ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: PROMOTING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN URBAN

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS: PERCEPTIONS AND

EXPERIENCES OF PRINCIPALS, PARENTS, AND

DISTRICT OFFICE

Dwayne Wheeler, Doctor of Education, May 2019

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Urban Educational Leadership

Parent participation continues to decline among African American communities

in urban schools. Parental involvement is essential to closing the achievement gap in

urban schools. This grounded theory study explored the principals' perceptions and

experiences of elementary school principals, parents, and district office staff as it relates

to promoting parental involvement in the educational process of children in an urban

school district in north-central Maryland. In order to develop a substantive theory

addressing the barriers of low parent participation, data were collected from multiple

sources. The data consisted of transcripts of semi-structured interviews of the

participants, notes from parent focus group discussions, document review from school

and district's Family and Community Engagement Office, and field notes. The findings

suggest the existence of complex and unique barriers that continue to plague the parental

involvement in this urban school district with students from low income, traditionally and

culturally underserved minorities. The findings add to the existing literature. An important contribution of this study is the development of a model to explain and address the barriers related to low parental involvement. Based on the findings, recommendations were incorporated into the development of *Wheeler's Model: Circle of Continuous Engagement.* The new model describes ways to address the barriers to low parental involvement by building the capacity of the principals, as well as human and social capital of the parents in the communities being served by the school district enabling them to handle challenges in their schools, and the city.

The findings of this study have the potential to inform parents, school leaders, and policy decisions. This study underscores the need for designing professional development that is (a) differentiated, (b) culturally relevant, (c) based on the realities of the work environments, (d) the issues in the local communities, and (e) based on the research evidence from urban contexts. Engaging parents in transparent conversations and providing resources will shift the trajectory of the current state of affairs to a collaborative, respectful, highly effective partnership, where students excel socially, emotionally, and academically.

PROMOTING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN URBAN ELEMENTARY

SCHOOLS: PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF PRINCIPALS, PARENTS,

AND DISTRICT OFFICE

By

Dwayne Wheeler

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

MORGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2019

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March 2019

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

DEDICATION

First, and foremost, what a mighty God we serve! If God be for us, who can be against

us? Second, I would like to thank my entire family especially my sisters Ermine and

Alicia, brother in law Joseph Sr, nephews and niece Joseph Jr, Jolicia, and Jordan, all of

whom who have been my source of support and strength during this process. I would also

like to thank Anthony, the son that I never had, for the constant encouragement and

courageous conversations when I felt like walking away from the journey. James

Camper, a friend, brother, motivator, and pillar of strength provided constant

encouragement and sound guidance. And Keisha, my life long high school friend and

confidant, you told me to seek a doctoral degree, and I followed your advice.

To my Pastor, Bishop Otto Richardson Jr and the entire True Gospel Apostolic Faith

Church Family, it is the prayers of the righteous that availed me to this victorious place. I

cannot forget Sister Nicholson, Althea, Elder Crosby and The Calvary Cathedral of Praise

for always remembering me in prayer. I am so grateful to Bishop Chism, and The

Restoration House International Ministries for speaking greatness into my life even at a

time when, I could not see it myself, and to BHL Ministries for expanding the vision

whereby, disadvantaged youth can one day reach their pinnacle of success.

Tell me, who can stand before us, when we, call on, that Great name, Jesus, Jesus,

Precious Jesus, we have the VICTORY!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Parents help cultivate the morals, values, and principles that help children to succeed in school and life. Parents ultimately want assurance that their children will receive adequate preparation in schools to lead rewarding adult lives. Parents are the first and most enduring teachers who play a critical role in helping their children learn and succeed (Amatea & West, 2007). Parental involvement is essential to closing the achievement gap in urban schools (Bower & Griffith, 2011). Several studies document the positive relation between parental involvement and student success (Epstein, et al., 2009; Sheldon & Van Voorhis, 2004); Warren, 2010) and "the evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence in their children's achievement in school and through life" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 2).

When school leaders build positive relationships with parents in promoting academic achievement, regardless of the families' socio-economic status, educational attainment, or ethnicity, children are more likely to: achieve at higher rates; avoid retention; attend school regularly; develop positive social skills; demonstrate leadership qualities; adapt well to school; and graduate from high school and go on to postsecondary education (Long, 2007). Reynolds (2010) contends that many school leaders in concert with policymakers have come to accept the idea that Black parents are more of a hindrance in their children's educational development. Some school leaders have created environments where parent opinions, ideas, and questions are considered bothersome (Stelmach & Preston, 2007).

Research over several decades has shown that many strategies have been implemented to advance educational opportunities and resources for children, irrespective of race or social class. And yet, millennial era school leaders in high poverty urban districts are still grappling with many of the same equity issues as their predecessors (Paige & Witty, 2010; Robertson, 2008). What many school leaders fail to realize is educational inequities between people of color and dominant race oppressors are no accident. Years of oppressive, dehumanizing, and abusive policies and legislations were deliberately contrived and manipulated to maintain power and privilege within the hands of a few (Abby, 2011; Allen, 2008; Cross, 2007). In the United States, Jim Crow laws and other subversive forms of oppression decimated economic and educational opportunities for blacks and other minorities of color (Allen, 2008; Page & Witty, 2010).

Recent reports from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (2016) show that educational disparities in discipline and race are widespread. Black Pre-K-12 students are suspended, expelled, and referred to special education at higher rates than white students. Furthermore, K-12 students with disabilities are suspended more frequently than students without disabilities. For this reason, it is critical for school leaders to make more concerted efforts to communicate with parents and to engage in outreach activities that will improve parents' and schools' understanding of one other, including expectations, barriers, and resources.

The development of the school vision is a collaborative process facilitated by the school leader. It is the principal that sets the expectations in the building, partnered with staff, and stakeholders in the creation of a safe and welcoming school environment. This partnership should extend beyond the school walls in the hope of building community

relationships that are beneficial to the success of the school (Epstein, 2001). However, some urban districts have discovered that principals lack the necessary skills to enhance parental involvement (Auerbach, 2009). Understanding principals' perceptions and experiences about parental involvement is very important. In this study, the researcher sought to explore the perceptions and experiences of elementary school principals, parents, and district office staff as it relates to promoting parental involvement in the educational process of children in an urban school district in north-central Maryland.

Despite the many challenges that exist in urban communities, the school leader must create and promote a menu of opportunities that are inclusive, transparent, and welcoming for all parents (Payne, 2006). Furthermore, Payne (2006) advocates showing respect as critical in building trust with parents in the urban settings. Lloyd-Nesling (2006) recommends engaging parents in positive conversations.

Statement of the Problem

Schubert (2010) underscores the importance of an understanding of principals' perceptions of family-school partnerships for effective and sustained partnerships. Only a few studies were found on principals' perceptions (Haack, 2007; McGhee, 2007; Smith, 2008). School leaders are an intricate part of school community relations (Ferguson, 2005; Sanders & Harvey, 2002). However, principals' professional development is not thoroughly documented and does not address appropriate training for school administrators leading high-poverty urban schools with little to no parent involvement. According to Johnson (2008), despite the concerted effort of urban elementary school

principals to engage parents in the educational process of their children, low rates of parent participation remain a challenge.

Furthermore, Epstein (2009) believes, closing the achievement gap means finding new ways of engaging parents in schools and addressing the barriers/challenges of not only the children but the parents as well (e.g. financial literacy training, GED programs, job training, etc.). Belfield and Levin (2007) argue that,

By fostering the development of a broader and more institutionalized set of resources for parents, devolving resources and authority for local school communities, and expanding opportunities for local participation with parents, community members, and staff, will improve parent involvement in education and forge stronger family-school-community partnerships. (p. 23)

Policymakers must address ways to develop and support urban school principals through research-based, on-the-job training aligned to what they need to do their jobs every day (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009).

In order to address the problems outlined above, this study explored principals' perspectives and experiences about parental involvement, as it relates to promoting parental participation in their children's educational process in elementary schools in an urban school district in north-central Maryland by using grounded theory methodology. Additionally, this study investigated principals' school district practices that either hinder or promote parents from becoming involved in their children's educational experience. Finally, this study sought to develop a theory to enhance the understanding of the interaction between perceptions and experiences of various stakeholders in order to

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inform policy and practice about parent involvement by collecting data inductively from multiple sources.

Ingram, Wolfe, and Lieberman (2007) assert that many parents do not actively support substantive parent involvement programs, and the subsequent levels of parental involvement in a given school may be the result of the attitude of the principal towards the concept. Quite often, parents blame the school leaders as the problem in the school. They often refer to the attitude or behavior of the principal as to why they do not want to be involved. Regardless of district actions, it is the leadership that can either promote or deters parents from being involved in their children's education.

While school leaders cannot control everything, they can control their behavior, henceforth, their leadership styles. The researcher, who currently serves the school district as an elementary school principal found, during his tenure, some principals are revered by the parents and were looked at as a family, spiritual leaders, ministers, parents, and role models. Therefore, the researcher who has been a principal in the local school district for the past nine years thought it was important to identify the characteristics of the leadership and identify them at each school that participated in the study. He wanted to understand the reasons for the decline in the parent involvement as indicated by the climate surveys in the district, and yet their leadership styles represented individuals that possessed caring and compassion for their community. So, the researcher planned to gain an understanding of principals' leadership styles through an emic perspective. Thus, understanding of the leadership styles of school principals as well as school districts' policies that promote or hinder parents' engagement with their children's education process was critical.

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When tension exists within the vision of the school principal and the parent, a paradigm shift towards a more cohesive approach towards congruency becomes a priority. This provides an opportunity to explore parental involvement and expand the research body of knowledge. The researcher used a parent focus group, principal and district staff semi-structured interviews, and document reviews to investigate parental involvement and leadership in the development of a substantive theory.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of elementary school principals, parents, and district office staff as it relates to promoting parental involvement in the educational process of children in order to develop a theory addressing the barriers of low parent participation in an urban school district in north-central Maryland.

Research Questions

The overarching research question that guided this study was: How do elementary school principals, parents, and district office staff in an urban school district in north-central part of Maryland, explain the barriers that hinder effective family engagement at their schools?

Sub-questions to support the overarching question were:

1. How do elementary school principals, parents, and district office staff define parent involvement?

2. How do the Family and Community Engagement Office and parents perceive their role in supporting elementary school principals and promoting parent participation in the schools?

3. How do elementary school principals, parents, and district office staff describe and explain the barriers obstructing parental involvement in school and district activities?

4. How do principals perceive their leadership styles?

5. How do parents describe effective leadership as it relates to engaging parents in the educational process of their children?

Significance of the Study

This study underscores the importance of understanding the perceptions and experiences of major stakeholders—principals, parents, and district family engagement office staff—to understand the barriers obstructing parental involvement due to the increased research evidence of the role of parents in children's school success. This study adds to the existing literature on parent involvement in urban schools. The study may shed light on the potential needs or gaps in the services that might be necessary for students coming from inner city neighborhoods. Thus, the findings have the potential to inform practices in the urban school districts and sensitize urban school administrators. Additionally, findings may result in the development of workshops that may increase parents' and principals' self-efficacy as well as social and cultural capital resulting in students' school success.

The outcomes of this study resulted in the development of a substantive theory that makes replication possible in other districts and regions of the country. This study

sought to investigate parental involvement from the perspectives of elementary school principals, parents, and school district staff with a hope to develop an understanding to the barriers that exist in the wider social culture in urban communities. This study is unique in the sense that, it involves the voices and perceptions of parents about their involvement, and also brings in an impetus to start the conversation among them about the importance of their involvement. This study provides a platform for parents to voice their concerns and identify their own shortcomings as it relates to parental involvement. It further creates a vehicle of communication to address the barriers by embracing the voice of the parents through a community approach with the needs of the children at the forefront of the conversation.

Further, the findings will seek to inform educators in their desire to change the trajectory of parental involvement in urban school districts. The ultimate benefactors of the study are the children, who are the heartbeat and pulse of education in any school district. Some of the student benefits include high achievement, increased attendance, improved self-esteem, regulated self-discipline, avoiding suspension, and low percentage of being placed in special education or remedial courses. The findings will add to the existing literature. An important contribution of this study is the development of a model to explain and address the barriers related to low parental involvement. Based on the findings, recommendations were incorporated into the development of Wheeler's Model of Circle of Continuous Engagement.

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Assumptions

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Bloomberg and Volpe (2015) state that "assumptions are statements reflected to be held true as you go into the study, and from which you believe you will be able to

draw conclusions" (p. 93). For the purpose of this study, the following assumptions have been made:

1. Urban school leaders are thrust into positions of leadership without the requisite knowledge or skill. Research by SREB (2007) revealed serious flaws in administrative internships, hindering candidates' development in the competencies they will need to be effective principals.

2. Urban school leaders are assigned to the communities unaware of the real challenges that exist. Inexperienced school leaders are often assigned to disadvantaged urban communities—which have fewer resources, difficulties in staff recruitment, and retention, and limited community support—are "less likely to include a system of shared values, a clear mission, high expectations, meaningful social interactions, collegial relations among adults, and extended teacher roles" (Leaders Network, 2014, p. 4).

3. The school principal should interact with all stakeholders with trustworthiness, honesty, integrity, and by modeling positive behavior and self -discipline (Temoitayo, Nayaya & Lukeman 2013; Njoroge & Nyabuto 2014).

4. It was assumed that the participants will share their thoughts and experiences honestly. All research is value-laden. For this reason, the researcher has discussed his role and the risk of potential subjectivity in chapter 3.

Limitations

Rossman et al. (2012) state that "Limitations are the exposure of the conditions that may weaken your study" (p. 164). The issue of generalizability limits this study because of the purposive and convenient sampling used in this qualitative grounded

theory study. At the same time, grounded theory studies are designed to initiate theoretical investigations that, eventually, may be applied in quantitative studies utilizing probability samples. This study was conducted in 10 K-5 schools in an urban school district in north-central Maryland only. The findings may not be applicable to other schools or school districts.

Limitations have been identified throughout the researcher's educational journey. The researcher's cultural approach to parental involvement has influenced his approach in researching this topic. The researcher's early education began on the island of Barbados where parental involvement is mandatory and corporal punishment is legal and can serve as a form of discipline when parent engagement is unachievable. Therefore, being confronted with limited or no parental involvement in a school contradicts the value system that has been embedded within the researcher's beliefs. Another factor that influenced the researcher's outlook is the researcher's experiences as an urban school principal in the current school district where threats of physical violence, verbal and abusive language, with a lack of parental involvement at school-wide activities, remains a barrier. Continuous negative engagement with parents and failed attempts to increase parental involvement in the researcher's current school has also influenced the researcher's views. Finally, issues of generalizability limit this study because of the small sample size and its ability to influence implementation.

Definitions

1. Parent Involvement: "The participation of parents in a regular, two-way, meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities" (NCLB Action Briefs, 2004. Para. 5).

2. Urban Principal: "School leader characterized by extensive responsibilities and limited control, nestled in the context of relentless responsibility. They exist within a large bureaucratic school system that occasionally lacks the resources required to handle various challenges in educating every student with little to no parental involvement" (MetLife, Inc., 2013, p. 270).

3. Principal Professional Development: "Opportunities for principals' continuous training and development, and the time to reflect on, and refine principals' practice" (Coggshall, 2015, p. 12).

4. Urban Community: "Centralized area often plagued with high poverty, crime, and drugs" (Cooper, 2009, p. 696).

5. Leadership**:** "Leadership is influence nothing more, nothing less" (Maxwell, 2007, p. 7).

6. Heat Tickets: They are complaints from parents towards the principals made at the district central office and sent to principals via email with a 24-hour response time from them. The principals are guilty until proven innocent (Principal Interview).

Summary

  This chapter included the background of the problem, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, and significance of the study, assumptions, limitations, and definition of terms. In the initial stage of the study, some literature scan was done to get familiar with the studies in this area. In the next chapter, the literature review and theoretical framework are presented. This is followed by the description of the methodology used to collect and analyze data in chapter 3. Chapter 4 presents an overview of the findings related to the research questions. Chapter 5 presents the summary and the discussion of the findings. Chapter 6 describes the grounded theory emerged from this study, and the new model to address the barriers to parental involvement. This is followed by the recommendations and conclusions.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Much research suggests that, while many parents want to be involved in the education of their children, there remain many barriers that hinder them from being involved. This chapter presents a thematic framework which guides the study and the literature review. The search for literature relevant to the research questions was extensive. It involved the dissertation databases, ERIC searches, and journal articles relevant to the topic of interest in this study. The timeframe of the literature search extended from 2007 through 2017. The thematic literature review examined the research on parent involvement, with a particular emphasis on research about parent involvement among communities in urban schools. The literature presented is classified into the following themes: (1) parental involvement, (2) role of the school leader in promoting parent involvement, (3) perceptions of parental involvement in urban schools (4) barriers to parental involvement. (5) Community influence on school culture, (6) and leadership that transforms urban communities

Theoretical Framework
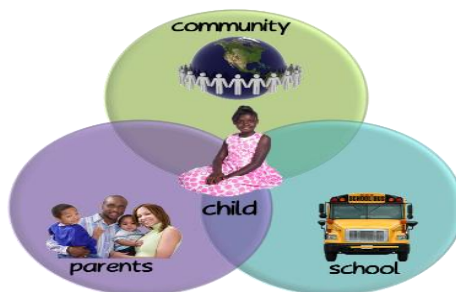
Figure 1. Epstein's *Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence* (Epstein, 2001)

Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence

This study uses Epstein's *theory of overlapping spheres of influence* (Epstein, 2001) to guide the study. The overlapping spheres of influence consist of intersecting spheres representing the family, the school, and the community. The influence of the three spheres demonstrates that each plays an integral part in the development of the child. Parent involvement is also a function of inter-institutional interactions, an approach at how institutions mutually-shape each other's views, identities, and approaches between the family, school, and the community. Epstein (2001) also identifies times when the family structure, community partnerships, and type of school impact family partnerships with all stakeholders. The goal is to ensure the success of the child. Each of these factors impacts the behavior of the parents and the children. Epstein (1991) posits that the changing demographics of the family will influence a closer interaction with more overlap or pull further apart resulting in less overlap.

According to (Epstein, 2001) changing demographics is evident as there has been a retreat from marriage: increasing numbers of adults disengage, detain, or avoid formal ties, either entering cohabiting relationships or living outside a partnership. Furthermore, childbearing and childrearing have become increasingly separated from marriage, with great increases in the numbers of children born outside of marriage, either in cohabitation or to single mothers (Lesthaeghe, 2010). These changes have occurred in conjunction with the rise in female labor force participation. Two-parent households are on a steady decline in the United States as divorce, remarriage, and cohabitation are on the upward trend. Families are smaller now, both due to the increase of single-parent households and

the drop-in fertility. Not only are Americans having fewer children, but the circumstances surrounding parenthood have changed. A closer look at the dynamics that influence the changing demographics of the country should also focus on the role of the father. The concept of fatherhood has changed so that more "parenting," not only the provision of finances, is expected of fathers (Taylor, Parker, Morin, Cohn, & Wang, 2013). New laws that govern divorce and custody have changed in ways designed to treat spouses and parents more equally, and they have thus facilitated more father custody (Coles, 2009; Koch, 2007). In addition, it has been documented that most single fathers obtain custody through out-of-court agreements between parents. In the same vein, Koch (2007) supports that single men are now able to adopt children (usually older children), but these adoptions, whether by gay or straight men, account for a very small percentage of single fathers.

When schools communicate and collaborate fully with the fathers, they can help to revolutionize developmental gains for their students (Flippin & Crais, 2011). Research on single father involvement shows that fathers uniquely influence their children's development and learning in ways that are distinct from mothers, potentially adding to the contributions of mothers. The quantity and quality of father engagement, as well as fathers' vocabulary use with children in educational activities such as book reading, positively affect the development and learning of their children. (Flippin & Crais, 2011; Pancsofar, Vernon-Feagans, & the Family Life Project Investigators, 2010).

Further research supports that children of incarcerated parents (COIP) is an increasing family demographic that impacts the lives of many American children (Dallaire & Wilson, 2010). Demonstrating the ability to cope with separation from a

parent is difficult, especially when the child may have witnessed the parent's criminal activity or arrest which can be anxiety provoking or even traumatizing, especially if the parent's crime is violent (Dallaire & Wilson, 2010). Wakefield et al. (2013) and Wildeman (2009) also posit that children of color are disproportionately affected by parental incarceration, reflecting large racial disparities in mass incarceration. As a matter of fact, Black children are seven times more likely than their White counterparts to experience parental imprisonment (Wildeman, 2009). Black children of fathers without high school diplomas have a fifty percent likelihood of experiencing the incarceration of their fathers during childhood, compared to seven percent of White children (Wildeman, 2009).

Quite often, the spheres can be drawn apart by individuals' familial home environment, generational practices, developmental characteristics, as well as historical and policy contexts, all of which create fewer opportunities and incentives for shared activities (Epstein, 2009). Both children and parents often get lost in the lack of continuity and consistency between values and norms promoted at the schools, as those values are often not congruent with the values and norms in the family, and community.

Epstein (2009) posits that the way schools care about children will be reflected in the way schools care for the families of the children that they serve. When schools view children simply as students, they are likely to see the family as separate from the school and make decisions that best meet the needs of the school. This approach to school partnerships is divisive as the family is expected to provide the basic necessities for the child and leave the education of children to the schools. When administrators and teachers view students as children, they are likely to see both the family and the

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community as partners with the school in children's education and development. Partners understand their shared roles and responsibilities for children, and they work together to create better programs and opportunities for the students. As it relates to this study, the theoretical framework guided the investigation of parent involvement from the principal's, parents' and central office perspective, and influenced data analysis, and interpretation for this qualitative research.

Parental Involvement

The terms for parental involvement are as varied as the definitions. According to Teicher (2007), some theorists and practitioners refer to *home-school partnerships;* some prefer to call it *parental participation*, and some call *parents as partners.* Despite the terminology, parental involvement is an increasingly popular topic, both conversationally among professional educators, and legislatively among politicians in charge of school funding. The literature related to this category is vast. Accordingly, the scope of this literature review is structured to include literature that is relevant to the problem.

Parental involvement can be measured in a variety of ways (Green, 2007). To create a parental involvement model inclusive of diverse parents that embodies race, gender, marital status, religion, and socio-economic status, the school leader must first understand how parental involvement is defined. According to (NCLB, 2001; ESSA, 2004; & NCLB, 2004) parental involvement should encompass the participation of parents in a regular, two-way, mutual respect, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities including: assisting their child's learning; being involved in their child's education at school; serving as full partners in

their child's education and being included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child.

