kubitschek, 1999).

2.2 **Parental Involvement**

This study examined parents' perceptions of their children's experiences in school. The researcher investigated parents' opinions of the value of parental involvement, how they participated in their children's education, the interaction between parents and schools, and parents' beliefs about the school's involvement in communicating with them to support student access to opportunity and achievement. In addition to analyzing the theoretical frameworks that guided this study, the researcher explored established research on parent involvement during the adolescent years and the factors that impact Black parent involvement.

At the outset of this study, the researcher suggested that race is a key factor affecting the educational experiences of ethnically diverse Black youth and the ability of their parents to access opportunities for them and advocate on their behalf in American schools. Historic racial stratification has entrenched a system of institutional racism in schools, which shapes how students experience school, how parents interact with schools, and how schools interact with both students and parents. Minority parents' educational orientations, including their level of involvement in their children's schools, have been influenced by the educational environments their children experience, the resources parents possess to navigate these environments, and their

own social class and race-based educational experiences (Diamond and Gomez, 2004). The existing research suggests that the conditions for Black parent involvement are impacted by social and economic variables that create unique conditions for parent participation in schools.

Longstanding research supports the benefits of parent involvement. However, most of the research has focused primarily on Caucasian parents. Parent involvement offers positive benefits to students regardless of parents' race or ethnic ancestry (Jeynes, 2003). Parents of Black children and those of other minorities approach involvement in their children's education from a context that has been shaped by their social, cultural, and racial experiences. Ethnically diverse and economically disadvantaged parents both value involvement in their children's academic learning, but may face barriers in supporting their struggling children (Drummond and Stipek, 2004).

Lee and Bowen (1998) argued that different levels of parent involvement do not reflect minority parent disengagement from schooling; rather, they may reflect differences in parents' *habitus* for educational involvement. *Habitus*, a system of internalized dispositions for thinking and behaving, results from the acquisition of cultural capital (Hemmings, 2007). For families from nondominant cultures, the type and level of cultural capital they possess are reflective of their subjugated experience as racial minorities in this society.

Parents play a critical role in the cultivation of *habitus*. When the *habitus* of parents meshes with that of the broader culture, differences become invisible. Minority parents, who develop a different *habitus*, may experience prejudicial treatment when they visit the school and come in contact with school personnel. Lee and Bowman (2006) found that involvement at school occurred most frequently for those parents whose culture and lifestyle were most congruent with the school's culture. Participation by parents of European-American, dominant-

culture backgrounds in their children's education was associated with higher student achievement because the parents' habitus meshed better with traditional American schooling (Lee and Bowman, 2006).

Grenfell and James (1998) stressed that parents display different types of involvement based on their level of cultural capital. They emphasized that parents from nondominant groups may exhibit less involvement at school because they may possess limited education and less confidence in their ability to be an asset to their child. Minority parents may be detached from the school because they are unfamiliar with educational jargon. Additionally, schools may lack familiarity with the types of involvement that best suit Black parents who have certain perspectives on schools and their role in schools. Muller and Kerbow (1993) stressed that parent involvement at home and school is shaped by three factors: parents' resources and opportunities, the relationship between parents and their children, and parents' interest in their children's education.

Black parent involvement, reflecting varied social classes and different ethnicities both nonimmigrant and immigrant, takes different shapes interracially and across cultural lines. It is also different from that of the dominant White middle-class culture. Lareau (2000) suggested that working-class African-American parents in the United States may be more separate from their children's schools. On the other hand, Demi (2005), in a 2004 case study of Caribbean immigrant parents whose children attended Lambeth Schools in England, found that parents responded to linkages with educational institutions when schools were open and inviting to the cultural diversity of the wider community. These results suggest that parental disconnection from school participation is not inherent to any sort of monolithic notion of "Black culture"; rather, it seems to be related to parents' relationship to the dominant culture of the area in which their

children's schools are located. Middle-class African-American parents, who possess cultural capital that may be more similar to that of middle-class Whites than lower-income Blacks, tend to take a more active role in pursuing school-based involvement opportunities because they feel confident in their right to do so and their level of readiness to engage (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987, cited in Lareau, 2000).

In addition, Blacks in cultural milieus that are not dominated by White cultural norms demonstrate a close connection to and sense of empowerment about involvement in their children's schooling process. According to Duane Albury (personal communication, July 20, 2011), in the Bahamas, where the population, government, industries, and public school system are relatively small and predominantly Black and nonimmigrant, parental involvement is considered a key factor in student success; Bahamian schools work closely with parents and families to ensure the development and maintenance of academic and behavioral standards.

Parental involvement in schools . . . was a big part of our education system, from homework to teacher meetings. . . . [T]his was a small island and it was not hard to see the teachers outside of the school environment in their everyday life. In most cases during my school days it was OK for teachers to discipline students and then report the student to their parents, who might . . . discipline the student again depending on the nature of the misbehavior. . . . Parents had no fear of school officials; I think the school officials had a fear of the parents. (D. Albury, personal communication, July 20, 2011)

Yet Black parents in the Bahamas who are not part of the dominant Bahamian culture may not enjoy such confidence in their relationships with the schools. Albury also pointed out that despite the Bahamian schools' purportedly equitable practices toward all students, during his school days Haitian immigrant parents in the Bahamas experienced separation from the school environment similar to that encountered by working-class African-American parents in today's United States schools. In the Haitian immigrants' case, the language barrier was among the causes for this disconnect between schools and parents.

In the Bahamas we had a large immigrant community from Haiti, and their children attended our schools and were given the same opportunities as all the other students. However, because of the language [difference] we did not see their parents at meetings or sporting events. (D. Albury, personal communication, July 20, 2011)

In the United States, the incongruence between Black parents and schools results in what Lareau and Horvat (1989) referred to as “moments of inclusion and moments of exclusion.” Their study of the interactions between schools and Black parents, both middle-class and low-income, revealed that the reactions of educational institutions determined the opportunities available for Black parents to positively utilize their cultural capital to support their children in school. When schools resist Black parents’ attempts to become involved, parents are less able to activate their social capital to their children’s benefit.

The researchers found that the cultural stigmatization imposed on African-Americans impacts schools’ assumptions about Black parents. Lareau and Horvat concluded that whiteness is an attribute in primarily White schooling environments because the standard of parental involvement reflects White cultural displays. If a minority parent displays a style of communication different from that of the dominant White culture, that display is linked by school personnel to a negative stereotype of the child and parent’s race. In response, the school personnel limit interaction, thereby impeding Black parents’ ability to become more involved. The roles parents play in school are circumscribed by the definition schools create, which can lead them to interact abruptly with minority parents (Smekar and Cohen-Vogel, 2001). Minority parents are expected to accept their roles as supporters and helpers of the school rather than advocates, decision makers, and collaborators in the interest of their children.

This researcher was particularly interested in the perceptions of parents of Black adolescents. The researcher’s argument is framed by the question of how parent involvement manifests differently for Black teens. The existing research shows that the role minority parents

play in their children's schools is strongly influenced by their perception of their role, their capacity to assist their children, and the schools' desire to receive parents and cultivate their participation. Student perceptions of their parents' involvement are significant during adolescent development as students seek autonomy and focus on peer relations (Hill and Chao, 2009).

When parents are involved during their children's adolescent years, the type of engagement and the level of involvement they display are affected by the teen's level of comfort with parent involvement and the parent's capacity for involvement (2009). Adolescents desire to distance themselves from their parents and families, but impressive continuity has been shown between family and other interpersonal relationships (Smetana, 2004); positive parental involvement in school therefore has the potential to impact adolescent children's school social networks and academic performance positively. Burchinal et al. (2008) asserted that African-American adolescents are vulnerable to academic adjustment problems because of the additional stressors and social pressures they must navigate. The community cultural capital Solórzano and Delgado (2001) described as the array of knowledge, abilities, and attributes available in communities of color are not embraced and utilized by schools to transform the level of connectedness between students of color, minority parents, and the school. The accumulated experiences and skills that marginalized minority communities bring to the table have not historically been valued and recognized to the degree that White middle-class cultural capital has (Yosso, 2005). Non-White families in various communities are faced with barriers to involvement operating both at school and at home, including language differences for immigrant Black families. These families have a limited understanding of school expectations for involvement, which impacts parents' ideas about and choices of involvement activities (Clark, 1983; Moll et al., 1992).

Additional challenges to parental involvement exist for Black high school students and their families. The pressures imposed by multiple family and employment responsibilities are barriers to school involvement. Minority parents compensate for these pressures when possible: In cases where minority parents are unable to participate in their children's school life, for example, parents often focus on checking on their adolescent's homework at home as a way to involve themselves (Clark, 1983, Weiss et al., 2003; Gutman and McLoyd, 2000). Because high schools allow students to make coursework decisions, parents support that process by discussing it with their children (Hill and Chao, 2009). Research has emphasized the importance of the role the school plays in supporting and facilitating opportunities for parents to become involved in ways consistent with their life circumstances (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Simon, 2004).

Weldon (2011), in his review of the book *Parental Involvement and Academic Success* by William H. Jeynes (2011), suggested that the need remains to learn more about the patterns of parent participation in high schools. He asserted that the positive trends of parent involvement at the elementary-school level do not continue as students grow older. Parents who participate closely in the school experiences of elementary school students are not as actively involved when students reach their teen years. Perspectives from parents on schools and their involvement in their children's education shed light on the components of this study that inform the topic of Black parent involvement.

2.3 **Race and Resiliency**

Racism, racial discrimination, and racial stereotypes are elements of the American cultural ethos (Hooks, 1992) and operate in the lives of American minority individuals both immigrant and non-immigrant. Lee (2011) noted that race and immigration are intertwined; neither concept can be understood in the United States without examining the complex cultural

web and unique historical experiences surrounding the racial and ethnic identities of non-White minority groups. Racial and cultural identification is complex in the U.S., partly because individuals recently arrived from other areas of the world may not have identified themselves according to American racial or cultural categories—that is, as Black or minority—in their countries of origin (Lee, 2011).

This study asserts that race significantly impacts the social and educational experiences of Black youth in the United States. The foundation of this investigation is the notion that institutional racism is reflected in schools. In order to succeed in school and life, minority students must develop resiliency—the ability to cope by compensating for, surmounting, and navigating such institutional racism. Families and communities play a crucial role in developing such resiliency.

The dynamics of power, control, racial subservience, and class conflict mold and build education (Watkins, 2001). The political and ideological implications of education impact how schools interact with the diverse student populations they serve. Black students and their parents, in their quest to build channels for participation and academic support, attempt to navigate schools whose systems mirror our social hierarchy. Individually, African-American students think and behave in school in response to their perceptions of themselves and their experiences.

All adolescents face biological, cognitive, and social changes that interact with school transitions and social choices. They are peer-oriented and care deeply about being accepted socially. Younger adolescents face self-esteem issues that shape their values about school subjects and hold beliefs about their competency that signal the potential risk of failure in school (Wigfield and Eccles, 1994). The decisions youth make have long-term implications for school success and social mobility. Because teens oscillate between family dynamics, peer relationships,

and school experiences, they constantly construct and negotiate realities that affect their quality of life (Phelan et al., 1991). Black youth face these decisions with the additional stressor of racism, which complicates their adolescent period. The negative stereotypes, images, and messages they internalize greatly impact their impressions of themselves (Scott, 2003). The presence of an intersecting pattern of discrimination based on race and gender may further complicate both Black males' and Black females' adolescent years as they seek to sort out the multivalent realities that define their worlds (Simien, 2005).

Fordham's (2008) research on the experiences of Black Capital High School students established a lens through which she viewed the enduring social state of Black students and their families. She emphasized that Black people, specifically Black students, are compelled to perform a White identity by mimicking the cultural, linguistic, and economic practices of the historically European American society. The subordinate racial status of Black students and their parents limits the level to which they possess the dominant cultural capital that is valued by White society and necessary for mainstream upward mobility. Roscigno and Ainsworth (1999) noted that African-American students are disadvantaged educationally because they have less family cultural capital and fewer educational resources than do their White peers.

Carter (2008) called for increased understanding of Black students' attitudes about race, awareness of racism in society, and understanding of the utility of schooling for social and economic mobility. She asserted that psychological and social emotional factors play an important role in Black students' educational outcomes. Black students experience identity conflicts because they must contend with issues relevant not only to their own cultural milieu but also to mainstream White middle-class society. This confrontation with the idea that their cultural realm does not rank as highly as that of the White middle class causes Black youth to

experience a low sense of adequacy, feelings of isolation, and self-contempt, all of which are aggravated by poor peer relationships. Carter stressed the critical role of the Black family and community as resources to increase African-American students' awareness of racial discrimination and help them maneuver around obstacles presented by racial discrimination. Stevenson et al. (2002) noted as an example of such resource provision that Black parents can support their children when they dialogue with them and discuss strategies for coping with challenges (cited in Scott, 2003).

Family and community, Carter (2008) contended, serve as a connecting force to keep Black youth aware of the societal dynamics they face. Carter emphasized the need for teens to identify a perspective of themselves as a racial group with member consciousness. She claimed that an African-American identity schema is necessary to provide a framework within which teens can develop pride in their race in order to be able to face structural constraints in society that continue to affect their social and economic mobility. This construct fosters a positive self-image in Black teens and offers a buffer in their lives that facilitates development and positive achievement in school and work.

Taylor (1994) pointed out that Black students face discriminatory behavior from individuals, institutions, and political, residential, and occupational sources. Nonetheless, in spite of additional risk factors that cause disruption in their lives, African-American teens have been able to develop and exhibit resilience as a tactic for combating unfair treatment. Though adolescents have the ability to adapt, which is a characteristic of resilience, they are particularly vulnerable to loss or devastation concerning friends, family, and school (Masten et al., 1997). The capacity for resilience in poor and minority students varies from individual to individual depending on the protective factors that might increase or limit the amount of stress these

students face due to the social conditions that affect them (Borman and Overman, 2004).

Protective factors include access to resources such as average or better-than-average intellectual skills, good parenting, and other supports from home, school, and the community. Protective factors prompt students to develop a sense of personal efficacy (Masten et al., 1990).

Positive peer relations that support the development of social capital are important to building resilience. Masten et al. (1997) discovered in a study conducted in Minnesota that students who floundered in school had few individual or family resources and most importantly lacked a positive, caring, and prosocial relationship with a supportive adult, a factor that appeared to protect and promote human development. Clark (1991) observed that resilient outcomes developed as a product of African-American students' mainstream socialization. Through interracial friendships, Clark asserted, Black students can improve their academic and social outcomes because through them they learn the values intrinsic to the middle-class culture of schools.

Resilience forms in a developmental process that occurs over time and is eventually characterized by good psychosocial and behavior adaptation despite developmental risk, acute stressors, or chronic adversities (Borman and Overton, 2004). Black adolescents, both African-American and immigrant, face challenges in adapting to school and societal aspects. Along with the pitfalls of incarceration, poverty, and unemployment, Black teens face in-school peer conflicts that require them to activate resilience. Teasing from less academically successful peers is a manifestation of the contempt other students have for higher-achieving students in both Black and White communities (Darity, 2004). When Black students possess oppositional attitudes to academic mobility, it is because racialized structures exist in schools that permit inequality in placement and achievement. This inequality stigmatizes Black students by creating

an environment in which being smart means “acting White.” Similar conditions force the burden of “acting White” onto low-income White students who, when they achieve academically, are labeled as acting like the “others,” that is, high-income, arrogant whites who are seen to have an air of superiority and arrogance (Tyson et al., 2005). Carter Andrews (2009) emphasized that it is crucial for African-American students to embody racial group pride and develop a critical understanding of racism in order to view achievement as a raceless trait and resist hegemonic notions that academic success is reserved for Whites only.

Although some immigrant families of West Indian heritage are able to move ahead through resilience, self-determination, and supportive families, their adolescents have limited financial resources or human resources to help them academically. They depend for success on the characteristics of a favorable home, supportive personalities, and external supports that work together. The Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (Rumbaut and Portes, 2006) indicated that immigrant students succeeded more through the acquisition of positive social capital than because of the education or economic resources of their parents.

The conceptual frameworks and supplemental literature this researcher reviewed offer theoretical orientations that were important to the data analysis process in this study. The above-summarized research informs this study with scholarly contributions on race and resilience, the dynamic nature of family–school relationships, and theory on social capital and networks. Although Sandelowski (1993, cited in Kilbourn, 2006) noted that theory may emerge at a variety of points in a dissertation, this researcher has sought to provide frameworks and relevant thought at the outset of this thesis in order to elucidate theory highlighting the interaction between race, culture, families, schools, and student success.

Understanding the theoretical framework and literature that guide this study was particularly important to interpreting the study's data. Qualitative studies clarify the phenomena under exploration through a particular point of view; it is assumed that no such thing as a value-free or unbiased interpretation of an event exists. Interpretations are always filtered through one or more lenses or theoretical perspectives that we use for "seeing"; reality is not something that we "find under a rock" (Kilbourn, 2006, p. 545). This research was shaped by an information continuum beginning with theory application at one end and consummating in data that revealed emergent findings.

3. METHODS

3.1 Background of Study

The data set for this study consisted of the responses of parents of Black students attending high school in a suburban community adjacent to a major Midwestern metropolis. The data were originally gathered as part of a larger study that included more than 200 interviews with parents, students, and school personnel from Riverview High School. This researcher served as a member of the research personnel team for that study, called the Suburban School Achievement Study (SSAS) (principal investigators: Dr. Amanda E. Lewis, University of Illinois at Chicago; and Dr. John Diamond, Harvard University). While a graduate student, this researcher was asked to conduct interviews for the SSAS. Dr. Lewis and Dr. Diamond's study focused on examining how schools in particular play a role in the achievement gap. They sought to understand why African-American and Latino students significantly trailed White students in scholastic achievement, even in the absence of peer pressure for the minority student to perform poorly or face being accused of "acting White" (Anderson, 2007).

The city where the parents and children lived, Riverview, though not as diverse as the bordering city, was racially, ethnically, and economically mixed compared to most of the suburban communities that surrounded the city. Riverview High School served the public school students in the community where the research took place. In 2004, more than 3,000 students attended the high school. White students comprised 47% of the attendees. Approximately 36% of the population consisted of African-Americans. Latinos were the next largest minority population, followed by Asians. ACT results reported the scores of White, Latino, and African-American students. The average score of Black students was 17.4; Latinos, 20.7; and Whites, 27 ("Riverview" Township High School Student Achievement Report, 2004–2005). Additional data

revealed the economic condition of the community and the academic achievement of Black and White students as indicated by other standardized test scores, the percentage of students enrolled in advanced placement, student grade distributions, and cumulative GPA (Appendix A).

Riverview, the location of this study, has housed Blacks since the early 1900s. It became a desirable settling place for waves of Black migrants who fled the atrocities of the Jim Crow South in the 1930s and beyond. In a time when housing discrimination was a fact of life for African-Americans, White elites allowed Blacks to settle in rapidly growing Black enclaves in the community. Substantial opportunity existed for Black families to become homeowners, though those opportunities were bound by strict geographic limits. Several factors supported Black homeownership in Riverview before World War Two. First, the community contained a large amount of vacant land, which was open to African-Americans who wished to buy or build new homes. Second, local Whites made no concerted effort to block African-American settlement in a segregated, "Black" section of the suburb. Whites from Riverview and the neighboring large city built homes there and provided mortgages and construction loans that supported the growth of the Black community. The geographic limits of the Black community, sustained by barriers such as railroad tracks and wide sanitary channels, calmed White fears of Black expansion. Blacks moving into the community did not challenge the limits of their modest, segregated neighborhoods because they owned homes and had more economic mobility than they would have had in the burgeoning city, where most Blacks lived in poverty. Blacks in Riverview predominantly performed domestic and service jobs for the suburb's wealthy White families, which characterized their relationship with Whites as one of servitude and Whites' relationship with them as one of paternalism.

The dynamics of local race relations worked in concert with the aspirations of Black southerners, who desired to benefit from a housing market that both supported Black homeownership and accommodated the growth of a large Black community in an otherwise affluent and White suburb. This setting supported more residential stability for Blacks compared to the tenement conditions experienced by many African-Americans who settled in the neighboring urban center. Although low incomes and low-status occupations characterized the situation of Blacks in Riverview, the community offered African-Americans greater opportunity for economic mobility and racial integration, which contrasted greatly with the deliberate racial segregation and isolation imposed upon the Black community in the bordering large city.

Black homeownership in the study suburb declined during the Depression, dropping to about 26% of Riverview's Black population in 1940, but African-Americans were almost as likely to own their homes as the majority of Whites. Although Blacks were relegated to domestic and personal-service jobs at this time, the patterns of race relations in Riverview influenced a history of settlement, homebuilding, and interracial cooperation that was distinct from suburban patterns elsewhere (Wiese, 1999). The class status of Black families in Riverview was generally fairly high when compared to the class status of those living in the neighboring large city.