Msengi (2007), further created an operational definition of parental involvement to support his meta-analysis of 41 studies on the topic. He defined parental involvement as "parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children" (p. 34). This definition includes parental involvement related to education within the school, and also in the home of each child. Parental involvement cannot be defined in one conclusive statement. In fact, parents and school personnel may view parental involvement differently. For example, some parents may view parental involvement as keeping their children safe and transporting them to school, whereas teachers and other school staff members more see it as parents' actual presence at school (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Bower and Griffin, 2011). Furthermore, parental involvement can be differentiated by school-based and home-based involvement. School-based involvement requires parents to make actual contact with the school personnel (for example, encouraging daily student attendance, attending school meetings, talking to teachers, supporting school events, and volunteering time at the school). Home-based involvement encompasses assisting with the homework, responding to children's academic performance, and talking to children about happenings at the school (Bower, p. 34).

According to Georgiou and Tourva (2007), parental involvement includes five simple dimensions that were originally coined by Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon (1997). These five dimensions include parenting, assisting with homework, communicating with the school, volunteering time at the school, and participating in

school decision-making. Epstein et al. (2009) added a sixth dimension, namely collaborating with the community, which includes the following categories:

➢ Parenting: refers to the support for education children receive in their own homes.

➢ Communicating: refers to written and oral communication between school and home.

➢ Volunteering: refers to the number of time parents actually donate towards enhancing the school environment.

➢ Learning at home: refers to homework and other curriculum activities including reading to children in the home.

➢ Decision-making: refers to parent leaders and representatives who comprise councils and committees for the school.

➢ Collaborating: refers to the community, which includes seeking resources and services for the benefit of the students (p. 82).

Role of the School Leader in Promoting Parent Involvement

The commitment of the school principal is critical if potential opportunities for children and families are to be extended (Auerbach, 2009; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). For this reason, implementing policies and procedures that welcome parents and families is imperative and necessary for the school principal. School leadership, according to Barnyak and McNelly (2009), must realize the importance of the family in the overall role of student achievement, and take responsibility for bridging the home and school environments.

The school principal as the leader sets the tone and standard of the building with a climate of trust and collaboration between the school and the home. Building trust and collaboration with parents is important for involvement programs to be effective (Mohajeran & Ghaleei, 2008). School leaders must convince teachers, students, parents, and community members of the value of working together for the benefit of the school and the students it serves (Epstein, 2009). Moreover, it takes a devoted leader to create a successful, welcoming partnership with parents. Effective principals must also be willing and able to delegate power to stakeholder groups while simultaneously guiding the process (Gordon & Seashore-Louis, 2009; Hoover-Dempsey et al. 2005). Such a process of shared decision-making among teachers and parents may produce better decisions and create a sense of ownership and responsibility for the outcomes of those shared decisions.

According to Stelmach and Preston (2007), parents are now being asked to contribute to educational decisions that were once left only to the professionals. Encouraging this democratic point of view has led to the voices of parents and non-professionals being heard in making decisions on school reform, and gives parents a more powerful place in the educational establishment (Stelmach & Preston, 2007). To create parental partnerships that are grounded in democratic practice, the principal must implement three processes: (a) allow parents to take part in decision-making by implementing workable mechanisms for all stakeholders to voice their opinions, ideas, and concerns. Topics such as budgeting, student safety, curriculum, and policy lend themselves well to parental input; (b) increase awareness of community norms and expectations; and (c) create strong links between families and community organizations and resources (Epstein, 2009; Henderson et al., 2007, p. 7). Providing principals with a

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handbook to build strong schools, families, and communities will increase the school leaders' confidence and build capacity for all stakeholders (Epstein, 2009).

Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) also endorse a model of parental involvement in which the school leader is the key partner with the parents. This model consists of three constructs. The first concerns parents' motivational beliefs, that is, how and what they perceive as their responsibilities in relation to education. Parents make decisions based on how likely they think their involvement will be linked to positive outcomes. The principal should create parental roles that focus on active participation in the school. It is not enough for principals to simply listen to parents' input; rather, they must actively follow up on parents' input. The next construct is general school invitations. The principal should require teachers to deliver specific invitations to parents. Teachers should be encouraged to communicate with parents about interventions, achievement, and home-based activities to enhance school learning. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) also implied that a child's invitation is powerful. Receiving an invitation from their child's school to engage in an educational conversation can be a great way to increase parental involvement. The final construct is life context variables, that is, knowledge of parents' strengths so that they may be provided with opportunities to participate where they feel most comfortable and benefit the school in the most effective way (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005).

In exploring the literature that identifies practices that would deter parents from being involved in the school, it is the demeanor and posture of the school leader towards parental involvement that can be the key determinant of the extent of involvement parents have in school programs (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007; Ingram, Wolfe, &

Lieberman, 2007). Even though many principals view parental involvement as desirable and necessary for a successful school climate, many do not actively support substantive parent involvement programs (Ingram, Wolfe, & Lieberman, 2007). Thus, establishing educational practices that may discourage parental involvement can serve as barriers to effective parental involvement although not intentional. Whannell and Allen (2011) further assert that school staff will ultimately mirror the attitude of the school leader, which will either promote or discourage many parents and community leaders from active participation. Consequently, the attitude of the school leadership and staff towards parental involvement could influence how much or how little parents are willing to participate in their children's classroom. When school leadership and teachers ignore or disengage the parent's contributions and abilities, the level of parental participation will diminish greatly (Anderson & Mike, 2007; Whannell and Allen, 2011).

Perceptions of Parental Involvement in Urban Schools

Establishing relationships is critical in the African American community. There is the African proverb that says "It takes a village to raise a child." Raising children is a community initiative, as everyone is invested in the advancement of the children that are reared in the community. The community is involved in the protection of the children on the streets, keeping them away from the drug pushers, sex predators, gang bangers, and dream killers. Furthermore, school leaders in urban communities must establish relationships not just with the parent, but with the community in an effort to foster a culture of collaboration and partnership (Darling- Hammond, 2014). Students in urban communities are often plagued with rigorous challenges that make their school experiences meaningless and devalued (Milner & Lomotey, 2014) and (Alameda-Lawson

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& Lawson, 2016). To tell the truth, most schools in urban communities lack the ability to elevate African American children in poverty academically, socially or emotionally Lawson, (2016).

Berkowitz et al., (2017) conducted a recent study using data from the first major statewide survey of parents in California, drawn from the California School Parent Survey (N = 15,829). This study examined parental perceptions of school climate, school problems, and school encouragement of parental involvement. The findings question the roles that schools, and federal, state, and local policymakers play in supporting active school involvement of parents and families from non-dominant ethnicities in the community. An ANOVA test was used to compare the parents' perceptions of school problems by students' grade levels (p. 11). Scheffe's post hoc comparisons revealed that middle school and high school parents indicated the highest levels of school problems. Lower levels of school problems were indicated by parents of elementary school students, and parents of kindergarten students indicated the fewest school problems. Findings revealed that parents of all socio-economic-status (SES) were similar in their positive perceptions of issues concerning school climate (P. 16).

Another recent study conducted by Jaynes (2017) explored research methods and data analysis plan for the meta-analysis on the relationship between parental involvement and academic outcomes for Latino students. This meta-analysis examined the relationship between parental involvement in Latino youth and kindergarten to college freshman school student achievement (p. 6). This meta-analysis addressed:

(a) was there is a statistically significant relationship between parental

involvement in Latino youth and kindergarten to college student achievement?

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(b) Did the effects of parental involvement differ by the age of the student?

(c) Do parental involvement programs help Latino students?

(d) Has the final analysis addressed the effects of specific expressions of parental involvement on Latino youth?

The results of this study indicate that the overall parental involvement variable yielded a statistically significant outcome of .52 ($p < .01$).

Stewart (2008) argued that the parents are able to model high expectations for students and display their allegiance for education and appropriate behavior for the learning community. However, urban communities have developed a reputation that fosters a culture where their current circumstances dictate their behavior (Jeynes, 2014). These behaviors are usually hostile in nature and often reflect barriers, which include stress, poverty, violence and crime (Gorski, 2008; Jeynes, 2014). These behaviors often cause school leaders to form opinions about urban parents' deficiencies, and their lack of decorum and ability to communicate appropriately (Gorski, 2008).

At the same time, the parents in urban communities also come to the table with their views of educators (Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013) and administrators. Many urban parents believe that their children are mishandled by administrators who do not resemble their own ethnicity (Gay, 2014). In addition, some also believe that African American administrators also display an elitist disposition and create an environment where urban parents are not wanted or valued (Munin, 2012).

Professional Development of School Principals

According to Manna (2015), school leaders have expressed benefits when prioritizing parental involvement. For many urban schools, parent engagement can be the missing link to student achievement at their schools. For this reason, many urban districts support school leaders in their approach when engaging parents. Despite new initiatives, district mandates, and curriculum development, principals in urban communities heavily weigh parental involvement as strong support in the educational process.

An analysis of five high poverty urban school districts' principal professional development calendars revealed that parental involvement was not a part of the top-seven values they instilled (Davis, 2012). The districts acknowledged the importance of parent involvement but ranked other factors above it. Some of those factors were student achievement, data analysis, new teacher professional development, teacher recruitment and retention, school funding, student attendance, and legal issues in education (Horng et al., 2009; Davis, 2012). These priorities leave limited time for principal professional development geared towards parent and community engagement (Davis, 2012). As per Rowland (2015), professional learning for principals should focus on factors such as (a) Equity, inclusiveness, and social justice, (b) Supporting and empowering teachers, and cultivating leadership among staff, and (c) Integrating the school with the community (p. 8). Strong principals must have opportunities throughout their careers to be trained, developed, and supported inconsistent ways that reflect modern, evidence-based standards. Principal professional development tends to be highly variable and often depends on where the principal works (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Darling-

Hammond et al., 2009). One source of this inconsistency is a lack of common standards (Horng et al., 2009; Darling- Hammond et al., 2009). Professional development offerings for principals often:

➢ Fail to link professional learning with school or district mission and needs.

➢ Are misaligned between program content and candidate needs.

➢ Do not leverage job-embedded learning opportunities, such as: applying new skills, learning in real situations, or working with a coach or team—to focus on a specific issue or problem of practice at the school (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, p. 3).

As school leaders strive to be lifelong learners, their ability to lead will only be cultivated based on the level of professional learning that is made available to them. Therefore, as parents seek opportunities to engage in the school, principals must possess the skills and knowledge to embrace parent participation with new and innovative ways to maximize parent contributions (National Association of Secondary School Principals [NASSP] and National Association of Elementary School Principals [NAESP, 2013).

Barriers to Parental Involvement

Munin (2012) argues that personal experiences, social class, socio-economic status, and ethnicity are major contributors on how involved parents will become in their child's school experience. Barriers that have made direct involvement difficult for low-income African American parents include transportation, lack of financial resources, and lack of knowledge that the school functions are occurring (Williams & Sanchez, 2011).

Parents care and are vested in their children's education. They noted that school events and meetings frequently occurred in the middle of the day or during their workday, and thus they could not leave their jobs to attend. While parents' employment status and conditions are generally recognized in the parental involvement literature as influential factors in their engagement with their children's education, only a few studies have engaged in an in-depth exploration of how parent's employment impact their engagement Williams & Sanchez (2011) and Mawhinney-Rhoads, & Stahler, (2006). Furthermore, rising financial burdens on many families, interlaced with growing employment insecurity, and worsening working conditions, may exacerbate parents' day-to-day challenges in meeting educators' expectations for engagement (Spera, Wentzel, & Matto, 2009) Barriers that further hinder parental involvement include life circumstances, conflict that arise regarding how they feel schools should operate and appropriate strategies when engaging with school staff (Paige & Witty, 2010). Often times, these factors play an enormous role in cultivating norms and expectations held by school staff related to parental involvement. When parents are unable to meet the basic needs of their children, they can feel inadequate or unworthy of effectively representing their children in the school (Allen, 2012; Cooper, 2009). Furthermore, Cooper (2009) observed that administrators can generalize assumptions about low-income parents, and parents of color often made the administrators to overlook or simplify "the complexity of parents' lives, demands, schedules, goals, values, and their relationships with them" (p. 381). In addition, some administrators are unfamiliar with the cultural challenges of African American children, thereby posing additional barriers to home-school partnerships

(Edim, 2016). This cultural gap may be exacerbated by the real and perceived prejudice based on their socioeconomic and racial status.

In the same vein, African American parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds can sometimes face ridicule from White teachers when it comes to playing an active participatory role in their child's education (Reynolds, 2010). Parents become frustrated causing them to be disenfranchised with the norms and culture of the school. Another common misperception amongst White educators is the belief that many of these parents do not value education or do not care about their children's schooling, because they are not physically active at school functions (Fan, Williams, Wolters, 2012). There is no doubt that parents are confronted daily with the challenges of poverty. The research presented only provides a snapshot of the impact of poverty as parents really want the best for their children (Milner, 2013). Low income means high risk for mental health problems, physical health problems, and family violence (Moore et al., 2009).

Overshadowed by the socio-economic circumstances, drugs, hunger, inequality, and homelessness, parents living in poverty elect not to be involved in their children's education but rather focus on just day to day survival; furthermore, parents often have to choose between feeding the family and attending school activities, participating in field trips, or other cost baring activities; these factors can serve as examples of the challenges that hinder parental involvement (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Guryan, Hurst, & Kearney (2008). Jiang, Granja, and Koball (2017) provide additional data to support that 85% of children live in low-income homes and 57% in poor families due to low educational attainment which impacts job opportunities to engage at the school. To further clarify, parents of urban children want to be involved in their children's education but frequently

experience ongoing barriers to direct involvement at their children's school (Vega, 2010). While there is a growing recognition of the need to make parental involvement opportunities more accessible to parents facing economic and/or employment constraints, in these efforts, the school rather than the parent is often the point of departure (Auebach, 2007; Baquedano- Lopez, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013).

There remains a great emphasis on traditional forms of participation which negates culturally diverse perspectives and deflects attention from the school's responsibility to establish effective parental involvement programs for marginalized groups (Whannell & Allen, 2011). However, when school staff and family members recognize and embrace new sources of related support to enhance communication to include technology, they are more likely to tap into those sources and support students collaboratively (Hilgendorf, 2012). A 1999 national poll conducted for the Public Education Network indicated that parents often "feel excluded from, or without a role in, their local school." Wong & Hughes (2007) note that, while 47% of those parents polled admitted that time was a barrier to their school's participation, even more (48%) felt that they were never given the opportunity to become involved or did not know how to initiate such involvement (Wong & Hughes, 2007). These numbers demonstrate a clear lack of communication between parents and schools.

Van Velsor & Orozco (2007) also speak of a communication problem that often exists between parents and teachers resulting in a decline in parental involvement as children progress through the educational system. "Many teachers believe that parents are not willing to become involved in their children's education and many are not aware of the opportunities" (Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007). In a like manner, Epstein (2009)

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highlighted the dependence of the schools on the institutional interactions that involve families such as parent-teacher associations, open houses, newsletters, or general invitations to a school play or activity, whereas individual interactions between a parent and teacher involved a specific student.

Summary. The literature scanned suggests factors that negatively impact parents from being involved in their children's education. Low educational attainment, incarceration, single parenting, lack of transportation, drugs, crime, homelessness, mental health, physical abuse, inequality, poverty, and racism are some of the barriers in urban communities that contribute to low parental involvement. Engaging parents in transparent conversations and providing resources will shift the trajectory of the current state of affairs to a collaborative, respectful, highly effective partnership where students excel socially, emotionally, and academically.

Community Influence on the School Culture

According to Ramharai et al. (2012), the manifestation of a lack of school discipline among urban students, such as use of foul language, chronic absence, and lateness, smoking, verbal aggression, use of mobile phones in school, bullying, class disruptions, stealing, inappropriate dress, damaging school property, hooliganism, alcohol, and drug abuse, and immoral acts are increasingly deteriorating an environment designed for teaching and learning. Beebeejaun-Muslum (2014) by the same token posits that the demise of school authority and parents, coupled with the influence of community influences, social media, technology abuse, along with a decrease in educator ability to address inappropriate behavior is creating a state of pandemonium and dysfunction.

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Additionally, schools with high rates of detentions, suspensions, expulsions, and law enforcement referrals are regarded by students, teachers, parents, and community stakeholders to be less safe than other schools (Osher, Poirier, Jarjoura, & Brown, 2014; Steinberg, Allensworth, & Johnson, 2014). In a like manner, students who have been suspended or expelled are more likely than students who are compliant to be pushed out of school and into the juvenile criminal justice system; this process is often referred to as the ''school-to-prison pipeline'' (Fabelo et al., 2011; Rausch, Skiba, & Simmons, 2004; Skiba et al., 2014). A further inquiry of urban culture and the detrimental effects of suspension have driven educators to consider alternatives to traditional suspension practices and policies. The U.S. Departments of Education (DOE, 2014) and Justice cohesively recommend that students should not only be held accountable for conduct but should also have opportunities for rehabilitation to increase their social and emotional capacity. However, this practice has fostered limited success as urban parents lack the skills and resources to provide the support necessary to reform the chronic behaviors identified by school teachers and administrators (DOE, 2014).

Furthermore, families who live in poor urban neighborhoods are more likely to face hardships, such as worse mental and physical health, long-term joblessness, welfare dependency, family disruption, social disorder and crime, and educational failure (Renzulli, Parrot, and Bettie, 2011). Mental and physical health, violence, drugs, and gang violence in urban communities may hinder stable social connections between the school, family, and the community. Additionally, low levels of parental involvement may lead to an increase in negative behaviors and outburst by the children who reside in these disadvantaged school neighborhoods (Renzulli et al., 2011). To promote equality, many

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school principals try to be *colorblind*. They try to look past the race and behavior of their students to avoid bias and create a refuge from the racially charged atmosphere outside the school (Noguera, 2007). However, school principals who achieve notable results with impoverished children possess the ability to embrace students' race and culture as central to their identity, and as assets to build on (Gershenson, Holt, & Papageorge, 2015). Accordingly, Hrabowski & Saunders (2015) concur that school principals play a critical role in addressing this paradigm by providing time and support for professional learning, modeling, and assets-based approach towards respect for students and families. Edinyang (2017) also asserts that for school principals to effectively educate underprivileged children, they must devote professional learning time to effective discipline that will optimize school culture and promote student achievement.

The gaps in the literature fail to provide an adequate definition for the courageous principals who demonstrate these characteristics, who are classified as fearless leaders. Such leadership requires openness to new ways of doing things, intense examination of one's belief systems, collaborative approach to decision making, and development of critical skills. The next section of the literature review presents an overview of different types of leadership.

Leadership that Transforms Urban Communities

According to Sloan (2015), the school principal should be cognizant of the seven "P's" that are associated with leadership: People, Planning, Personality, Performance, Proficiencies, Purpose, and Persuasion. Concurrently, Mathew (2015) also believes that the seven "F's" are also necessary for the development of an effective school leader:

Focus, Factual, Fairness, Flexible, Friendly, Fearless, and Futuristic. In the same vein,

Modiba (2015) courageously defends school leadership, specifically as an individual who

is passionate about the vision and mission for the school and maintains a posture of

outcomes and student achievement. A broader approach to school leadership is captured

by Gordon and Seashore-Louis (2009), who affirm that school leadership creates a

culture of shared decision-making, and effectively collaborates with all stakeholders in

the best interest of the students. Reynolds (2010) further conceptualizes that school

leadership encompasses transparency, flexibility, equity, and community. In all cases,

McDargh (2015) contends that effective school leaders set the atmosphere by uniting

staff in the pursuit of goals that match the leader's vision. This requires the school leader

to develop an intimate relationship with the students, parents, and the community.

According to Hollman and Yates (2012), when school leaders impact student's

perceptions, they are promoted from manager to a role model. The student can develop a

feeling of empowerment, value, and belonging which will yield accountability for one's

behavior and promote self-discipline (Glasser, 2009). In other words, Maxwell (2007)

believes that the true essence of school leadership is an influence. Influence transcends

young learners from a concrete state of being to an abstract pinnacle of possibility. More

importantly, Onorato (2013) asserts that effective school leaders possess the ability to

shift students who are disenfranchised to a proficient level of competency.

Mleckzo and Kington (2013) investigated two United Kingdom schools. Each of

the schools had relatively high proportions of disadvantaged students. The successful

principals used two-way communication and incorporated the ideas of parents and staff to

involve and help them feel included. The authors further argue that levels of parent

involvement in schools increase when principals actively embed a whole school vision that values the role of parents in their child's learning. It is also possible that principals who value parent engagement may be more likely to provide training opportunities for teaching staff to build their skills in working with parents, something that Australian teachers identified as their greatest professional development needs (Doecke et al., 2008). Clearly, there is still much to be learned about how principals foster parent-school partnerships, and what makes some principals more successful at this than others.

Transformational Leadership. Transformational leadership is one of the most popular models of leadership that has been advocated for success in the school improvement process and student achievement (Northouse, 2016). Transformational leadership has an unmistakable contemporary approach towards leadership; it prepares individuals to lead by challenging their capacity at a rate that is gradual, yet metamorphic (Moolenaar et al., 2010). In other words, Sergiovanni (2007) claims that transformational leaders are cultivated through a transparent and refined blueprint for change that focuses on increasing momentum and maximizing potential. When school leaders communicate the need for teacher leadership development, a culture of empowerment is established with a renewed sense of commitment towards the vision and mission of the school (Cohen et al., 2009). In particular, Stewart (2006) supports that transformational leadership is credited for its ability to impact teachers' perceptions of school conditions, their individual commitment to change, and a professional learning community that will shift the trajectory of student achievement from failure to proficiency (Goff, Goldring, & Bickman, 2014).

To further clarify, Finnigan and Stewart (2009) found that the characteristics associated with transformational leadership were most frequently evident in high performing schools, thereby giving credence to the assumption that transformational leadership is the most effective form of leadership. In a deeper dive into the literature, Cohen et al. (2009) reveal that transformational leadership is directly aligned to teachers' positive perceptions of their schools' climate of innovation. With this in mind, Bass & Riggio (2006) suspect that teacher perception of a principal's leadership style can also influence school climate in a positive manner.

By way of contrast, Vos et al. (2012) determined that low staff morale can lead to ineffectiveness and a contaminated culture. Monitoring the climate of the school is an important attribute in developing strategies for management improvement and restructuring of an organization's overall health. The authors underscore the importance of measuring organizational health in order to maintain positive work performance. In any event, a worthwhile, positive school climate encourages creativity and accelerates learning that is necessary for students to become productive citizens and valued contributors in a democratic society (Moolenaar et al. 2010).

Collaborative Leadership. Under a collaborative approach to school leadership, principals must shift their thinking from power to partner (Edwards & Smits, 2008). This conversion can be a heavy lift for some school leaders as they are always viewed as an individual with authority (Northouse (2016). As a matter of fact, Llopis (2017) further supports that principals can improve teachers' perceptions of school climate by exhibiting collaborative decision-making and attempting to remove obstacles that prohibit teachers from focusing on instruction. In fact, Weber (2009) further contends that effective

collaborative leadership will promote a sense of trust, openness, consistency, and respect. Needless to say, teachers, parents, and community members will stay focused, listen to each other, willing to compensate for each other (Harris, 2005).

A school culture that embraces collaborative leadership fosters authentic relationships, as staff will see the school leader as an advisor and supporter (Rhodes, Camic, Milburn, & Lowe, 2009). In order to sustain a collaborative approach to leadership, Llopis (2017) suggests that school leaders should actively listen and advance the ideas of others. Even more important, collaborative leadership should always be reciprocal, inclusive of good communication skills, and open to feedback (Llopis, 2017). The power of shared governance is critical in shaping the school's blueprint for success (Carmichael, Collins, Emsell, & Haydon, 2011). Besides that, collaborative relationships can also be established with students through project-based learning, as this will provide an awareness of the subject (Wagner, 2010). This can be accomplished through cooperative learning teams across grade levels and teachers.

Distributed Leadership. Urban school districts are steadily becoming a multi-layered complex system as it relates to vision, organizational progression, strategic management, and leadership (O'Brein, 2015). As a matter of fact, Naicker and Mestry (2013) found that dictatorial styles of leadership, hierarchical structures, and non-participative decision-making made adoption of distributive leadership difficult. Furthermore, school leaders have functioned in isolation and have made executive decisions, without input from stakeholders (Gorder, 2015). In an effort to promote a more collective efficacy, Hartley (2010) suggest that school leaders redistribute power authority and leadership. Smithgall (2016) speaking about this, has recommended the

restoration of distributed leadership where collaborative conversations are valued and input from community integrated. Distributive leadership has been increasingly used in the discourse about school leadership in the last few years and is currently receiving much attention and growing empirical support (Hartley, 2010). In like manner, Bawany (2015) further concludes that distributed leadership can strategically challenge assumptions about the nature and scope of leadership activity as it re-conceptualizes leadership in terms of the leadership of the "we" rather than the "me." Kim (2016) maintains that distributed leadership concentrates on engaging expertise wherever it exists within the organization rather than seeking this only through a formal position or role. By the same token, it provides for opportunities of engagement as the principal may coach partners in best practice strategies, without swaying the individual's position or belief (Bawany, 2015).

Distributed leadership readily fits into the concept of a new science of leadership because it establishes boundaries, and also empowers all stakeholders to use their creativity to capture the imagination of those in education (Hartley, 2010). A more constricted explanation supports this as an evolution in the field of education, as the new science of leadership continues to emerge (Barshad & Hudson, 2017). Like all other leadership terminology, it is a challenge to locate an agreed upon definition of distributed leadership because it encompasses an array of unique attributes. According to Ritchie & Woods (2007), distributed leadership provides opportunities for collaborative engagement in the development of comprehensive frameworks to address partnerships, academic deficits, social-emotional health of students, school discipline, school climate and culture, and district-wide initiatives. It is used in many facets and describes a

universal approach to school leadership that is respected and conducive to school improvement.

      Spiritual Leadership. The examination of spirituality and its relationship to the workplace can lead to a discussion about spiritual leadership and its impact on school improvement. Fry and Slocum (2008) offer further insight into the concept stating that

> spiritual leadership, therefore, requires 'doing what it takes' through faith in a clear, compelling vision which produces a sense of calling – that part of spiritual well-being that gives one a sense of making a difference and therefore, that one's life has meaning. (p. 90)

This statement relates to transforming the individual and then, transforming the organization. The root word of "*administrator is minister,*" a word that takes personal power out of the leadership equation and replaces it with service. Ideally, ministers work on behalf of others in an effort to achieve the greater good (Orr, Berg, Shore, & Mercer, 2008). They are mediators, people who deliberately intervene between the individuals or group, and the environment. Schools need ministers (i.e. people who look out for the common good, are devoted to service to the school, and have a moral influence) to improve conditions for learning and teaching (Orr, Berg, Shore, & Mercer, 2008). In some cases, mediation involves political and community advocacy. In other instances, it involves putting the right people and resources to support the school's vision and mission. In all cases, it requires an intimate knowledge of the teacher, student, and community needs and is often done behind-the-scenes with little to no gratitude or recognition (Orr, Berg, Shore, & Mercer, 2008).

Conclusion. According to Epstein (2009), when parents, school, and community work in partnership there is an alignment that prepares the child for success. However, when one of those spheres detaches from the model, there is a conflict within the community that often produces negative outcomes. An area of paucity in defining parental involvement may arise when the expectations of the school principal conflict with the barriers of the parents in the community. One of the possible reasons for this gap in the literature can be attributed to the fact that parents often communicate with the classroom teacher more than the principal. Furthermore, school principals are currently operating under a model of parental involvement that is not aligned to the current challenges that they are facing in their schools as it relates to parents, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions. This results in an even greater opportunity to investigate parental involvement and add to the existing body of knowledge.

Summary

This chapter has presented the relevant thematic literature in the substantive area. This chapter provided an overview of the context in which this study was investigated with discussions of parental involvement, barriers to parental involvement, and types of school leadership. Identifying the barriers as it relates to parental involvement has presented an opportunity to further justify the need for a new model in shifting the paradigm towards a more collaborative parent centered environment.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the methodology and research design used in this study. More specifically, this chapter will assist in clarifying the "what and how" of the research that was conducted in this study. This qualitative study followed a Straussian grounded-theory design to identify emerging categories and generate a substantive theory as this method allows for review of literature at the beginning of research. In qualitative research, the goal is to understand the viewpoint of the participants in their natural setting, and the influence perspective has on participants' actions in a specific setting (Hatch, 2002).

The Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in qualitative research is important in that the "inquirer is typically involved in a sustained and intensive experience with the participants" (Creswell, 2014, p. 187). Thus, the researcher becomes the instrument. According to Patton (1999), the researcher must have personal experience with, and intense interest in, the issue under study. The researcher has been a principal in the elementary school in the school district for nine years. The research site was chosen because the researcher sought to examine a local problem that directly influences parents' and students' academic success in the school district. As an administrator, the researcher had a strong interest in understanding how the term, *parental involvement*, is perceived by the stakeholders, parents, and administrators. Parental involvement remains a topic of discussion amongst stakeholders in the state and nationally.

During the parent focus group. The host principal removed herself from the interview space to allow parents the opportunity to be candid and honest as they responded to the questions. As an administrator of nine years, the researcher has had his share of challenges with these parents. He wanted to hear from the parents as a researcher and not as a principal. His attire which was a sweat suit, sneakers, baseball cap, and a book bag, was strategic in presenting a blank slate for the participants to see him in the role of the researcher. The researcher's professional experience and preparation informed the study and the data at the conceptual level. The researcher has had his character assassinated, endured explicative abuse, threatened with physical harm, and has been reported by way of the heat ticket system to the central office. These actions have frustrated the researcher and have caused the researcher to question his decision to work in an urban district. The bias arising out of his own work experience was checked by constant comparative analysis, member reflections, triangulation of data sources, and peer debriefing. By embracing the challenges that parents discussed during the focus group, along with violence that parents encountered in their communities on a daily basis, in conjunction with the conversations with colleagues as the researcher drove through the communities in which the schools were located, the researcher became empathetic to the current state of affairs of the parents in the school district. Despite the researcher's bias, it is both the personal and professional experience of the researcher that provoked the inception of this project which has added value and girth to the creation of theory generation.

Rationale for the Grounded Theory Approach

According to Corbin and Strauss (2007), grounded theory is a design of inquiry from sociology in which the researcher derives a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of the participants. This process involves using multiple stages and sources of data collection, and the refinement, and interrelationship of categories of information (Creswell, 2014). For the purpose of this study, data were collected using a semi-structured interview approach with principals, district staff, and focus group with parents of children in K-5 elementary schools. Additional data collection included document reviews of parent workshop meetings, school-wide activities, climate surveys, School Family Council, and Parent Teacher Organization sessions.

Despite of the variety of programs used to address low parent involvement in the school district, the researcher wanted to understand the reasons from the perspectives of principals, parents, and FCE in order to develop a theory that may explain the existing conditions and barriers that resulted in the phenomenon of low parental involvement. This supports the selection of the Straussian grounded-theory design (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The grounded theory method allows for the research questions to evolve and change over the course of the study (Creswell, 2007) and for the use of multiple data sources. Grounded theory allows for the proposal of causality by looking at the specific process and explains the interaction of various variables involved in the process (Merriam, 2009).

A Description of the Participants and the Research Settings

  This study was conducted in 10 elementary schools of an urban school district in north-central Maryland during the months of July and August. The researcher's journey through the streets of the neighborhoods in which these schools were located, was both insightful and alarming. Upon the agreement of the 10 school leaders who volunteered to participate in the study, the researcher ventured out to make a connection not just with his colleagues in the field but also with the staff in those schools that embrace their work in these high poverty, high crime, broken urban communities on a daily basis. The researcher was welcomed with opened arms by the participating principals. The physical description of most of the schools is typical of most urban schools in the United States. The researcher was confronted by homeless individuals begging for spare change, and young children between the ages of six and 15 attempting to wash the researchers' windshield for a small donation. While approaching one of the schools in the neighborhood, the researcher observed a drug transaction taking place in the alley. It had been 90 to 106 degrees over the past few days, and everyone was out on the streets, fire hydrants were blasting across residential roads, and children were seen on almost every corner selling bottled waters, and other beverages with no observable adult supervision.

  One consistent observation was the absence of grocery stores within walking distance of the living quarters of most of the families in the school communities that are represented in this research project. There were many corner stores or delis, chicken box bodegas, pizza parlors, and Chinese food establishments. The neighborhood was developing as new construction was noticed in most of the surrounding areas. All of the

schools had adequate parking and a playground. Some of the schools were on major city streets, while others were tucked away in residential communities. Three of the schools were hosting summer learning sessions. Some were preparing for renovations as a part of the 21st century school improvement project, and others were re-organizing and preparing for summer cleaning in anticipation of the upcoming school year.

This experience reminded the researcher of the huge sacrifice school leaders makes daily, despite the tumultuous responsibility of shifting urban communities. For this reason, the "Fruits of the Spirit" was selected as the theme to name the participating principals in the sample, in an effort to maintain confidentiality. It was evident that it takes an individual who possesses these characteristics and traits to embrace these broken communities and serves despite the challenges.

Data Collection Procedures

Upon IRB approval, data were collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews with 10 principals in an urban school district in north-central MD. Additionally, an interview was conducted in the office of a representative from the Family and Community Engagement Office of the school district. Finally, data collection concluded with the parent focus group, and document reviews from the principals and the school district. This study also used field notes generated during this experience to assist with the validation of the findings

The Participants

According to the school district website data gathered for the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 academic school years, climate surveys identified a decline of parent

engagement. Ten traditional urban elementary schools were selected for this study. A breakdown of the schools can be found in Table 1. The table provides the ethnicity, years of service, years as principal, and education of each participant. Furthermore, a fictitious name was assigned to each school to ensure confidentiality. Location was removed from the study to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. Purposive and convenience sampling was done. An email was sent to 15 elementary school principals in the school district inviting them to participate in the study. Ten principals volunteered to participate in the study. Pseudonyms were used for the participating schools and the principals.

Table 1.

Principal Participants

School Name (Fictitious Name Assigned)	Ethnicity	Gender	Years of Service	Years as a School Principal	Highest Degree Earned
Love Academy	AA	F	18	5	Masters
Peace Academy	AA	M	22	7	Two Masters
Joy Academy	AA	F	18	7	Masters
Goodness Academy	H	M	8	6	Masters
Gentleness Academy	AA	F	26	9	Masters
Hope Academy	AA	M	18	1	Masters
Kindness Academy	AA	M	22	4	Two Masters
Long Suffering Academy	AA	M	18	2	Masters
Meekness Academy	AA	F	22	8	Masters
Self-Control Academy	AA	M	11	4	Masters

The sample consisted of six male principal participants: five African Americans and one Hispanic. There were four African American female participants. All of the participants have earned Master's degrees and two participants have both earned two Master's degrees. Two participants are currently pursuing their Doctorate degrees and two of the male participants have received additional certifications or recognized awards for excellence in leadership. One participant had less than ten years of service to the Baltimore City Public School System, and nine had at least ten or more years of service. In the role of a school principal, five participants had less than five years of experience in the position, and the other five participants had at least five years or more experience in the position. One participant will reach the 10-year anniversary marker as a Baltimore City Public School Principal in the coming year.

Protocol and Procedures for Conducting the Interviews

The researcher was equipped with an audio recorder, laptop, notepad, pens, and individual folders in order to capture the full experience of each participating principal, a representative from the district Family and Community Engagement Office (FCE), and participating parents of the focus group. The following protocol was established for conducting the interviews:

1. The study was carefully and explicitly explained to each participant by the researcher.

2. The informed consent form was placed in front of each participant to read while the researcher reviewed the document in its entirety.

3. The participants were asked for clarifying questions and to sign the consent form (see Appendix A).

4. Each of the participating principals was asked to select a fruit. The researcher explained to the participants that the fruit represented an attribute aligned to the "Fruits of the Spirit" and that they would be referred to as that fruit for the purpose of the interview. These fruit names will be used as pseudonyms in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

5. The researcher explained that the interview would be taped and later transcribed.

6. A copy of the questions was placed on the conference table in front of each participant. Participants were informed that the researcher would probe or use additional questions (as desired) that may not appear in front of them.

The interviews began with a collection of demographic information which included a) gender; b) race; c) number of years in the position; d) highest degree earned, and e) certification status. Each interview began by defining the terms followed by the research questions. The participants were given the interview schedule (see Appendix B). The researcher prepared an interview guide and later modified it during the process of data collection (see a sample in Appendix C).

Data Sources

Upon receiving permission from the University's IRB, permission also had to be obtained from the school district. This study used a field research approach inclusive of document reviews, interviews and a focus group. This study also used field notes generated during the researcher's observations to assist with validating the findings. The various methods (listed above) used in this study are discussed in this section.

The Invitation. The initial scheduling of interviews was done via email with all of the participating principals and district office staff. The parent focus group was

scheduled at the school of one of the participating principals. In an effort to generate participation for the parent focus group, participating principals posted fliers on the bulletin board in the main lobby and on the school web page inviting them to participate in the study.

Principal Interviews. These interviews were conducted in the principal's office. It was July and the temperatures were excruciating. School buildings lacking air conditioning were indeed hotter than the temperatures outdoors. All of the principals provided the researcher with a conference table where lunch was carefully placed with enough room to set up for the interview. All of the principals informed their secretaries that they were not to be interrupted during the interview process. The researcher provided a double crab cake lunch, with a grilled chicken Caesar salad, chocolate chip cookies, and a beverage. The same courtesy was extended to the district representative in an effort to ensure equity towards all district participants.

District Office Interviews. Interview at the district office was held in the Family and Community Engagement Office (FCE) conference room. The conference room displayed an agenda with meeting notes that targeted strategic actions to engage parent participation for the upcoming school year. This was a wonderful curser in provoking a rich and meaningful conversation around the research topic. Despite the fact that the conference room was located at the center of an open space area, partitioned with numerous cubicles, the district representative placed a do not disturb sign on the glass door to limit any distractions during the interview.

The conversation with the district representative was enlightening, personal, and engaging. The FCE representative responded to the following questions:

1. From your perspective, what do you identify as the major barriers that hinder parental participation in schools?

2. What are some of the strategies utilized by the Family and Community Engagement Office in addressing the barriers associated with low parental involvement?

3. How does the FCE office describe their role in supporting the school leader, when low levels of parent involvement remain a challenge?

Additional probing questions accompanied the research questions in the hope of securing a holistic approach to the role and operation of this office, and its perspective on the barriers that face urban parents and school principals in the school system.

Parent Focus Group. Focus groups are facilitated group discussions and constitute elements of both participant observation, and individual interviews, while also maintaining their own uniqueness as a distinctive research method (Liamputtong, 2011). A focus group was conducted with the parents of the schools represented in the study. A flyer was designed by the researcher and distributed to each principal participant. The parent focus group was held on the campus of a participating principal in the study. The focus group was held on a Saturday in August to accommodate working parents and the principal hosting the activity. Parent participants in the focus group were not the parents of students from the researcher's school. The hosting principal was requested to leave the room to make the parents feel comfortable during the discussion. The parent focus group was attended by 10 African American females, ranging from age 19-31. The participants were all excited about the project (see Appendix D for a sample of the flyer).

According to Kreuger and Casey (2015), focus group participants are usually selected because of the shared social or cultural experiences, or shared concerns related to

the study's focus. As a current school leader, the researcher understood the challenge of getting parents to participate in activities, especially on a Saturday. For this reason, the researcher arranged a buffet for the participating parents. The menu included chicken tenders, barbeque meatballs, egg rolls, bow-tie pasta, mini stuffed shells, crab dip, veggie tray, a variety of drinks, chocolate chip and oatmeal cookies, mini cheesecakes, and tiramisu.

The first parent to arrive was awarded a gift bag of spa essentials from Bath Body and Beyond. She did a dance that made me laugh. She stated, "I wanted one of these baskets for a long time but they were too expensive. I am going to keep this locked in my bedroom because it just smells too good to share." As she was celebrating her gift basket, the room began to fill up until the researcher achieved the goal of 10 participants. The personalities of the participants were friendly and engaging. The atmosphere was positive and engaging and the introductory activity was humorous. For the opening activity, the researcher did an African role call chant: 'Shabooya roll call.' "Shabooya Roll Call" is a rap or cheer that always begins with the refrain "shabooya sha sha shabooya roll call" or a similar line. The earliest documented use of the word "shabooya" that I have found is Spike Lee's 1996 movie *Get on the Bus*.

Establishing protocol and informed consent was received in a very positive manner. However, the participants unanimously elected not to be audio recorded. Additionally, the participants denounced being referenced or acknowledged in the research project. The researcher opened the buffet for the parent participants to further create a more relaxed conversation. The researcher gathered a data chart to capture participant responses and began to engage in the conversation. During the parent focus

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group, one of the parents volunteered to take notes. Additionally, the researcher was assisted by his friend for note-taking.

To ensure equity amongst all the participants, equity sticks were distributed to each participant and it was explained that each individual would be guaranteed an opportunity to speak. Upon the response of each individual, the researcher retrieved the equity stick, and redistributed them after each participant had an opportunity to respond to each question. This procedure was adopted to assist with the managing of the conversation, and facilitating a robust experience for the participants. During the focus groups, one of his colleagues and a parent volunteered to take notes so that he could focus on listening and reviewing the interview questions, if needed.

Document Reviews. The researcher reviewed all the documents that could provide more information about the research focus of this study. According to Blomberg and Volpe (2015), "document reviews are another primary source of qualitative data. The term document is broadly defined to include an assortment of written records, visual data, artifacts, and even archival data" (p. 157). The authors further support that some documents may be created at the researcher's request, and some can be created independently of the research study thereby confirming insights gained through other methods of data collection. The documents reviewed were the School Performance Plan (SPP) which is the strategic plan that guides the school's academic, social, and emotional focus for the school year. The current school performance plan was analyzed to gain knowledge of the activities used to engage parents in the educational process. The plan is driven by the data and focuses on improving school outcomes for the year. The state assessment Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career scores and

goals are described on SPP. In this document, school suspension and referral data are also presented, along with identifying the roles and resources needed to address the behaviors of the students. These are inclusive of the role of the school social worker and psychologist in supporting the emotional and psychological needs of the students. This document also includes the differentiated strategies to meet the needs of every student identified with special needs.

The researcher also reviewed Back to School Night agendas, sign-in sheets, and feedback forms. The participant principals also shared agendas from Literacy Night, and Math Night. These documents were used to triangulate and validate data collected from other sources. The school-wide engagement documents were also analyzed for consistency between the artifacts found in the minutes of the School. Researchers supplement participants' observations, interviewing, and other data by gathering and analyzing documents produced in the course of everyday events. As such, the analysis of documents is potentially rich in portraying the values and beliefs of participants in the setting (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). The school binders were reviewed to capture parent attendance at the school-wide meetings, the agenda items addressed by the school leader, parent feedback identifying the concerns, issues or contributions to the school vision and mission. These documents helped in gaining an understanding about the problem being studied.

Field Notes. Bloomberg and Volte (2015) state that field notes as a part of qualitative research are materials gathered and compiled on the site of the research study during the course of the investigation. The researcher took the time to document the elements of the surrounding area of each school. There were streets where abandoned

homes faced many of the schools. The streets lacked speed bumps to slow down traffic

during arrival and dismissal. There was no recreational center in sight for students to play

or receive additional academic support. Most of the school buildings were outdated and

lacked appropriate air conditioning. The field notes also captured intimate moments when

the researcher documented the emotions of the parents, family community engagement

office and, principals. The researcher maintained notebooks for the purpose of

maintaining field notes and reflections. These notes facilitated referencing and cross-

referencing. The notebooks collectively were secured with each transcribed interview and

the informed consent in a locked folder. This procedure was implemented for each

interview (see Appendix E for a sample of the field notes).

Data Analysis

The data analysis in a grounded theory involves three types of coding: open

coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Coding denotes "the analytic process through

which data are fractured, conceptualized, and integrated to form theory" (Strauss &

Corbin, 1998, p. 3). During the coding process, the transcripts were read and re-read as

recommended by Glaser and Strauss (1967), eyeing closely for words and phrases that

would allow "substantive concepts and hypotheses to emerge first, on their own" (p. 34).