At the time the data for this study were collected, Riverview remained a relatively affluent suburb. Most Blacks in this study lived on the west side of the suburb. Some had lived in the area since childhood. Several respondents had attended Riverside schools, which has been under a desegregation plan since 1967, when the schools were predominantly White (Moore, 2007). By 1979 declining enrollment had caused schools to close, including a predominantly black elementary school. During the mid-1980s, the district developed the 60% guideline, a regulation stipulating that no school could have a population in which more than 60% of the

students were of one race (Moore, 2007). Reports indicated that Riverside demonstrated racial housing disparities, with Whites representing the majority of homeowners and Blacks comprising the bulk of renters. Further, population trends in Riverside over the last decade have suggested that population shifts are occurring in the community, with certain areas slowly growing more segregated in pockets. Riverside's White population has decreased by 6% in the last 10 years. One section in a predominantly Black area of central west Riverside saw a 25% increase in whites, while a once racially balanced neighborhood in southeast Riverside has become majority black for the first time (Moore, 2007).

While clear racial differences existed at the time of this study in the family resources available to Black and White families in Riverview (e.g., White families had much higher median family incomes and homeownership rates), which contributed to different circumstances for school-age students and their families, Blacks in Riverview had a much higher median family income compared to Blacks living in the adjacent metropolis (Appendix B). Riverview residents lived in a suburb where the schools benefited from strong funding and were significantly supported by community resources.

3.2 Current Study: Research Questions

The literature shows limited research on the perspectives of parents of Black children regarding their children's schooling experiences. This study, which focused on the ways and the extent to which race continues to matter to parents, examined the perspectives of parents of Black students on their children's schooling experiences in a White middle-class suburban school. The research took into account the contextual viewpoint of race and the experiences of youth and their parents as they interacted with the school. It described parents' perceptions of sources of social and cultural capital and how these resources impact their children's chances for

upward mobility in society. Further, it explained the way in which the investigated school reacted to Black students and how parents were able to develop networks to navigate the school in their children's best interest. The study addressed four research questions:

1. How are decisions made about students' academic programs? Does the school involve the parents of Black students in making those decisions? How do the parents of Black students feel about measures of academic performance?
2. What do the parents of Black students believe about their role in the educational lives of their children at home and at school?
3. Do the parents of Black students believe that specific indicators—including race, gender, and social and cultural capital—shape their children's chances for success in school and life? To what degree do they believe these factors affect their child?
4. Does the school create access networks for Black students and their families that improve children's chances for success? What are the sources of these networks and how do they operate for both children and parents?

3.3 **Design**

The study is noncausal and descriptive in design. The data were drawn from semistructured interviews with parents of Black students. This researcher used the SSAS interview protocol, which consisted of 38 questions (Appendix C). During the audiotaped interviews, the researcher posed the questions to the respondents following the required procedures designated by the principal researchers. Each interview was taped separately and assigned a code for identification.

For the current study, the transcribed information from 21 of the 38 questions constituted the data source (Appendix D). The format of the interviews allowed for guided and open-ended

replies that provided rich, in-depth content reflecting the participants' attitude and perceptions. As Bogdan and Biklen suggested, "The interview [was] used to gather descriptive data in the subjects' own words so that the researcher [could] develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world" (2003, p. 95). Each interview lasted for between 1.5 and 3 hours.

During the interviews, this researcher's intent was to gather data on individual parents' perceptions of their children's schooling experiences, including what they thought about the school's academic processes, the level to which the school made them feel welcomed and involved, and their understanding of the factors that impacted their children's upward mobility in school and society. Additionally, the researcher sought to explore to what extent parents linked with other parents who were alike racially or socially and how they connected with the school to access opportunities for their child.

During the interviews with the parents, the researcher took note of any specific details significant to the setting that distinguished the respondent or the interview(s). The field notes referenced the location of the interview, interview anomalies, and any notable intensity demonstrated during the interviews. Research, particularly qualitative research performed in a social and cultural setting, is experienced subjectively, so the field notes reflect on specific observations (Appendix E).

3.4 **Setting**

The respondents were interviewed in multiple settings in Riverview. Over the course of the interviews, 21 interviewees agreed to meet in their home, one interviewee in a church, two parents in a restaurant or coffee shop, one parent in an office, two parents in a park, and one parent in the community library. All the interviews took place in Riverview except for the

interview that took place in the office of the researcher, which was situated in the large metropolitan city adjacent to Riverview

In total, the researcher interviewed 28 parents. One of those interviews of two parents was not useable for the data set for this study because the student was Caucasian and therefore outside of the study's focus area. Of the remaining interviews, in five cases both the mother and the father were present. In three of these cases, however, only one parent responded to the questions. In the other two, both parents offered responses. In four interviews the father was present and the only respondent. In 15 interviews the mother of the student was present and the only respondent. In each setting, the parent(s) were positioned in an area of their choice where they could be recorded clearly and there would be minimal sound distraction.

During one interview the son was present in order to listen to the questions with his parents, both of whom spoke English as a second language. However, the father was able to comprehend the questions and responded accordingly without the input of his son. In the other interviews no children were present. All respondents were aware that responses were to come only from the parents; this guideline was stated in the introductory protocol before the interviews began. No child interjected during the interviews.

3.5 Sample Variables and Selection

3.5.1 Student's GPA

In the SSAS study, the parents were selected for the study if their child was selected. Students for the SSAS were selected based on their academic performance. A group of low-achieving (GPAs below 2.0) 10th and 11th graders and their parents was interviewed first, and then groups of moderate achievers (GPAs between 2.0 and 2.9) and high achievers (GPAs between 3.0 and 4.0) and their parents were interviewed. For this study, 26 parents were

interviewed, representing 24 students. Dr. Lewis identified the parents of 15 students. The population represented 10 students that were higher-achieving and five classified as lower achievers based on GPA. These students were in the graduating classes of 2004 or 2005. This researcher selected an additional nine families based on a contact list of Black students and their parents. GPA information was available for each of those students, who were graduates of the class of 2006 or 2007. This sample represented the parents of six high achievers, one moderate achiever, and two lower achievers. Parent responses received during interviews did not show a substantial difference between parents of higher-achieving, moderate-achieving, and lower-achieving students.

3.5.2 **Ethnic Status: Nonimmigrant or Immigrant**

The sample represented ethnically diverse Black parents in the school community. It included Black immigrant parents, descendants of individuals from Africa and the Caribbean, nonimmigrant African-American parents, and three parents (two White and one Black) raising children they identified as Black. In the original selection of participants, family surnames provided an initial projection of the parents' immigrant or nonimmigrant status. The SSAS interview protocol asked parents to identify where they grew up, where they went to school, and how they came to live in Riverview. This data confirmed the parents' origin. For the current study, of the set of 26 parents, nine parents were Black immigrants born in the Caribbean or Africa, 14 parents were African-American, and three parents were in interracial unions (Appendix F). One of the parents from the biracial union was a Black mother and the other two consisted of a White father and a White mother. These parents were American born.

3.5.3 **Socioeconomic Status: Middle or Working Class**

This researcher was particularly interested in studying parents who had some degree of access to resources individually and in the community where they had chosen to live, notwithstanding the fact that the type or amount of capital these families possessed might differ from the social and capital resources encapsulated in the White middle-class school their children attended. The alignment between school and home is affected by social class because middle-class parents have social resources. Possession of those resources alone, however, does not determine parents' actions towards schools. Although social class provides resources, parents have to activate these resources. It is through social practices that parents transform their resources into benefits for their children (Lareau, 2000).

This researcher was aware when choosing Riverview for the study that the respondents would vary in their social class but on average would be closer to “middle-class” than many of the Black families in the neighboring urban center. Economists often use income as an indicator of class status; however, the interview instrument did not require parents to disclose their income. Income accumulation, conversely, differs from wealth, which is essential for maintaining class status. Unlike Whites, Blacks, on average, do not have sustaining generational wealth, regardless of income (Oliver and Shapiro, 1995). A report sponsored by Demos: A Network for Ideas and Action and the Institute on Assets and Social Policy (IASP) at Brandeis University showed that only one in four African-American middle-class families in America is financially secure (Wheary et al., 2008). In this study, income and family wealth were not discernible from the data. Further, household income is not a true indicator of class status.

Because class affiliation is an important variable in considering the social and cultural capital that families possess, in the analysis of this study it was important to arrive at a standard

definition of class before attempting to analyze any class differences. Defining class is, however, very difficult. The notion of a middle class is central to American society, yet the concept has no official, universal definition. The concept of class is amorphous and changes over time (Parker, 1972). In contrast to economists, who use financial markers to determine class, sociologists generally use occupation, which reflects educational attainment, to assign class status. In approaching the data, this researcher chose to classify parents' class status based on their educational backgrounds and types of professions.

At the beginning of the original interview, the parents were asked to reveal their levels of schooling and their occupations. Based on those responses, for the current study the researcher classified the respondents as middle class or working class. Most of those included in the sample worked at the time of the interviews in white-collar or professional jobs, and many had college educations. Those parents who had attended at least one year of college and worked in careers that required undergraduate- or graduate-level education were classified as white collar/middle class. Those parents who had not attended college and maintained more technical or labor-oriented jobs were classified as blue collar/working class (Appendix G). Twenty-one parents were classified as middle class/white collar, and five parents were classified as working class/blue collar.

3.5.4 Family Status: Single or Married Household

Parent marital status, an important variable in the data sample, was considered in the data analysis. The questionnaire asked parents to indicate who was currently living in the home with them, which revealed the presence of a spouse or partner, children, extended family members, or friends. Of the 24 households that comprised the data sample, 16 respondents lived in two-parent married households and 10 respondents lived in single-parent homes. Broken down ethnically,

six of the seven immigrant families were headed by a husband and wife. Of the 17 nonimmigrant respondents, eight represented two-parent homes and nine represented single-parent homes.

3.6 **Sample Size**

Sample-size decisions in qualitative research are more dynamic than in quantitative research. They are often made on the basis of having identified the salient issues and finding that themes are repeating rather than diversifying (Mertens, 1998). In ethnography the recommended sample size is between 30 and 50 interviews, whereas in phenomenology the recommended sample size is six interviews (Mertens, 1998). The number of respondents for this study was sufficiently placed between both ethnographic norms and phenomenological norms and sanctioned by the principal researchers for the SSAS study.

This researcher conducted interviews with a set of 26 parents of 24 Black students. This set comprised the data used for this study. Two of the couples interviewed were treated as four parents because both contributed to the interview. This participation increased the number of respondents to 26, which accounts for the difference between the number of parents and the number of students they represent. This researcher determined that for the couples in which the parents responded separately, both sets of answers would be included in the data set. Their separate responses indicated individual perspectives, though the perspectives did not necessarily contradict one another.

3.7 **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Data analysis is a complex process that involves oscillating between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, and between interpretation and description (Merriam, 2003). This researcher followed specific steps for qualitative analysis that included the following:

1. sorting and sifting through the materials to identify similar phrases, relationships between variables, patterns, themes, distinct differences between subgroups, and common sequences;
2. beginning to elaborate a small set of generalizations that cover the consistencies discerned in the database; and
3. examining those generalizations in light of a formalized body of knowledge in the form of the theoretical framework (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Using the constant comparative method, this researcher visited the data multiple times to interpret them and generate theories and conclusions based on the viewpoints expressed by the research participants. Through content analysis, pattern matching, and categorization, a crucial element for grouping responses, this researcher identified relationships within the data. As Patton (1990) pointed out, “The qualitative analyst's effort at uncovering patterns, themes, and categories is a creative process that requires making carefully considered judgments about what is really significant and meaningful.”

After reading the interview transcripts several times, this researcher developed a conceptual understanding of the type of responses parents gave as they described their perspectives on their family and educational backgrounds, educational aspirations and expectations for their children, knowledge of school, educational orientations and resources, the instrumental value of schooling, and the social networks, sources of information, and peer networks operating for their children. This “big picture” developed after a macro review of the data. The next step required that the researcher begin to organize the data more narrowly by extracting specific information from the transcripts and coupling the interview-question responses with specific research questions. This process can best be explained through

LeCompte's (2000) analogy equating qualitative analysis with assembling Van Gogh's painting "Crows Over a Wheatfield": Put all the similar pieces (all the edges, or the blue sky pieces, or those that might be parts of the wheatfield) in piles; assemble the sky chunks, the wheatfield chunks, and the outside borders; and finally, identify the linking pieces so that the big chunks can be tied together into a coherent facsimile of the painting.

This researcher created basic graphic organizers for the respondents so that the responses of the parents could be individually disseminated. These tables included a research question, the correlating interview questions, and the parents' responses, which were either quoted or paraphrased. For multipart questions, the tables addressed each component so that the researcher was able to analyze the data specifically for that component of the question. They included variables such as the parent's ethnicity, the student's grade level, and the family's social class. The referenced quotes of the parents provided a context within which this researcher could begin to derive themes and concepts.

Next, the researcher created data analysis charts, which were formatted similarly to the individual charts but included multiple respondents on each page with the columns of information. In the final column, labeled *Themes/Concepts*, this researcher noted reoccurring messages in the parent response(s). Because the parents were listed in rows next to one another, the researcher was able to note trends and anomalies from these charts.

After creating the combined charts for every interview question and corresponding protocol questions, this researcher created a group summary table for the research questions. Clusters of themes are typically formed by grouping units of meaning together (Creswell, 1998). Tally marks denoted the respondents that exhibited responses that could be connected with a particular theme. The variables that could be applied to a parent or sets of parents were also

tallied, including their status as an immigrant or nonimmigrant, working or middle class, and the children's level of achievement. The group summary charts gave the researcher a visual landscape of the themes that were emerging and how groups or individual parents responded based on specific characteristics. Deconstruction, identifying meaning, formulating conclusions, and recognizing anomalies in the data are essential in qualitative research (Patton, 1990). The metamorphosis of the analysis from individual themes to sets of themes within groups was therefore a critical process through which this researcher made sense of the data and methodically gained understanding.

3.8 **Bias**

The value of qualitative analysis rests on how findings reflect people's perceptions (Stainback and Stainback, 1988, cited in Mertens, 1998, p. 351). To limit subjectivity, this researcher refrained from precoding any trends or categories. When identifying themes, this researcher paid attention to the context of, specific words and phrases in, and intensity of the responses to build understanding of the parents' perspective.

The deductive approach allows categories to be built and refined, conceptual similarities to be examined, and patterns to be uncovered (Stainback and Stainback, 1988, cited in Mertens, 1998). The researcher paid attention to responses that formed a common thread, as well as to anomalies. Returning to the propositions that initially formed the conceptual framework ensured that the analysis would be reasonable in scope (Yin, 2003). Negative evidence that opposed the theoretical underpinnings of this study also informed this analysis.

Peshkin (1988) suggested that it is important to be aware of the subjective self and the role it plays in research because awareness of our subjectivity offers a more accurate perspective than assuming that we are able to rid ourselves of all subjectivity. Being aware of the subjective

self means acknowledging the researcher's personal context as it relates to the beliefs the researcher has about the subject being researched. This researcher acknowledges that this work was conducted and presented by a Black woman from a middle-class family who attended majority-White middle-class institutions for elementary, secondary, undergraduate, and graduate schooling.

Black Americans view racism not with detachment, as most White Americans do, but in terms of personal and family members' experiences in past and present encounters (Feagin and Sykes, 1994). Eisner (1988) suggested that the way in which we see and respond to a situation, as well as how we interpret what we see, will bear our own signature. Reflecting upon her interaction with school and her parents' interaction with school, this researcher recognizes that a combination of educational experiences have left a lasting imprint on her personal script. Similarly, as an educational leader, this researcher interacts with Black students and their parents in diverse ways in the context of schooling. The level of connectedness this researcher had with the research topic created a strong sense of commitment to share heretofore unexamined perspectives from voices that are rarely heard. Whatever the method used for phenomenological analysis, the investigator aims to reconstruct the subject's inner world of experience (Hycner, 1999, cited in Groenewald, 2004). This researcher followed sound qualitative procedures that supported accurate interpretation and construction of the findings in order to contribute new information to the field. The next two chapters present what this researcher learned about the schooling experiences of Black students from the perspectives of their parents, as well as the implications of these findings.

4. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In this study, the researcher investigated parental perceptions of the schooling experiences of public high school students at a single school in a midwestern suburb and explored how and in what ways these parents interacted with the school to support their children's success. The study identified what parents accepted as true about the level of access to opportunities available to their children and how societal factors impacted their children. This inquiry acknowledges the distinct position that Black students and their parents hold as minorities in majority-White public schools. It reinforces the claim that parents' understanding of their children's school experiences through the context of race, cultural capital, social capital, and networks creates an important connection between minority families and public schools.

The themes that developed from the data reflected findings that were common to the group of parents as well as notable patterns that applied to specific variables in the data set. Anomalies important to understanding the parents' perspectives were included in the analysis. The parent responses were organized in conceptual categories that exemplified the context of the research questions. The researcher considered multiple variables including race, class, ethnicity, family structure, and student achievement and presented the findings that applied to these variables when they revealed patterns that were significant via the whole-group analysis. The voices of the parents were embedded to reveal intensity and meaning. The quotations featured from the transcripts are intended to assist readers in making decisions regarding the transferability of the results to other populations and situations (Patton, 2002).

This investigation summarized parental viewpoints regarding how academic decisions were made for their children and who was involved in the process. It uncovered what parents believed about standardized tests as academic measures. The analysis described what parents

thought about their role in their children's education, to what degree they were involved, and how the school interacted with families to engage them. This study revealed to what extent parents believed race and other social factors impacted their children's overall chances for educational and long-term success. It also elucidated how parents perceived their interaction with other parents and whether those interactions provided them with school-focused information that increased their linkages with the school and benefited their children.

TABLE OF SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Major Themes of Study (with findings that inform themes and tallies of all respondents and relevant variable groups)		
	All Respondents	Immigrants
1. Parents believed that the school was racist and uncommunicative.		
a. Parents believed being Black would impact their children's opportunities to succeed.	21 of 26	
b. Parents believed being Black would not impact their children's opportunities to succeed.	5 of 26	
c. Parents believed the school included them in academic decision making; they clearly understood the process.	2 of 26	2 of 9
d. Parents believed the school did not include them in academic decision making; they had limited knowledge of the process.	24 of 26	7 of 9
2. Parents believed they received limited information from the school to involve them at home or school; they did not receive school information from peer parents.		
a. Parents believed the school made some effort to involve them at home.	11 of 26	1 of 9
b. Parents believed the school made little or no effort to involve them at home.	15 of 26	8 of 9
c. Parents believed the school made some effort to involve them at school.	7 of 26	5 of 9
d. Parents believed the school made little or no effort to involve them at school.	19 of 26	4 of 9
e. Parents reported they received school information from other parents.	6 of 26	
f. Parents reported they did not receive school information from other parents.	20 of 26	

	All Respondents	Single Parents
3. Parents had a sense of social capital; they seldom used it to deal with school matters. They believed it did not function to provide them with maximum advocacy, understanding, or support.		
a. Parents believed that whom their family knows would make it easier for their children to succeed in school and life.	10 of 26	3 of 10
b. Parents believed that whom their family knows would not make it easier for their children to succeed in school and life.	16 of 26	7 of 10

Interviews with the parents reinforced a set of three major themes that embodied their perceptions of how they believed the school served their children. The interviews also revealed the parents' awareness of the factors impacting their children's access to opportunities, as well as the parents' ability to assist their children through interacting with the school. Analysis of the data revealed the following themes:

1. Parents found the school racist and uncommunicative and believed that the two qualities were linked in some significant way. This was the predominant finding of the study. In the interviewed parents' experience, school personnel made the decisions about students' academic placement and opportunities without ensuring that parents understood the logic or rubrics behind said decisions or that parents were informed ahead of time about the fact that these decisions were being made. Parents felt that they had only a limited understanding of the factors determining students' placement in advanced, honors, basic, or remedial classes. Some parents believed their children had been discriminated against in course placement. Parents varied in the degree to which they interacted with the school to advocate for their children's needs. Parents also believed that racial and gender discrimination impacted their children's access to opportunities for success in both school and larger society.
2. Parents believed they had only limited means of receiving information from the school and did not receive school-oriented information from peer parents. Parents believed that they could make a difference in their children's education by being involved but felt that personal and institutional barriers existed that prevented their involvement. Parents believed that the schools' outreach efforts did not

maximize opportunities for parents and their children to become involved. Parents interacted with other parents and exchanged information about school, but these interactions did not create strong networks that transmitted school knowledge capable of supporting student success.

3. Parents had a sense of the nature and importance of social capital; however, they seldom used it to deal with school matters. They believed the social capital they possessed did not function to provide them with maximum advocacy ability, understanding, or support when it came to their children's schooling. Parents felt that the presence or absence of financial resources and social capital in the form of beneficial social relationships in their families, along with the aptitude to activate resilience, influenced their children's ability to be successful.

The summary analyzes the parent perspectives that exemplify these themes and presents conclusions derived from them. The researcher discussed the findings in the context of the theoretical frameworks guiding this study and other relevant research.

4.1 **Academic Decision Making, Sources of Influence, and Academic Measures**

4.1.1 **Academic Decision Making**

Parents in this study sought quality schooling for their children at Riverview High School. They desired to be involved in educational decisions that affected their children and reported that decisions regarding their children's academic program were made based on multiple factors. Parents described how they believed decisions were made and what sources of influence were most significant in the decision-making process. They revealed who made the decisions that determined their children's academic schedules and what they understood about the selection process.

Each of the 26 parents interviewed had some degree of mixed or limited familiarity with the internal practices of the school and the ways in which specific personnel and measures of achievement determined their children's academic programs. Of this group, 11 parents recalled that test results were used to provide information for academic decision making. However, these parents displayed an incomplete understanding of which tests were most important to the process—national or state standardized tests, classroom assessments, or placement exams. Along with tests, parents believed that school personnel were engaged in making key decisions. Parents had different perspectives on whether counselors, classroom teachers, administrators, or a combination thereof were most involved. Additionally, parents differed regarding the factors they believed were the most important indicators in confirming their children's placement (i.e., tests or the recommendation of school personnel). Lisa exemplified the general tone of uncertainty expressed by most parents in the study:

I think it's his counselors, but I'm not sure where she derives her decisions. . . . I'm confused on that issue because on one hand I'm assuming it's his test scores, his statewide test scores or other test scores. On the other hand, I'm told that they're recommended by some teachers . . . I'm a little confused.

Parents did not know whether the same set of factors that determined their child's placement upon entering Riverview High School were considered in determining the student's annual class placement in subsequent years. Therefore, they were unaware of how changes in their children's academic program might take place over time, including enrollment in higher-honors or advanced placement courses. They were also unaware of who would be involved in making those decisions from year to year. When asked who made academic decisions for her son, Sonya recalled her son's experiences:

Actually, I don't know, but I was told that it was administration. I actually don't know. I know, though, when he came from junior high—eighth grade going over—that they

tested them and then that's how they got their classes their freshman year. But as far as his sophomore year, I think that's him and his counselor.

When parents were asked how they knew about the process for academic placement, their answers varied. Parents recalled that they had received information from the school informing them of their children's placement. It was evident, however, that the school had not invited parents to meet with personnel to determine the best academic route for their child. Another parent, Howard, recalled that if he had a concern about his son's placement after classes were assigned, he could contact the school and ask for the opportunity to discuss the decision. He asserted, however, that school counselors did not meet or discuss options for placement beforehand with parents.

Significant patterns developed among the parents of different socioeconomic groups regarding the extent to which they intervened in the academic decision-making process. Trends differed depending on the parents' status as nonimmigrants or immigrants. On this issue, the perspectives of parents with different family structures, including single parents or married parents, along with the parents of children of varied achievement levels, did not differ noticeably from the perspectives of the group comprising all the respondents.

Students' academic classification as higher- or lower-achieving did not correlate with any difference in parents' ability to articulate a complete understanding of the school's process for academic decision making. This consistency suggests that the school offered the parents of higher-achieving students no more access to information about placement opportunities than they did to those of lower-achieving students. School personnel identified students who were higher-achieving and enrolled in honors or advanced placement classes for rigorous academic opportunities. Parents were then informed of school decisions through written communication.

The responses of several parents revealed that they did not know they could access higher-level classes for their children. As far as these parents were concerned, the school evaluated and selected the students that fit certain criteria and offered them more enriching opportunities. The researcher found that Stanton-Salazar's (1997) assertion that schools selectively offer above baseline support and sponsorship to some but not all students was evident. This recruitment process is often based on the organization's perception of the student's ability to adopt the cultural capital and standards of the dominant group (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). In schooling, a student's ability to achieve high grades is a traditional measure of middle-class success. Children of the parents in this study who exhibited fewer of the desired qualities or were perceived as not having the ability required to perform well academically were not chosen for higher-level academic opportunities.

4.1.1.1 **Middle-class Nonimmigrant Parents**

Differences in the parents' socioeconomic status influenced how they advocated to the school on behalf of their children. Middle-class nonimmigrant parents seeking to make academic decisions for their children initiated engagement with school personnel. They asserted themselves to ensure that the process worked in their children's best interest. Working-class nonimmigrant parents and immigrant parents in this study did not object to school decisions or approach the school to inquire about the decisions school personnel had made regarding their children's placement. Their responses did not reveal instances in which they had questioned the decisions of the school personnel in the same manner that middle-class African-Americans had.

Five middle-class African-American parents shared that they believed parental input should shape decisions regarding what level of class a child took. They recounted instances in which they had addressed school personnel regarding academic decisions. Dana, a middle-class

mother, acknowledged that she had informed another parent of the role parents could play in altering their children's placement. She had also advocated for her own child:

I had another child who had a terrible experience there (Riverview High School) But I know that they (the school) generally make decisions. . . . For AP you have to be recommended, for honors you can—a lot of parents don't know this, but you can take honors if you want to . . . You don't have to be recommended. In fact, I had an argument with the teacher when my child was a freshman because she'd taken the exam that they take. She didn't do very well. I wanted her in the honors track . . . “Well, if you won't let her in, then I'm going to the principal!”

Dana, like other middle-class African-American parents, recognized the need to facilitate a more rigorous program for her child and took the initiative to address the school. Eight middle-class parents mentioned that they believed parents were able to make decisions or impact the decisions the school made regarding a child's academic program. Several of them had met with school personnel to discuss their child's placement in a general-level class when they believed that their child could perform well in honors or advanced-placement classes. Two middle-class mothers used the term *tracking* when describing the placement of students in classes of different levels. One expressed intensely that she knew teachers had an impact on her child, but she was best able to make the academic decisions.

These parents noted that they believed some parents did not know they could have input into their child's academic placement. One parent remembered that she had not been welcomed by the school when she advocated for her child. She shared that she had had to be very insistent in order to counteract the decisions of her child's counselor, who attempted to ignore her request to reconsider her child for higher-level classes. Two of the parents referred to their efforts as a “fight.”

One parent noted that because decisions for placement were based heavily on test scores, many African-American students fell into the lower end of the placement continuum. She

emphasized that Black students needed someone in the school to ensure that they had the opportunity to move up to honors classes. Another parent opined that she believed Black students were disproportionately placed in general-level classes. One parent recalled that she did not know how high school placement decisions were made but had familiarity with the Explore mathematics test and knew that it was an achievement measure for ninth-grade placement. She was unsure how much it affected placement and understood that such decisions were based on the test, along with teacher recommendations and a review of the student's eighth-grade mathematics grade. She described how she had responded to the teacher's recommendation that her son be placed in general (level II) ninth-grade math, as well as the reaction she received from the teacher:

My son was getting Bs, almost As, in eighth grade. The eighth-grade math teacher sabotaged him at the end of the year and gave him a D or an F, I can't even remember. So when his papers came to Riverview Township, the recommendation didn't match. So the math chair called and explained that she thought he should repeat algebra in high school. I had to fight for that. It was a big mess. But I had a conversation with his eighth-grade math teacher about him being in honors-level classes . . . for some reason, the teacher just turned on me after that, after I started asking about him being in honors classes.

Subsequently, this parent demanded that her son be placed in an honors-level English class so that he could experience more rigorous studies that went beyond what she described as the "fourth-grade-level work" in the general classroom.

These African-American parents shared their experiences and described their attempts to support their children's opportunities to gain quality educational experiences. Although they were aware that school personnel shaped their children's daily academic experiences, they believed that they should have the opportunity to influence decisions that impacted their children. The parents countermanded school actions when they believed the school had not made decisions that were in the best interest of their children. As stated previously, Ogbu's (2003)

description of the confrontational actions taken by African-American parents against public schools characterized those parents as contemptuous of the system. Their disdain for school authority, he contended, contributed to the lowered achievement of African-American youth compared to Black immigrants, including Africans and West Indians (Ogbu, 2003).

In this study, middle-class nonimmigrant parents recognized and acknowledged the critical role school personnel played in decision making. They respected the expertise of teachers, administrators, and counselors. Nonetheless, they intentionally involved themselves in decisions about their children's academic careers. Due to a historical legacy of racial discrimination, African-American parents have the added concern, not faced by White parents, that their children may receive poor treatment in school because of their race (Lareau and Horvat, 1999). This researcher, in contrast to Ogbu (2003), found that the parents' desire to engage in the academic processes of their children did not derive from contempt for the school. They sought to monitor their children's scheduling, ensure that their children were treated fairly, and advocate for access in the interest of their children's academic needs.

Parents of a higher socioeconomic stratum took a more active role in communicating with the school personnel regarding their children's academic program than did their counterparts of a lower socioeconomic stratum, both immigrant and nonimmigrant. These college-educated parents had access to resources garnered from their education, work experiences, or social connections that enabled them to assert themselves with school personnel. Like Lareau (1989), who recognized that middle-class parents may have tighter connections with social institutions than those available to working-class or low-income families, this researcher concluded that the middle-class parents in the study purposefully engaged with school officials.

The social class of the middle-class parents in the study offered made their children's educational context less challenging to negotiate. Like Diamond and Gomez (2004), this researcher observed that these parents were responsive and able to customize their children's learning experiences by engaging strategically to influence their children's educational experiences. The middle-class parents in this study reacted to school decisions by countermanding them or making recommendations that influenced the courses their children took.

4.1.1.2 **Working-class Nonimmigrant and Immigrant Parents**

In contrast to the middle-class African-American parents, the working-class African-American parents and immigrant parents in this study considered the school the academic decision maker. They did not indicate that they were actively involved in the process that determined the classes their children took. The lower-income parents had less self-initiated direct involvement with the school. Like Lareau, who found that parents of lower socioeconomic status sought little information about either their children's curricula or the educational process because their relationship was characterized by greater separation from the school (2000), this researcher found that the parents in this study had a poor understanding of how to navigate the educational system.

Referring to a special education review meeting for her child, Evita shared that a group of school officials had determined her son's placement. She stressed that the teachers and coordinator would gather in a team to make academic decisions for her son. This parent communicated that she believed this group of school professionals would make the best decision regarding the classes her child needed. She emphasized that this team would determine whether

her child would have the opportunity to move beyond special education and take higher-level classes.

As stated previously, Stanton-Salazar's theory asserts that working-class minority students depend on increased levels of institutional support in order to maneuver the system. School personnel are the nonfamilial institutional agents that provide guidance and advocacy to working-class families in order for them to be able to navigate schooling processes. This researcher found that Evita's emphasis on the school-personnel team as the decision makers for her son's academic program exemplified the level of internal support she needed to gain information and access for her child. Her perspective contrasted with that of the study's middle-class African-American parents, who self-advocated for their children and believed that they knew best what their children needed.

Immigrant parents, like working-class nonimmigrant parents, tended to defer to school personnel for decision making. Ogbu suggested, and this researcher likewise contends, that immigrants have a pragmatic trust of schools because they see school personnel as "useful experts" possessing the knowledge, skills, and language their children need to succeed in this country (2003). Ultimately, this relationship approach suggests that these parents work more closely with teachers and other school officials than do parents who do not trust schools. Children then observe their parents' attitudes and behaviors, internalize them, and approach their school learning as an opportunity to gain useful skills and information for the future. Researchers (Rambaut, 1977, cited in Perreira et al., 2001) have determined that immigrant parents' emphasis on education leads children to make sensible decisions that enhance their educations. Similarly, this researcher found that these families supported the intentions of the school personnel who made academic decisions for their children. This support was characterized by a decreased level

of engagement with the school in terms of inquiring about their child's placement or making recommendations and general at-home support of the decisions the child had made in conjunction with the school.

Of the nine immigrant parents in the study, two shared that they had talked with counselors and taken a role in making academic decisions. Six of the parents deferred to the school as the primary decision maker and had a nonspecific understanding of the steps that school personnel took to decide on their children's academic programs. These parents believed that school personnel made recommendations based on test results. One immigrant parent, when asked if she would like to be more involved in the process of making academic decisions for her son, insisted that she knew about the process because she had read all the papers. She indicated that there were many teachers, whose names she could not remember, who made decisions about her son. When referring to one teacher, the parent described the teacher as "the one taking care of all this stuff. She really cared about my son."

Although the significant majority of the parents were able to speculate as to how they believed academic decisions were made for their children and who they believed to be involved in the process, four parents out of the 26 interviewed, two nonimmigrants and two immigrants, stated that they had no knowledge of how academic decisions were made and who was involved. These occurrences were significant because they indicated the level of detachment between home and school for these families. Sonya, a middle-class nonimmigrant parent, admitted that she did not always know how to help her son succeed. She responded frankly when asked if she would have liked to have been more involved in the process of making academic decisions for her child: "Oh, definitely, I would really want to know. And I ask a lot of questions. I guess I don't ask the right questions because I'm not sure what to ask."

The bridging function of the network-analytic framework requires that school staff members initiate communication with parents and build a strong linkage between families and the school so that parents understand the operations that impact their children's academic careers. In this study, parents did not fully understand the academic decision-making process at their children's school. They differed in their ability to activate their influence on school personnel to help shape the best academic program for their child. The data revealed that the school had not engaged in effective bridging to ensure that parents were fully involved in academic decision making.

4.1.2 **Sources of Influence**

Parents' perspectives on who had the greatest influence on academic decisions and who actually made the decisions presented an interesting contrast. Some parents believed that teachers and counselors were the most identifiable sources of influence and that they made the actual decisions. Almost three fourths of the parents believed that either they or their children were most influential in deciding what courses their children took. When asked who actually made the academic decisions, however, all the parents referred to school-based indicators including tests, teacher recommendations, and counselor actions. Nine parents believed that they, not their children or the school, were the most influential in shaping their children's academic paths. Some shared that they exercised their influence through home discussions with their children or by reviewing class selection material.

Aaron believed that academic decisions for his son were determined by scores, an interview with school personnel, and discussions held among the counselors and administrators. However, he did not believe that counselors were the most influential force in determining the classes his child took. He stated that the counselor's role was to guide and steer the students. He

insisted that the counselor had not had much impact on his child and that several sit-down discussions about coursework he had had with his son had made the difference. He insisted, “Lots of this really comes from the home.”

Those parents who believed their child was the most influential source for academic placement decision making considered themselves supporters of the process because they provided input including information that would assist their teens in making wise academic choices. They trusted their children’s judgment and served in a consultative role by reviewing the options and providing feedback. They did not make the final decision. Those who did not believe that the parent and student were most influential forces in academic placement referred to the teachers and their recommendations as most important.

Stable relationships with parents or a significant person at home are critical in order for students to make decisions and solve problems constructively (Garagino et al., 1992, cited in Stanton-Salazar, 1997). This researcher affirmed that home relationships provide students with familial capital. In this research, the level to which the familial relationship extended into the school environment affected whether or not there were opportunities for continuity in decision making between home and school in order to maintain a congruent and free-flowing relationship between the family and the institution. Families in this study showed varied levels of home–school connection. For most families, this relationship was underdeveloped.

4.1.2.1 **Immigrant Parents**

Of the nine immigrant families included in the study, none of the parents believed that they had the most influence on their children’s course decisions. In the same way that they relied on the school to make academic decisions for their children, immigrant parents believed that school personnel had the strongest influence on their children’s class selections. Hill and Chao

(2009) asserted that high schools allow students to make curricular and coursework decisions and that for students to be successful their parents must promote and support them in making decisions and developing themselves. Working-class immigrant parents were less active participants in the process of reviewing course guides and making recommendations to their children. Instead, they believed their children knew what to do and supported their decisions. Linda shared that she was unsure who was most influential in shaping her child's academic career. Pauline vaguely explained her understanding of the role she believed teachers played.

The immigrant parents in the study represented two cultures, Caribbean and African. Of those families, both sets of African parents were middle class, whereas the Caribbean families were middle and working class. Most of the Caribbean parents had children who were lower-achieving. Based on their responses, they were less formally engaged with the school and did not have direct involvement with their children when course decisions were made, although they had some knowledge of their children's schooling activities. The African parents identified their children as being most influential. They shared that they had visited the school and met with personnel to hear presentations and receive information.

Denisia, whose son was in honors and advanced-placement classes, shared that she and the counselor sat down and determined along with her son what the best choices for him would be. Randall recounted that he attended school events and knew how classes were chosen. His wife, Chantall, when noting whom she believed was the most prominent source of influence, declared that her daughter made the decisions and they supported her. She did not expound on what type of support she and Randall provided at home. Similarly, both Chantel and Damien said their child was most influential in academic decision making; they did not indicate that they had

contact with the school, nor did they refer to specific activities they engaged in at home that influenced their child's decision making.

A misperception exists among teachers, administrators, and other school staff that parents who are not visible do not care about their children's education because of their lack of "active" involvement in their children's activities at school (i.e., direct involvement and contact with the school and teachers). This researcher, like Thao (2009), found that immigrant parents highly value education and hold high educational expectations for their children. Minority parents may have lower levels of education or be less confident about approaching the school, may lack familiarity with educational jargon, and may have a different culture that values home involvement (Grenfell and James, 1998).

Parental involvement at home and in school is shaped by three factors: the resources and opportunities parents have, the relationship between parents and their children, and parental interest in their children's education (Muller and Kerbow, 1993). For Black immigrant families in particular, social and cultural factors and an incomplete understanding of how schools work in this country may impact their ability to involve themselves in a relationship with the school or know how their role can be most beneficial for their child. Parents with cultural backgrounds different from the culture of the school may display different types of involvement in their attempts to connect with the school on behalf of their children because they have certain predispositions, behaviors, or attitudes (Grenfell and James, 1998).

Nonimmigrant parents, regardless of social class, ethnicity, family composition, or their children's level of achievement, were more engaged in decision making and emerged as more significant sources of influence in the process than immigrant parents. The data revealed that the level of student achievement and the structure of the family did not influence parents'

involvement. However, specific trends based on social class and ethnicity did develop. Middle-class African-American parents most prominently advocated for their children to gain access to higher-level learning opportunities and believed themselves to be the most influential force in academic decision making. Both middle- and working-class immigrant families and working-class nonimmigrant families deferred to the school to make decisions about their children's programs of study and believed that their children or the school had primary influence over the process.

Patterns of communication between schools and parents are lodged in an established social order that suggests that teachers, administrators, and counselors possess a certain body of knowledge. The school structures interactions between families and school in a formal, abrupt, and incomplete exchange of information (Smekar and Cohen-Vogel, 2001). In this study, parents engaged at varying levels with the school in an effort to interject themselves and influence the process that shaped their children's instructional programs. Their relationships with the schools fluctuated, and overall the parent-school relationship was underdeveloped. From the home, parents strove to activate their role as a viable source of influence by engaging with their children to direct course choices or follow their children's lead in a supportive manner. In this study, the role of the parents in the context of everyday home life was one that reinforced, monitored, and, to differing degrees, influenced their children's academic planning.

4.1.3 **Academic Measures: Standardized Tests**

Half of the parents in this study believed that standardized tests were not a good measure of their children's capabilities and expressed concern about tests and their impact on their children. Of this group, some parents believed standardized tests produced high levels of anxiety

that negatively impacted their children and the resulting scores. They were concerned that the exams were less reliable than other classroom tests and that the data lacked usefulness.

Parents of both lower- and higher-achieving students questioned the validity of the standardized tests. A parent of a student who took AP and honors classes believed that grades were better predictors of her daughter's achievement level. She questioned how the tests could mean anything because they were taken at a single point in time. She believed that, for her child, maintaining a 3.8 grade point average and National Honor Society membership for four years exhibited strong academic success, regardless of a standardized test score.

Of the nine immigrant parents who were interviewed, the majority believed that standardized tests were good academic measures for their child. Overall, they supported the tests and asserted that they offered parents an opportunity to see how their child was performing nationally. Some expressed concern over testing climate and communication. Two parents commented that they believed the test caused frustration. One, who shared that she was concerned about how test standards consistently changed, was troubled because she believed parents did not receive frequent communication from the school that thoroughly explained the testing process. Chantall was unable to recall the Prairie State Achievement Test by name and could not identify its purpose. She did not declare if she thought the test was a good indicator of academic achievement or not.

4.1.3.1 **Nonimmigrant and Immigrant Parents**

Three African-American parents expressed their concern that the standardized tests were racially biased. They believed the tests were designed for White students. This sentiment presented itself among parents with achieving children, along with other parents. One parent, who described her daughter as one who did well on standardized tests, stated:

I am not an advocate for standardized tests. I don't agree with them and I don't believe in them because I think they can be biased . . . I think most of these tests are designed for, first, all European Americans . . . the standards are according to how European Americans score.

In contrast, immigrant parents did not express concerns about racial bias in the tests. The three immigrant parents who had concerns about standardized tests focused on the need for more parent information and less stressful testing environments for their children.

4.1.3.2 **Lower- and Higher-Achieving Students**

Of the seven students classified as low achieving, five parents believed the standardized tests were good indicators of academic measure and two parents believed the tests were not. Those parents who did not believe the standardized tests were good indicators expressed concern that the tests did not measure true ability and that teachers were more equipped to measure student progress. One offered, "I don't believe in it. I think it's a bunch of garbage . . . If anyone should know these children better than anybody it's the teachers, not something that the state just sent to the door."

The majority of the parents with higher-achieving students believed that standardized tests were not a good measure of student achievement. The parents of only four students from the set of those who were not classified as lower-achieving believed that standardized testing was beneficial for their children. Those parents found value in the data the test provided, which they believed informed them of their children's academic level.

The majority of parents in the study, however, did not believe the tests provided accurate data that informed them of their children's ability. Several parents believed that the data and communication about the tests needed to be articulated in a way that allowed them to understand fully how to analyze results and prepare their children for the tests. Moreover, several African-

American parents questioned the validity of the tests and asserted that they were biased and not designed to ensure that all Black students would be fairly assessed.

Few parents considered the school a reliable source to help them establish a greater understanding of the standardized tests. Some acknowledged that they had received information in the mail announcing the tests, but immigrant parents revealed that they would have liked to have received more information in order to better understand the process their children would undergo when taking the test or how the test would benefit their children.