Theorizing is involved in all the steps of data analysis. Broad groups of similar concepts

or common themes were used to generate a theory, which is the ultimate goal of

grounded theory (Creswell, 2014). The objective is to generate a theory from the data,

modify existing theory, or extend existing theory. Data were analyzed by using "a

systematic stepwise analysis procedure" (Bloomberg et al., 2015, p.193). According to

the authors, this process

> ➢ is a repository for the findings as well as a tool for analysis, with careful
>
> development,
>
> ➢ provides categories that are directly tied to the research question(s) that must be
>
> established,
>
> ➢ provides descriptors for each category based on the literature, pilot study, findings
>
> and/or personal "hunches",
>
> ➢ provides opportunities for the researcher to refine and revise the conceptual
>
> framework as the study progresses. (p.131)

It should be noted that the repositories that Bloomberg and Volpe speak of are a means of

organizing and collecting data. The researcher viewed this method of coding, collecting,

and analyzing data as being closely aligned with the goals outlined for grounded theory.

The stepwise process was instrumental in assisting the researcher with the development

of logical coding schemes and the tool for depositing data. The transcripts were read and

re-read to become familiar with the data. The researcher listened to audio recordings for

one week during his regular commute to work. Additional questions focusing on

leadership, leadership styles, and professional development were created to support the

development of a new theory in the context of parental involvement, principal

perspectives, and experiences. The emergent categories were directly aligned with the

research questions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). The roadmap for the process of

qualitative data analysis as described by Bloomberg and Volpe (2015) is described in

Figure 1.
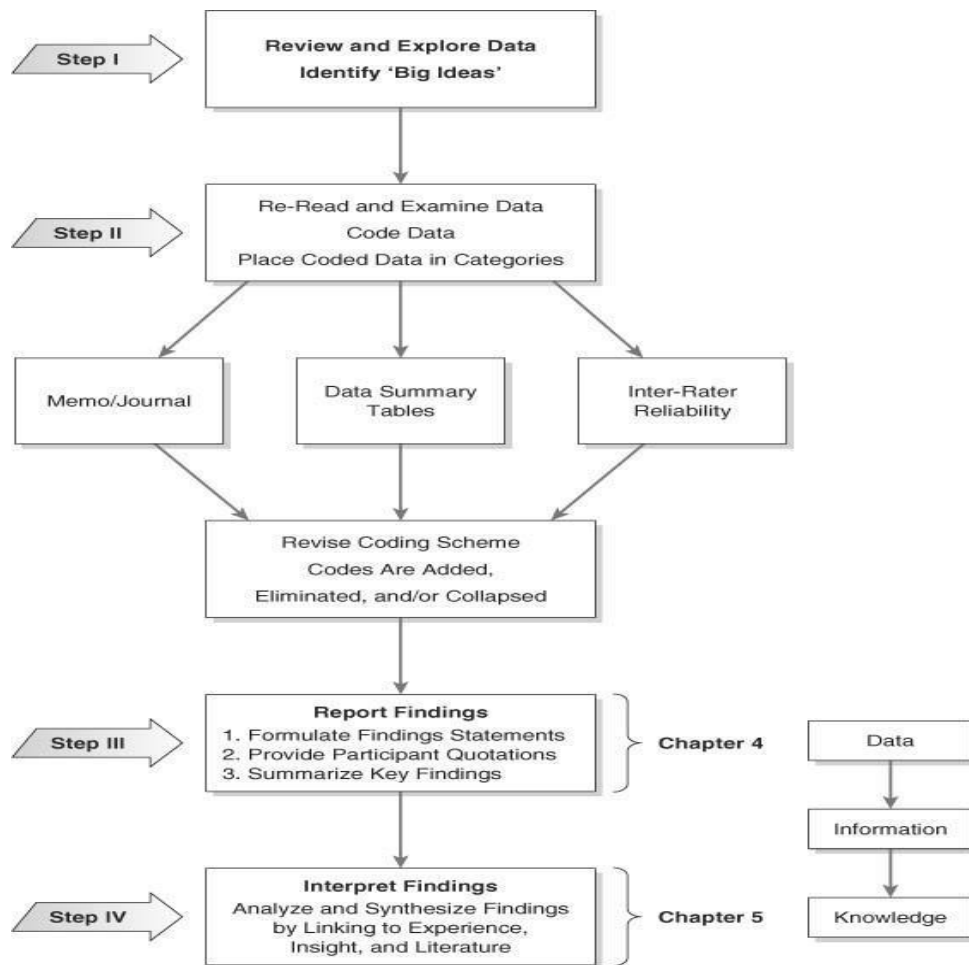
Figure 1. Roadmap for the Process of Qualitative Data Analysis: An Outline (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2015).

The constant comparative analysis method was used to compare the segments of

the transcribed data from the data sources in order to determine similarities and

differences (Creswell, 2007). Data were then manually grouped according to similar

themes, and patterns in the data. According to Merriam (2009), as relationships are

formed between categories, a core category is emerged, and then grounded theory can be

formed (Merriam, 2009). The researcher employed color coding of transcripts in order to

simplify this process. No qualitative software was used. The Coding Legend/Scheme is
presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Coding Schema

Life Issues Variables: (Assigned a highlight color of purple)

COM1-Crime and Violence

COM2 -Unemployment

Beliefs Variables: (Assigned a highlight color of blue)

VAL 1 -Academics

VAL 2 -Social Influence

Professional Development Variables: (Assigned a highlight color of green)

PRI 1 -Transparency

PRI 2 -Accountability

Codes:

Community

Values

Priorities

Themes:

Life Issues

Beliefs

Professional Development

Data analysis was an ongoing process that required thoughtful judgments about

what was significant and meaningful in the data. Through coding, one can reduce the data

and create groupings, subgroupings, categories, patterns, connections, and themes (Miles,

Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Interpretation required more conceptual and integrative

thinking than data analysis alone. This involves identifying and abstracting important

understandings from the detail and complexity of the findings (Bloomberg & Volpe,

2015). What you have seen in the field, and what you have heard participants say all

come together into an account that has meaning for the participants, for you, and for the

reader (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2015).

Trustworthiness: Addressing Credibility, Dependability, Transferability,

Confirmability, and Subjectivity.

  Credibility refers to whether the participants' perceptions match up with the

researcher's portrayal of them. In other words, has the researcher accurately represented

what the participants think, feel and do? The researcher used "peer debriefing" to

enhance the accuracy. The researcher sought the support of fellow colleagues to share

ideas, get input and transcribe data. Triangulation of data was achieved by using multiple

data sources. Thick descriptions have been presented in chapter 4 to add to the

creditability. A sample of debriefing form is given in Appendix F.

  Dependability refers to whether one can track the processes and procedures used

to collect and interpret the data. To ensure dependability, the researcher asked colleagues

to code several interviews, thereby establishing inter-rater reliability. This process of

checking reduces the potential of bias of one single researcher collecting and analyzing

the data (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2015). Dependability was also achieved by triangulation

of data and memoing.

  Transferability refers to the fit or match between the research and other contexts

as judged by the researcher. The researcher sought to discuss the strategies/criteria for

evaluating the trustworthiness of the study, displayed sensibility, and sensitivity to the

used literature to support statements (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2015). Triangulation was achieved by using multiple data sources. Frequent debriefing sessions were held between the researcher and the participants to ensure trustworthiness.

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others. To ensure this quality, the researcher used member checking by asking participants to review transcriptions and sign a tracking form to ensure the accuracy of the content to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings. Thus, triangulation and member checking were used to add credibility and trustworthiness to this study.

Subjectivity refers to the quality of being based on or influenced by personal feelings, ideas or opinions. As a current charter school principal in the Baltimore City Public Schools System, the utility of conducting interviews with principals with whom the researcher collaborates professionally and personally is critical and has the potential to impact the research. Only principals of traditional schools were invited to participate in the study. These principals are governed by the district, adhere to all district procedures and protocols. As a charter school principal, the researcher is governed by an oversight board and has no interaction with traditional principals in the Baltimore City Public School system. In addition, to ensure that participants are accommodated and comfortable in their own school environment, the researcher conducted the interviews on their campuses and provided refreshments. Taking this additional step fostered a comfortable, personal setting and will increase the likelihood of an honest discussion during the interview process. Document reviews and parent meetings also took place on the campus of the participants with no input from the researcher. Furthermore, theoretical

sampling enabled the researcher to decide what data to collect next and where to find

them, in order to develop a theory as it emerges.

Summary

This chapter explained the research design, the data collection and analysis

procedures. Chapter 4 of this study presents the findings from all the data sources. The

researcher supports the analysis of the data with relevant quotations from the interviews

in the next chapter. This is followed by the summary and discussion of the findings in

chapter 5 followed by the description of the grounded theory, new model to address the

barriers, recommendations, and the conclusion in chapter 6.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

"The accountability of a city school leader is overwhelming"

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of elementary school principals, parents, and district office staff as it relates to promoting parental involvement in the educational process of children in order to develop a theory addressing the barriers of low parent participation in an urban school district in north-central Maryland. Epstein Model (2009) served as a useful lens and tool for deeper understanding of themes and categories that emerged in this study. The richness of the descriptions included in the study are presented by way of "thick descriptions," which according to Bloomberg and Volpe (2015), give the discussion an element of shared experience. Thick description is the vehicle for communicating to the reader a holistic and realistic picture which is necessary for judgments of transferability.

Research Questions (RQ)

The overarching research question that guided this study was: How do elementary school principals, parents, and district office staff explain the barriers that hinder effective family engagement at their schools?

Sub-questions (SQ) to support the overarching question were:

1. How do elementary school principals, parents, and district office staff define parent involvement?

2. How do Family and Community Engagement Office and parents perceive their role in supporting elementary school principals and promoting parent participation in the schools?

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3. How do elementary school principals, parents, and district office staff describe and explain the barriers obstructing parental involvement in school and district activities?

4. How do principals perceive their leadership styles?

5. How do parents describe effective leadership as it relates to engaging parents in the educational process of their children?

In this chapter, the researcher addresses the research questions. Relevant quotes from the interviews and focus group discussion are presented to support the analysis. The overarching research question focused on the perceptions and experiences of the participants as it relates to parental involvement in order to understand the barriers obstructing parent participation in the education of their children. Additionally, findings from the FCE representative interview and document reviews are presented. The purpose of data collection from multiple sources was an effort to triangulate data. Establishing creditability and avoiding bias was of importance to the researcher as he is also a current school leader in the district. The findings are presented in the order of the research sub-questions.

Perceptions about Parental Involvement

When asked how they define and perceive parental involvement, all the participants, including parents, demonstrated a common understanding of the term 'parental involvement' in the education of the students in the district with little variations.

The principals had a broad spectrum of perspectives as to what parental involvement entailed. Principals saw both positive and negative parental involvement as

involvement that focused on the advancement of their children. The responses are in inclusive of the following:

Perceptions of the principals. Response from Peace Academy principal beautifully summarizes the common understanding among the participant principals:

> One in which the parent makes sure that the student arrives to school every day, and on time, ready, and prepared for instruction, ensuring that they go to bed on time, making sure that all home assignments are completed. Some like to volunteer for events, after-school activities or help with the supplies.

The principal from Long Suffering Academy shared his perception of the term parental involvement. He shared:

Parental engagement is any interaction with the parent and it is two-way. It's not just the school reaching out to the parent but the parent reaching to the school as well, expressing concerns, asking about the child's progress, or inquiring about what may be going on, and they are opened to feedback from the school as well or open to providing feedback to the school.

According to Principal Meek, "a parent is one who is willing to be a part of the village, who will support another parent's child in the absence of that parent." The principal from Goodness Academy expressed frustration when asked this question after giving a similar overview of his interpretation on parental involvement:

> Parental involvement is when parents are visible in the school building. They are visible at parent-teacher conferences or volunteering in the classroom. The fact is that when parents call and complain about the issues that they find important that is involvement. They might not always communicate it in a way that is desirable, but they are involved. They may have a complaint… about a teacher, substitute, or a bullying incident.

He further said:

> Unfortunately, involvement is often centered around student behavior. Parents are usually unavailable or visible when there are academic concerns. But if you say something to the child that the parent does not like…then you can usually expect a phone call or a visit.

Even though the researcher involved the principals in the conversation focused on perceptions, these responses provided the impetus for deep exploration and hinted towards the barriers and frustration for low Parental Involvement. Another principal echoed, "one or two dozen taking up all of your time." adding that, it happens with the teachers as well in the school as students do not understand the importance of following routines and procedures hinting at the home influence.

A consistency was noticed in the participants' responses regarding parents more on the complaining side rather than participating in a constructive way and taking more interest in academics. Principal Self Control shared, "There is a culture ingrained in the in the parents of this district, if they don't like something, they go straight to the school board because you work for me." The principals' responses revealed that the school board met on the second Tuesday of every month and provided a window of opportunity for open comments to the parents to air their concerns regarding school policy, student performance or leadership behaviors. The board heard complaints and then launched an investigation. Furthermore, with the implementation of the "HEAT TICKET" process, parents can call the district office and file a complaint against the school leader/ This complaint was logged in the district portal and sent to the school leader's supervisor and the school leader for a response within twenty-four hours. The parents had an opportunity to share their perceptions as to what parental involvement meant to them. The responses also had a wide range of insight. The following responses were captured:

Perceptions of the parents. The parent focus group responses were documented by the Principal intern who is pursuing the principalship upon completion of her one-year residency with the researcher. Parents had similar responses that were aligned to the principals. The only difference was they were not able to articulate well everything in their responses at one time and were seen agreeing with other parents after hearing their responses, and adding more to the conversation. Responses from parents II, III, V, and VIII show this:

Parent II said: "Parent Involvement is doing what I can, when I can with what I have to help the school" (Focus group transcript).

Parent III added: "Parent Involvement is checking in every now and again. I go to the awards assembly, the school dance, and the Mother's Day breakfast" "It is also listening, not taking your child's side on an issue without hearing what the school has to say." (Focus group transcript).

Parent V clarified: "Parent Involvement is supporting my child academically, socially, and emotionally to make sure that she succeeds" (Focus group transcript).

Parent VIII supported by saying, "Parent Involvement is checking in every now and then, supporting by fundraisers, and buying a uniform for someone in need" (Focus group transcript).

These responses mirrored some of the responses captured by the principal interviews. It is evident that there are multiple ways of defining or comprehending parental involvement. The researcher's curiosity intensified to gain deeper insight into what are the barriers, that hinder parents from being involved.

The FCE representative gave a unique perspective to parental involvement. Her insight brought an outlook of collaboration and collegiality amongst all stakeholders. Her response is as follows:

Perceptions of FCE representative. The perception of the (FCER) was a partnership that exists between the school and the family that provides ongoing communication that fosters a climate of respect, collaboration, and positive engagement. The ultimate goal is that effective partnerships between all stakeholders should eventually lead to student success. Parental involvement can be inclusive of various grassroot agencies at the city, state level, community-based organizations, and also some private partnerships to effect positive change in the district, and encourage parental involvement. She described her view about parental involvement as:

> . . .building of strong relationships means a two-way communication. We are showing what we are communicating is appropriately communicated for all of our audiences, despite their literacy level. . .…building relationships and finding out where people are or what their needs are, and really offering them a space at the table. Being transparent about what we are trying to do, and not to them, but *with them*…Respecting where families are. That is what *real engagement* is to me.

This section of chapter 4 has summarized responses for the SQ#1. Some of the subthemes have been italicized. Next section presents findings relevant to SQ#2 which is restated below.

SQ#2: How do Family and Community Engagement Office and parents perceive their role in supporting elementary school principals and promoting parent participation in the schools?

FCER role. The responses from FCER shed light on the important role being played by her office in supporting the principals and also reaching out to the parents. This is clear

from the excerpt from the interview, "I am the face of school community strategy, I am the face of our Title I requirements, I sit on just about every committee in this district as a representative of Family Community Engagement." FCER also described the funding sources for the office of FCE. She explained about funding being received from the city Mayor's office and the state Governor's office of children. She explained her role as someone trying to maintain a healthy balanced relationship among those involved. This is clear from her interview:

> People really want to see the engagement. They want to know that folks understand them, and they want to have a deeper understanding of what is happening with their children. This office has to be that healthy tension in this place, we have to be the voice of the parent or the community person at tables…so that they can truly be an intricate part of what we are doing.

FCER further described the importance of building connections early in the year and establishing relationships that support a climate of family engagement. She explained: "from the district office perspective, families will only embrace engagement when it is extended and modeled by the leader and staff. It contributes to what kind of culture you have in your school." She further explained when probed about the collaboration between her office and the principal's office by sharing a recent experience. The school principal had been receiving several heat tickets (a kind of reprimand) from the district office, and the school leader did not know how to shift the culture in the building. It was then that the FCER provided the resources and strategies to support the school leader by saturating her with data and research around urban communities and leadership approaches. This leader was amenable and willing to implement new ideas for the advancement of the entire school community. FCER shared:

When it comes to engagement, it's really offering some out of the box programming and resources for their families. I think, it was just the person did not know, they really didn't, his (this principal) initial thinking was, I am here for the children, this is my job.

FCER also mentioned the complex nature of the city neighborhood and the unique nature of the community served by the schools on the west side of the city. She mentioned the help asked by one of the principals as she felt somewhat anxious: "I just don't truly understand how to engage my parents and build a culture of collaboration. Can you come to meet with me?" FCER mentioned a *shortage of staff* in the office due to a possible lack of funding. The findings suggest that no attention was being paid to the unique challenges faced by some principals and the focus of the district seemed to be issuing *heat tickets* in case of any complaint received or a principal asking for help adding to the *anxiety* amongst principals. This finding also emerged in the principals' interviews.

The interview with the FCER led the researcher to ask the additional questions. In grounded theory, data collection cannot be predetermined. Rather it is guided by the emergent themes and collected data is driven by the emerging theory from the substantive field. Accordingly, one of the additional questions was:

How would you describe your role in supporting the school leaders when low levels of parent involvement remain a challenge?

When the above question was asked, the posture of the FCE Representative shifted to an upright, very direct, and intentional manner. The researcher could see a reflective gaze on the expression of the participant, and he was bracing himself for what was about to be revealed. The participant throughout the entire interview never sought a

drink of water or reached to the lunch that was provided, but the researcher could see that, there was a need to break the ice that suddenly existed in the room. He decided to reiterate the confidentiality of the conversation, and the freedom of a robust and honest conversation. The researcher placed his hand over hers and said, "We are all vested in the work of making things better for our children in this city despite the hardships and challenges we encounter every day." The researcher could now see a more relaxed tone; however, the direct posture remained the same. The FCE representative (FCER) responded in the following manner:

> I'll be transparent. Principal feedback on leadership surveys that asses monthly principal meetings support that principals have a difficult time engaging parents in their schools. Our current CEO talks about equipping school leaders to engage parents, but we aren't necessarily putting our money, where our mouth is. We definitely could do a bit more.

This suggests the need but it also suggests the lack of execution. FCER further explained:

> Being transparent about what we are trying to do, and what we are actually doing does not add up. If we don't provide the resources and tools to educate school leaders, then we fail to create a culture where a parent would want to be involved. That is what real engagement is to me.

The researcher could feel the passion that exuded from the participant. However, the truth is that the work is not being done. The parents are faced with numerous challenges/barriers that they are not equipped to handle. Therefore, the school is obligated to shift priorities and realign the vision of the district to encompass the needs of the parents. Her personal experiences and the truth that existed regarding the challenges of the families that we serve in the school district caused me as the researcher to reflect on my desire to find a theory that would change the dynamics of not only the district but the larger society.

The second additional question asked was: We've talked about your role and what you do in your office. *What more needs to be done to ensure that principals have the skill set to deal with the urban culture?* I am sure, you have experiences, where perceptions of the community are not often aligned with how schools are. So how can your office support school leaders in dealing with those challenging behaviors that we see from parents and community as well?

FCER explained that she started by building relationships with principals, and by reaching out to those who asked for help and even those who did not asked for help. Some embraced her support, and some did not. But she did not take it personally. She explained:

> I was modeling for them, how this is something extra to do if you do this- this will make the job, the piece of the work you love to do so much, easier. So, under that structure, I hope, I expressed that there were learning opportunities, peer to peer learning opportunities . . . it was an equitable structure in regards to ensuring that principals got what they needed.

FCER emphasized "*lots of collaboration and alignment*" and "selling attendance at the events by family/community engagement specialists." She emphasized:

> You can't engage folks without recognizing that what is real to them, what is really happening. You can schedule parent-teacher conferences, you can schedule academic nights, but if you don't have the food bank open if you don't recognize that you might need to have a social worker or partner on hand, who is an expert in helping folks meet their needs. I'm not going to *prioritize your parent-teacher conferences*, because I am sleeping on my neighbor's floor right now with my five babies. Network structure should aim and allow for lots of collaboration and alignment.

The response supports the *complexity and the issue of poverty* in some of the neighborhoods served by the school principals, and the emergence of major theme *Life Issues.* However, if the school is going to undertake such a heavy lift, it will take

partnerships with external resources to work with struggling families to bridge the gap

that further hinders parental involvement.

Parents' role. Some participants believed that principals' attitudes impact school

culture as is clear from the excerpt from one of the parents:

> "Some principals can be nasty. They look down on us because we on section 8.
> But I let them know that you are still black. You aint no better than me because
> you got a job and drive a nice car."

Another participant shared a similar belief:

> "Some principals are ignorant. They stay in their office and don't even come out
> to see you."

This suggests that some parents saw the behavior of the school leader as the hindrance to

engagement. This finding also emerged from other participants during the interview.

Parent VI pointed out:

> "Just because you wear designer clothes and expensive bags doesn't mean that
> you should look down and turn up your nose."

The findings suggest that some parents saw principals as intimidating because of the

designer paraphernalia that they wore to the school building. This is a barrier that parents

voiced as it presented a separation based on class.

Building a sense of community and shared responsibility. An important theme,

building a sense of community and shared responsibility, emerged from the parent focus

groups data after parents felt more comfortable sharing their thoughts and concerns. This

is evident from what Parent III said: "If everybody would do a little, it would make things

better. We all can't sit back and let things get worse." Parent V added, "If I do my part

and you do your part our kids will be ready to learn." This finding also emerged from the

responses of some other parents. Parent IV said:

> I try to knock on my neighbors' doors when there is an activity at the school to remind them. I am hoping that more parents would come out to help the school.

Parent VIII believed, "It is the *community* that makes the school a target. If we would

take pride in the community and teach our kids *values* and *appreciation* for things that

the school would be better." Parent V recommended having activities to *build*

connections with the community such as community clean up. She mentioned a similar

activity in her neighborhood last year and the fact that she felt nice to see the principal

pulling weeds in the neighborhood with some staff and parents. She recommended, "If

we could do more things like that maybe it would help."

Parent VI stated that "Some principals are ignorant. They stay in their office and

don't even come out to see you." If parents can see principals engaged in these

community activities, it would shift the trajectory for the relationships in urban schools.