From a psychological standpoint, Black immigrants have been less impacted by the segregation and alienation that have plagued African-Americans institutionally. They regard the school curriculum as learnable and do not question the pedagogy or the content of the material (Ogbu, 2003). Ogbu (2003) emphasized that nonimmigrant African-American parents are more interested in the content of the conventional public school curriculum and contend that it is reflective of White values. He also maintained that immigrant minorities focus less on the content of the curriculum and more on the classroom instructional requirements of paying attention, doing the classwork, completing homework, and studying (2003). This focus, which homes in less on the subjects' content and more on their purpose, is what allows immigrants to excel where nonimmigrant Black students fail (Ogbu, 2003).

In this study, African-American families were aware of the institutional racism that has historically been embedded in American institutions and were more attuned to the biases that could impact curriculum, instruction, and standardized testing. Contrary to Ogbu's notion that African-Americans exhibit a level of mistrust for public schooling that immobilizes their children's academic progress, this researcher noted that the African-American parents in this inquiry who believed the content of the standardized tests to be racist had children who were

moderate to high achievers, some of whom were enrolled in AP and honors classes. As evidenced by the students' academic level of achievement, the parents' distrust of the test content did not prompt their children to disengage from school.

The concerns of nonimmigrant parents exemplified their need for better understanding of the standardized testing process their children underwent, the content of the instrument, and the utility of the data. Further, their belief that these academic indicators were biased against Black students exemplified their acknowledgement that race impacted their children's experiences in school. African-American parents, because of their concern for the validity of standardized tests, advocated for their children to be exposed to objective academic measures. They did not oppose tests in their entirety, but sought fair options that could be used to assess their children effectively.

4.2 Parental Involvement Roles, Relationships, and Barriers

4.2.1 Beliefs about Parent Involvement

It is a common belief supported by research that positive parental involvement in school will make a difference in the education a child receives. When parents in this study were asked if they believed parents could make a difference in the education their children received, all the parents responded that they believed they could make a difference in the education of their children. They provided detailed descriptions of their beliefs about what parents could do, and in some cases they reflected specifically on what they had done to become involved in their children's education.

Some parents believed that their primary role was to be involved in their children's education at the home. They emphasized that parents should sustain a positive environment for their children and participate in activities that support studying and a peaceful learning climate.

Several parents opined that it was the role of the parent to provide social and emotional support to students at home by following up with their children to monitor their school experiences and find out how they were progressing socially, emotionally, and academically. Denisia emphasized that parents should cultivate their children's strengths by providing a family environment that offered a balance of work and play and did not judge African-American students. She believed this was of great importance because Black students would be "categorized in different locations."

Parents understood their role of providing their children with exposure to success-oriented practices that would enrich their children and help them develop cultural capital. They believed they could support their children's education by taking them to the library, providing computers for research, reading to them, and visiting museums. Parents embraced the need to understand the academic process and be involved. Some parents indicated that they went to conferences, board meetings, and other school events when they were able. Other parents communicated with the school in order to understand the teaching and learning process. An immigrant couple emphasized that it was important not to be estranged from the school. They believed it was beneficial to learn about the school's system and instructional program.

4.2.1.1 **Lower- and Moderately Achieving Students**

Some of the responses of the parents of lower-achieving students revealed that they believed there was a reciprocal effect between parents and teachers when parents became involved. They believed that teachers reacted more positively toward parents depending on the parent's level of involvement in their child's schooling.

Of the parents who represented the seven students classified as lower-achieving, one stressed the importance of parental intervention at a very early age. Another emphasized that

teachers and school personnel respected those parents who were involved in their children's education. The parents of higher-achieving students did not focus on what teachers believed about them. They emphasized how they perceived the school and what they believed to be their best role. This researcher, in agreement with the findings of Drummond and Stipek (2004), concluded that those parents who felt their children were struggling were less confident in their ability to meet their children's needs.

4.2.1.2 **Middle-class Nonimmigrant Parents**

Middle-class nonimmigrant parents comprised the largest set of parents who participated in this study. Although the responses of two parents did not constitute a trend for the entire group, their responses were significant and noteworthy. These parents asserted that their involvement was important because they needed to advocate for children and monitor the learning environment. Where other parents referred to parental involvement as a means to keep track of what the students were learning, these parents believed that in-school involvement was particularly important to ensure that children were being treated well in school. Both parents suggested that parents needed to be astute and visible in the school so that they could be proactive. One parent suggested that she was an advocate for her child because teachers "need[ed] to know somebody was watching." The other parent shared that parents have to be involved because children may need someone to fight for them.

The status of the parent as married or single was not a significant indicator influencing whether or not parents believed their school involvement was important. Similarly, no relevant trends could be traced to parents' income levels. As with middle- and working-class parents, the responses of these groups were embodied by those of the entire set of parents. Overall, the

parents in this study recognized the importance of a positive home–school relationship and its constructive impact on their child’s experiences.

4.2.2 **Opportunities for and Barriers to Parent Involvement in School**

In the educational arena and in the larger society, varying assessments exist about how much impact parents have on adolescents. Further, parental involvement may diminish in both intensity and importance during high school. The parents in this study believed that parental involvement in their children’s education was important, and they made choices about how they could best be involved. Similar to the findings of Hill and Chao (2009), this study revealed that the parents’ decisions regarding involvement directly or indirectly impacted their adolescents’ educational experiences.

Although parents believed that their involvement in their children’s educational lives was essential, when asked if they were more involved by actually helping out in their child’s middle or elementary school, 24 of the 26 parents acknowledged that their involvement at the high school was considerably reduced in comparison to when their child was younger. Seven parents responded that they were not able to help out at all in their child’s high school. Several other parents noted that they were not active at the school because they believed that they did not need to be directly involved in their child’s classroom. They emphasized that they were not involved because they felt their child needed to become more responsible and more independent. One parent suggested that the school did not encourage parents to be involved:

I am not active because I’m trying to respect his independence . . . I actually don’t see a reason to be as involved in high school . . . so I just don’t see a need to go up there that much because, you know, during high school they don’t want parents around as much . . . I’m trying to respect that request.

Those parents who stated that they were involved identified various activities in which they were engaged. These included helping out with homework, transporting their child back and forth to

the library, attending school-based extracurricular events, fundraising, volunteering for field trips, attending parent–teacher conferences, making sure their child attended school, and periodically visiting a teacher to discuss their child’s progress. Other than at-home support, they participated in these activities very sporadically.

Several barriers preventing parents from being involved at the high school extended beyond their own belief that the school or their children might not want parents to be involved. Half of the parents shared that their work responsibilities limited their ability to be involved. Of those who noted that their work interfered with their level of involvement, several admitted that they had made more time in their schedules to involve themselves when their children were younger. Nonetheless, others were involved on a limited basis. In spite of the work commitments these parents bore, they believed that their involvement was central to their children’s success. Damien noted, “To be honest, my work schedule does not allow me to do that (get involved) at all . . . I would love to be able to help, to go to the school, PTA, stuff like that, but time is a factor.” The demands of work left limited or no time for parents to volunteer at school or participate in school-based activities. This posed a challenge for middle- and working-class nonimmigrant parents, immigrant families, single and married households, and parents of higher- and lower-achieving students.

4.2.2.1 **Single Parents**

Of the 10 parents in the study who were the single heads of their household, all were mothers. Like married parents, they expressed that work commitments limited their ability to be active at the high school. These mothers had been involved in their children’s elementary schools and had volunteered. They noted that they had participated in field trips, volunteered at school events, tutored, and initiated visits with teachers to check on their children’s progress. All of the

parents worked, and some noted that they would have been interested in adjusting their work schedules to become more active if it had been feasible. Single working- and middle-class mothers in the study were interested in being more involved and recognized the importance of being active in their teen's education. Their involvement was limited because of time constraints due to work and college classes.

4.2.2.2 **Immigrant Parents**

Of the nine immigrant parents in the study, two noted that they were unable to get involved at the school because of the language barrier. Another shared that she was unable to be active at school because she did not drive. Like the African-American parents, the immigrant parents worked and believed that their schedule prevented them from fully participating in at-school activities. Immigrant parents' beliefs about their roles in their children's schooling were framed by their own experiences in their home countries. A parent shared that in her country parents did not come to the school to volunteer but would come for scheduled parent teacher meetings or call teachers from home to check up on their children's progress. Most immigrant parents were less directly engaged at school and supported their children's education from home. The parent's description of the home involvement that they remembered as youth resembled that which Grenfell and James also noted (1998). Different cultures may value home involvement more highly than at-school involvement, which impacts the way parents interact with schools.

Parents expressed that they were involved at different levels and had engaged in varied activities at their children's schools at some point. However, their involvement had significantly decreased once their children reached high school. Although parents believed it was important to be involved at all levels of education, they admitted that they had been more involved at the middle- and elementary-school levels. A few parents shared that they had refrained from

becoming involved at the high school because they believed that their child needed to be more independent. Most were not as active because of challenges that impeded their involvement, not because they desired not to be. Parents worked during the day, and some had transportation difficulty getting to and from the schools. In the case of immigrant parents, their limited understanding of English and their desire to conform to traditional parent involvement roles as understood in their country affected their ability to be actively involved in the school.

4.2.3 **Parent Involvement at Home**

The data showed that parents were able to be more involved in their children's educational life at home than at school. However, parents were unable to offer consistent support because of work and home responsibilities or their children's extracurricular schedules. Nine out of 26 parents primarily assisted their children by helping with homework. Others supported their children by editing papers, reading with their children, providing a computer to them, or visiting museums with them. One parent noted that she spent time educating her daughter about life.

4.2.3.1 **Immigrant Parents**

Immigrant parents indicated that they engaged their children by asking what he/she had learned and helping with homework. Several parents emphasized that their children relied on personal knowledge and were self-motivated in completing homework, but that they as parents answered questions that they understood. Not all of the immigrant parents had the capacity to help their children with homework. Two mothers shared that they did not understand the work. One of these parents revealed that the homework was too hard for her. The other stated that she relied on a sibling born in the United States to assist her high-school aged child. Another immigrant mother stated that she did not engage in educational activities at home with her child.

Another parent shared that he helped with homework by monitoring its completion and inquiring about his child's day:

On a daily basis when he comes home, I always ask him, "What did you learn today?" Because if you go to school every day, you should learn something new, I ask them, "Do you have any homework?" If they say yes, I say, "Okay, are you done with that? Are you done with your homework?"

Higher levels of parental involvement in schooling occurred most frequently for those parents whose lifestyle and culture were most congruent with the that of the school. White, middle-income, educated parents face few psychological, economic, or social barriers that alienate them from traditional American schooling. Thus, they are able to engage in the educational process at home and school.

Parents in this study contended with significant work responsibilities, which limited the amount of time they could volunteer in school or work with their children at home. Some, mostly immigrant parents, did not have the academic or linguistic capacity to assist their children with the homework assigned. Parents' varying levels of involvement did not reflect disengagement from schooling; instead, it reflected differences in the parents' habitus—specifically, their readiness for educational involvement (Lee and Bowen, 2006). Parents' levels of education and exposure to the schooling culture impact the cultural capital in the family and the value of the support that parents are able to offer their children.

4.2.4 **Perspectives on the School's Efforts to Involve Parents**

4.2.4.1 **Home Involvement**

When asked how much effort Riverview High School made to encourage parents to engage in educational activities at school, 15 parents responded that the school made little or no effort. The other parents recalled the efforts that they knew the school made. Most referred to the mailings that they received at home. Their recollections of these mailing were inconsistent.

Parents who believed that the school made efforts to encourage them to participate recalled receiving information that could best be described as informational and aligned with school operations rather than the instructional process. One parent referred to the automated voice calls reminding her that her child was late or absent. Another parent mentioned that the school encouraged parents to talk to their kids about standardized testing when that time arrived annually, but nothing else. Another parent recalled that she had received a course catalog. One middle-class parent of a higher-achieving student believed that she never needed to get involved. Similarly, two immigrant parents shared that because their child was doing all right academically, they believed the school thought the parents did not need to spend any additional time with her. Both of these parents believed that involvement made a difference for students, but they themselves were not involved and were not sought after by the school to be involved.

Parents in this study who referred to mailings as the main source of communication they received from the school did not fully engage in the material. One parent acknowledged that the school sent information that would encourage parents to become involved, but was unsure whether she had read it. A mother who did not read the mailings reflected on why she chose the Internet as an informational tool. She was uncertain whether all parents had access: “They send a lot of papers out. I don’t know if they’re organized or not organized. For me, I do the website. . . . This may not be an opportunity for every parent.”

The school’s mailing campaigns did not constitute an outreach effort that prompted substantial parent involvement among those interviewed. The school had established a website, but not all families accessed it or had Internet access. Nonfamilial institutional support is what connects minority families to their children and schools (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). The school’s disjointed outreach efforts did not connect parents in this study and also did not offer them viable

options for home-based involvement activities, despite the fact that most parents could not be involved in in-school activities due to their work schedules.

Parents reported that they did not receive resource information, believed that they did not need it, or did not know how best to implement strategies to help their children at home. Single and married parents, those of higher- and lower-achieving students, immigrant and nonimmigrant, and middle- and working-class parents all reported that they had not received adequate information from the school. This phenomenon embodies the contradiction that Stanton-Salazar identified, which is a self-reinforcing cycle whereby minority students, who are most in need of support, encounter fewer opportunities to attain that support.

4.2.4.2 **Involvement at School**

Seven out of the 26 parents indicated that the school did little or nothing to encourage parent participation in educational activities in school. The other parents had received numerous mailings from the school. Several parents shared that the material focused on sports events and an occasional field trip when the school needed parents as chaperones.

As with the parent information sent out to encourage in-home participation, the parents who acknowledged that they had received information regarding in-school involvement opportunities for school involvement commented that a lot of information was sent to keep parents up to date. Parents had varying perspectives on the value of the information sent, and most commented on the amount rather than the utility of what they received. One parent expressed her concern that the information sent by the school was not relevant to the needs of parents and their children:

I don't know that it's called a significant effort, but we are inundated with notices of upcoming events . . . But I can't say that we're really given what we need to be as involved in the areas we should be involved in . . . I look at the counselors there as more schedulers versus someone that actually counsels.

Other parents noted that they did not feel that the school communicated in a timely manner that allowed parents to be involved in the school and that the topic of the communications was not education-related. Referring to what she perceived as the school's differential treatment in favor of wealthy parents, a middle-class mother revealed that she believed the school unfairly excluded parents who were of lower socioeconomic status in favor of those who were wealthier:

There's always a clique within a school community. . . . the more wealthy parents tend to be included in the clique versus those who are not part of these groups. [Interviewer: Do they find out more?] Yeah, they find out more . . . they know everybody . . . they know the coaches, they know the teachers. They've got this whole community cultural thing going on . . . most people are on the outside.

4.2.4.3 **Immigrant Parents**

Half of the immigrant parents reported that they received a great deal of correspondence in the form of letters. One parent shared that he received something from the school daily. The other half of the parents reported that they did not receive anything, had no response to the question, or received something that they did not understand from the school.

Parents varied in their opinions of the school's efforts to encourage them to engage in activities at the school to support their children's progress. Some parents perceived the flyers that were sent to them as representative of the school's commitment to involving them. Others acknowledged that the school sent flyers but believed that the effort was incomplete, ineffective, or aimed at activities that would not meet the parents' or students' needs. Still other parents shared that they did not receive information from the school or received it but did not read it because they did not understand it. Based on the parents' varying perspectives regarding the value and effectiveness of the school's outreach efforts, this researcher observed that the school's

strategies to involve parents had not created pathways that increased involvement. Parent participation was not institutionalized and the assets of engaging African-American parents were not maximized.

Jeynes (2003a, 2003b) revealed that parents naturally become strong partners in their children's education when teachers, principals, and leaders become actively engaged in encouraging high levels of involvement. This researcher found that the school offered parents in this study limited opportunities to stay involved and build positive relationships with school personnel. These limitations decreased the informational resources and skills parents had available to help improve their children's educational outcome.

4.3 Parents' Perspectives on Factors that Impact Their Children's Opportunities

4.3.1 Race Matters

The parents in this study believed that race shaped their children's lives and influenced their ability to attain academic and social success. They believed that discrimination operated in aspects of their children's lives and acknowledged that their children would face additional challenges because they were African-American. Parents' knowledge of race and its impact on opportunity contributed to their perceptions of how it would affect their children's lives. Parents interpreted the impact of race on their children's lives differently.

Eighteen of the 26 participating parents believed that being Black in America would make it more challenging for their children to succeed in this society. Parents in this study believed that the United States' racial heritage presented longstanding barriers that affected and would continue to affect their children's experiences. Racism, racial discrimination, and racial stereotypes have been shown to be intractable elements of the American cultural ethos (Bell, 1992, cited in Horvat and O'Connor, 2006). This researcher found that the majority of the

parents in the study were attuned to the power of race and racism in their lives and those of their children.

Parents believed that institutional racism was persistent and ever present. Howard exemplified the belief of many parents in the study that their children would experience discrimination in various aspects of their lives. Because it was longstanding and embedded throughout American society: “Oh, it [being Black] makes it more difficult . . . it will make it more difficult for him because he’s African-American . . . because I think culture exhibits . . . race is always just below the surface line in everything.”

A small group of parents believed that their children’s race would be of benefit depending on the circumstances or have no impact on their chances to succeed. Two parents did not elaborate on why they believed their children’s race would have no impact. One parent hoped that race was not a significant factor and that people would look past her child’s race; another believed that her child was doing fine in school, which was evidence that her race had no impact; and a third believed that although racism might be evident, her child would not be affected because she was resilient. These parents either believed that racism did not exist to the degree that it once had or chose to reject it as a formidable force that could undermine their children’s viability.

Cheryl, who described her Black child as multiracial (Caucasian, African-American, and Japanese), believed that her daughter’s multiracial status would make it easier in the future because the country was becoming more diverse. Although this parent classified her child as Black, she did not believe her daughter would be denied access to opportunity. The other parents of biracial or Black children believed race would negatively impact their children’s chances for success.

Acknowledging racism, several parents reflected on their children's positive mental attitudes and self-concepts as the factors that would prevent racial discrimination from negatively impacting them. Evita asserted that she had instilled a sense of confidence in her son that would enable him to face adversity:

I have always told my child, all my children, that anywhere you go inside this world your color is gonna be an impact on everybody . . . but I've always explained to my child just because somebody is ignorant and don't believe in your color . . . you should never let it pull you down.

Some parents believed that racism impacted their children differently depending on the circumstances their children would face. They believed that their children would have access to certain resources because of race and less access to other resources for the same reasons. One mother stated:

Being Black could be a disability in this country. It depends on which way he goes. If he's an athlete making money for somebody, being African-American might be a good thing. But if he's in White corporate America, he's going to have a way to go.

The majority of the parents acknowledged the presence of racial stratification in American society and believed its effects would impact their children's lives. The parents who indicated that race had no impact on their children's chances to succeed focused on their children's ability to be resilient as a defense mechanism against existing racism.

Parents' perceptions of how race affected their children's experiences could not be categorized based on family composition or the student's achievement level. Single-parent and married homes responded similarly in most cases, as did parents of lower- and higher-achieving students. Parents, both middle and working class, reported that race affected their children's chances for opportunities and success in schooling and society. Likewise, nonimmigrant and immigrant parents reported that race affected their children's opportunities. No distinctive trends definitively distinguished parents based on differing variables.

Parents' understanding of how race impacts their children's lives is critical in their perception of the school and how their children are treated. Students do not succeed simply by having strong racial or achievement concepts. They must embody racial group pride and understanding how race and racism may operate to constrain their success (Carter Andrews, 2009). They must become knowledgeable about the challenges that exist and recognize how to confront and overcome those challenges. African-American adolescents and their parents engage in interactive and communicative processes regarding race and how to navigate the landscape of American society (Stevenson et al., 2002, cited in Scott, 2003). Parents in this study discussed what they believed to be the impact of race on their children's ability to succeed and how their children responded to potential obstacles.

Schools, as mainstream institutions, embody a culture that reflects the dynamics of society. According to Stanton-Salazar, schools rarely provide minority students with the necessary training to decode the educational system effectively (1997). To do so would expose the existence of an unequal playing field. When race shapes the family-school dynamic, the relationship between minority parents and the school may be fraught (1997). In this study, parents' perception of how race operates in society impacted what they believed about their children's opportunities in school and society.

4.3.2 **The Gender Factor**

Parents in this study acknowledged that their children's gender impacted how society reacted to them and influenced their access to opportunity. When describing how gender operated in the lives of their children, parents tended to refer to gender and race together when elaborating on the circumstances they believed their children faced. They expounded on their perspectives of the experiences of their children as Black (African-American) males or Black

(African-American) females. This shared identity, or *linked fate*, arises from lived experiences in which members of a group feel close to others who identify with the group label. Individual life chances are inextricably tied to the group as a whole (Jaynes and Williams, 1989; Gay and Tate, 1998). Parents in this study predicted that their children would encounter unique experiences specific to their racial and gender status.

African-American females bear the burdens of both racial and gender inequality. As Blacks in this society, they develop a heightened sense of racial identification because they concurrently experience gender discrimination. Some believe that their classification as an African-American most directly shapes their life experiences. Others maintain that their female status subjects them to more significant discrimination. This gender awareness may shift with the level which they exhibit racial loyalty (Simien, 2005).

In this study, 19 parents believed that being either a Black male or a Black female would make it more difficult for their children to succeed in society. Parents recognized that both Black males and females faced barriers that impeded their success in American society. Most parents believed that males gained societal favor for their male status. Others emphasized that being Black and female relegated young women to gender and racial inequality. Parents identified the disparity in the pay women received relative to men's salaries as a significant indicator of the additional challenges women faced. They acknowledged that young men fared better financially, which improved their options for economic mobility. Maya, reflecting on her own experience as a Black woman, described the advantages enjoyed by Black males: "I still think that we're a little bit behind even though we try to say that we're not . . . According to statistics, males still dominate income-wise, job-wise; males are still on top."

Although several parents referred to the gender income gap favoring males, parents believed that Black males faced distinct challenges that would impede their current and future opportunities. Several parents described the obstacles threatening the success of Black males. One acknowledged that African-American males were unfairly targeted by law enforcement officials and mentioned that unfair practices were taking place in Riverview. She stated that young Black men in the community were cornered and taken to jail. She believed it was very difficult for a male to be young and Black in Riverview.

From the perspective of parents, race and gender influenced the access their children would have to successful life pathways. Parents believed that Black males and females would confront discrimination while seeking employment. They assumed that the level of access their children would have would be contingent on the types of job the teens sought later in life. Pamela believed that her daughter would have opportunities to teach because there were a limited numbers of Black teachers. Robin, who believed her son would face discrimination in a business career, stated, “The fact that he is a Black male is going to be big problem . . . White corporate America is not ready for the educated, articulate Black American male.”

Four parents believed that being Black and male or female would not affect their children’s ability to succeed. These parents were aware that racial and gender discrimination existed. However, they believed that their children’s resilience would allow them to combat impending obstacles. Resilience is the result of specific protective factors that may be developed through external contact with family and the wider community or through internalized factors such as personal efficacy (Masten et al., 1990). These parents held that their children were determined and possessed a high self-concept. They believed their children had developed the

spirit necessary to overcome outside barriers. Howard believed that his son would be successful despite discrimination:

I think that [he] will make it. Well, [being a Black male] can make it more difficult, and it can make it easier—more difficult because he’s a Black male and easier because he will have the kind of self-confidence [needed] to move ahead.

Two parents believed that being Black and female in society made it easier to succeed.

Although most parents who shared their perception of the climate for both genders believed that being Black and female was more challenging than being Black and male, two parents believed that being female made it easier for Black youth to succeed in society. One mother, whose daughter she classified as Black yet described as multiracial, bicultural, and multilingual, believed her daughter would be able to use her mixed background as a positive attribute, even though the mother believed the world might not see it as a positive. Another mother believed her daughter’s gender would work in her favor, but she did not expound on what would make that so.

4.3.3 **Anti-intellectualism**

The intensity of one parent exemplified a relevant viewpoint that reflected a significant argument found in the research. This parent professed that intelligent, high-achieving Black males were subject to two forms of discrimination. He believed that students who were upwardly mobile were unfairly scrutinized and excluded by White society. Similarly, they were scorned by other African-American males who were not academically successful. “For African-American males it is a double jeopardy . . . at high school, once you reach a certain level, some of the other African-American males that are not high achievers . . . they ridicule the ones that are.”

This parent’s perspective on Black youths’ negative reactions to the academic success of other Black youth aligned with Ogbu’s (2003) findings. Ogbu asserted, based upon his study of

an all-Black high school, that a highly destructive cultural bias had developed in the African-American community. He noted that Black students who did well in school were being ostracized by their Black peers and accused of “acting White.” This negative attention, Ogbu asserted, prompted Black students to reject doing well in school in order to avoid criticism, which explained their lower achievement levels (2003).

Another perspective from more current research has questioned the applicability of Ogbu’s theory to school environments like Riverview in which Blacks are not the majority (Tyson et al., 2005). Further, it has refuted the notion that anti-intellectualism is only characteristic of Black communities. The study, which focused on achievement in North Carolina high schools, found that regardless of race, intelligent students were teased by students who achieved lower grades. It revealed that no correlation existed between race and achievement in elementary schools (Tyson et al., 2005). The researchers emphasized that both African-American and White students succeeded in school; similarly, African-American and White students failed academically (Tyson et al., 2005).

Further, the study asserted that in high schools with large African-American populations and a small number of Black students assigned to honors or advanced-placement classes, the higher-achieving African-American students were often ostracized by their Black peers and accused of acting White (Tyson et al., 2005). These researchers argued that this learned behavior was not inherent to the Black community, as Ogbu (2003) and others have suggested. They noted that the ridicule students experienced arose under very specific conditions based on the dynamics of the school. When schools relegated most Black students to lower-level classes, a divide occurred between those in higher-level classes and those in lower-level classes, prompting students to identify themselves based on their academic labels (Tyson et al., 2005).

Tyson et al.'s (2005) argument refuted the notion that Black students characteristically react negatively to high academic achievement. Instead, it suggested that lower-achieving Black students responded unfavorably to circumstances that allowed a few Black students to be selected for higher-level classes. Those not given access to the more rigorous courses manifested their alienation by being adversarial with the higher-achieving students in the advanced placement classes.

4.3.4 **Parents' Perspectives on the Role of Discrimination**

The majority of parents in this study acknowledged that gender and racial discrimination were prevalent in society. They were aware that discriminatory factors affected aspects of their children's lives. These parents believed that their children's ability to access opportunities that would improve their schooling outcomes and career success would be more challenging because of existing racism. Parents referred to their children's ability to be resilient as a strategy that they believed would help their children combat discrimination. As noted earlier, resilience is the result of specific protective factors that may be external, including the support of family and the wider community, along with the internalized quality of personal efficacy (Masten et al., 1990).

Several parents identified the actions and attitudes of their children as a factor that would influence how the larger society responded to them. They noted that they had shared lived experiences with their children to build a foundation for their children to understand the realities of being Black. A few parents believed that their children's race would have no impact on their success or would make it easier to access opportunities for future success, basing their assessment on their belief that society had evolved beyond blatant discrimination and had become more accepting of African-Americans and other diverse cultures.

Working-class parents differed overall in their understanding of the effect that race would have on their children's chances at success in life. Three out of the five working-class parents believed that being a Black male or female would have no effect on their child's ability to succeed in society. Their beliefs presented a trend that contrasted with that of middle-class parents, none of whom believed that being a Black male would fail to affect their children's ability to succeed in life. The other two working-class parents believed that being a Black male would make it more difficult to succeed in society. None of the working-class parents believed that being a Black female would make it either more difficult or easier to succeed in society.

Among the working-class parents, two (both of them mothers) believed that being a Black male would have no effect on their sons' ability; their responses indicated that they relied on their sons' resilience and personal ability to manage challenges in order to achieve. Differently from middle-class parents of Black males, who were very aware of racism in society and believed it to be operant in their sons' lives, both of these working-class mothers believed that their children could individually overcome obstacles. Indeed, for lower-income students with limited monetary resources, protective factors can operate to support the development of resilience. These factors can include having a pleasant personality and access to external assistance, including a supportive family (Floyd, 1997). The capacity for resilience varies from individual to individual. It may grow or decline depending on the operant factors that promote or limit stress (Borman and Overman, 2004).

African-American mothers tend to be the primary source of affection, aspirations, and assistance when it comes to their children's educational pursuits. These working-class mothers did not discuss the critical components necessary to foster and sustain resilience, including outside support. They referred instead to their child's role. Parents who possess a mainstream

orientation are not likely to emphasize race; rather, they tend to focus on confidence, personal self-esteem, and hard work as defenses against societal insults and racial barriers.

4.3.5 **Living in the Neighborhood and in Riverview**

Beyond race and gender, parents offered their perspectives on how certain factors of social and cultural capital impacted their children's access to opportunity and chances to succeed. They responded to how they believed locational factors, including living in Riverview, living in their neighborhood in Riverview, and attending Riverview schools, shaped their children's lives. The parents identified the social capital operative in their families by stating how they felt whom their family knew affected their children's opportunities for upward mobility.

Parents in this study believed that the above factors had varying degrees of impact on their children's outcomes. African-American families, as minorities, possess community cultural wealth in their neighborhoods. This array of knowledge and abilities is possessed and utilized by communities of color, allowing them to survive and resist macro and micro domination by larger White communities (Solórzano and Delgado, 2001). The wealth consists of behaviors and values that are shared by members of the community. Although considered a racially diverse city, Riverview contained some primarily Black sections. The parents in this study lived in Black enclaves and in areas that were predominantly White middle-class.

Ten of the 26 parents believed that living in their neighborhood and living in Riverview would have a positive impact on their children's future life chances. They assumed that opportunities would come more easily to children raised in Riverview compared to those raised in other suburbs of the adjacent large city. The parents emphasized that that their neighborhood and Riverview were safe and offered a good education.

Of the 10 parents who believed that living in their neighborhood and living in Riverview were beneficial, six emphasized that Riverview offered cultural diversity because of its racial and ethnic makeup. Many of the communities within the adjacent large city and neighboring suburbs were racially and economically segmented. From the perspective of five African-American parents included in the group of 10, Riverview's racial diversity, along with its cultural opportunities, offered their children exposure to students and families who were predominantly White. Referring to what she believed to be the benefit of the interaction her child would have in Riverview, Susan shared, "Because I live in a predominantly White neighborhood, it will have some effect . . . she will know how to deal with both sides of the coin . . . [with] her own culture and with European cultures . . . it is a plus."

This researcher, in agreement with Stanton-Salazar (1997), who asserted that minority children have social networks that are more limited due to racial, gender, ethnic, and class stratification, noted that the parents in this study believed their interaction with White residents in Riverview would enhance their children's ability to get ahead in life. Social capital and supportive relationships are important components of network formation (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). In Black communities the social capital that residents possess may not mirror that which exists in primarily White schools. Clark (1991) asserted that interaction between Whites and Blacks improves Blacks' chances to succeed in a society that discounts Black culture and promotes White culture. This researcher identified that parents believed Riverview would offer mainstream socialization through which their children would gain an understanding of the values of the larger society.

Five parents believed that living in their particular neighborhood would impact their children differently than living in Riverview or vice versa. Three of these parents believed that

living in their particular neighborhood would have no effect on their children's ability to succeed in life, but that living in Riverview would make it easier for their children. Riverview's neighborhoods varied socioeconomically and racially. Some students lived in all-Black enclaves that were significantly less affluent than upper-middle-class White sections of the suburb. One parent acknowledged that she did not believe her neighborhood was influential.

Two parents believed living in their particular neighborhood would make it easier for their children to realize future life opportunities. However, they wanted to leave Riverview and did not expound upon the reason. One of these parents interpreted the neighborhood as a safe and less troubled community, but described Riverview as more segregated.

Three parents believed that neither their neighborhood nor Riverview would have an effect on their children's chances of getting ahead. Both of those parents believed that their children would be influential in attaining their own success, regardless of the neighborhood in which they lived. One commented that she had lived in "ugly neighborhoods" before and that her child had not been affected. For these parents, resilience emerged as the salient characteristic that would enable their children to become successful, regardless of the neighborhoods or communities in which they lived.

A significant anomaly arose in the findings. One working-class immigrant mother whose son was classified as lower-achieving believed that both living in their particular neighborhood and living in Riverview had made it difficult for her child to succeed. She believed that drugs in the community had impacted both Riverview and her neighborhood. Less affluent and educated than the majority of the parents interviewed, this parent did not describe Riverview, the city, or her neighborhood as safe. She did not believe her neighborhood or Riverview to be a source of

positive influence for her child. Her responses reflected what she knew to be indicative of her son's experiences.

4.3.5.1 **Single Parents**

Six out of the ten parents who were single heads of their households believed that either Riverview or the neighborhood in which they lived had no effect on their children's chances for success. Four of the ten parents believed that neither Riverview nor their neighborhood had an impact on their children's upward mobility. The responses of these parents exemplified their belief that neighborhood and community were not the foundation of their children's success. They emphasized instead the importance of their children's individual will and determination. Brittany responded that neither the neighborhood nor the city of Riverview shaped her child's chances for success in school and life. Reflective of the sentiments of several of these parents, Brittany responded, "No, I don't believe that it will [affect my child's future] . . . because ultimately it is all about what a person wants in life."

The trends in the data did not reveal significant differences in how parents believed their neighborhoods or the city of Riverview would affect their children's outcomes based on the parents' socioeconomic status, immigrant or nonimmigrant classification, or level of achievement. The parents included in the study, when describing how they had come to settle in Riverview, believed it to be a positive choice. The background data on the parents who were interviewed revealed that most parents considered Riverview a community that would offer diversity, a good quality of life, and educational opportunity for their children.

The neighborhood and larger community in which they lived were significant to the parents in this study. In cases where they believed their neighborhood and community would have no effect, parents clung closely to the notion that their children would face obstacles

regardless of where they lived. Therefore, their children would use resilience as a tool to combat adversity. Other parents who acknowledged that Riverview and their neighborhood directly affected their children's ability to succeed varied in their sense of the degree to which location of upbringing would alter their children's outcome.

4.3.6 Riverview High School's Impact

The data analysis produced two primary trends that revealed the impact parents believed Riverview High School had on their children's chances of succeeding in school and getting ahead in life. Fifteen of the 26 parents believed that attending Riverview High School would make it easier for their children to become upwardly mobile in society. Seven parents believed that attending Riverview High School would have no effect on their children's future outcomes. Three parents believed that attending Riverview High School would make it more difficult for their children to succeed. One parent believed that the school provided a quality education to her child but voiced concerns about the educational climate for Black students and its impact on their experience in school. When ascertaining how they believed Riverview High School would affect their children's chances of succeeding and getting ahead in life, the parents focused on the school as a larger institution rather than individual teachers.

The majority of the parents believed that the quality of Riverview High School was instrumental in their children's success. The reputation of the school was an important factor for the parents. Within the larger society, they believed the high school's reputation would improve their children's readiness for college. Parents supposed that an education at Riverview would give their children a chance to do well in life because after graduation the opportunities for college would be vast. Dawn focused on the per-pupil cost of educating a Riverview student. To her, this elevated the quality of the school. "[Attending Riverview High School] make it easier . .

. I think the resources are \$16,000 per child that they spend . . . that's a lot that school has . . . stuff better than some colleges.”

Parents chose to compare the quality of Riverview with other schools in other districts. Some parents believed that the quality of the school relative to others was overrated. One parent, who compared Riverview to the region, acknowledged that it was a good school. However, Howard believed that there were other school districts where the work was “less conflicting.” Denise doubted that Riverview was the premier school in the area. Another parent described Riverview as a good school system but shared that people were worried about it. In her opinion, it was better than the district in the adjacent sprawling urban center.

Those parents who believed that attending Riverview High School would not make a difference in their children's overall chances for success credited their children's internal will as the factor that would most affect their children's future success in school and society. This recurrent theme of resilience surfaced among both working-class and middle-class African-American and immigrant parents who believed that the school was inconsequential to their children's success, although these parents valued a quality education. Instead, these parents emphasized the importance of their children's choosing a path and being diligent about reaching goals. To them, school was a necessary step that would help their children reach their potential, but it would not give them anything more than what they strived to achieve. These parents emphasized hard work as the factor that would most impact their children's lives and make success easier to achieve.

A smaller group of Riverview parents expressed a divergent opinion about the quality and practices of the school. In contrast to those who believed that Riverview was of high quality and that their children would be well-served by the school, these parents believed that the school

had the ability to offer their children a quality experience but was not doing so. The parents alleged that classes were divided by race. They contended that some classes were mostly minority and that in other classes minority students were isolated, with one or very few in the class. This circumstance defied any notion that because Riverview High School was racially mixed, it was a utopian environment in which a diverse group of students learned together.

Although only one parent claimed that Riverview High School did not provide support to its students, this perspective was valuable to this study because it presented a significant anomaly that contrasted with the majority of the parent responses. Robin's sentiments arose out of her personal context as the mother of a Black son and her belief that Riverview did not address the social or academic needs of her child:

He doesn't have the support system he needs . . . I feel that the fact that a child is a Black child in a White world with no help, no support, no leadership, he feels kind of alone. He feels good when he's with his friends, but when he goes to honors class; he's the minority . . . that is one of the biggest problems with Riverview . . . You're still a minority . . . You're a minority in the country, now you're a minority in the educational system, then you become a minority in the work world. We don't have the support systems that other groups have.

As stated previously (Stanton-Salazar, 1997), school personnel, teachers, and counselors act as exclusionary agents both consciously and unconsciously. They are limited in their ability to mentor or nurture students and their families effectively because they operate under scripted policies and procedures that support organizational needs over individual student needs. Robin contended that Riverview High School had failed to provide the follow-up and support necessary to encapsulate minority students like her son. She believed that the school alienated Black students through its practices and climate by upholding racial and social stratification that affected the students' ability to get ahead and succeed.

Nevertheless, most parents in the study believed that the school had strong resources and quality academic programs. Comparatively, when the data were examined by social class, ethnicity, family composition, and students' academic status, the outcome did not produce a significant trend that differed from the analysis of the larger parent group. The parents communicated how and why they believed the school shaped their children's future opportunities. Parents' perceptions of the school influenced their beliefs about how the school served their children.

4.3.7 **The Impact of Social Capital**

This study asserts that positive social capital leads to strong ties that support success in school and society. Stanton-Salazar (1997) noted that lack of this capital leads to limited networks and decreased institutional support. The opportunities for Black youth and their families to build this capital are contingent upon the abundance and quality of the strong ties they have. In this research, parents shared their perspectives on the importance of knowing people and the degree to which these relationships helped their children get ahead and succeed in school and society. A primary theme of the data shows that half of the parents interviewed believed that whom a family knows impacts children. The parents were aware that the social capital that developed out of relationships expanded beyond the familial circle. However, they did not agree on how and to what extent these relationships would benefit or damage their children's access to opportunities.

The data showed that 10 of the parents believed that whom their family knew would make it easier for their children to succeed in school and life. Those parents who expounded on their responses emphasized that Riverview as a community offered opportunities for Black parents to socialize through church or general contact. Parents believed that some relationships

would lead to employment opportunities for their children because of the close-knit African-American community in Riverview. Maya noted,

It would make it easier. Riverview is one of those places that's . . . not that big . . . and the majority of the Black people . . . they know each other or they know somebody that knows somebody . . . and the ones that is up in the corporate world, a lot of times they end up looking out for each other."

Parents who agreed that whom their family knew could positively affect their children's outcome were not able to recall specific instances when that exchange of support had occurred.

One parent speculated that church was an environment in which her child could meet people.

Pamela was able to confirm that she knew people who could serve as resources to her child:

"Yeah, that will make it easier . . . because in life it is all about whom you know . . . Between both of our families there are people that we know. People in our family know other people that can help out."

The other half of the parents did not believe that whom their family knew would affect their children's ability to succeed in school and society. They emphasized that they had no networks that would give their children additional support because they did not know anyone who was in a position to help. This researcher acknowledges that such an absence of support networks exemplifies that which is indicative of the limited opportunities of low income and minority youth. Even though minority groups possess social capital (that is, friendship networks and support networks), this social capital does not necessarily afford minority group members opportunities for social mobility (Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

Parents in this study recognized that knowing people who could help their children obtain success was not a given. They were able to distinguish between knowing people and knowing people who could help their children acquire upward mobility. Denise believed that of the people she knew no one had the clout necessary to guarantee her child more opportunities that would

lead to higher status. “For my child—I mean, politically or educationally—I don’t know anyone there, so I don’t think that it will have an impact.”

The lack of relationships with success-oriented individuals who would be able to provide information or resources leading to middle-class status attainment for Black students is particularly significant for lower-income parents who have not had access to White middle-class cultural or social capital because of racial and economic alienation. The social networks of most Blacks, both nonimmigrant and immigrant, reflect the communities in which they live and socialize. Prudence Carter (2005) asserted that cultural markers exist in communities of color. Families are acclimated to the mores and values of the communities in which they feel comfortable and accepted. Robin, who had not always lived in Riverview but felt closely linked to another region and did not recall having developed any relationships that she believed could benefit her child, stated, “We don’t know anybody. We have no influences. We have no friends, no family with influences here. All of our stuff is down in the South.” Because of the limited access that minority and low-income students have to social capital that propels upward mobility, students need organizational support to create opportunities for access to mainstream settings where they may have more options for social mobility and success.

Several of the parents who believed that whom their family knew would have no impact on their children’s ability to attain success in school and beyond emphasized hard work as the attribute that would best enhance their children’s opportunities. They rejected the notion of attaining status based on relationships. Instead, they promoted the ethic of hard work to their children. Hillary reiterated this expectation of her son:

No, not my family. My family believes in hard work . . . and I think that my son understands that as a teenager, but I think, you know, it’s like osmosis at the end . . . he was exposed . . . He’ll remember and do it.

4.3.7.1 **Single Parents**

Of the ten women in the study who were single parents, seven believed that the people they knew would have no effect on their children's level of opportunity. The one mother who believed that family acquaintances and friends could influence a child's chances to get ahead in this country did not identify any persons she knew who could assist her child in obtaining access to social mobility. She acknowledged that in the work world the adage "whom you know is more important than what you know" was relevant. Because she did not identify how she or her child had benefited from social relationships, however, it was not evident that either of them had.