One of the parents said that "instead of calling the central office with the negative

stuff, I can praise the principal for the good things that I see, and maybe try to find out,

how I can help." Some parents appreciated the efforts of some principals by saying that

district and schools have ways to reach out to them as is clear from what Parent X said,

"Well, I have had the principal, social worker, and parent person to come to my house

because of my child's attendance. So, when the letters and calls don't work, they came to

my house." The letters and calls do not work because students are responsible for

transporting written communication. Therefore, if students are not meeting with success,

then they will not deliver parent conference notices to their parents. Also, many students

play as they are going home and they misplace important notices for parents. Another

parent complained about a *lack of responsibility* on the part of some parents as they did

not update their addresses and phone numbers in the school records. This issue was also

raised by some principals due to hundreds of undelivered letters returned to the schools.

This is critical as it shows a common thread between parents and principals. This

identifies a common thread that impacts the relationship between the school and the

home. Some parents cited more issues with the district office rather than with the

principals whereas others felt a disconnect between teachers' and principals' perceptions

about student's backgrounds, and the reality in the neighborhoods.

According to FCE representative, partnerships play a critical role in addressing

family engagement. However, there are often times when misunderstandings evoke a

larger conversation and are centered on social influence. The brutal reality of operating in

a deficit is a major factor in providing the quality of support that is needed to address the

challenges that currently exist in the school district. The reality is that the FCE office can

lend support in bridging the communication gap between the school and the home. She

added:

> The FCEO needs to be the lynch pen, the connector, and the liaison between the
> schools and the broader community. The purpose is to ensure that there is
> effective communication and positive partnerships between all stakeholders that
> can aide in providing a seamless approach towards family engagement. As I just
> mentioned, effective partnerships eventually lead to student success.

According to the FCE Representative, an honest conversation will confirm that additional

resources were necessary to bring the change in the district.

Culturally relevant approach to parent engagement. FCER advocated for a

culturally relevant approach to parent engagement. She said, "We need to know our

families, and what our theory of action is. If we build trusting relationships and we offer

folks real opportunities to collaborate, then that will equate to authentic engagement,

that's what our families want."

A culture of snitching/complaints.: This theme emerged from several responses

in the transcripts from parents' interviews, and their perceptions that this culture is

perpetuated by the central office when they call them to complain about the issue they

have with the school of their child. Parent IV conveyed, "I can help to stop the gossip in

the community about the principal and try to get more parents to help the principal. I

think that principal *snitch* line needs to go." Another parent pointed out:

> I don't know if things will get better because the problem is bigger than the
> school. I have been to the board meetings but they love to hear principals get
> slammed. So, the problem needs to be fixed at the district office.

Parents were provided a number, where they could call to log their complaints against the

school leadership. These complaints can vary in nature. For example, if parents are not

happy with a decision made by the school leader, they can call and complain. If the

parents feel that they were spoken to harshly by the school leader, they could call and

complain. If the parents do not like the school leader, they can call and complain

anonymously against the school leader. The parents felt empowered because, they had the

ability to get the school leader reprimanded at the central office.

Principal Love argued by saying that, the one thing parents failed to understand

was that all the complaints would be filtered back to the school leader for their account of

the incident. The participants believed that, this school district initiative evoked a *culture*

of snitching as parents were under the impression that their complaints would remain anonymous, and the school leader would be reprimanded. The principal participants also shared that, some parents felt that central office representatives were rude and dismissive to their concerns, and supported the principal. However, when these complaints were sent to the school leaders, they were accusatory and provided no room for subjectivity. This divide probably caused both parents and school leaders to lose confidence in the central office to support them in these uncomfortable situations.

Principal Love clarified as complaints were directed to the school leaders for clarity, parents felt violated and exposed. Therefore, the confidence of the parents in the district office to support them, and remain confidential was a major factor in the establishment of the *Heat Ticket* process. FCER mentioned providing support to the principals receiving heat tickets, and how getting heat tickets added to the anxiety among the school leaders.

The findings suggest that many of the children in the city are victims of the circumstances. It is at this point that the researcher recognized the passion of FCER in conjunction with the passion of the principals. They both seemed to care about the students and empathized with the community. They spoke and supported the same vision and mission, but there seemed to be a disconnect that existed between the two entities. The disconnect occurs when school leaders are accused of failing to provide quality service to the parent, it is the FCER that must address the principal without knowing the truth of the occurrence which will foster a culture of hostility.

Barriers Obstructing Parental Involvement in School and District Activities

Life Issues. Life issues emerged as one of the major themes from all the

participants including parents. Principal Love, one of the ten respondents stated that:

> "Some of their primary goals are just survival, so they have limited time to focus
> on their child's academic performance or school activities. They have limited time
> to think about school."

Parent VI added to this theme by stating that, "There are many negative changes in the
community. I am scared to go outside. They steal cars, steal your groceries, and your
clothes. One of those b***** stole my grill off my porch."

The FCER also added that, "Some parents are dealing with homelessness, lack of
finances, and mental health. Many are sleeping on the floor of family members and some
are sleeping in the closest shelter available to them."

This suggests that parents are having external challenges that hinder their participation in

school conferences and activities. The parents are doing the very best that they can to

keep the family together.

Unemployment and poverty. Principal Joy, another respondent answering the

same question and sharing a similar sentiment specifically stated that:

> "But we are functioning in a community where parents just don't have time to just
> sit down and discuss the accomplishments or challenges of the school. The
> majority of the families that we serve are currently not employed, they spend the
> majority of their time sitting on the porch in the community. However, they do
> not consider the school to be a priority. When I seek the parent's insight around
> why they are unable to attend the meetings, they respond by saying, "I ain't got
> time for this."

Principal Joy reports even in the state of unemployment, parents are blinded by

the community and are socialized in a mindset where the value of education is not

appreciated. An unemployed parent can be a vehicle of support to the school in a variety

of ways: Creating student homework packets, stuffing envelopes or the office staff,

answering phones, monitoring the halls, assisting at lunchtime, or assisting in the classroom. But despite the need, parents are often far removed from the sense of urgency as it relates to student achievement.

According to Spera, Wentzel, & Matto (2009), financial burdens on many families, interlaced with growing employment insecurity, and worsening working conditions, may exacerbate parents' day-to-day challenges in meeting educators' expectations for engagement. The researcher believes that parents often want to be involved but circumstances beyond their control may influence parent participation.

FCER responses also highlighted this subtheme of poverty and social life issues plaguing the community. She mentioned from her personal experience:

> I have a cousin who is a bus driver and he shared that there is a family that rides the bus at night because they don't have a place to stay. Those are our kids, I'm an affiliate with a non-profit and we did a wellness activity for forty-seven homeless women, two homeless shelters combined. And when I stood up, I just started crying. When, I started talking to the people because I was looking at their faces and this was my auntie, this was my neighbor, and I could see people. Then the women began to reflect on what they wanted, and what they have become, some were prostitutes, substance abusers, some had HIV.

The responses to the interview questions revealed that there were many families in urban schools that were plagued by homelessness. Additionally, many parents did not have the necessary resources to adequately provide for their children. This barrier can cause students to be ostracized or ridiculed because they lack the ability to appropriately address their bodily needs. These factors play a major role in the identification of low or absent parental involvement.

Hygiene and unsanitary conditions at home. Principals reported that some parents bring their children to school dressed in their pajamas and night dresses. A principal shared that:

> Kids are very honest, they will tell you the truth. They will explain that mommy hasn't washed in a couple of weeks. My hope very soon is to get a washing machine in the building so that we can help the children who need help getting their uniforms washed.

Munn (2012) further supports that families of color and those living in poverty are much more likely to be exposed to hazardous environmental conditions that can have an influence on their health and, consequently, their performance in the schools, including disproportionate exposure to "air and water pollution, waste disposal sites, airports, smokestacks, lead paint, car emissions, and countless other environmental hazards" (p. 10). These conditions have been shown to increase asthma among children, cause mothers to deliver babies prematurely, and with low birth weights, increase children's diagnosis with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and increase student absenteeism (Munin, 2012). The fact remains that exposure to poor living conditions can impact the developmental stages as individuals approach adulthood. When these issues are not addressed, the cycle of poverty and the impact of mental health remain at the forefront of the urban culture.

Crime, Violence, and Substance abuse. This subtheme emerged in every interview from all the data sources. Crime and violence in the neighborhoods where these schools were located limited parental involvement. Eight of the ten principal respondents reported the impact of violence and drugs on the community as one of the barriers. Principal Self-Control stated:

In the city, the reality is that the violence and substance abuse with opioids are unprecedented, so school is a microcosm of society. What we are dealing with especially at the elementary level are children, whose parents may have these issues.

The impact of drugs in the city has begotten a society of crime and violence. Parents are unable to fulfill their roles and responsibilities because of the influence of opioids in the community. This impairs a parent's ability to make sound decisions and to be a vested stakeholder in the decision-making process.

Parent II, with tears in her eyes, said, "Children are caught in the crossfire and sometimes, pay a heavy price with their very lives." Several principals reported that their relationship with the parents improved when they emotionally supported the families. Parent IV reported that their support was visible in hospital visitations even to the morgue when their child became a victim of the violence that exists in the city. Several participants including parents pointed out the problem of violence and drugs in the neighborhoods and the influence of these issues on the young minds of the children. One of the principals added:

"As a school leader, we see drugs, kids that have been affected by their parents' use of drugs. Not just as babies, but even as the kids get out of the car and you can smell the marijuana from the car."

This theme was also validated in the response from another participant from Hope Academy:

. . .reality is that the violence here is pretty unprecedented, substance abuse with opioids are unprecedented so schools are microcosms of the society, and what we are dealing with especially at the elementary level is children whose parents and siblings may have the issues.

The themes *crime, violence, and substance abuse* were dominant in the parent focus group discussions suggesting that both parents and their children were overwhelmed by the extant of crime, drugs, and violence in the city, and in particular

their neighborhoods (I, II, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, and X). Several parents cited the reason

for not attending evening sessions at the schools due to their safety concerns. Participant I

said, "The death rate in the city is scary. I have to protect my child and myself. So, I

don't get to the school much. But, when all you hear is *gun*shots, you don't want to go

anywhere." Parent III also joined her by saying, "Look at how that little girl was sitting in

the car and got shot, and died. These people are sick and they don't care. I don't want to

bury my children or attend senseless funerals." Parent V supported by saying, "Yes, she

was shot in the broad daylight. Who does that to a child? If crime is going down then,

why are people dying every day? Watch the news." Parent VII with tears in her eyes said,

> Even during cease-fire movements, they are killing people anyway. My friend lost her son, who was a freshman in college. He had just come home for the holidays, and she ended up burying him. It has to stop.

No importance to academics. Several participants expressed frustration about

low levels of parental involvement. Joy said, "Parents show up to bring cupcakes, ice

cream, candy and drinks for their children's birthday. But will not come to support the

classroom during the instructional period." Joy further explained:

When I ask parents, what more can be done? They respond, "more *music" "more* entertainment" "more sports" "more games" "more fashion shows and more dances". It seems like, I have to provide more entertainment in order to captivate the community. If there is a meeting about academics, the parents are not going to show up. But, if I fire up the BBQ grill, and turn up the music, there will be standing room only. They have no time to sit and take an interest, it's all about *entertainment.*

Data from other interviews supported this subtheme. Principal Peace stated,

"Parents are always invited to be a part of the planning. They don't always show up to the

budget meetings or planning meetings." Principal Love also expressed this concern about

the parents:

It is important that as a school, parents need to know the *importance of education*. When we have a fashion show or Valentines' Day party, we have so many people, that there are not enough chairs for the parents and the community. But for an academic or budget meeting, they do not come at all, and it is disappointing.

Principal Kind expressed a similar sentiment, "When I had my daddy/daughter dance, I had close to two hundred people to turn out. When I had my mommy/son dance, we had one hundred and twenty- five people." One of the participants mentioned that idolizing rappers and basketball players and *not academics* is a priority for most of the parents.

Parent IX supports the sentiments of Principal Kind by stating, "Parent Involvement is checking in every now and again. I try to go to the awards assembly, the school dance and the Mother's Day breakfast." The school dance and Mother's Day breakfast are annual events that captivate the social aspect of learning. However, the awards assembly captures the student's accomplishment but does not really provide parents with the academic knowledge necessary to support student learning.

Parent X also stated, "I usually can't get up to the school. So, I try to send my mother or my son. They are scared of my older son so they will behave when he comes. So, I send him as much as I can if he is not working. I can't be involved so they go for me. This comment sends a message that education is not a priority. There is no further excuse as to why the parent could not attend. The parent just responds by saying that they just can't be involved.

Leadership styles. All the principal participants were extremely knowledgeable about their leadership styles, and their approach to engaging parents in the school community. Collective data about leadership styles assisted in validating the findings from the literature review that leadership styles may increase or hinder parental

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involvement. Leadership styles captured by the researcher included: Distributive

Leadership, Spiritual Leadership, Collaborative Leadership, and Own Personality. The

subthemes and codes such as values, academics, and social influence emerged from this

conversation. *Own personality* emerged as one of the barriers.

    Distributive leadership. Principal Joy and Principal Hope seemed to address

leadership from a distributive perspective. According to Smithgall (2016), distributive

leadership encompasses collaborative conversations that are valued and input from the

community is integrated. Principal Joy stated:

> One thing I do is, create many opportunities for parental involvement. But how it
> gets communicated is usually through the community school coordinator, who
> handles most of the parent engagement activities, or the dean of students
> communicates with the families a lot. The office staff is also a major component
> to parent communication.

    This form of leadership allows the school leader to tap into different modalities in

an effort to increase parental involvement. Parents have an opportunity to hear from

different individuals within the school community that will allow the principal to not be

the only form of contact to motivate the parent to become active at the school. Parents

can interface with individuals with whom they have developed relationships and have

established a sense of comfortability thereby increasing parental engagement.

According to Principal Hope,

> The principalship can be stressful, especially when you are the only administrator
> in the building. However, I am lucky to have two or three people that are
> amenable to wearing two or three hats at one time. This is the only way that I am
> staying alive."

    Distributive leadership builds capacity not just with the staff but with the parents

as well. Staff are given the opportunity to engage with the parents through problem

solving and providing supports to benefit student achievement. By implementing this form of leadership, the work is leveraged and the ability to reach more families is attainable.

Spiritual leadership. Principal Meek and Principal Long were found to be strong advocates of Spiritual Leadership. According to Fry and Slocum (2008) spiritual leadership requires "doing what it takes" through faith in a clear, compelling vision which produces a sense of calling." They discussed the importance of working, not for the earthly recognition, but for a greater purpose. Furthermore, many parents might not walk through the doors of the church for various reasons, but they will come to the school because they see the school leader as a spiritual source of empowerment and support. Meek stated:

> This is not a job for me, it's ministry because, there's so much more that it entails that *is not in my job description*, but I find out that the only way for children to be successful is to meet the needs of the whole child, which might mean finding some resources for the parent or giving that parent clean uniforms or taking that parent to the laundromat and helping them to wash their clothes. So, when I think about what ministry entails, it entails you succumbing not to your will, but to the will of God. And the only way to be successful is to succumb to the will of God, you have to serve others because, that is what we're here for, to serve other people. So, the *best leader, is the one who's a servant*.

Principal Long also expressed her thoughts on this style of leadership as she understands that ministry is relative to wholeness. She uses her gift of counsel to restore parents but also understands that there are times when other support measures must be in place to execute a deeper level of contact. She shares the following:

> My approach in leadership. This is my ministry, with that, I have parents coming in with personal problems, and I will counsel them. I am able to console them, and if they are in need, with my team, I can point them in the right direction. They are comfortable sharing their needs and concerns, and issues with myself. Certain

staff members that I have in place because, they feel welcomed, they feel supported, and that is important in making sure that children are successful.

It is evident that Spiritual Leadership causes the school leader to reach beyond common knowledge and tap into a greater power to address the needs of the school community. There are times when academia just doesn't fit the script and you have to rely on that inner strength that can only come from above. Many of the principals referred to their role as a minister. Parents come with numerous challenges and burdens that cause them to lose hope in the natural realm. It is at this time that the school leader can rest on the power of faith and prayer to seek answers to the questions that relativity cannot answer.

Collaborative leadership. Principal Kind, Principal Good, and Principal Gentle expressed that collaborative leadership is beneficial, as it is an inclusive practice that seeks to gain insight from all stakeholders. According to Edwards & Smits (2008), under collaborative leadership, the principal must shift from power to partner. Principal Kind mentioned, "In order to enhance PI, I always create multiple opportunities, I send global calls, I send notes home with the students. I want my parents to have a vested interest, and a voice in the school community." Principal Good shared that he tries to build trust with the parents and the community by keeping an open-door policy, and by being fair. He further clarified his approach:

> I strive to build relationships with my parents to make them feel comfortable. When a parent approaches me with an emergency, I respond right away. I listen to them, and I don't deter them. I immediately see them. It helps then to see that, I am willing to meet their needs. I am a parent, and I always want our children to be treated as I would want my own to be treated. I strive to live up to the expectations, and I am always going to be fair. I want the parents to know that I understand their situation, and believe that we can come to a mutual agreement. Parents, very often are appreciative of that leadership characteristic.

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To further support this leadership style as an effective form of parental involvement, the parent stated: "Well, I have had the principal, social worker and parent person to come to my house because of my child's attendance. So, when the letters and calls don't work, they came to my house". This level of collaboration involves a wrap around approach to make parents feel supported. It was shared during the interviews that the social worker provides the technical resources that help the parent in improving the students' attendance. The parent support person assists with the personal needs of the family and the principal is there to oversee the process and provide guidance as needed.

Principal Gentle explained his leadership style by saying that he tried to use different ways to communicate. He felt that some parents are intimidated by coming to the school to sit in front of the principal. So, his leadership style was based upon the needs of the students and the parents. He further added:

> If I have to get to the parent sometimes, I have to take my hat off as the principal and talk to them about a real-life situation. There are times that I have to disclose my own personal situation just to break down the barrier.

This suggests transparency which is often necessary when building authentic relationships. Parent III seemed to support this form of leadership when he said: "If we could get more parents to come out and work with the principal instead of against the principal then we might see things get better."

The findings suggest that collaborative leadership is effective in breaking down the barriers because it is inclusive and not exclusive of the parent. There is a sense of value and ownership that comes with this form of leadership. The power is shared and not possessed by one individual. Despite the many positive approaches to leadership, there

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are some styles that can serve as a barrier to increasing parental involvement. The

researcher heard of an individualistic dynamic that fostered a tone of hinderance in

getting parents on board. This is documented by the researcher as the Own Personality

leadership style. The own personality leadership style is using your dominant personality

to engage parents.

Own Personality: One of the principals mentioned that after working in the

district for few months, she felt that she was not a good fit for this community. She

shared, "I am the one who is serious about the work, I am not a social butterfly, and this

community needs someone who is more social". She further added that she unwillingly

made comments, "I really like your shoes" "I really like your nails" "I really like that

color in your hair" She clarified that she did that to make herself as a good fit with the

community. This participant felt that she would do better in a community where the

parents want better education for their children, and share the responsibility. She cited her

own personality as barrier to enhance parental involvement when she said:

> The barrier is lowering myself to engage parents in conversations about things
> that really have nothing to do with children and academic achievement. The
> community is looking for a friend, but my position is that, if being your friend
> doesn't move student achievement, then we don't need to be friends.

This attitude of elitism is one of the factors that causes parents not to be involved

in the school. School leaders have to be mindful that their demeanor and attitude shape

the culture not just for students and staff but also for the parents. This behavior is a

deterrent and sends a message to the parents that the school leader is above the work and

not a part of the work. This is a major barrier and is aligned to the literature. School

leadership, according to Barnyak and McNelly (2009), must realize the importance of the

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family in the overall role of student achievement, and take responsibility for bridging the home and school environments.

Lack of Professional Development (PD). All the participants highlighted a lack of professional development to address the barriers in promoting parental involvement and dealing with the parents. Most of the participants mentioned that professional development was almost non-existent. They expressed resentment about the district's unprofessional way of handling complaints as is clear from, "They always seem to have a preconceived notion around the school leader's actions. There is often no support." Principal Gentle also mentioned lack of support from the district office and the absence of uniformity in the procedures. She shared:

> We do have the Family and Community Engagement Office for district support (stated with a hint of sarcasm and a quick laugh) but it is usually, because of my relationships that if I need something, I could reach out and speak to someone. But there is no proactive reasoning or effective immediate support for school leaders at the district level to resolve issues or address concerns.

Some of the principals expressed helplessness at times to deal with the challenges of handling some of the parents. This response supports the FCER views mentioned earlier in this chapter that the district office is not doing enough to support the principals. The energy around this discussion was electrifying. Most of the principals gave the researcher side eye, laughed uncontrollably, twisted their lips, lowered their glasses on the bridge of their nose, or turned their head with attitude while responding. The first five principal participants to share their insight around professional development and parent engagement were inclusive of Principal Love, Principal Peace, Principal Meek, Principal Kind, and Principal Long. Principal Love said:

The district has done nothing to prepare me to engage parents. Now, there is an acknowledgment that we need to do more around *social and emotional health* with the children. People responsible for planning for PD have no idea, what we endure? Yes, the pedagogy may look great but when did you do the research? Where was the research conducted? Was it done in a city that is comparable to our city? If not, then your research is not going to help us. You can't plan for the communities when you are so out of touch with the realities of what is really going on.

Her response suggests that a one-size-fits-all approach cannot work in their work context.

She further said that parents are not held accountable. They are *verbally and physically*

aggressive with the staff causing disruption to the instructional day. When principals

make the decision to bar such parents, they have to explain. He recommended *zero*

tolerance for inappropriate parent behavior. He expressed frustration by saying that they

often are left to fend for themselves due to a limited number of officers in the district to

handle such conflicts in proportion to the demand. Principal Peace added:

Most of this work is on the job training. There is no one strategy given to school leaders to address these challenging issues. You have to use your common sense and knowing how to pick your battles. I have been cursed out twice in a five-minute time span. It is knowing how to maintain your decorum.

Principal Meek smartly confronted the professional development provided by the

district. She mentioned:

If you have never walked in my shoes, there's not a whole lot that you can tell me about how to engage parents. And, if you have walked in my shoes, show me the statistics, show me the proof that you were successful as you claim that you were. One thing that I've learned on my own is that when you engage your parents during the happy times when they are irate, they know that they can come talk to you, and that the situation is going to have an outcome that they can live with. If you don't have a relationship with your parents, they are not going to want to hear anything that you have to say out of your mouth.

This also suggests building good relationships with the parents to get the message across

without much discord and bringing people with experience in urban schools for planning

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of professional development. The findings also hint at lack of values and social influence

of the community on the behavior of some parents. Principal Kind shared that 98% of the

district's professional development is focused on curriculum, systems protocols, and

internal structures. He further explained,

> It will be very hard, if you don't have the personality to deal with the community or people. If you are not a people person that is going to be your barrier, and there is really nothing in place that is set and solid to say that, this is how you should or can go about this.

> Principal joy also supports this position by stating, "I have not received any professional development in this position, in terms of parental engagement. I am the one who is serious about the work, I am not a social butterfly, and this community needs someone who is more social". She further added that she unwillingly made comments, "I really like your shoes" "I really like your nails" "I really like that color in your hair" She clarified that she did that to make herself as a good fit with the community.

Principal Kind's response highlights own personality may hinder or encourage parental

involvement. The following quote from Principal Long highlights the lived experiences

and challenges of these school leaders:

> The truth is that, if you have been a principal in the city for six months, you can write a book. By this time, you have already been yelled at, cussed out, threatened, and reported to central office. I am not saying that you won't have some great parents in the midst. Then you have those quiet parents that flip on you and make you scratch your head and say, "I didn't know that parent could behave like that." You have a plethora of experiences in your first six months. By the time you get to the holidays, you have already been baptized by the parents.

> FCE Representative concurs that district office has not provided adequate

professional development for school principals to address the barriers that exist in

promoting parental involvement in elementary urban schools. This study assumed that the

principal participants will be honest and expressive in sharing their experiences as it

related to professional development aligned to parent and community engagement. The

findings from the participants highlight the lack of professional development. The

principal participants mentioned that they have not received any professional

development from the district supporting them in dealing with the families in the deep

inner city or urban community.

> ***Need based differentiated Professional Development.*** This subtheme also

appeared prominently in the principals' responses. Principal Joy said:

> You can't have one evaluation for every principal because every principal's work
> looks different. So, if you have a high ESOL population, your work as a principal
> would look different from a principal who has a high special education
> population, or high poverty population, or a high performing…Where just coming
> to work every day, when you have been threatened, violence in the community.
> *It's* just a whole different thing; but do I have the answer? No.

> This is critical as parental involvement is uniquely different based on the

community and location of the school. For this reason, a one size fits all approach to

parental involvement and principal evaluation can prove invalid or create a culture of

inequity.

Principal Joy when asked about opportunity for PD shared:

> I would say, "NO, there is no evidence of professional development to support
> parent engagement" It is something that I think the district needs to take a strong
> look at. We as administrators are required to get to know our community,
> students, parents, and staff. The *district needs to get to know* the school as well.
> Until they do that, they are not going to be able to support schools in the manner
> in which they need to be supported.

She further explained:

> As an administrator for ten years, I can hardly recall, how many people have been
> here just to take a look around and actually stay for a period of time. Not, just a
> walk through, not just an hour, but to actually stay and have lunch with my kids,
> go outside for recess, and really engage in a conversation with the kids, they
> would learn a lot. They would learn about the school, what we do, how we do it,
> as oppose to the data and the numbers. The numbers don't always tell the story,
> the people tell the story.

This response recommends to the FCE that there is a need for a more specialized/individualized approach to principal professional development in order to make social connections with the students and the staff.

The responses from the principals suggest that most of the individuals providing the professional development had no contextual experience and hence were not capable of offering the PD related to the issues being faced by the principals. This was clear from Principal Meek's response, "If you have not walked in my shoes, then don't tell me what to do." This sentiment was shared across the board by the principals. Many of the principals thought that the professional development they participated in was a waste of time. Many also believed that parental involvement was not at the forefront of the conversation because the district did not have the capacity, time, and interest due to other competing priorities. The participants expressed frustration as they had to deal with the disrespect and abuse from the parents. Principals shared that you have to come with an internal passion and patience for the role as a school leader to handle the constant and consistent abuse. Being cussed out, disrespected, and threatened is not an easy thing to endure was a unanimous feeling amongst the principals. However, they demonstrated through their statements, what they do for the students is the heart of why they do this job, and then the behavior of the parents becomes miniscule.

Importance of leadership style

The findings to this sub-question have been described in detail in the foregoing sections of this chapter under the barriers to parental involvement. The next section of this chapter presents findings relevant to leadership style:

Parents' perspective on the impact of effective school leadership. During the

parent focus group discussion, the temperature in the room began to shift as there seemed

to be a clear divide regarding parents' interpretation of principal practices. Parent I dived

right in and stated, "Some principals can be nasty. They look down on us because we are

on section 8." Parent VI was eagerly waiting to say:

> Some principals are ignorant. They stay in their office and don't even come out to
> see you. I have had some nice ones that will do anything for you. You can't give
> them all a bad rap. Because, some of them go above and beyond for the children.

These sentiments were not shared by everyone in the room. There was variation in the

parents' perceptions of the role of leadership in engaging them for the support.

Immediately, equity sticks went up as the researcher moved quickly to hear what the

other participants had to say. While some parents shared negative responses, some were

positive as is clear from what Parent II shared, "My child's principal does a lot for the

school. She is always talking about achievement and wanting the best for the children."

Parent IV also expressed a similar perception, "My child's principal does a lot for

the school. She is always talking about achievement and wanting the best for the

children." Parent III added, "I love my child's principal. He listens, he cares about the

kids. He greets us every day. It's the parents that bring that ghetto s*** to the school."

Parent VII seemed to be supportive of the role being played by the school leaders in the

city as is evident from her response:

> It's not the principal. We blame them for everything, but that is a tough job…
> they have to face different attitudes and behaviors from the children, and the
> parents. It can't be easy. I know that, I could be no principal in this City.

Parent VII showed empathy towards the principal of her child's school by saying

that sometimes, she calls the district office to get answers to her questions, but she was

not trying to '*snitch.*' She further added, "Everybody got to eat and I am not trying to

take bread from nobody. So, it is deeper than the principal, they are humans too." Parent

X expressed similar feelings, "One problem is that she is trying to teach adults how to

conduct themselves. That is not her job. The parents make it difficult for the principals."

Parent IX felt that some of the principals can't handle the problems from their

community. This response is in agreement with the views expressed by FCER and some

principals that they sometimes find it difficult to handle the issues and problems from the

community.

Principal Good previously stated, "Principals are placed in communities without

the knowledge or context of the community. They are not equipped with the necessary

tools to meet the needs or challenges of the community.

Parent V was appreciative about the principal for her child's school. This is

evident from her response:

> My child's principal is great. I have been telling him not to stay around here late.
> He gets here like 6:30 a.m. and leave like 7:00 p.m.; somebody scratched his car
> one time, and someone hit his car but he kept moving. I wouldn't want his job
> because adults are crazy in the community and at the district office.

Parent Focus Group participants' responses suggest that accountability is the missing link

in addressing the barriers that hinder parental involvement in elementary urban schools in

the school district. Some parents understood this as is evident from their responses. The

researcher asked the parents: What more can the district do to support parents in

addressing low levels of parent involvement as it remains a challenge?

There was a small pause in the room hinting that the parents needed a short break.

The researcher believes that this question caused the participants to reflect on who the

blame for low parental involvement is really. Is it the school district? Is it the school leader? Is it the parent? This question prompted six of the participants to take another visit to the buffet. The blank stares on the participants' faces, finger twirling, the hand patting on each other and side bar comments allowed the researcher to know that the responsibility must reside somewhere. The researcher paused and allowed for some internal conversations amongst the participants. He could hear comments such as, "He really knows how to treat people."; "He is really listening to us."; "This was a lot of fun."; "I wasn't going to come but I am glad that I did, and I would do it again for him. Food is good as well." After this second trip to the lunch, everyone regrouped for the response to the final question. The researcher began to see the equity sticks elevated. The responses from the participant I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, and X are summarized below:

Parent I shared:

> The principal sends letters, robotic calls, text messages, they have a website but I don't have no internet. Yeah, they even have an app, and the staff comes out daily to share things that are happening at the school. They do a good job at keeping us informed.

Parent II informed that the district has a parent person who reaches out constantly. She added, "To be honest, when I see the school number, I don't usually answer. That's my time. I can't call them when I am tired, so why they are calling me? (Laughed)". This response highlights the passive approach of some parents in urban schools as data from the principals also supported this assertion. Several principals mentioned that only seven/eight parents support the school and volunteer. Parent IV added to the discussion by saying, "The teachers always ask for our cell phone numbers too. My child has a cell

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phone with my number and sometimes the teacher will have him call me from his phone.

They use every resource to get to me." Parents also mentioned the use of robo calls,

letters, visit of social worker, and FCE staff to their homes. One parent spoke favorably:

> I don't think that the principals can do no more than what they do to reach parents. The parent has to want to be involved as well. We again can't always blame the principal, we have to hold parents accountable as well.

Parent V supported by saying:

> I agree with what you said. They do try their best, when I think about it. They even give me food from the pantry, when I am low on food. You can really hold parents accountable to be involved. They are adults. They have a choice!" (With much passion).

She continued,

> I mean what do you want the principal to do, raise your f****** child. I would like to see parents do more and not cause the principal no trouble. My grandmother always said: 'Don't judge anyone unless you walk in their shoes.' Everyone can do something.

This experience further challenged the researcher in addressing the dynamics of

the relationships that exist in the local school system. The data suggest that the culture of

the community affects the climate in the schools and the district office. The findings

suggest that the parents and school principals struggle to coexist. However, the researcher

was confronted with the reality that everyone in the paradigm of this community is

cognizant of the human aspect that unites them all. The next section of the chapter

presents findings from document reviews. The findings from the documents review

provide triangulation of the findings discussed earlier in this chapter.

Findings from Document Reviews

The use of documents review was another method of data collection in this study. The review of these documents gave an idea of various strategies used by the principals to involve the parents in the education of their children. The researcher captured the data of the documents by creating a template to organize the content which validated or opposed the data captured during the principal participant interviews (see Appendix G). The researcher investigated the School Performance Plan of three schools to identify the list of parent activities that were noted as family engagement activities for the 2017-2018 academic year. Artifacts inclusive of agendas, minutes, sign in sheets, and feedback from parent meetings were captured by the researcher. The sample documents that were created for the purpose of compiling and organizing data can be found in Appendix G of this study. The findings from the analysis of document reviews are presented in the next section of this chapter.

School Performance Plans. Three School Performance Plan documents for the academic year 2017-2018 were reviewed during this study. All of the plans addressed an academic component to engage parents. They were inclusive of Back to School Night, Literacy Night, Math Night, Assessment Night, and Science Night. There was also evidence of School Family Council (SFC) which is an organized group that served as the oversight of the school. It is evident that the school leader serves as a participant and not as the primary facilitator of the group.

In addition to the strategies and activities identified, some school leaders mentioned the establishment of an organized Parent Teacher Organization/Parent Teacher

Association (PTO/PTA) that would assist the school with supplemental activities to further promote a culture of family, community, and schools working in partnership. Some of the activities identified in the documents were Father/Daughter Dance, Mother/Son Dance, School and Community Food Pantry, Grandparents Committee and Community Association, and Fashion Show. It was clearly stated that the PTO/PTA would work collaboratively with the SFC to meet the goals of the school. The documents reviewed by the researcher ranged from 39-42 pages.

Back to School Night. The agenda and sign in sheet from Back to School Night at a participating school had a total of 275 parents and community members to attend, including students. Further review of the sign in sheets confirmed that out of the 275 participants 39 individuals (about 14%) were actually parents of registered students in the school. The agenda specified community partnerships and student performances as inclusive of the program. Students and community partners were well represented but parent presence was lacking.

Literacy Night. A review of the agenda and sign in sheet for a participating schools literacy night revealed a total of six parents, five grandparents, and 14 students. The agenda revealed school leadership in conjunction with academic support personnel, providing strategies, literature, and building vocabulary and comprehension make and take session. *Low parent participation* was captured based on the researcher's review of the sign-in sheet and evaluation forms.

Food Pantry Distribution. The documentation reviewed by the researcher in supporting the distribution of food pantry items revealed a large outpouring of parents. The parents came in record numbers ranging from 245-550 to retrieve food items to feed

their families. The principal's goal was meeting the needs of the whole child. It was evident in the selection of food items which ranged from cereal, assorted meats, rice, macaroni, vegetables, ice cream, potatoes and fresh vegetables. All the participants mentioned the importance of this activity for increasing the attendance of the parents and the community in the events.

School Family Council. A School Family Council Meeting held in November revealed poor parent attendance despite the important issues that were addressed. Agenda items included budget, enrollment adjustments, and faculty reassignments. These were critical issues that impact the overall culture and climate of the school. The principal apparently wanted parent input on programming and preferences as to what is more impactful for students and community. A total of three pages represented the participation of the parents. The three pages included the agenda, announcement flier, and sign in sheet with a total of four parents in attendance with a school enrollment of 359 students. The fliers were posted on the school website, back packed with students, posted on the parent bulletin board in the parent room located on the first floor of the school. The meeting was scheduled on a Thursday at 6:00 pm, and there was no mention of refreshments for parents. Having refreshments at this time of the day could increase parent involvement as it lifts the burden of parents preparing dinner for the family.

School Funding Rally in the State Capital. As school communities were facing challenging financial times, a rally in the state capital for increased funding was organized in the hope of gathering parents, community partners, teachers, administrators and district staff to unite in solidarity at the state capital. This activity alerted the state officials that there is a negative impact on the school district when funding is reduced.

Despite the importance of this event, and the principal's ability to absorb all costs associated with the travel, *not one parent showed up* to attend the rally. The binder analyzed by the researcher identified two pages inclusive of the flyer and a *blank signature page.*

Daddy/Daughter Dance. A popular social event to recruit fathers in spending valuable time with their little girls was a school wide success. There was a total of 17 signature pages totaling over 235 participants. Fathers and Daughters were able to dance, eat, and take a picture together. This event was significant as attracting fathers to the school building has been an ongoing challenging for many school leaders. The researcher was encouraged to see so many African Americans represented at a memorable event for their little girls.

Mommy/Son Dance. The mother/son dance was also well attended by parent participants. The same courtesies were provided for the mothers and their sons. The event was captured with 13 pages of data with parent signature sheets to support the importance of this event to the parents in the community. This is an activity that appeals to the parents and they are vested in spending this time with their children with attendance totaling 325 participants.

State Assessment Night. State assessment night was implemented to provide parents and stakeholders with an overview of the exams and best practices to ensure students' success. The assessment night also addressed parent roles in getting students to the bed early so that they might come to the school on time. The agenda addressed additional incentives and activities to motivate students inclusive of a pep rally, awards

assembly, an attendance raffle, and pizza party for the class with 100% perfect attendance. Low attendance was reported at this event with only six attendees.

Summary

This chapter has presented the findings from all the data sources relevant to the research questions for this study. Direct quotes from the data were presented to support the findings. The findings presented described the experiences of urban elementary principals, FCER, and parents. The document reviews provided a context that supported many of the views articulated by the school leaders that participated in the study. The reoccurring statement that parents primarily show up at social functions were aligned with the findings in the document reviews. A review of the literacy night parent workshop agenda and sign in sheet revealed a total of six parents, five grandparents, and 14 students with a school enrollment of over 300 students. However, that same school hosted a daddy/daughter dance, and the attendance according to the sign in sheets provided by the school leader exceeded over two hundred participants. To further support this finding, a school leader organized an event for parents to rally for additional funding at the state capital with transportation provided to and from the event.

According to the attendance document provided by the school leader, not one parent was present for the activity. This school enrollment is currently exceeding 300 students. However, the same school leader hosted a food pantry distribution event and the participation exceeded over 500 attendees. The researcher believes that parents care about their children but have somehow prioritized survival over achievement. The value of education has been diminished because of the daily challenges that are ever present before them. The researcher supports that a shift in priorities is indeed necessary, but it

can only happen with collaboration and buy in from all stakeholders. The work must be leveraged to empower parents to effectively provide for their children, while at the same time establishing a partnership with the school and community that education has weight and can change the trajectory of a student's life. Another factor that has impacted parent participation is the crime and violence that exist within the community. Families are scared to attend school functions because of the possibility of being shot or mugged. School leaders must consider the neighborhood that surrounds the school and provide options for parent engagement that would remove the barrier of fear.

This can be accomplished with the partnerships of grassroot organizations and neighborhood associations. It is partnerships, collaboration and communication that are necessary for continuous development. The next chapter of this dissertation presents interpretive summary of the findings and discussion related to the themes developed throughout the researcher's experience in the development of the new theory.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Five themes and six subthemes emerged from the data to explain the barriers to PI. These themes are *Life Issues* (subthemes: Values, academic and social influences; no importance to academics and education; mental health; hygiene and unsanitary conditions at home), *Crime, violence, and substance abuse* (subtheme: incarceration and kinship), *Leadership styles*, *Own personality*, and *unemployment and poverty*. This grounded theory research study was designed to investigate the perceptions and experiences of the principals, parents, and FCER in promoting parental involvement. The study was conducted in a local school district in north-central Maryland. The goal was to develop a theory addressing the barriers of low parent participation in an urban school district in north-central Maryland. This chapter presents the summary and the discussion of the findings followed by an interpretive summary of the substantive theory emerged from the data. The relevant literature is interwoven with the findings. This is followed by the description of the model to address the barriers to low parental involvement. The findings guided the researcher to develop a new model to address low parental involvement at the research site. This model is based on the recommendations based on the research and in presented in chapter 6. The recommendations for practice and future research are presented next. Finally, this is followed by the conclusion of the study.

Summary of the Findings

A pragmatic inquiry approach was used to collect qualitative data by conducting face to face interviews, in person parent focus group, document reviews, and field notes. Participants in the study included 10 traditional urban elementary school principals in the

city, a representative of the Family and Community Engagement Office in the district office, and 10 parents whose children attend one of the participating schools in the research study. Principal experience ranged from one to nine years of service. The document review included artifacts from the meetings such as sign-in sheets, agendas for back to school and literacy nights, and evaluations. School Performance Plans, and data from the district website. Narrative summary of the findings was presented in chapter 4 to give an overview of the current state of affairs in the local school district as it related to the central phenomenon of low parental involvement.

Defining parental engagement

All the research participants demonstrated a good understanding of the term parental involvement including the parents. Many principals believed it was important for the parents to be visible in the school and to be actively engaged with the vision and mission of the school. They were adamant that showing up for the food pantry or giveaways should not be the driving force for their presence. Principals valued a broad spectrum of parent engagement-- from returning phone calls, responding to emails, attending conferences or simply just sending the child to school. A remarkable contribution to this study was the ability of school leaders to acknowledge negative involvement as "parental involvement." It is acknowledged by school principals when parents take time to call the central office or attend a school board meeting to voice their concerns that parents desire the best for their children. This might not be the form of parental involvement that school leaders desire, but it is recognized as parental involvement from a different lens.

According to some of the principals, urban parent involvement is best, when they were not involved as they brought too much drama and inappropriate behavior from the community into the school. Principals addressed the way the parents dressed, when they came to the school in pajamas, unkempt hair, bedroom slippers, and borderline lingerie. Some principals shared that quite often, parents who were involved positively in the beginning of the school year, time and again switched the sides against the principals later by becoming a part of the cantankerous behavior of the community. The researcher posits that this has influenced the school leaders' perception of the parents and is deemed a part of the problem that impacts the disconnect between the school and the home. Furthermore, the researcher supports that the lack of professional development for school leaders in urban communities perpetuates a class structure, thereby identifying the school leaders as a part of the problem and not the solution.

The perceptions about the parental involvement across the 10 principals was consistent. One thing that they all seemed to agree upon was that they were doing the very best that they could but needed some support in truly understanding the partnership that is necessary to positively impact student achievement. The researcher believes that the parents could also benefit from professional development that will bridge the gap between the school and the home which will foster open two-way communication that is respectful and collegial. One of the principal participants thought that most relationships were established through altercations, where parents first acted ugly, and then through conversation, counsel and patience on the part of the principal and the staff, in partnership with a shift in mind that the parent embraced the school as a partner. This is power of mutual understanding and relationship establishment. This has been identified

by cross-referencing the interview transcripts that the behavior reflected the barriers that they were experiencing in their personal lives hinting at the emergence of the major theme: *Life Issues*.

Some parents considered transporting their child back and forth to the school as parental involvement. Principals pointed out that only about 10% of the parents embraced their ideas and volunteered to support academics. FCER also believed that parental involvement is a collective responsibility. There was a consensus across all the interviews that parental involvement is a *shared responsibility*, and everyone has to play an important role for students' success.

Providing high-quality service for urban schools

FCER posits that the ultimate goal of the engagement office is to meet parents and school leaders where they are, and provide all stakeholders with the resources that would create a culture of partnership and collaboration. The FCER supports that shift will require buy-in from all stakeholders with the external partnership of grassroot organizations in an effort to extend opportunities for parents and school leaders.

Providing high-quality services for parents will require out of the box thinking. This might require external partners to provide services at the homes of the parents. Furthermore, the school must become the beacon of the community and serve as the nucleus for re-establishing relationships between the parents, community and the school.

FCER further believes that modeling positive behaviors for both school leaders and parents will proactively build collegial relationships and provide best practices to increase parental involvement. As the budget remains a major barrier towards aiding these services, the FCER must internally seek grants and private funders to invest in

urban districts. This will allow all stakeholders to receive both individualized and general

professional development based on the needs of the district as a whole and at each

individual school as well.

Confronting the barriers

All participants demonstrated a good understanding of the barriers to parental

involvement. Principals described the barriers to parent engagement through various

perspectives. Some saw the barriers as self-inflicted such as own personality, biases, and

their leadership styles as hindrances. Various principals believed that parents can be their

own barriers as they portrayed bad attitudes towards school leadership. The lack of

respect for school climate, disregard for policies and procedures, and resistance to change

are also self-inflicted. The culture at the home reflected in the students' behaviors at the

school, can cause a disruption to the school culture and climate.

Many principals addressed *incarceration and kinship* care as barriers. An example

of non-inflicted is the death of parents due to cancer and other diseases that are

inevitable. However, acts of violence due to drug possession or gang-related activities are

also major factors as it relates to self-inflicted barriers. Parent incarceration has been on

the rise in many urban communities, due to drugs, violence, crime and mental health.