Although the data showed a trend that was attributable to single parents, no evidence emerged of any significant trends based on the academic level of the student, the ethnicity of the parent, or the social class of the parent. The parent group both accepted and rejected the notion that personal relationships fostered by their families increased their children's opportunities to succeed. Even when they believed that increasing their social capital would positively impact their children, they had limited or no resources upon which to build. The supportive relationships that fostered network formation were scarce for the parents in this study.

4.4 **Social Networks and Sources of Information**

Parents in this study acknowledged that they had interpersonal relationships with fellow parents. The sources and quality of the relationships varied for the parents. Further, the linkages they had fulfilled different purposes. However, the relationships existed primarily for social reasons. Their scope did not involve establishing a better relationship with the school.

Twenty-three of the parents interviewed explained that they knew other Riverview parents. Nine of the parents had met other Riverview parents through civic organizations, including committees and church. Nine parents had met others through school-related events or

through their children. Other than three parents who did not know any other parents or did not recall having met them, the rest of the parents met other parents through informal means, including in the neighborhood.

All but one of the parents knew at least one of their children's five closest friends. In some cases, parents knew all five of their children's closest friends and were very well acquainted with them and their parents. These parents communicated in person, mostly through social events, casual venues, or by phone. Overall, parents in the study recognized the importance of knowing the parents of their children's friends and wanted to maintain those relationships.

The networks that parents had with other parents were not networks that formed capital supporting student success. The relationships were loosely coordinated and the interactions were nonspecific. Only six of the 26 parents in the study stated that in the last year they had gathered information about school policies, teaching practices, and course selections from the parents they knew. All but one of those parents responded that their main source of information about their children's school consisted of school newsletters or teachers. One parent shared that she usually consulted a friend for information about the school. Twenty parents indicated that they retrieved information about Riverview through school publications or their children. Several parents had contacted the school or teachers for clarification on particular issues; however, they did so only after they had first received information from the school. They did not reach out to the school first.

When parents shared or received information from other parents regarding their children, these exchanges occurred informally rather than in a deliberate manner or at an organized venue. Dawn described how information between parents traveled in the community: "Just a casual

setting, like they will say, ‘Oh, did you hear that?’ or ‘Have [you] heard such and such?’ . . . ‘My child did such and such’ . . . Just kind of talking done on the street or in the grocery.” Eleven parents indicated that they would consult teachers or counselors if they wanted advice about how to handle a school situation. Several indicated that they would first read the school handbook in order to become informed regarding a particular policy. Parents also considered the superintendent or dean of students to be viable resources.

Although parents interacted at school-based and community events, their knowledge of the educational needs of each other’s children was limited. The opportunity to serve as a resource or advocate for one another’s children occurred infrequently. Shana expressed a concern that talking to another parent might not provide her with the information she needed; therefore, she noted, she chose to talk to her child’s teachers. Her apprehension about speaking with parents derived from the fact that she did not believe they would share all of the information they had.

Coleman’s (1988) theory of intergenerational closure, which asserts that parents receive important information that supports their children’s school success by bonding with other parents in the community, is therefore not relevant to this discussion, as it was not evident that parents in this study created networks that supported student success. Although peers and parents interacted, they discussed only on a limited basis school topics that would assist their children in maneuvering the system and acquiring access to socially elevating educational opportunities such as higher-level classes or college scholarships. The interpersonal interactions between peers and parents did not result in quality social capital that sustained valuable networks. Parents engaged only on a peripheral level regarding their children’s schooling. Parents shared policy information and exchanged tips to assist one another in finding department resources and ascertaining teacher quality. However, their communication did not result in whole-group

advocacy to prompt policy change about school decision making that would improve their children's opportunities for academic success and expand their opportunities for upward mobility.

The data did not present significant trends based on variables among the parents, including socioeconomic status, their children's level of achievement, their status as single parents or a married unit, or their ethnicity. The findings were indicative of this set of parents as a whole and took into account various pieces of demographic information. The parents lacked strong networks developed from valuable social capital. They reinforced norms and values independently and did not benefit from the closure that allows a tight bond to form around their children through parental connectivity. Robin recognized that her experiences as a Black parent in Riverview were different from that of the White parents she knew. She expressed in her personal account what the data revealed:

I learned [that] most of the White parents . . . they share information that affects the children and they talk a lot about their children. In doing so, they reveal information that when you hear you are like, "Oh, really? I did not know about that."

4.5 Condensed Data Analysis and Policy Recommendation Platforms

This chapter discussed the interviewed parents' responses to the study's four research questions; these responses offered rich data for this study. This researcher used comparison, content analysis, pattern matching, and categorization to uncover relationships within the data. Patterns emerged in the data through the process of deconstruction, identifying meaning, and formulating conclusions.

The detailed policy and practice recommendations highlighted in chapter 5 of this study correlate directly with the patterns, themes, and categories that emerged from this research. The parents' responses to the following guiding questions offered micro-themes

that are encompassed in the larger macro-themes presented at the beginning of chapter 5. The data derived from the parents' responses inform the policy and practice suggestions that this researcher offers to the educational community.

4.5.1 **Academic Decision Making, Sources of Influence, and Academic Measures**

1. How are decisions made about students' academic programs? Does the school involve the parents of Black students in making those decisions?

How do the parents of Black students feel about measures of academic performance?

Of the 26 parents interviewed, 24 believed that the school did not include them in academic decision making and were unable to describe clearly how their children's class assignments were determined. Immigrant and non-immigrant parents differed regarding what they believed were the most important indicators in confirming their children's placement (i.e., tests or the recommendations of school personnel). In this study, middle-class, non-immigrant, African-American parents approached school personnel to advocate for learning opportunities for their children. Immigrant and working-class African-American parents readily accepted the placement decisions of school personnel and rarely approached the school regarding their children's placement.

Seventy-five percent of all parents interviewed, none of whom were immigrants, believed that either they or their children were the most influential factor in deciding what courses their children took in school. The parents' perceptions of the importance of their role did not affect their ability to direct school decisions. The extent to which the familial relationship extended into the school environment in order to provide continuity of

decision making between home and school was underdeveloped. Half of the parents interviewed believed that standardized testing was a poor measure of student progress. Several non-immigrant African-American parents expressed their distrust of the testing process and their belief that the tests were racially biased. Immigrant parents, who believed that the tests offered valuable information about their children's progress, stated that the data derived from the test were poorly explained to them and that they did not understand their validity.

Based upon these trends in the study's data, this researcher recommends policy and practice measures that will increase opportunities for parents to learn about the academic, state, and local guidelines influencing instructional placements and standardized testing. This researcher suggests that teachers and administrators establish multiple opportunities for parents to access student information and school data through both paper-based and technological sources. In chapter 5, the author advises schools to identify onsite and offsite opportunities for parents to participate in specific outreach events as a way of engaging diverse immigrant communities and establishing arenas in which parents can build their understanding of the schooling process.

4.5.2 **Parental Involvement Roles, Relationships, and Barriers**

2. What do the parents of Black students believe about their role in the educational lives of their children at home and at school?

All of the parents interviewed for this study believed that they could make a difference in the education their children received. Most parents believed that their primary role was to be involved in their children's education at home. Some parents stated that it was important for them to attend school meetings in order to be a visible presence and

learn about the instructional program. Twenty-four of the 26 parents acknowledged that they were less involved at school during the high-school years than they had been when their children were in middle or elementary school. Their lack of involvement was prompted by several factors: They believed they did not need to be directly involved in their children's classrooms because their children were independent and responsible; they believed that their children did not want them to be involved; they had work responsibilities that limited their involvement; and they faced language, transportation, or cultural barriers.

The parents were involved at home, but some shared that they did not always understand the material their children were required to complete. They also revealed that the school did not have an organized and deliberate means of outreach to involve parents at school or home. More than half of the parents believed the school made little or no effort to involve them at home, and more than 75% of the parents believed the school made little or no effort to involve them at school.

In the following chapter, this researcher recommends policies and practices that seek to connect parents with school. Staff members and parents have similar ideas about the importance of minority-parent involvement (Lee and Bowen, 2006). The data show that the ways in which the parents in this study were able to become involved were impacted by their beliefs in their own roles and the school's lack of commitment to establishing mutually beneficial ways for them to connect positively and effectively with the school. The forthcoming recommendations suggest that teachers and administrators support in-home involvement strategies and extend opportunities to connect with families through creative scheduling and partnerships. The author emphasizes that parents must

consciously commit to partnering with their teens' schools and participating in the educational process.

4.5.3 **Parents' Perspectives on Factors that Impact their Children's**

Opportunities: Race Matters, the Gender Factor, Living in Riverview, Riverview High School, and Social Capital

3. Do the parents of Black students believe that specific indicators—including race, gender, and social and cultural capital—shape their children's chances for success in school and life? To what degree do they believe these factors affect their child?

Parents believed that certain factors impacted their children in different ways. Most evidently, 18 of the 26 parents believed that being Black made it more challenging for their children to succeed in America. These parents identified racial discrimination as a relevant force impacting them and their children. A small group of parents believed that their children's race could be beneficial in specific cases where race was attached to a particular attribute, such as sports ability; or where the need existed for more Blacks in a career field, such as teaching. One parent felt that her daughter's multiracial status, which included Asian, Caucasian, and African-American ancestry, would afford her broader access to opportunities.

Parents also believed their children's gender was significant. They noted that Black females are saddled with a double burden of racial and gender disadvantage. Black males, parents noted, face potential pitfalls, including violence, incarceration, and targeting by law-enforcement officials. Some parents stated that they believed their sons would face

corporate discrimination and increased peer pressure from other Black males because they were intelligent and ambitious.

Although most of the parents believed Riverview to be a community that offered more cultural diversity, a better quality of life, and more educational opportunity than surrounding areas, fewer than half believed that living in their neighborhood or in Riverview would have a direct positive impact on their children's future life chances. Several parents recognized their children's level of resilience as the key factor for positive mobility, regardless of the neighborhood in which they lived. Those who believed that living in Riverview would positively impact their children's chances for future success credited it to the racial diversity of the city. Half of the parents believed that attending Riverview High School would be instrumental in their children's success because of the school's reputation and its high expenditure per pupil, but several shared their concerns about discrepancies in the way the school served students, including their perception that classes were divided by race.

Social capital, defined as whom parents knew, was not a significant attribute for their children according to more than half of the parents interviewed. They did not believe that their acquaintances would give their children a positive edge because they did not know anyone who was in a position to help their children. The parents who believed that whom they knew could positively impact their children's opportunities were not able to recall specific instances in which an exchange of support had occurred. They had a sense of social capital, but it was not operative for their child.

The policy and practice recommendations in chapter 5 direct school leaders to create environments in which their staff members can share viewpoints on race, class,

culture, and gender. This researcher encourages schools to launch conversations among school personnel about racial ideologies and how they impact teaching practices. The theoretical framework of this study acknowledges Stanton Salazar's claim that, due to a historical pattern of discrimination, Black students have limited social and institutional supports to ensure their access to success-oriented opportunities. This researcher recommends that school-based advocates such as counselors, as well as community supporters, introduce Black parents and their children to college, financial aid, and career resources.

In chapter 5 the author suggests that policy be developed with a lens focused on the particular communities being addressed. Policymakers should be aware of the unique needs and attributes of minority neighborhoods in order to support Black students' ability to forge relationships with like-minded students and identify advocates with shared experiences to assist them in navigating their high-school years.

4.5.4 Social Networks and Sources of Information

4. Does the school create access networks for Black students and their families that improve children's chances for success? What are the sources of these networks and how do they operate for both children and parents?

The parents who were interviewed explained that their relationships with other parents were primarily social, loosely connected, and not specific to school-related matters. All parents indicated that they knew their children's best friends; however, even in cases where they knew the parents of these friends, no evidence existed of intergenerational closure, in which parents receive important information that supports their children's school success by bonding with other parents in the community (Coleman, 1988). Twenty

of the 26 parents indicated that they received school information from mailings or from their children. When there was contact between the parents and school, parents stated that they had initiated it.

These data prompt this researcher to recommend networking opportunities that support the development of social capital in Black families. The study suggests that policymakers should seek to create opportunities for social-capital development among Black students and neighborhood families that reside in communities where minority parents may live in the midst of significant social capital but have limited access to it because of racial or social confines. The recommendations that follow acknowledge that linkages among minority parents may be weak because parents have limited information about schools and opportunities that enhance their child's education. In chapter 5, this researcher offers policy and practice solutions that support the establishment of community partnerships to engage minority parents with one another, school personnel, and outside organizations that offer minority teens access to educational opportunities and long-term support.

5. IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

The major themes that emerged from this study contribute to thought on Black parents' perceptions of schooling. The parents who were interviewed believed that their children experienced racial discrimination and that the school was uncommunicative. The school, in their opinion, did not conduct a concerted, effective outreach campaign that kept them informed of how they could become involved in the school. Parents stated that they did not receive useful information (i.e., information that they believed improved their children's opportunities for success) from peer parents. Although they had a sense of social capital, they recognized that it seldom operated to improve their children's chances for success in society. Further, the parents in this study did not use their social capital to maximize their advocacy efforts or expand school linkages that increased access to opportunities for their children.

In addition to contributing to research, this study aimed to offer a candid synopsis of how the parents of Black students perceived their adolescents' school experiences. It captured, from the parents' perspectives, how and in what ways they interacted with the school to increase their children's level of access to educational opportunities and social progress. The study uncovered parents' beliefs about how the school interacted with them and the social and cultural factors they believed impacted their children's chances of succeeding in school and beyond.

Of critical importance to this study was the author's desire to examine how Black parents felt about race and whether they believed that race affected their children's chances of succeeding in school and society. At the outset of this study, this researcher contended that as members of a racial category historically subjected to discrimination and stigmatization, Black students and their parents experience schools and society differently from White students and their families. The cultural difference that exists between the familial environment of

ethnically diverse Black students and the middle-class Eurocentric context of public schools creates a lack of understanding that undermines student success and limits the access parents have to schools. This divide suppresses opportunities for the parents of Black students to collaborate cohesively with school officials to support their children's success.

Black families, like all other families, possess capital that embodies their culture, traditions, ideals, and exposures. However, the conditions that continue to affect the social station of those of African descent diminish the value of Black cultural capital in primarily White institutions. Public schooling embodies and accepts prevailing social standards and mores predicated by a longstanding racial hierarchy. This acceptance continues to have far-reaching conscious and subconscious effects on the educational success of Black children and the ability of their parents to assist them in achieving in these environments. This study suggests that society is neither "postracial" nor color-blind. Thus, public schools that do not consciously examine their practices and alter them to be inclusive of the needs of the non-White population inherently serve those who represent the dominant culture of power and disserve all others.

This work proposes that the level to which public schools accept, utilize, and build upon the cultural and social dispositions of Black children and their families is critical. Such inclusion or exclusion shapes what parents believe about how their children's schools support or limit students' academic success and the access they and their families have to upwardly mobile status attainment. Black students' school experiences influence their social acclimation to the environment and their academic outcomes. What parents know about how schools treat their children and their own perception of the school's interaction with them influences the nature of the connection Black families are able to build with schools to support their children's progress. Understanding these interactions between Black parents and primarily White middle-class

educational environments in which Black adolescents of immigrant and nonimmigrant parentage attend school offers a valuable perspective on race and schooling that extends beyond the scope of previous studies, which have focused on low-income, minority-dominant schools with very limited resources.

The findings of this study offer a set of implications and recommendations that give direction to school personnel, parents, students, policymakers, and future researchers in developing approaches that will sustain positive school-home interactions to foster success for students from historically marginalized racial and social groups. Further, the study's limitations provide insight to inform future inquiry that can examine the intersection between race and schooling in various settings involving Black youth and other minority populations.

5.1 **Implications**

This research has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically speaking, the study links several research traditions: race, cultural capital, social capital, networks, and parent involvement. Although existing research has suggested that schools may more comfortably communicate with middle-class parents because these parents are more attuned to the culture and values of the school (Lareau and Horvat, 1999), the findings in this study indicated that both middle- and working-class parents from immigrant and nonimmigrant backgrounds alike had only a fragmented understanding of how academic decisions were made at the school. The parents' perception that the school offered uncoordinated outreach efforts to involve them entrenched the notion that personnel were uninterested in forming strong linkages with parents that increased the latter's involvement. Although these findings may be unique to this study, they do suggest that the theory contending that middle-class status offers African-Americans greater opportunity and access in public institutions may not apply in school settings. In this study,

parents did not believe that school personnel made a dedicated effort to communicate in order to involve them more deeply in their children's education at school or home, regardless of the parents' social class or ethnic background.

Coleman's (1988) theory of intergenerational closure, a construct that contributed to the framework of this study, emphasizes that when parents are friends with one another and the children of these parents are also friends, they create social bonds that encapsulate students in a supportive network that promotes school success. Coleman asserted that this web linked students through shared parental norms and values, knowledge about school-related matters, and social control. In this study, the findings showed that parents knew the parents of the students who were friends with their child, but the type of information that the parents exchanged with one another was very limited. The study revealed that though multiple opportunities existed for these parents to come in contact with one another, including at church or the store, they rarely conversed on school matters.

These findings suggest that multifaceted variables impact the focus of parent networks. This implies that future work building upon the claims of intergenerational closure should seek to answer the following additional questions: What characteristics of successful Black-parent networks support academic achievement? How do community dynamics affect the ability of diverse minority parents to interact in productive ways to support their children's school success? How can schools support the development of minority-parent networks that will support student success? Do White-parent networks differ from Black-parent networks around student achievement? If so, why and how? Hallinan and Kubitschek (1999), in response to the concept of intergenerational closure, suggested that research must be done on schools in which most of the

internal parental networks support academic achievement, schools in which most of the internal parental networks work in opposition to achievement, and schools in which networks vary.

A practical implication of this study is that it contributes to current policy on the impact of race on school success in the context of minority parents, students, and their relationship with schools. From a policy standpoint, research that investigates what Black parents think about their children's schools and identifies how they and the schools interact can inform us about the gateways and roadblocks to the success of Black youth in public schools. Ethnic minority and immigrant families face the challenges of raising adolescents who seek independence and autonomy in a society that does not guarantee them access to social and economic realms that propel them beyond what their parents are able to offer. Policy that addresses issues of high school and home relations serves to bridge cultural and social gaps to better prepare students and parents to identify and access educational opportunities and networks that will offer them college and career success.

The findings of this study advise that policy addressing minority parents and their involvement in school should consider how elements of culture and family belief systems about education and their proper role in schools affect parental interaction with schools. The diverse experiences of minority families form their set of attitudes and dispositions toward education. Black families in this study advocated for their children's needs based on their assessments of their capacity to do so and their philosophies about how best to support their children.

The parents in this study demonstrated great respect for the role of education in their own and their children's lives. They sought a high-quality education for their children but recognized that racial and social barriers threatened to impede their children's educational and social mobility. Influenced by their cultural background and social class, parents addressed

school personnel to affirm or refute school-based decisions. African-American parents, having experienced a history of prejudicial treatment in American public institutions, have developed a set of ideas about how their children will be treated in public schools.

In this study, middle-class Blacks emerged as the most vocal and least trusting regarding schools. Fiercely supportive of their children's education, they asserted themselves and questioned decisions made by school personnel when they deemed it necessary. Notably, working-class parents, both immigrant and nonimmigrant, trusted school personnel to make the best decisions for their children. Their pattern of distant interaction with school officials reflected a more passive and acquiescent view toward their role within the school.

Theoretical discourse on social and cultural capital has claimed that the tenets, experiences, and exposures of diverse cultures are unique and valuable, yet public institutions in this country continue to reflect the White middle-class principles upon which they were built. The extent to which familial and community capital benefit minority students in schools that are predicated on majority values is restricted. Critical to emerging policy is the acknowledgement that Black families and other minorities possess valuable social and cultural capital that can bridge families and schools to support student success collaboratively.

The context and findings of this study imply that future policy should incorporate practical initiatives that address ways in which public schools can successfully commingle the attributes of dominant and nondominant capital to create educational networks that benefit all students. The focus of programs would address the following outstanding questions: How can teachers in diverse schools utilize the cultural capital of minority students to enhance pedagogical methods and curricular content to engage learners better? What community outreach should schools initiate with minority parents to offer and sustain sources of social capital that

will benefit the life and educational chances of their youth? What skills should minority parents develop to negotiate the network needs of adolescents better in the context of the schooling environment?

5.2 **Limitations**

This study gathered the multiple perspectives of parents of Black adolescents on their children's schooling experiences and their perception of the school's responses toward them and their child. In a descriptive and exploratory inquiry, this researcher sought to interpret the candid responses of parents who support education and invest in public schools as parents of students. The goal of this work was to create meaning out of the voices of those whom our schools are entrusted to serve. This researcher recognizes that no matter what the design, paradigm, or type of data collected, it is not possible to conduct a "perfect" research study in education. The limitations of this study will assist this author and others who seek to continue work of this nature.

For this researcher, the constructs of social and cultural capital were salient in this examination of how parents perceived their adolescents' schooling experiences and opportunities for success in school and beyond. Commonly defined, the cultural dispositions and appreciations of people constitute their cultural capital. Educational institutions tend to value the cultural dispositions of the middle and upper classes and devalue those of less affluent groups (Diamond and Gomez, 2004). *Social capital* refers to resources derived from interaction in social relations. It is through acquisition of this social capital that networks form.