 A few of the principals named *mental health* as a barrier that has magnified over the past

few years. They believed that the parents were struggling with emotional trauma, and

they were unable to support their children because of their own mental issues. Many of

them needed resources to help them meet the challenges that they faced in urban

communities. The findings suggest that some parents were dealing with unemployment

and major financial challenges. Other barriers were inclusive of regret. Some principals

described jealousy as a barrier as they come to the school with preconceived notions about the school leader.

The parents cited crime, drugs, work pressures, family responsibilities, and unsafe neighborhoods as the barriers. The parent's lacking education served as a barrier to parental engagement. Some parents saw the school leader as successful or belonging to an upper class, and their lives absent of the challenges that they were currently facing. The principals also revealed that community influence is a major barrier as their own personal beliefs often challenged the principles, and the values.

Importance of leadership style

The data about leadership styles assisted in validating the findings from the literature review that leadership styles may increase or hinder PI. Four leadership styles emerged from the data. These seemed to be servant, spiritual, collaborative, and distributed. All of the principals saw their roles as uplifting the community. All of them wanted to add value and serve the community. Many of them stepped out of their roles to provide counseling and emotional support to the parents that were dealing with insurmountable challenges, to include losing a child to violence, losing their children to the foster care system, and eviction.

The servant leaders spoke with conviction and passion for the communities that they served. They saw the challenges, and most of them could identify with the challenges that they now, sought to change.

Spiritual leaders saw their roles as ministers. They used ministry as an avenue for providing hope and purpose to the community. One of the principals mentioned that spirituality is the backbone of the African American community.

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Collaborative leadership was a trendy response as some principals shared the goals in having a collaborative approach to leadership. They expressed a desire to include parents and stakeholders in the decision-making process as it relates to the overall success of the school and to educate parents and community of the challenges, yet aid in developing strategic plans to address the challenges and ensure that the students are meeting with success. The collaboration was also inclusive of knowing the needs of the community and seeking resources to meet the needs.

Distributed leadership was classic as reported by some of the school leaders. They first recognized that the school can't effectively function without the support of vested individuals. They delegated responsibilities to school staff that demonstrated leadership potential and monitored progress while providing feedback. All of these unique styles were captured during the interviews. The crime, violence, verbal and physical abuse, threats, and cantankerous revolts against these school leaders did not deter them from being committed to the mission of the school.

Parents perspectives on the impact of effective school leadership

The parent responses suggest a strong variation regarding parents' interpretation of principal practices in engaging them for support. Their responses seem to be based on their values and social influences. Parents who were actively involved in the schools of their children appreciated school leaders and the hard work done by them to reach out to the community. However, some parents took a very casual approach towards their responsibility, showed lack of interest by saying that she never picks up the phone to answer the call from the school fearing that the call is about negative things done by her child. Some parents shared negative perceptions about the principal in their

neighborhood. This perception seemed to be coming out of perceived disparities in

education and the financial situation between the parent and the school principal. One of

the parents mentioned that, a principal's job is very hard, and all the issues are due to the

unique culture of the neighborhoods in which they lived. Parent Focus Group participants

agreed that accountability is the missing link in addressing the barriers that hinder

parental involvement in elementary urban schools in the school district. Parents said that

the school and district were doing a good job of reaching out to them. They mentioned

that the school district uses letters, robo calls, text messages, messages posted on the

district website. One parent spoke favorably:

> I don't think that the principals can do no more than what they do to reach
> parents. The parent has to want to be involved as well. We again can't always
> blame the principal, we have to hold parents accountable as well.

The findings suggest that the culture of the community affects the climate in the schools

and the district office. Building a sense of community and shared responsibility was the

most important theme emerging from parent focus group discussions, and this theme was

also observed in other participants' interviews

Findings from document reviews

The findings from the document reviews suggest that school principals and the

district employed various strategies to involve the parents and provide the information

necessary for students' success. But the parents' low participation resulted in the waste of

efforts, loss of tax dollars, and low morale for the staff. The focus on the curriculum,

which is the center of education, was often viewed with disdain by many parents in the

city. However, when there were meetings to plan a schoolwide fashion show, talent

show, dance recital, cookout or carnival, there was no room to sit, but standing room only. The principals reported that they had numerous parents that would volunteer to 'DJ' the school carnival, decorate the auditorium for the fashion show, and bring rappers or hip-hop artist to the talent show. But the academics were not a priority for the parents.

<div align="center">**Discussion of the Findings**</div>

The importance of parent involvement has been documented by numerous researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. There is a great need for parental involvement in elementary urban schools, and sustained levels of parental involvement have been shown to have a positive effect on students' grades, attendance, attitude, and motivation (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). A strong degree of consistency was noticed among the responses from the principals' interviews, but inconsistency was observed in the parents' perceptions of their own role, and the expectations from the schools. The responses from the principals and FCER were more consistent in comparison to the responses from the parents. The analysis of the data highlights the following dominant themes across all the data sources:

- Life Issues (Crime -Violence-Substance Abuse-Unemployment and Poverty)

- Shortage of staff

- Effect of community on culture of the school

- Lack of trust for school principals on the part of central office staff, and the lack of confidence in central office staff- Heat Ticket

- Culture of snitching/complaints

- Lack of Professional Development

The subsequent sections present the discussion of these themes and subthemes.

All of the participants demonstrated a good understanding of the term parental involvement (PI)' among the principal participants, parents, and the FCER. The findings suggest that parental involvement is a two-way communication process with *shared responsibility*. Communication and understanding are key components of a diverse multi-dimensional model for involving parents in their children's education. Acknowledgment of differences is of the utmost importance when implementing a partnership system (Payne, 2006).

This study found that parents' understanding regarding parent involvement in schooling processes is limited and needs to be improved. The data suggest that the parents do understand the need for parental involvement but were overwhelmed due to *life issues* and the *challenges* in their community (Stewart, 2008). Lack of education, unemployment, crime, substance abuse, and violence in the community exacerbated the issue of low parental involvement. These factors lead to poverty in several homes in the local neighborhood in the selected research site. These findings add to the existing literature on low parental involvement in urban schools.

It is at this time the researcher was faced with addressing his bias regarding the tone and reference to the parents as it relates to the study. The researcher being a current school leader in the same urban district saw the poor conduct of parents on a regular basis. As a student raised on the island of Barbados, the researcher observed parents and teachers as partners. Teachers were welcomed to the homes of parents to discuss student progress, and relationships between the school and the home were valued. Upon migrating to the United States as a third grader, the researcher observed students

disrespecting teachers by using inappropriate language, throwing objects and walking out of class. Fighting was a norm in the researcher's new setting, and the behavior was always of concern to the researcher. It was in the seventh grade when the researcher observed a parent assault a teacher for redirecting his child. In the eleventh grade, the stabbing of the researcher's favorite language arts teacher by a parent caused trauma that has provoked the birthing of this research project. In hopes of shifting the trajectory as it relates to parental involvement in urban schools, the researcher obtained a bachelor and master's degree in education with a focus on school improvement and leadership to aid in addressing the plight of parental involvement in urban schools.

However, even as a classroom teacher the researcher sought creative ways to engage parents in his first and second-grade classes where parental involvement at parent-teacher conferences was minimal to non-existent. The researcher baked cookies, implemented painting activities for children and parents and even offered incentives. However, parents did not show up. This was discouraging, and for this reason the researcher pursued an administrative position to gauge a better approach in shifting the culture of low parental involvement in urban schools. The researcher currently serves in the position as an urban school leader. The researcher has encountered situations with parents behaving inappropriately, using hostility, and causing damage to his personal belongings. The researcher has witnessed parents assaulting school staff, threatening bodily harm, and destroying school property. The researcher in his role as a Transformational Leader, which is a level achieved through consecutive years of high student achievement, maintaining a positive climate, and developing teacher leaders, has supported colleagues who have been hospitalized due to angry and irate parents. With

this being stated, the researcher constantly sought the support of his peers to monitor bias and provide honest feedback during this research project.

An assumption commonly shared by the educators is that ethnic cultural values and norms, in particular, those of the Black culture, are not supportive of education (Msengi, 2007). Epstein (2009) found that poor socioeconomic conditions in both school neighborhoods and those of their pupils negatively affected school stability and thus increased school disorder. In addition, urban minority children in public schools are more likely than children in other racial groups and settings to report the presence of gangs in their schools and are more likely to report being fearful of an attack at or on the way to or from school. Not surprisingly, research suggests that students in schools where gangs, drugs, and weapons are present face higher risks for victimization (Mateu-Gelabert & Lune, 2007).

Several parents reported that not only the students but they themselves felt unsafe walking in the neighborhoods where the schools were located, fearing gunshots and sighting drug deals in the alleys. Due to their safety concerns, parents did not feel comfortable going to schools for events during evening hours. After segregation was abolished, African American parent involvement in schools dropped (Fields-Smith, 2005). Several recent studies have documented low parent participation of African Americans (Banerjee et al., 2009; Vega et al., 2015). African American parents now believed that their children had an opportunity to be successful because of smaller class sizes and better learning environments; therefore, their presence was not necessary. However, a universal approach to parental involvement that empowers parents with a

sense of urgency regarding their students' attainment could evoke a system that gives all parents the tools that build capacity for every child.

A consistent resentment was noticed in the principal participants' responses regarding parents more on the complaining side rather than participating in a constructive way and taking more interest in the academics. A *snitching culture* was reported in the school district. The principal participants reported that the concept of Heat Ticket was introduced to increase parent participation and to enhance transparency. But this resulted in creating negativity in the school district. The responses from three school leaders suggested this. Principal Love challenged the process by saying:

> The "Heat Ticket" culture which was created by who? (side-eye and twisted face) that if a parent has an issue they can come to or call the district office. There is still this engrained culture where parents say, "I don't care I am going to the central office." Now me, being an experienced school leader at this point, I know that I don't care either." (side eye, twisted face).

This response suggests that the heat tickets created anxiety and negative feelings making them feel as though their power was being taken as a leader. Principal Self-shared his thoughts about the heat ticket:

> (Irritated, body twisted, and totally disgusted is the tone, and disposition observed by the researcher) The "Heat Ticket" (SHM-aka-Shaking my head) calls that most often don't need to be addressed. Most calls are from disgruntled parents because they got an answer that they did not want to hear. Most calls are untrue and they create situations and again it goes back to mental health. I have had to take an entire day investigating and writing a narrative (eyes rolling). It is to give parents a platform, but it is not ok to give parents a platform to spill negative energy at a school leader.

This suggests that empowering the parent and bringing in transparency is a good initiative, but there is a risk of misusing the concept. The focus should be to build a

stronger district and a stronger community by collaboration and sustained effort.

Principal Peace said:

> It should not be a platform for parents to share all of their frustrations in life. We all work for the same agency, and there should NEVER (emphasis added) be a time, when parents should air all of their concerns especially when it is televised to publicly humiliate school leaders. Most things become personal and not about the child.

According to Lawson et al. (2017), trust needs to flow both horizontally (within a school) and vertically (between school and district). They refer to these relations among educators within a school as *relational* trust, which is contingent on colleagues having confidence in each other's dependability, honesty, competence, and professionalism. Lack of *reciprocal* trust was evident in the findings. Trust and transparent communication are two sides of the same coin, and both are necessary for organizational learning and improvement.

Trust is also essential for developing individual capacity to innovate and improve; high levels of trust, for example, support the collaboration and professional autonomy required for measuring progress towards improvement goals, and learning how to get better (Lawson et al., 2017; Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2015). Furthermore, Tschannen-Moran & Gareis (2015) believe that when trust is bestowed or expected of one's colleague, it is accompanied by calculated risk and some vulnerability. The full measure of this risk and the cost of vulnerability becomes apparent when acts of betrayal are in evidence. Despite several initiatives used by the participant principals and FCE at the research site, parental involvement continued to be low.

The principals mentioned a culture where parental involvement is reflective of the current circumstance of the parents and community which dictates behavior. Jeynes

(2014) states that a common barrier for parents living in poverty is the stress of violence, poverty, and crime; in addition, educators have negative images when parents do not participate or function in school activities to the degree teachers believe necessarily appropriate. Milner (2010) further argues that other barriers that deter parental involvement in urban settings include scheduling and problems with the transportation. Parents from disadvantaged backgrounds often have barriers volunteering long hours at schools and donating money (Posey-Maddox 2012) for a variety of reasons, including fewer monetary resources, less work flexibility, and a greater likelihood of being a single-parent family.

Several participants during the interviews and focus group discussion mentioned about mental health issues with the family members of their students, and pressures from the job-related responsibilities. Furthermore, Ream and Palardy (2008) found that parents with lower SES, who are more likely to live in less advantaged neighborhoods, have more difficulty building social networks and utilizing their networks to advance their children's education. The lack of *interconnectedness* may lead to lower levels of social control and less effective collective action observed in urban neighborhoods. This study also highlights the importance of *shared responsibility and effective partnerships among* all the stakeholders. One of the barriers that emerged from the data was lack of trust for school principals on the part of central office staff and the lack of confidence in central office staff. The findings add to the existing literature (Howard et al., 2008; Paige and witty, 2010; Whannell et al., 2011; Guryan et al., 2017).

An important concern that emerged from the principals' interviews that resonated with the responses from some parents, was that several parents ignored calls from the

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schools thinking that calls were to inform the parents about negative behavior of their children. The parent focus group underscored the *role of social influence in low family engagement* in the schools. However, the researcher felt that there were often times during the focus group discussion when values evoked a larger conversation inclusive of leadership that was centered on social influence. The parents expressed that they believed that the principals who have attained success and drove nice cars, often looked down on them and the community. This indicated an element of mistrust, and the researcher believes that it needed to be addressed through an open dialogue.

FCE Representative cited the budget deficit, staffing issues, and the rift as the major factors that impede the progress of reaching out to the parents, community, and the staff in addition to the theme *Life Issues.* The effect of the community culture and characteristics seemed to influence the school culture. The findings suggest that the principals and the staff took a real interest in understanding the problems in the community and appeared to be fully involved in reaching out to the parents by using all the available resources. At the same time, they reported frustration due to low parental turn out in the school events. Both the principal participants and FCER reported minimal professional development in the school district on the issue of low parental involvement. This finding accords with the existing literature. School leadership has shared that they often have too few opportunities to hone their craft and focus on improving key practices for leadership and parent engagement (Epstein et al., 2009).

Leadership Styles

The principal participants through their utterances during the interviews showed different leadership styles. One of the participants cited his own personality as a barrier to low PI. This principal seemed to mention that he is not an extrovert, and he would do better in a school that has more PI from parents who value education. Mleckzo and Kington (2013) examined principal quality in the context of principal's influence on the school climate, as it relates to parent engagement. School principals appeared to play a central role in shaping school climate and facilitating parent engagement in children's learning through their leadership style, communication, attitudes, and expectations (Mleczko & Kington, 2013). These researchers further argue that principals who distribute school leadership among parents and teachers will be more successful in accomplishing this goal. The school temperature shifts with changing times as described by the principal participants.

Principal Love clearly reflected the kind of leadership described by Mleckzo and Kington (2013) in terms of building authentic, sustainable, productive relationships, and possessing the interpersonal skills to execute them as is clear from what she said:

> I have to use different ways to communicate. Some parents are intimidated by coming to the school and sit in front of the principal. I have to remove all of that and become personable, some don't need all of that massaging and others do. So, my leadership style is based upon the needs of the situation. If I have to get to the parent, sometimes, I have to take my hat off as the principal and talk to them about a real-life situation.

Principal Love paused and added:

> There are times that I have to disclose my own personal situation just to break down the barrier. I just believe in being flexible, because when you are dealing with the public, especially urban education that goes out the window a lot. There are times when parents tell me that they can't get their children to school on time

because they have two children. I say, "Pause" let me tell you what I do because I have the same challenge. Then they might say, "Well, I am a single mother", I say, "Pause" well so am I and this is what I do. They then say, "Well I am going through this", I say, "Pause" well so am I.

The leadership styles of the participants suggest that some used a combination of the styles based on the needs and the situation.

Need for Professional Development

This study found that all 10 principal participants, in concert with the FCE representative, unanimously agreed that school district office does not provide the necessary professional development needed to address the barriers with low parent engagement or to meet the challenges of the community (Msengi, 2007). Furthermore, according to Turnbull et al., (2014), the findings reverberate with the existing literature and bring new insight about the pressing need for the new design of professional development that is culturally relevant, differentiated and based on research evidence from urban contexts. When school leaders participate in principal-focused professional development, it is largely centered on what is expected for district teacher evaluation policies, and not on the "how" of leading change (George W. Bush Institute, 2016a; School Leaders Network, 2014).

The principals also reported that they were evaluated in the same way regardless of the student population in their schools, and the neighborhoods in which the schools were located. Some principals mentioned large number of students who did not have English as their primary language, and some had a large number of students with special needs. The researcher argues that using 'one size fits all' approach for the evaluation and the professional development will not work. When the approach of 'one size fits all' has

not worked with the students and all stakeholders spend so much time differentiating

instruction, then how can this approach be used for the principals and teachers working in

urban schools. These findings are consistent with the existing literature. Traditional

professional development for principals typically involves workshop-style meetings

where 'one size fits all' content is delivered to administrators who rarely receive critical

feedback (Ikemoto et al., 2014). Thus, there is a need to design need based professional

development for the principals in urban schools based on the realities of the work

environments, and the issues in the local communities.

Summary

The summary and discussion of the findings were presented in this chapter. The

next chapter describes the grounded theory emerged from this study and presents an

interpretive summary of the substantive theory. This is followed by the description of the

new model developed to address the barriers to low PI. The Epstein (2009) model was

refined and extended as it is unable to guide how urban schools, and communities are to

function within this model. Chapter 6 concludes with the presentation of the

recommendations and the conclusion of this study.

CHAPTER 6: GROUNDED THEORY, RECOMMENDATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter describes the grounded theory emerged from this study and presents an interpretive summary of the substantive theory. As explained in chapter 3, the researcher planned to use a modified version of the paradigm model (Strauss et al. 1998) to represent the emergent theory from this study. The emergent theory represented as a model explains the barriers of low parent participation in an urban school district in north-central Maryland by identifying causal conditions, contextual factors, actions taken by the principal participants and FCER, and the outcomes or consequences of those actions (See Figure 2). In this figure, desired outcomes by the principals and FCE are also highlighted along with recommended actions to address the barriers to low PI. Figure 2 thus describes the model to explain and address the barriers of low parent participation in an urban school district in north-central Maryland.

Grounded Theory to Explain and Address the Central Phenomenon of Low Parental Involvement

"The procedures of grounded theory are designed to develop a well-integrated set of concepts that provide a thorough theoretical explanation of social phenomena under study" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 5). The grounded theory design is used when a researcher's objective is to explain the existing conditions that contributed to the occurrence of the phenomenon. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of elementary school principals, parents, and district office staff as it relates to promoting parental involvement in the educational process of children in order to develop a theory addressing the barriers of low parent participation in an urban school

district in north-central Maryland. The purpose of the research has been achieved (see

Figure 3). In the beginning of this chapter, dominant themes emerged from the data

analysis were presented. Collecting data from multiple sources helped in the generation

of the theory.

The *central phenomenon* of interest in this study is 'Barriers to low parental

involvement (PI).' The *causal conditions* were identified as barriers such as:

1. Life Issues (Crime -Violence-Substance Abuse-Unemployment and Poverty)

2. Shortage of staff

3. Effect of community on the culture of the school

4. Lack of trust for school principals on the part of central office staff, and the lack

   of confidence in central office staff- Heat Ticket

5. Culture of snitching/complaints

6. Lack of Professional Development

Barriers # 1, 4, and 5 point to the *lack of human and social capital and* are the contextual

factors that impact the low parental involvement.

To increase parental involvement, action strategies were implemented by school

leaders based on the observations and conversations with stakeholders. These action

strategies identified were (a) distribution of *Food Pantry items*, (b) *Counseling Services*,

organization of entertaining events (dad-daughter dance, mom-son dance, fashion

shows), (c) social events such as cleaning the neighborhood, (d) principals used all the

available resources such as phone calls, emails, letters, visits by the social worker,

psychologists, organizing events after school.

The *HEAT TICKET* system was implemented by the FCER at the central office as a tool to hear from parents and communities regarding the leadership and school climate. The findings suggest that there is a disconnect between the school and the coexistence of the family and community resulting in the lack of trust and confidence. Figure 2 summarizes this *disconnect.*
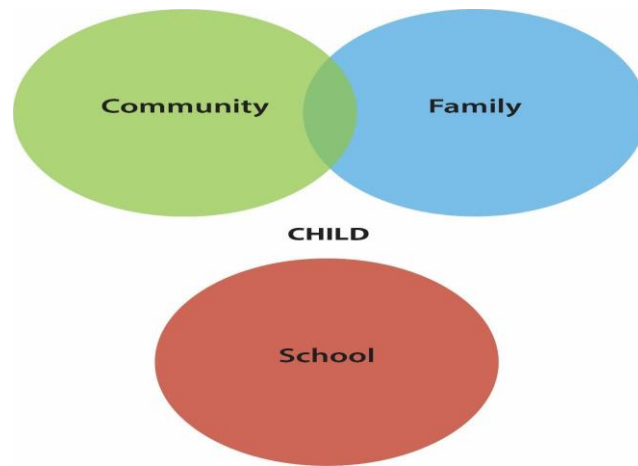
Figure 2. The Disconnect-Current State of Affairs

The overlapping spheres of influence communicate a perfect alignment within the community, family and school when all of the variables are working collaboratively with the child at the center. However, when there is stress or influence of external factors the spheres can become misaligned causing a divide between the coexisting entities referred to in this study as the disconnect. The findings suggest that the disconnect or current state of affairs shows that the school is currently viewed as an isolated force that operates in conflict with the values and beliefs of the family and the community. The school, which emphasizes values, morals, communication, and academics, often battles with the plaguing forces of the community which is riddled with violence, crime, drug abuse, and poverty. Due to the coexistence of the family and community, there is a merging of

values which can be submerged with the principles of survival. The family seeks to

survive while battling the constant challenges embedded within the community. When

these variables are in conflict, the focus on the child becomes less important and often

leads to a down trajectory because the support system is now faltered and the child

becomes a target for failure or academic, social and emotional trauma.

This variable of *mistrust or lack of trust* emerged as a limitation in this study as

the researcher further investigated the data. The Overlapping Spheres of Influence

support that there is a congruence between the existence of the relationships established

by all stakeholders. However, the data support that there are six levels of mistrust as

emerged from this study: trust between

(a) the district office and school leaders,

(b) school leaders and parent

(c) parent and district office

(d) district office and community,

(e) community and school leaders

(f) community and parents.