This researcher, through face-to-face interviews, collected parent responses on what they believed to be their level of capital, both social and cultural, and how they believed it would impact their children's chances of getting ahead in life. All researchers must recognize that

individual perspectives are valid to those who offer them because these perspectives are based upon the respondent's perceptions. However, they are not scientific. Cultural capital and social capital are relatively abstract phenomena that need to be defined in context to alleviate limitations on their interpretation.

Families' understanding of the capital they possess may be directly related to what they believe to be sources relative to their scope. Indicators of social and cultural capital such as the school one attends, whom one knows, or one's type of employment differ considerably for a person from a low-income neighborhood compared to a person from a high-income neighborhood. Individuals of moderate means who live in a neighborhood of higher socioeconomic status may perceive themselves to have more social capital because of neighborhood orientation rather than because of the level of access they have to the perceived source of capital (e.g., people who name-drop but have no direct affiliation with individuals of status).

In future studies, a set of indicators to categorize social capital for specific communities may need to be discussed. Focusing the research lens on the experiences of Black families and other people of color will require researchers to identify the set of accumulated assets and resources in the histories and lives of communities of color that are valuable and enable these communities to survive amid societal racism. Yosso (2005) emphasized that these characteristics are not stagnant and that they represent six forms of capital that nurture cultural value:

1. Aspirational capital: The ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future in spite of real barriers.

2. Linguistic capital: The intellectual and social skills attained through engaging in cultural ways of communicating, including storytelling, oral history, music, and poetry.
3. Familial capital: Cultural knowledge acquired through broad-based kinships with others of the same culture that inform spiritual, moral, educational, and occupational mindsets.
4. Social capital: Peer and other social contacts that provide emotional support and access to society institutions.
5. Navigational capital: Strategies to navigate racially hostile environments that threaten the ability for students of color to succeed.
6. Resistant capital: Knowledge and skills developed through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality, such as expressions of self-worth in the face of racial or gender bias.

Bourdieuian capital, while an enduring perspective, emphasizes the accumulation of middle-class White cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities as crucial to offering students and their families entry into mainstream society. It reflects a narrow, biased view that negates the attributes non-White students develop through their family and community exposures. This study emphasizes that minority communities possess valuable capital that deserves recognition and respect in public schooling environments. Future studies will benefit by elaborating on specific sources of cultural and social capital in non-White minority communities. Various circumstances may impact individuals' abilities to utilize their capital, including their ability to "invest" these resources to gain advantages for their children at school (Lareau, 2000). Developing a measure for capital activation (assessing how, in what ways, and to what degree capital is productively

used) would enable future research more fully to reflect the actual and potential impact of the various forms of capital on families' ability to connect successfully with schools.

The sample size poses limitations on the generalizability of the findings of this study and offers opportunities for more expansive future research. This study population consisted of 26 parents derived from an existing data set created for a larger study—a sufficient number according to the recommended number of participants for phenomenological studies. However, the students and their parents lived in the community in which the larger original study took place. Therefore, the school community had some knowledge that discussions were taking place about the school. Parents in this study had never been interviewed and agreed to participate. Future research on this topic may consider a larger, random sample of parents whose children attend high school in a community in which no other studies have been done to gather public opinion about the school.

In this study, fewer working-class African-American parents and immigrant parents were interviewed than middle-income African-American parents. Although the findings indicated that socioeconomic status made little difference to parents' perceptions of their knowledge of academic programs, their belief that racism impacted their children's experiences, and their perception that parent-to-parent networks did not connect them with the school to improve their children's chances for success, future studies may benefit from a comparative school model in which more low-income parents are respondents.

Lower-income parents maneuver in a more challenging educational context because their children often attend poorer quality schools in communities very different from the places in which the primarily White and middle-class community parents in this study perceived were good places to live and send their children to school. Parents who are the working poor possess

few resources to assist them in interacting with economically depressed, racially isolated educational terrains, which influences their perceptions of their children's schools as well as their educational orientations (i.e., their beliefs about the parent's proper role education and strategies for involvement) (Diamond and Gomez, 2004). Future studies in communities where the schools are less well funded may provide insight into how and in what ways working-class Black parents advocate for their children's needs in more urbanized minority-school environments.

This study informs research and practice on issues involving multiethnic Black parents. Black people today, regardless of ethnicity, navigate a modern society established upon a system of hierarchy that elevated Europe and "Whiteness" and denigrated Africa and "Blackness." This stratification continues to operate throughout this country's social, economic, and educational spectrum. Other non-White communities (i.e., Asians, Native Americans, Latinos, and Pacific Islanders) have unique pasts that also reflect social, racial, and linguistic discrimination and alienation. To attempt to generalize the findings of this study to other minority communities would be to assume erroneously that minority communities in America are one-dimensional.

What is common is that the prevailing communities of color in this country persistently experience inequality in public schools. All indicators of achievement reveal that African-American, Latino, and Native American high school students are plagued by lower test scores, higher dropout rates, and lower graduation rates. Students and their parents in these communities remain on the fringes of public schools, hoping, praying, and trusting that the system will work for their children. Parent involvement in lower-income minority communities often falls short of school expectations because additional barriers exist for parents in helping their children learn or miscommunication takes place regarding participation between educators and parents (Drummond and Stipek, 2004).

The emphasis on the experience of Black students in public schools is significant for all minority communities. The legacy of the African-American struggle to achieve social and educational equality in this country has spurred cries for change in other minority communities. Nathan Glazer (1975, cited in Takaki, 1994), in his essay “Emergence of an American Ethnic Pattern,” reminds us that what began as an effort to redress the inequality of the “Negro” of the South turned into an effort to redress the inequality of all deprived groups. He writes, “But how is that to be done? . . . To redress inequalities means, first of all, to define them.” Future research can benefit myriad minority communities by using the findings of this research to encourage inquiry in these communities that allows diverse parents and children to define their stories and tell their stories for themselves.

5.3 Recommendations for Future Practice

The findings of this study can shape current and future practice through the implementation of appropriate school- and community-based strategies to improve Black student achievement through parent–school partnerships. This researcher has taken into account implications for future policy development. The limitations of this study offer important considerations for future research. Recommendations for school- and community-level interventions have been developed to address the needs of Black students and their families. They are derived from the findings of this study and provide opportunities for school personnel, policymakers, students, and parents to address the institutional and familial barriers that impede Black student progress and limit the creation and usefulness of networks supporting productive school and parent linkages.

5.3.1 **Key Recommendations for Administrators, Counselors, and Teachers**

School personnel should recognize the barriers that impede Black parents' ability to be involved in their child's schooling both at school and at home. In response, they should aim to increase Black parents' engagement by promoting success-oriented practices and increasing parents' levels of social capital to support student success.

- This study revealed that Black parents believed they could make a difference in their children's educational lives by being involved. There is more congruence than incongruence between the beliefs of school staff and parents from nondominant minority groups about involvement (Lee and Bowen, 2006). However, the parents in this study differed in their ability to be involved in their children's schooling due to their philosophies about the role they believed they should play, their comfort level with their role, and the accessibility of at-home and at-school involvement opportunities. Some parents, because of cultural and linguistic differences, were less inclined to become involved at the school or in the home regarding school topics. Minority parents view the school as an important source of information (Drummond and Stipek, 2004). However, the findings from this study indicated that parents did not believe the school had a well-coordinated means of involving them. Black parents stated that their means of receiving information from the school were quite limited, which impacted their knowledge of opportunities for involvement in their children's education. This researcher recommends methods by which teachers and administrators can increase parent involvement and connect with diverse Black families.

- Opportunities for parent involvement should build on each family's individual strengths and take into account barriers that limit participation at school, including parent work schedules. Teachers and administrators should emphasize supporting in-home involvement by establishing classroom resource centers and parent websites that offer math and reading skills along with homework and study tips. Through school-sponsored wiki spaces, blogs, internet dashboards, email, websites, and webinars, parents can gain access to teacher-led tutorials in core content topics and share information. They may access their children's schedule and retrieve information on class times and teacher names. For those parents who do not have access to a computer, parent learning packets can be distributed that highlight selected reading skills (i.e., describing summaries, identifying the main idea) and include parent-friendly exercises that align with student assignments in key subjects. The establishment of an outgoing call system for parents can inform households of involvement techniques at home and invite parents to in-school events.
- Although this study revealed that Black parents face numerous barriers that prevent them from being involved at school, the researcher noted that parents strongly valued in-school involvement. However, they believed that institutional obstacles existed that limited their ability to be at the school. Most parental school involvement in this study occurred at home because many parents worked. However, in-school involvement is important because it fosters direct communication between parents and school personnel, thereby breaking down misperceptions that may exist.
- The findings suggest that schools should focus on identifying and reducing the possibility that work schedules may hinder parental involvement. This effort includes

creating innovative and engaging opportunities on the weekends and during evenings where school staff members and parents can interact at school related events. School-sponsored evening and weekend craft workshops, cultural dance and musical events, computer classes, and recognition ceremonies for student achievement and attendance foster positive interaction between families and schools. School-established onsite parent centers offer a common venue for parents to interact to discuss school-related matters, access school information, and learn about positive ways to partner with the school to support the instructional and operational environment.

- This researcher found that parents viewed the school as racist and uncommunicative and believed the two traits were linked in a relevant way. An evident lack of connection with the diverse Black communities that comprise the school community necessitates the creation of practices that focuses on pathways to embrace racial and cultural diversity. Placing a sharper focus on existing successful models of parent involvement in immigrant communities can assist primarily White schools in bridging the ethnic gap. Because of the emphasis on extended family and community cohesiveness in many Caribbean and African cultures, activities that promote goodwill between the school and the family will be beneficial in establishing positive interactions between teachers and parents. School personnel can host outreach nights at local community hubs, including churches, cultural centers, and host homes, to build linkages with immigrant families and provide bilingual support.
- This researcher noted that parents had a sense of the nature and importance of social capital as a vehicle to support their children's chances for success and offer opportunities to them and their children. However, they did not have

access to it, nor were they able to utilize it significantly to improve their children's outcomes. That Black communities are plagued by underdeveloped social capital that bridges community members with middle-class White institutions and opportunities is evident. The failure of majority institutions to recognize and value the cultural wealth that comes from families of color emphasizes this researcher's claim that institutional capital is important in supporting the success of minority students. Institutional capital serves as a major component in equipping students and parents with the skills to advocate for themselves. This researcher therefore recommends that school agents become viable resources to Black youth in order to improve the link between school and home. School counselors should assist students and their parents in identifying advocates within the school and community as a component of high school advisor/student development programs that focus on developing teacher/student relationships that promote success. Strategic precollege planning would provide a focus on identifying college and financial aid options. A classroom focus on embedding differentiated instruction techniques that promote "know your learner" strategies would propel confident communication in students, as well as teachers' respect for student differences. Along with effective character-education programs, standardized-test support sessions, college-readiness activities, and sustainment of business, community, and school partnerships would increase advocacy channels and develop student efficacy. Additionally, teachers should maximize the effectiveness of parent-teacher conferences with Black parents by engaging in dialogue that focuses on

students' positive attributes as well as their learning challenges and identifying ways in which parents might assist their children academically at home.

- The study revealed that parents believed schools and society embody beliefs about race that negatively impact their child's chances for success. This discovery provides a context in which school personnel should examine their own belief systems and how they impact the opportunity for Black students to succeed in public schools and their families to connect with public schools. This researcher recommends that school leaders acknowledge the impact of racism on Black youth and their families and take a deliberate approach to eradicating biased pedagogy and practice. School leaders should provide opportunities for school staff to discuss and deconstruct their own perspectives on race, class, and culture in order to identify any existing prejudices that could impede their ability to teach diverse learner populations effectively.
- Schools should embrace opportunities to engage in critical conversations about diversity and culture and participate in cultural-competency training to expose prejudices and myths, stimulate thought, and influence practice.

5.3.2 **Key Recommendations for Policymakers**

Policymakers should aim to develop neighborhood-enhancement programs that promote the creation of strong parent-to-parent and parent-to-community informational networks. Informing their efforts should be the realization that communities of any background are unlikely to adopt practices imposed from the outside without awareness of or respect for the community's unique dynamics, "merely in an attempt to stimulate their imitation of things in a foreign sphere" (Woodson, 1930, p. 130). Woodson (1930) further noted that

You cannot serve people by giving them orders as to what to do. . . . [The policymaker] must study his community sufficiently to discover the things which have a trend in the proper direction that he may stimulate such forces and thus help the community to do better the good things which it may be interested in doing. (p. 130)

Policymakers should therefore seek to enact programs that work with rather than against the grain of the minority communities they serve. The following recommendations offer concrete suggestions for crafting such programs.

- Parents in this study appreciated the diversity that their neighborhood and larger community offered, but they did not perceive it as a source of social capital that would make an impact on their children's chances of getting ahead. Parents noted that social networking among parents did not offer information that enhanced their children's school opportunities and outcome. The findings indicated that parents interacted with other parents and exchanged some information about school, but these interactions did not develop strong networks that transmitted school knowledge capable of supporting student success.
- Adolescents benefit from living in neighborhoods where high levels of social cohesion foster positive communication between parents, neighbors, and students about the importance of education (Coleman, 1988). A need therefore exists for social programs that take into account the social dynamics of diverse neighborhoods by promoting positive interactions between residents and schools in the community. The context of the neighborhood, along with individual-level characteristics such as attitude toward schooling, teacher/student relationships, parent socioeconomic status, and parent involvement, are important to students' school success.
- Black middle-class neighborhoods are much more diverse in their class distinctions than are White middle-class neighborhoods—that is, they carry a much greater

burden of poverty and typically include a higher percentage of poor residents (Patillo-McCoy, 1999). The data in this study reveal that parents believed the traditional middle-class social capital necessary to create opportunities for status attainment in White America is not available to most of the parents in this study. This researcher insists that community policymakers work cohesively with numerous stakeholders—including students, school personnel, and parents—to establish a timely goal for identifying key obstacles facing the families in their communities that limit these families' ability to identify success-oriented options for their children. Once policymakers have identified the key needs of communities, the goal will be to develop pathways for mutual exchange of information and the development of additional support that will enhance parents' opportunities to acquire the social capital dominant in society while continuing to utilize their communities' cultural wealth, which expresses the unique experiences of Black students and their families. This linkage between societally dominant social capital and community cultural capital will shape the way schools work so that they best serve the needs of the community.

- Parents in the study believed that they could make a difference in their children's education by being involved; however, the school offered them limited and fragmented means of receiving important information about school matters and educational issues related to their children. This researcher suggests that community leaders erect policy establishing school-home community centers that offer opportunities for interaction and collaboration among parents and school professionals. These centers will assist parents who seek to understand federal, state,

and local accountability language in order to navigate standardized test reports, school report cards, and school improvement plans. School personnel, family members, community leaders, and business professionals should interact and build upwardly mobile networks of support for school age children. Sites that advance family–school–community connections can be established in conjunction with longstanding recognized agencies such as The Urban League, YMCA, or Boys and Girls Clubs of America.

5.3.3 **Key Recommendations for Students**

Students should work proactively to identify sources of advocacy and develop strategies to build resilience.

- The study revealed that parents believed that their children would be able to get ahead by activating their resilience. They acknowledged that increased obstacles due to racial discrimination and social barriers existed for their children. The parents emphasized that it would be their children's personal will to overcome inequities that would make a significant difference to their outcomes. This researcher therefore proposes that students be proactive by identifying, at the onset of their high school years, the individuals available at school, at home, or in the community to serve as school advocates. Additionally, this researcher recommends that adolescents seek mentorship from African-American college students or young professionals who have successfully navigated high school and achieved post-secondary and/or career success. Through dialoging and spending quality time with their mentors, students will learn and observe success-oriented practices and coping techniques.

5.3.4 **Key Recommendations for Parents**

Parents should adopt and sustain a high level of engagement in adolescent schooling at home and at school to bridge cultural norms and amplify educational and social needs:

- The parents in this study were more involved in their children's education during elementary and middle school. They desired to remain involved, but few were involved at school. Some chose to be less involved because of their teen's desire for them not to be. Others believed that the school did not want them to be involved. Parents identified barriers to involvement including work schedules, transportation issues, language differences, and lack of capacity for understanding high school curriculum as reasons why they were not involved. The study acknowledged that parents did not develop networks with other parents that increased their knowledge of school events or improved their children's access to opportunities for success.
- During adolescence, students seek their own identity, self-image, and self-consciousness (Wigfield et al., 2006). Part of their desire to become more independent results in their close adherence to peers. Simultaneously, they desire a break from parental control and challenge their parents' authority (Smetana et al., 2004). This study showed that parents decreased their involvement during high school years, although they encountered similar barriers to involvement during their children's elementary and middle years.
- This researcher asserts that it is the responsibility of Black parents to remain involved in their adolescents' schooling at home and at school. Despite the conflict and distancing that frequently occurs between parents and teens and the lack of parent-to-parent linkages to create a web of communication, it is essential that Black parents

remain a significant resource for their children by asserting themselves as active participants in their children's scholastic endeavors. Minority parents play a key role in facilitating or impeding their children's negotiation of the educational process because what they believe about school is embedded in what their children believe about school. If they do not interject themselves into their children's day-to-day educational experiences through frequent monitoring of their children's progress by engaging in home-based activities and conferencing with teachers, they fail to act as advocates for their children outside of the immediate family.

- This study revealed that the parents interviewed believed that the school was uncommunicative with them and did not initiate coordinated outreach to involve them in the school. Parent-teacher school communication occurs in many forms: written notes, email, phone calls, formal and informal conferences, periodic visits, attending student athletic or arts programs, bringing refreshments for a team on a field day, offering help and advice at home rather than in the presence of peers, and visiting the media center to become familiar with the curricular materials. This researcher calls for parents of Black students proactively to identify existing opportunities that will engage them in developmentally appropriate representations of involvement in order to support, motivate, monitor, and discuss the progress of their adolescents.
- Perhaps the most critical single criterion that establishes the foundation of a family's standing in society is the parent's ethnicity or race (Clark, 1983). The nature of Blacks' experiences as a subjugated group has molded the beliefs Black parents have about the world for which they are preparing their adolescents. Because schooling is imbued with the philosophies of institutional racism, it is critical that Black parents

communicate frequently and deliberately with schools to keep the academic needs of Black children at the forefront and help themselves remain knowledgeable about school practices.

- The fragmentation that exists in diverse Black communities due to social, linguistic, or economic conditions makes it challenging to coordinate efforts to become involved collectively at school. The study revealed that the intergenerational closure believed to connect parents in a network of support for their children's success was non-existent for the parents in this sample. In light of the fact that schools wrestle with identifying and sustaining productive parent-involvement programs that are inclusive, Black parents must become empowered by independently engaging in current opportunities for involvement and enlisting support from one another in the community to increase their influence upon schools. Local community organizations such as the NAACP, Big Brothers and Big Sisters, the police headquarters, public libraries, and churches are interested in the progress of education for all students. They, along with school-based groups like the PTA, athletic associations, and fundraising committees, are sources of social capital and networks for parents that can propel a focus on the educational experiences and outcome of Black youth. Through engaging with these organizations by volunteering or attending community meetings, parents of Black children are able to show their tenacity in action and not solely in heart. What they profess as their unwavering belief that their children deserve an exemplary education is reflected in their actions to ensure that their children get it. Active participation by Black parents sends a message to schools that

the parents' level of representation mirrors their expectation of how schools should support their children.

No one can better advocate for the needs of Black children than the parents of these children. There is no doubt that, as oppressed individuals, minority families in this society have been ignored by institutions that were not at the outset built to serve them. Theorist Paulo Freire, in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, reminds us that the oppressed are not marginal, living outside society. They have always been inside the structure that made them "beings for others" (Freire, 1996, p. 54). Parents, as the strongest advocates for their children, have the power to become beings for themselves by forthrightly seeking opportunities that will assist them in advocating for their children to gain greater access to social and educational mobility.

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APPENDIX A

STUDENT STATISTICS: STANDARDIZED TEST SCORES, AP PLACEMENT, GRADES, CUMULATIVE GPA, AND GRADUATION PERCENTAGES

The Riverview High School Annual School Profile 2004-2005 and Statistical Report 2006-2007 show a significant Black/White achievement gap on tests including the Plan, Explore, and ACT, along with Advanced Placement enrollment, grade distribution, GPAs, and graduation rates. The Riverview High School 2004–2006 School Improvement Plan reveals that the student body is primarily middle class, with 33% of the students classified as economically disadvantaged. The reported poverty rate of the community is approximately 10%. The community is diverse, including both very wealthy people and very poor people. Between 1990 and 2000, the median income of families rose 47% to \$78,886, with 13% or more of the families in the community earning in excess of \$150,000 annually.

Standardized Test Scores	Whites	Blacks	White males	White females	Black males	Black females
PLAN 03-04			27.4	23.0	15.6	16.7
PLAN 04-05			22.6	22.9	16.1	16.4
ACT 03-04	26.0	17.8				
ACT 04-05	26.6	17.4				
ACT 05-06	26.5	18.2				

% Enrolled in No Advanced Placement	Grade Level	Whites	Blacks
2003-04	10 th grade	10.4	66.9
2004-05	10 th grade	12.2	67.9
2003-04	11 th grade	9.4	64.2
2004-05	11 th grade	12.1	57.6
2003-04	12 th grade	11.1	49.5
2004-05	12 th grade	5.3	50.8

% Receiving Grade in Quarter		Whites 03-04	Blacks 03-04		Whites 04-05	Blacks 04-05
A		27%	8%		29%	8%
D or F		3%	12%		2%	15%

Cumulative GPAs	Grade Level	Whites	Blacks
2003-04	10 th grade	3.5	2.3
2004-05	11 th grade	3.55	2.32
2005-06	12 th grade	3.58	2.48

Graduation Percentage	Whites	Blacks
2003-04	95.8	86.7
2004-05	96.3	86.4
2005-06	95.9	87.3

APPENDIX B

STATISTICAL INCOME COMPARISON AND JOB CATEGORIZATIONS OF INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS

Respondents to the Emerging Lenses study represent a sampling of Black parents living in Riverview. On average, the parents can be classified as middle-income, based on their position and level of education. Compared to Blacks in the neighboring large urban center, the education level and socioeconomic status of Riverview Blacks may be higher, as evidenced by a lower poverty rate in Riverview and a higher percentage of persons overall who achieve graduate degrees. In the table, participants are identified by the interview tape code number they were assigned and their professional category.

One academic class model defines upper-middle-class members as educated professionals and managers possessing graduate degrees. Lower-middle-class members are defined as semi-professionals and craftsmen who possess some training or a college degree (Thompson and Hickey, 2005). For the purposes of this study, upper-middle-class jobs were called *white-collar jobs*. They include but are not limited to professors, engineers, doctors, lawyers, architects, teachers, nurses, writers, analysts, mid-level managers, and office professionals (Professional Occupations, U.S. Department of Labor Report, 2006). Lower-middle-class jobs were, for the purposes of this study, called *blue-collar jobs* and include skilled laborers, beginning entrepreneurs, and office support personnel.

Census Information Comparison: Riverview and Neighboring City

<i>Census Information 2000</i>	<i>"Riverview"</i>	<i>Neighboring City</i>
% of Black residents	22.5%	36.8%
% of residents with college degrees	33% (graduate or professional degrees)	25.5% (bachelor's or higher)
% of residents living below the poverty line	11.10%	19.6%
Median income	\$78,886	\$38,625

(Source: <http://quickfacts.census.gov>)

APPENDIX C

CONDENSED SSAS INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Perceptions of the Racial Achievement Gap

1. Have you heard of the achievement gap between students of color and White students in Riverview? If yes, what have you heard about it? (Interviewer: If no, explain that students of color tend to perform at lower levels on test scores and other measures of student achievement) What do you think of this “gap”?
2. Why do think these gaps in achievement exist/persist?
3. Do you think White, Black, and Hispanic children are treated the same in the Riverview Schools? Why? Why not?
4. What, if anything, do you think should be done to reduce the gap?

Presence/Significance of Race, Social, and Cultural Capital (I have coded the factors according to their classification)

1. “Now I want to ask you a short series of questions about some factors that may or may not effect student’s chances of getting ahead in this country. Will the following things make it easier, more difficult, or have no effect on your child’s chances of getting ahead in this country? (Interviewer: Have the respondent explain why for each answer. Respondent does not see bolded capital classifications used in this study.)

Factor	Made Easier	Made More Difficult	Have no Effect
Attending Riverview Schools? (cultural capital)			
Living in Riverview (cultural capital/social capital)			
Being Black? (race affiliation)			
Being a Black female/male in particular? (race/gender affiliation)			

Whom your family knows (social capital)			
Whom your child hangs out with (social capital)			
The amount of money in your family (cultural capital)			
Your (parent's) educational background (cultural capital)			
Your (parent's) job (cultural/social capital)			

School-to-Parent Networks

1. If your child's teacher did something that you did not agree with, what would you do?
Can you think of an example of when this happened? What was the result?
2. Some parents are able to help out in their children's schools while others have less time for these activities because of work and other obligations. How much time do you spend helping out in your child's school? (Interviewer: If asked, you can provide examples, e.g., volunteering, attending meetings)
How many hours per week?
What kinds of thing do you do?
3. How able do you feel to help your child with homework? What might the school do to help you in these efforts?
4. How much effort does HS make to encourage your participation in educational activities inside the school? How do they encourage you? How much effort does ETHS make to encourage you to engage in educational activities at home? How?
5. How do you feel you have been treated by the HS staff? Probe for specifics on all of the following:
 - a. Do you feel like there is someone at the school who is looking out for your child? (If yes,) How have they exhibited their support?
 - b. Is there anyone at the school that you feel like you have a good relationship with? (If yes) How do you know them? What kinds of things have they been helpful with?

- c. Is there anyone at the school who you feel has been less than supportive of you or your child? (If yes) Can you tell me a story that might illustrate their behavior?

Parent-to-Parent Networks

1. Do you know any other HS parents? How do you know them?
2. Do you interact with these or other HS parents? If yes, how many of them? How often?
3. In the last year, have you learned information about school policies, teaching practices, and course selection from these or other parents? (If yes-How often would you say you have learned information from these people? If no, whom would you talk to if you have a question about the school or wanted advice about how to handle some education related issue?
4. What is your main source of information about your child's school? (Child? Newsletters? Friends? Other?)

APPENDIX D
RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND CORRESPONDING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Research Question 2	Interview Questions
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Research Question 1	Interview Questions
1A. How are decisions made about students' academic programs?	<p>13. Can you tell me what level of classes your child is enrolled in at "Riverview"? (If they ask what you mean, try to give them a chance to answer on their own—if they really don't seem to know, offer prompt of "what track in the school your child is in." If that doesn't work, give examples of "Level 1, Level 2, Honors, or AP.")</p> <p>14. Do you know how Riverview makes decisions about what level of course a student takes? (If yes) Please describe. How did you know about that? Is that how it works for your child? Probe for process—how it happens/ed for their child. (If no) How do you think it happens? What would you have liked to have known about the process?</p>
2A. Does the school involve parents of Black students in making those decisions?	15. Whom do you think is most influential in deciding what courses your child takes in high school?
3A. How do parents of Black students feel about measures of academic performance?	<p>16. How does your child perform on standardized tests?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think about these tests? • Do you hear about them much from school? • Do you think they are a good measure of your child's capabilities? • Have you and your child ever talked about the tests? (If yes) What have you talked about? • Do you think you can have any effect on how your child performs on those tests?

Research Question 2

What do parents of Black students believe about their role in the educational lives of their children, at home and at school?

Interview Questions

17. Do you believe that parents can make a difference in the education that their children receive? How? In what ways?

20. Some parents are able to help out in their children's schools while others have less time for these activities because of work and other obligations, how much time do you spend helping out in your child's school? (Interviewer: if asked you can provide examples, e.g. volunteering, attending meetings.)

- How many hours per week?
- What kinds of things do you do?
- If not very involved now, were you more involved in the school when (child) was in elementary or middle school? Probe for specifics.
- Next year, would you like your involvement in school to stay the same increase, or decrease? Why? Do you think anything will get in the way of this?

21. How much time do you spend doing educational activities with your child at home? What kinds of things do you do?

22. How much effort does Riverview make to encourage your participation in educational activities inside school? How do they encourage you?

23. How much effort does Riverview make to encourage you to engage in educational activities at home? How?

Research Question 3	Interview Questions
<p>3A. Do parents of Black students believe that specific indicators—including race, gender, and social and cultural capital—shape their children’s chances for success in school and life?</p> <p>3B. To what degree do they believe these factors affect their children?</p>	<p>28. “Now I want to ask you a short series of questions about some factors that may or may not affect students’ chances of getting ahead in this country. Will the following things make it easier, more difficult, or have no effect on your child’s chances of getting ahead in this country? (Interviewer: have the respondent explain why for each answer.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attending the Riverview Schools? • Living in this neighborhood? • Living in Riverview? • Whom your family knows? • Being Black? • Being male/female? • The amount of money in your family?

Research Question 4	Interview Questions
4A. Does the school create access networks for Black students and their families that will improve children's chances for success?	31. What is your main source of information about your child's school?
4B. What are the sources of networks and how do they operate for both children and parents?	<p>29. Do you know any other Riverview parents? How do you know them?</p> <p>30. Do you know the first name of any of your child's five closest friends?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you know their parents? • Do you interact with these or other Riverview parents? (If yes) How many of them? How often? • In the last year, have you learned information about school policies, teaching practices, and course selection from these or other parents? (If yes) How often would you say you have learned information from these people? (If no) To whom would you talk if you have a question about the school or wanted advice about how to handle some education-related issue? • If respondent does get information from others, what kind of information do you get from others? In what setting do you usually have these conversations? The neighborhood, children's sporting events, PTA meetings or activities, other school functions, clubs, church/temple/mosque, socializing in other homes, community service club or organization, chatting on the telephone, work, other (e.g., store, park).

APPENDIX E FIELD NOTES

Interview Locations

19—parent's place of residence
1—church
2—restaurant or coffee shop
1—researcher's office
2—park
1—library

Interview Length

Approximately 1/1/2 to 2 hours

Additional Notes Regarding Selected Participants/Settings

ID 070405P1702—College-educated African immigrant. Interview took place in Riverview café. Briefly discussed State of Africa and Zimbabwe reparations. Mentioned need for African-American psychologists at school to support needs of Black students. After interview, parent continued regarding unfair discipline consequences at school. She expressed concern that single moms have no support. She mentioned that low-income parents are disconnected from the school and blame their children for problems.

ID 071003PI715—Jamaican female, small business owner of in-home daycare. Interview took place in kitchen. Parent stressed that all people have the right to achieve. She mentioned that in Jamaica there is skin color discrimination. Stated that America is full of racism and extensive pressure, including police brutality. Blacks are persecuted. Concerned with saving the children ages three to six.

ID 071003PI705—African-American female. Met in park. Stated that she feared the outcome of how she would be treated in current job at post office because she had recently obtained her degree. Shared that she was hurt by lack of support. Mentioned that the Black man was disintegrating due to drug infiltration and that the teacher spoke differently to her once she found out she had a master's degree.

ID071003P1709—African-American couple, upper middle class. White house located in upscale section of Riverview (east). Parents conservative in appearance, mentioned that they both attended Black colleges and that the Black teachers were very nurturing. I explained that Riverview had different neighborhoods. Mother remarked that she had never realized it until she drove through and saw that some parts of the city were less attractive. After interview, gave me a tour of the house and mentioned dynamics of how Whites move out of neighborhoods when Blacks come.

APPENDIX E FIELD NOTES

071703PI716—African-American woman. Interview took place in park. Small son playing during interview.

071703PI712—African-American woman. Relaxed home setting. Interview took place in living room.

071703PI724—Haitian parents, medium- to dark-skinned. Son remained in room to translate. Father mentioned the divide between Haiti and the Dominican Republic during unrecorded time. He focused on how the Dominicans align with Spanish and not their African ancestry. Interview took place in living room of apartment. Father spoke English more fluently.

072203P1704—Haitian man, lighter-skinned. Interview took place in living room. Nice home, well furnished. Father very outgoing, loquacious, friendly. Mentioned the economic condition of Haiti. Expounded about the racism he experienced as an employee in the banking industry in US. Researcher probed more about experiences. He shared that many people mistook him for Cuban but reacted negatively when he shared that he was Haitian. He mentioned that he spoke Spanish fluently, along with French, Creole, and English. This created animosity/jealousy against him by Black Americans, Whites, and Latinos. He mentioned being discriminated against by Black Americans also. Had been in U.S. for over 20 years.

072403PI725—African-American woman with mixed features, short Afro, appeared part Latino, no accent, clearly socially aligned and racially aligned with being Black. Made reference to her mother, an African-American woman, in a positive light (researcher cannot recall exact comment—believed to be related to the influences that have surrounded the student.) Interview took place in family room of large vintage apartment or condominium. Respondent highly educated—evident in articulation—and she mentioned that she had earned a Ph.D. Parent inquired about researcher's status on Ph.D. She referenced a book by Leary entitled *Post Traumatic Slavery Syndrome*.

0728PI720—African-American woman. Interview took place in living room of large apartment. Mentioned that she was considering moving to Atlanta, Georgia. Reflected on children's personalities. After interview, parent expressed strong concern for what is going on in District 65 for Black males—younger son unable to read—and that teacher needs to find appropriate materials

072803PI710—Nigerian couple; smaller town house. Interview took place at dining room table. Father inquired as to how research benefits students. Researcher took time explaining process of questioning and purpose of research to respondents. Father disagreed that the minority achievement gap existed.

APPENDIX E

FIELD NOTES

10080501—Biracial couple; African-American mother in wheelchair remained in kitchen area during interview. Caucasian father participated in interview. Interview took place at kitchen table. Nice home near Chicago border in West Riverview. Father comfortable discussing race issue and acknowledged that Black students had more challenges

10080502—Haitian mother; entrepreneur developing catering business. Modest home in West Riverview. Mother was preparing for upcoming church banquet that she was catering at time of interview.

10080503—African-American mother, artist, spoke very highly of daughter's intelligence. Father is Caucasian. Mother is a professional artist who has shown work in galleries. Conducted interview at Borders. Mother wore natural hairstyle, locks.

10120501—Professional African-American mother, visited interviewer at interviewer's work place and met. Divorced. Direct responses indicated a sense of strong will. Parent had been very accommodating and intently wanted to be interviewed.

10150501—African-American mother

10150502—African-American mother. Nice home in upscale section of suburb. Met in living room. Father joined interview. Parents were highly educated professionals. Mother mentioned that she had given birth to second son at 41 and that he would attend the high school the following year.

10200501—Caucasian mother, born in Minnesota. Child's father is Nigerian and younger than mother. Mother and researcher briefly discussed Nigeria and the Yoruba culture. Mother began dialogue about ex-husband and showed pictures of husband and new wife, who was also White, and kids. Interview took place in antique-style church in north Riverview. Student was at choir practice downstairs. Mother indicated that she was very active in son's life and felt it necessary to be so. She mentioned that she was disappointed that she was only able to have one child. She said that her son talks to her about school and he had said that there were very few Black students in AP classes. Son later engaged with interviewer after interview and shared college plans.

10250501—Haitian mother and husband participated in interview. Husband very vocal about treatment of Haitians in U.S. Expressed concern that son was not very communicative. Both parents appeared very conscious about race and immigrant issues and very prideful. They were very vocal about their experiences as Black immigrants somewhat during interview and when the recorder was turned off. Both were very light skinned and clearly had mixed ancestry. Parents seeking scholarship information and indicated that they did not have any information. Mother expressed concern about whether son would go to college. Father mentioned that he had recently

APPENDIX E

FIELD NOTES

been displaced from job due to racism. Moderate home, appeared to be a townhouse, connected to other units. Interview took place in room off kitchen.

12070501—Single Haitian woman, widowed. Medium-sized apartment. Grandmother of student lived in home also. Reflected on deceased husband and shared that she never chose to marry when asked by interviewer. Older daughter is educated. Mother mentioned she is seeking a better job. Concerned about opportunities for younger daughter to go to college. Interview took place in front room.

12130501—African-American mother. Stated concern about history with district regarding her daughter's experiences. Daughter in community college in Florida. Concerned about son's progress. Interview took place in moderate-sized apartment. Mother had knowledge of leaders in district, including superintendent, and expressed opinion about candidates for that position, emphasizing that she doubted a Black candidate would be considered.

12210501—African-American mother. Moderate single-family home. Interview took place in kitchen.

12210502—African-American mother. Child's father is Nigerian and educated. Parents are still married with one child. Mother was highly educated—a dean at a college. Interview took place in dining room of moderate home. Mother expressed interest to be involved in education and mentioned need for more minority students to attend college.

APPENDIX F

RESPONDENTS' ANCESTRY

For the purposes of the proposed study, the parents of the 24 students classified as Black are the respondents. The largest group of students is of African-American ancestry. The second largest group is of Caribbean descent. The remaining students are of biracial/Black ancestry or continental African ancestry. All parents identified their children as racially Black.

Respondents' Ancestry

070405PI702 Zimbabwean
071003PI715 Jamaican
071003PI705 African-American
071703PI724 Haitian
072203PI704 Haitian
072403PI725 Afro-Latina
072803PI710 Nigerian
10080503 Biracial—African-American mother/White father
10080501 Biracial—African-American mother/White father
10080502 Haitian
12070501 Haitian
10200501 Biracial—White mother/Nigerian father
12210502 Bicultural—African-American mother/Nigerian father
1250501 Haitian
071003PI709 African-American
071703PI712 African-American
0728PI720 African-American
10120501 African-American
10150501 African-American
10150502 African-American
10240501 African-American
12130501 African-American
12210501 African-American
12210502 African-American

APPENDIX G
JOB CATEGORIZATIONS OF INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS

<i>Internal ID Number</i>	<i>Job Categorization</i>
070405P1702	White collar
071003P1705	White collar
071003P1715	Blue collar
071003P1709	White collar
071703P1716	White collar
071703P1712	White collar
071703P1724	Blue collar
072403P1704	White collar
072403P1725	White collar
0728P1720	White collar
072803P1710	White collar
10080501	White collar
10080502	Blue collar
10080503	White collar
10120501	White collar
10150501	White collar
10150502	White collar
10200501	White collar
10240501	White collar
10250501	Blue collar
12070501	Blue collar
12130501	White collar
12210501	White collar
12210502	White collar

VITA

NAME:	Carole R. Collins Ayanlaja	
EDUCATION:	B.A., Politics, Lake Forest College, Lake Forest, Illinois	1987
	M.A., Urban Teaching, Concordia University, Chicago, IL	1994
	Ph.D., Educational Policy and Administration, University of Illinois at Chicago	2011
CERTIFICATION:	State of Iowa:	
	Professional Administrator License—Superintendent’s Endorsement	2010
	State of Illinois:	
	Administrator Certificate Type 75-1998	
	Elementary Teaching Certificate Type 3 K-9	
	Secondary Teaching Certificate Type 9 6-12, 1996	
TEACHING EXPERIENCE:	Department of School Counseling, Concordia University Chicago, River Forest, IL – Adjunct Professor	
	Cognitive Theory	2009
	Career Counseling	2010
	Department of Educational Foundations, Social Policy, and Research, Concordia University Chicago, River Forest, IL – Adjunct Professor	
	Ethics and Foundations of American Education	2009
	Contemporary Issues in Curriculum and Practice	2010
	Department of Educational Policy Studies, University of Illinois at Chicago	
	Instructor-Administrative Issues in School Leadership	2000
	Research Program Associate, Achieving Higher Standards	2000-2001
	Chicago Public Schools	
	James Monroe Elementary School	1994-1998
	Andersen Elementary School	1993-1994

ADMINISTRATION:

Sioux City Community Schools, Sioux City, IA	
Director of Curriculum and Assessment	2010-present
Calumet Park District 132 Schools, Calumet Park, IL	
Principal, Burr Oak Intermediate School	2008-2010
Principal, Calumet Junior High	2007-2008
Chicago Public Schools, Chicago, IL	
Founding Principal, Applied Arts, Science, and Technology Academy	2004-2007
Assistant Principal, Nikola Tesla High School	2001-2003
Cincinnati Public Schools, Cincinnati, OH	
Founding Principal, Woodward Career Technical High School	2003-2004
Calumet City District 155, Calumet City, IL	
Assistant Principal, Wentworth Intermediate School and Wilson Elementary School	1998-2000

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT:

McCrel Corporation-Balanced Leadership	2010-2011
University of Illinois at Chicago – Liautaud Graduate School of Business	
Principal Development Emotional Intelligence (PDEI)	2006-2008
Evans Newton, Inc.-iTarget Teach	2007-2010
Kouzes/Posner-The Leadership Challenge	2007
Union Pacific High School Principal's Summer Institute	2003-2006
University of IL-Chicago, Principals Assessment Center	2002
State of Illinois Quality Assurance Reviewer	1999

INTERNSHIPS:

Washington, D.C. Public Schools, Office of the Superintendent	2002
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PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS:

Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development
American Association of School Administrators

School Administrators of Iowa

American Educational Research Association

SELECTED PRESENTATIONS:

District Leadership Data Discussion, presented to the Sioux City Community School District Board of Directors, July 28, 2011

Keynote Speaker, "A Christian Woman at Her Best," Annual Women's Day, Mount Zion Baptist Church, Sioux City, IA, July 9, 2011

Keynote Speaker, "One Nation, One Dream," NAACP Freedom Fund Banquet, Sioux City, IA, February 19, 2011

Common Assessment Progress Report–Presentation to Board of Directors, Sioux City Community Schools, February, 2011

IOWA Core Implementation Plan–Presentation to Board of Directors–Sioux City Community Schools, 2011

Striving Towards Educational Progress by Activating College Tools (STEP UP ACT UP) ACT Improvement Plan–Presentation to Board of Directors, Sioux City Community Schools, November 2010

Adequate Yearly Progress and Annual Progress Report–Presentation to Board of Directors, Sioux City Community Schools, September 2010

Panel Speaker, Small Schools Discussion–Orr Campus, Chicago Principals and Administrators Conference (CPAA), February 2006

Presenter, Minority Achievement Gap, Butler University 2005

Invited Speaker, Savage Inequalities in Urban Education, University of Cincinnati Department of Health Occupations retreat, Cincinnati Zoo, Fall 2004