Figure 3 describes the grounded theory emerged from the data to explain and address the

barriers to low parental involvement.

The Causal Contextual Conditions

Life issues, Unemployment, crime, violence, drugs, and poverty, Shortage of staff, Funding Deficit, Lack of trust and confidence, Culture of snitching, Lack of Professional Development, Leadership styles, mental health

Categories that Emerged From the Data:

Life issues

Beliefs,

Professional

Development

Desired Outcomes by FCE and Principals:

Increased Engagement parents

Outcomes

Persistence of low parental involvement;

No change

Central Phenomenon

Barriers to Low Parental Involvement

Recommendations for

Barriers

Culturally relevant approach to parent engagement
Power of education and dedication
Explore creative strategies

Action Strategies:

Education Through Professional Development
Partnership with Grassroot Organizations
Parent Empowerment
Mental Health Support

Action Strategies

Distribution of Food Pantry items, Counseling Services, organization of entertaining *events* (dad-daughter dance, mom-son dance, fashion shows), social events

Interventions by the FCE

Heat Tickets, Use of other grassroot organizations by FCE, Professional Development

Figure 3. Grounded theory to explain and address the central phenomenon of low parental involvement.

Wheeler Model to Address the Barriers to Low Parental Involvement in the Local School District

The actions taken by the participants did not result in increased parental involvement. So, a need was felt to develop a new model to address the barriers to low parental involvement (see Figure 4). Epstein (2009)'s *Overlapping Spheres of Influence* does not address the current state of affairs at the research sites, as the barriers that school leadership face are multi-layered, complex, uniquely sensitive, and plagued with poverty and inequity. Parental involvement is unique in itself to the culture of the local school district. Based on the findings of this study, a model was developed to explain and address the barriers to low parental involvement. It is hoped that this model, henceforth called the *Wheeler's Model* to address the barriers to low parental involvement, will foster a culture of collaboration, respect, and will be driven by the heartbeat of the district which is the children.

Throughout the process of data analysis, the researcher was enlightened with a deep insight into personalizing parental involvement that transcends urban communities. In order to enhance parental involvement, the school leader must lead the community with compassion and empathy without compromising the integrity of the educational institution. The school leader must foster a community of trust and collaboration, thereby recognizing that many parents are at capacity, and are doing the very best that they can. As we differentiate instruction for students, we must often times differentiate our approach when engaging urban parents. We must set high expectations, but those expectations must be realistic, achievable, and sustainable. Urban parents often come

with the potential but they lack the roadmap that will cultivate their potential to a state of progress. There is a need to use the power of education and find creative ways to engage parents in urban contexts.

The model to address the barriers to low parental involvement is powered with and by education and the reestablishment of relationships. This brings in new knowledge, as the blame is often shifted from one entity of the circle to the other in the Epstein (2009) model of overlapping spheres. The findings suggest that all the stakeholders involved are in need of support. Thus, there is a strong need to develop partnerships by using the *bottom-up approach* in order to develop a sense of shared responsibility to effect the change.

However, the only party that is central in the whole operational model is the Office of Family and Community Engagement. It is there that the parents complain and are pacified, and it is there that the school leader should receive support to cope with the challenges of urban education but does not receive it. It is there that the school leader is reprimanded and hears the allegations of the parent. Therefore, we must look to this office to provide professional development for parents, community, and the school. The findings do suggest that parents, district staff, and the principals have the best interest of the child at the forefront of their conversation. The parents, district staff, and the principals need to be professionally trained to respectfully interrelate with each other after taking responsibility for their role in the development of the child. There is a need to foster an environment of transparency and responsibility.

Wheeler's Model: Continuous Circle of Engagement

The researcher, who is an advocate for urban children and has dedicated his life towards shifting the trajectory for children in poverty, believes in the message conveyed in the book by Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, Leadership on the Line—With a New Preface: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Change, and its relevance to the outcome of this study. Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky (2002) advocate for (a) collective creativity, (b) adaptive change that is sustainable, (c) solidarity with diversity. The authors recommend equipping school leaders with the tools and resources to make shared decisions. Change is never an easy process, and the challenges that arise can either motivate towards longevity or cripple and minimize sustainability. In the field notes taken during the interviews, the researcher frequently noted the principal participants' responses to the changing climate in the school district that will require school leaders to explore new strategies to promote parent participation. Some of the parents during the focus group also hinted that they wanted strong leadership. They wanted to know that the leaders believed that the parents can bring something to the table for conversation and consideration. Change for all individuals must add value, and must be relevant to the current audience in which the change will be implemented.

Furthermore, all parties must see their worth during the change that it may be implemented with longevity and the appropriate resources for maximum productivity. Change is never an easy process, and the challenges that arise can either motivate towards longevity or cripple and minimize sustainability. Taking risks is inevitable when addressing change in any capacity. However, making the most of opportunities will aid in

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fostering a climate where buy-in and commitment to the vision will lead to progressive outcomes and a shifting of the minds.

Everyone during the change period will be seeking leadership that is relentless, fearless, grounded, knowledgeable, and experienced. They want to know that in times of uncertainty and distress that the leader is capable, and confident despite the current state of affairs. Everyone wants a leader that wins, but most importantly, everyone is looking for the leadership that is honest, transparent, and empathetic to their needs. Based on the findings, recommendations were incorporated into the development of the *Wheeler Model of Circle of Continuous Engagement.* The new model describes ways to address the barriers to low parental involvement, build the capacity of the principals to handle challenges in their schools, and build human and social capital of the communities being served by the school district.

Recommendations to Address the Barriers at the Research Site

In the wake of the findings from this study and the philosophy of continuous circle of engagement, exploring new strategies to promote parent participation is essential. Through education and parenting classes, parents may receive the training and skills to function appropriately in the school environment in order to reinforce the values and morals that are taught by the school and at home. These classes may assist in setting those expectations within the community, and interact with the community resources to assist with the challenges that they are currently facing.

It is recommended that a *Community Literacy Mission* document should be developed in partnership with the grassroot organizations, and voices of the school staff

should be incorporated. In this mission, a partnership may be developed with a local university. Additionally, high school students may be encouraged to participate in this mission as part of their service learning credit. This will foster a community of collaboration where parents are vested and will feel empowered, and valued to buy into this paradigm of change. Additionally, there is a need to restore the value education curriculum in the school district. Overcoming barriers to increasing parent participation requires creating more effective parent involvement opportunities by including activities such as cleaning, planting trees in the neighborhood, educating parents, and more parent focus group discussions.

Under this model, school leaders will receive support through professional development and job-embedded support from the FCE office to assist with engaging urban parents. The concept of spiritual leadership and is infusion with value education need further investigation, in 2010, President George Bush authorized federally-funded partnerships between the government and faith-based groups. This initiative gave faith-based organizations the autonomy to use tax-payers' dollars to expand social services within their local communities. This venture also pleased the Honorable President Barack Obama as he extended and supported the initiative during his tenure as well.

This can be fostered through the support of local community organizations inclusive of the church, which is still the cornerstone of the community. This kind of setup may provide psychological, social, emotional, and physical support to the schools. Community organizations, with the support of the FCE office, can be the facilitators of trainings within the community and the school. This partnership may bring transparency

and enhance collaboration by providing mediation for the school and the home. This approach may begin the conversation, and initiate a cycle of change with the potential to shift beliefs and practices. This cycle of change is represented by Wheeler's Model: Continuous Circle of Engagement (See Figure 4).

Wheeler's Model: Continuous Circle of Engagement through education fosters a community approach where each component within the community has the necessary support in shifting the trajectory of parent involvement as we know it. It moves the child from the center of the conversation to the forefront of the conversation, which is now inclusive and not isolated. According to the data, Parents, School and Community, all want the best for their children and care for their children and hold them in high regards. However, there are gaps at all points of the spectrum as it relates to how parents interact with the school, how parents interact with the central office, and how parents interact with the community. Also noted are break downs as it relates to the relationship with the school and the parents, the school and the community, and the school and central office.

Finally, there are concerns among the members of the community, school, the parents, and the central office. For this reason, no one entity can be blamed for the lack of parental involvement in the school, but it is a compilation of all participants in the circle that impact parents and their level of engagement. The way to change these dynamics is through education, and the hub will be the office of Family and Community Engagement (FCE). This office has the ability to reach into areas that the school cannot reach on its own. As the hub for engagement and advocacy, FCE can foster a community of learning and ongoing professional development for school leaders, parents, and the community.

This office should be provided funding and resources to educate school leaders on how to engage parents of the urban culture.

Wheeler's Model: Continuous Circle of Engagement

The Reconnect

Building Stronger Communities through Power of Education
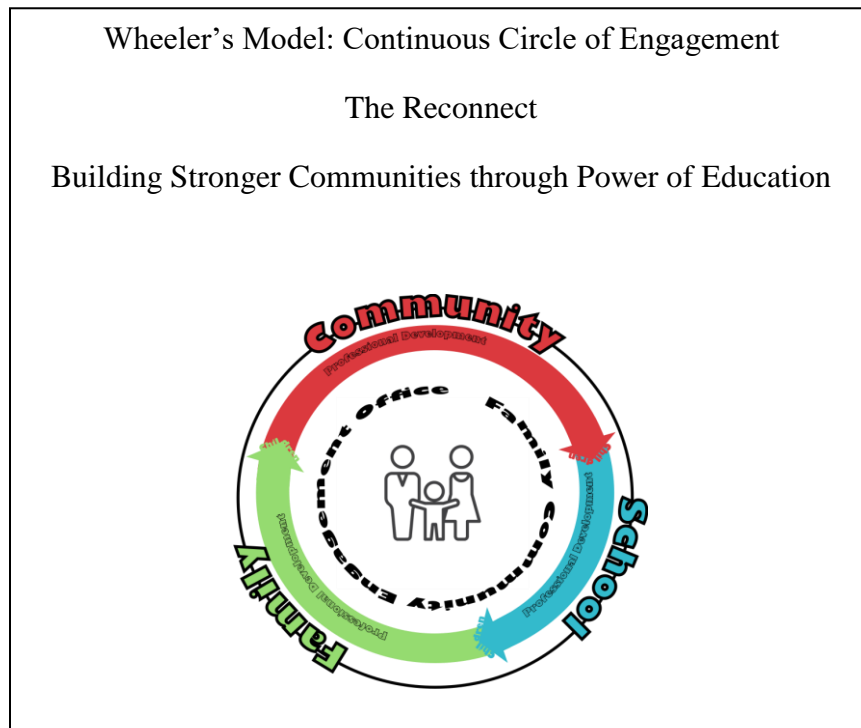
Figure 4. Wheeler's Model of Continuous Circle of Engagement

Another important function of FCE would be to educate parents on how to conduct themselves in the school, and also to educate the community on how to support the schools and the family by pouring resources back in the schools, building partnerships and reinstituting the whole notion of "*The Village*." The behavior of the parents in the schools can be irate and unacceptable, school leaders can at times lack empathy, and the community being overwhelmed with violence, drugs, and crime can only be transformed through education and ongoing professional development. The most critical part regarding the model is, when the children are at the forefront of all the participants, they

are never left alone, and always have an advocate to shield them during challenging times.

Locating the Model in the Literature

The emergent model is very similar to some of the models reviewed in chapter 2. Epstein (2009) Model places the child in the center of the overlapping spheres. Therefore, when challenges occur that cause the sphere to draw apart, then the child is left in the center alone. There is no umbrella for advocacy or support. Furthermore, the model of overlapping spheres is unable to guide how urban schools and communities are to function within this model. Most of the families in urban communities' struggle with poverty. Some of the demands outlined by Epstein can't be implemented by parents in poverty because they do not have the means. For example, most families have multiple children and cannot provide a place at the home, where children can work quietly in isolation.

Most educational leaders are grossly underprepared to address the range of inequities in underserved communities of color such as structural and institutional racism, systemic poverty, and violence (Ishimaru, 2013). Moreover, families in poverty are often in conflict with the values of the school most probably due to the shift in focus on aspirations. This study also found that barriers such as single-family households, incarceration, unemployment, crime in the community, and violence are the factors that can impact the overlapping spheres of influence, and cause the school, family, and community to work in isolation. Epstein (2009) also suggested less overlap among the spheres of influence due to changing demographics.

The model of a continuous circle of engagement through education fosters a community approach where each component has the necessary support in shifting the trajectory of parent involvement as we know it. It moves the child from the center of the conversation to the forefront of the conversation which is now inclusive and is not isolated. According to the data, parents, school, and the community all want the best for their children. However, there are gaps at all points of the spectrum as it relates to (a) how parents interact with the school; (b) how parents interact with the central office; and (c) how parents interact with the community. Also noted are break downs as it relates to the relationship among the school, parents, and the community.

Finally, there are concerns within (a) the community and the school, (b) the community and the parents, and (c) the community and the central office. For this reason, no one entity can be blamed for the lack of parental involvement in the school, but it is a compilation of all participants in the circle that impacts parents and their level of engagement. The way to change these dynamics is through education, and the hub will be the office of Family and Community Engagement, and a subdivision dealing with the mission of literacy in the community. This office has the ability to reach into areas that the school cannot reach alone.

A Functional Family and Community Engagement Office

Wheeler's model of continuous engagement advocates for a new approach to engagement and advocacy with the family and community engagement office. This paradigm shift will allow the central office to operate as the hub where collaboration with all stakeholders can foster a community of learning and ongoing professional

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development for school leaders, parents, and the community. This office can educate

school leaders on how to engage parents in urban cultures and it can educate parents on

how to conduct themselves in the school and house. This office will serve and a resource

for the community by providing resources for the schools, establishing relevant

partnerships and reinstituting the whole notion of "The Village." The behavior of the

parents in the schools can be irate and unacceptable at times. In addition, school leaders

can at times lack empathy for the community in which they serve. Many urban

communities are overwhelmed with violence, drugs, and crime, which can only be

transformed through education and ongoing professional development. The most critical

part regarding the new model is children remain at the forefront of all the stakeholders

and they are never left alone. In each phase of Wheeler's model, the children are always

attached to an advocate to shield them during challenging times.

A New Approach to Highly Effective School Leaders

Wheeler's model of continuous engagement will foster a community where

school leaders are effectively trained to respond to the changing needs of urban

communities. Incorporating the services of community partners equipped with the skills

to address mental health and the social needs of families in poverty will be a focus for

developing strong school leaders. As a part of the job-embedded professional

development cycle, the services of external partners and grassroot organizations will be

infused as a part of the school culture to support the school principal. This support will be

solicited from colleges and universities, mental health organizations, churches and social

services. These additional services embedded in the school community will release

additional time for school leaders to focus on preparing students to be globally

competitive, proficient on state and local assessments, and functional producers of

knowledge.

Building Parental Involvement Capacity

Wheeler's model of continuous engagement supports parents as partners. As

parents are focused on providing new and innovative opportunities for their children,

wrap-around services will be available at the school to support their endeavors. This

model will build parent capacity by providing individualized services to meet the unique

needs of each parent. Community and grassroot organizations, in partnership with the

school, will provide training and workshops to reestablish relationships, address the

mental health issues of the parents and families, and empower the parents to shift their

thinking and see their value in the overall success of their children.

A Community Focus on Children

Wheeler's model of continuous engagement recognizes the school as the beacon

of the community. The school is the place where families come together to celebrate the

achievement, recognize student talents through the arts, and is a sanctuary for meals in

the summer when there is nowhere else to turn. The goal of this model is to reengage the

community by reestablishing the value of the children.

The family which is the core of the community is the first learning station for

children. However, it is the community that can either reinforce or undermines the values

of the family. The community is influential and can be viewed as either a barrier or

companion in rearing positive children. When external partners and grassroot

organizations establish a visible presence in the community, they build trust and foster relationships. A visible presence denounces fear and promotes tolerance. It opens a pathway for conversations and develops a sense of security. When these relationships are built of the platform of children, everyone feels a sense of pride and achievement. This model is designed to build capacity at all levels with the children as the focus, but most importantly as the beneficiaries.

Recommendations for Further Research

This section revisits the significance of the study and speaks precisely to inform the practices of urban districts, leadership scholars, and educators in their attempt to increase parental involvement. Based on the discussion of the findings, the following recommendations are made:

Recommendation One

The Overlapping Sphere of Influence espoused by Joyce Epstein should be further modified to include new strategies that address the variable 'changing demographics' and create a process that would shift the trajectory for urban schools as new challenges emerge.

My study found that most educational leaders are grossly underprepared to address the range of inequities in underserved communities of color, such as structural and institutional racism, systemic poverty, and violence (Ishimaru, 2013). The *Overlapping Spheres of Influence* do not address the changing demographics that our urban school principals face today, especially in the schools in north-central Maryland. The first recommendation emphasizes the relevance of the correlates or the current state

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of affairs in conjunction with the changing demographics. Urban schools are not with the necessary tools to address the multitude of challenges that are plaguing urban communities (i.e. gang violence, opioid epidemic, mass incarceration, and police brutality/corruption). These factors are often extracted from the conversation, most importantly, "the children," and their input or contributions are never considered in an effort to truly identify what works.

Recommendation Two

More depth research must be done on the development of a new approach to school leadership quality.

The researcher explored a facet of leadership. During the literature review, it was found that school leaders should be a compassionate, communicator, inclusive, and engaging (Mleckzo & Kington, 2013). Doecke et al., 2008 (as cited in Mleckzo et al., 2013) point out that little research exists on these characteristics. But it certainly adds creditability to the complexity of leading urban schools. The researcher concurs with the literature in recommending further research in this area.

Recommendation Three

Equip school leaders with the appropriate tools to engage a few influential parents to foster an environment [where parents can use their presence to convert more parents] to embrace the continuous growth model to positively impact and increase parental involvement in urban schools.

Findings support a culture of mistrust and a lack of collaboration between all parties, inclusive of school leaders, district office (specifically, FCE), and parents

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towards the evaluation of the existing PD programs which fail to address the barriers that exist in promoting parental involvement. There is a sense of urgency for identifying a new approach that focuses on the barriers inclusive of a need-based professional development program that will address the unique challenges of urban schools based on the student populations in those schools. The researcher posits that leading this initiative is not only the responsibility of the school leader, but also the function of the district staff, parents, teachers, and all stakeholders. This requires a paradigm shift, inclusive of the requirement of continuous growth.

Recommendation Four

The concept of transformational leadership to enhance community growth and development should be incorporated along with other styles of leadership.

This recommendation for the collaboration of school leaders, district staff, and parents requires conducting workshops in the field, modeling the behaviors that they expect, and design courses, curriculum, and professional development around the specifics of context and the needs. It is clear that effective professional development involves coaching and mentoring (Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2014). According to Grissom & Harrington (2010), coaching often happens over a specific period and focuses on a targeted set of skills. Coaches are able to ask strategic, focused questions at critical moments that help individuals grow in their roles as experts (Von Frank, 2012). Mentoring on the other hand often refers to specific guidance and support for neophytes during the initiation phase (Mitgang, 2007). Despite the fact that the two terms are seldom used reciprocally, they are quite different in their respective roles. Often times,

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educators are confused regarding the definition of the two and the kind of coaching that would yield the best results in the urban settings. The researcher believes that this recommendation is pivotal both in the school, family, and community in the context of parental involvement if schools are going to lead the renaissance in effectively re-engaging parents for 21st century transformation.

Recommendation Five

The study can be replicated in middle and high schools in the urban settings, and in other contexts with the underserved populations. Future studies may explore the perceptions of the students about PI in the middle and high school settings.

Recommendation Six

Given the literature and the data cited in this study, the researcher recommends further study on the *variable of trust*. This variable emerged as a limitation in this study because of the observed strained relationships that existed at various levels at the research site. The various levels of mistrust as emerged from this study were trust between (a) the district office and school leaders, (b) school leaders and parent, (c) parent and district office, (d) district office and community, (e) community and school leaders, and (f) community and parents. The researcher believes that the ultimate goal of this research would be to re-establish *trust* in an effort to maximize students' academic achievement.

Recommendation Seven

It is recommended that the school district should work collaboratively with other agencies to recognize and address the mental health of some parents, and work to curtail the woes/worries of life for the parents.

Establishing partnerships with external organizations would extend the arms of the school district. Fostering partnerships with grassroot organizations will prepare a pathway for parents to receive the services that they need to function efficiently in their role as parents. Relinquishing the responsibility to trained professionals will also provide greater opportunities for the school district to establish a culture where education is embraced and valued.

Recommendation Eight

The school district may consider the creation of community schools. Recent research endorses the positive effect of creating *Community* schools (Anderson, Howland & McCoach, 2015; Momeni, 2015) in urban districts. These school provide mentoring, tutoring, athletic programs, and social events to build collaboration, improve academic success, and build capacity for not just the students but their families as well.

Conclusion

This grounded theory study explored principals', parents', and district office staff experiences and perceptions in promoting parental involvement in their children's educational process. Furthermore, this study examined district policies and practices that may hinder or facilitate parental involvement in order to develop a model to explain and address the barriers to parental involvement. The findings are in accord with the existing literature but also provide an insight into beginning a conversation towards establishment of a new directive to resolve the identified barriers. The study has the potential to contribute to future policy planning.

To summarize, cultural, social, and economic factors have acted as barriers to parental involvement in the urban schools. The findings suggest that misconceived notions towards school leadership need to be addressed in a responsible way, and there is a need to develop empathy towards the challenging work done by all stakeholders in the system due to the unique nature of the culture of the local neighborhoods from which these students come to the schools. The findings presented underscore the importance of inculcation of the culture of appreciation and values among kids. To achieve this, parents and children need to understand the power of education and dedication. Students who develop social and emotional skills are less likely to participate in high-risk behavior and are more able to persevere through academic challenges (Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000).

Based upon the data, no single variable can be designated as being the leading factor for low parent involvement in urban elementary schools at the research site. Likewise, some consistencies were captured between participants' responses regarding barriers, leadership, professional development, and what was actually occurring in the school community. The research supports the need for a paradigm shift at the district office level as the core initiator in cultivating the action plan that would be inclusive of school leaders, parents, community members, and fellow stakeholders. However, at the forefront of the work will be the beneficiaries of the highly anticipated shift, our children. As it relates to re-establishing a culture of respect and collegiality, another point worthy of further discussion was the reporting system known as "Heat Tickets." Many of the principal participants referenced their distaste for the process, and the impact that it had

on the culture of the principal community, and on students in general. Such measures may create unhealthy equations among various stakeholders. There is a need to refine this practice. A recurrent theme that emerged from the data was *building relationships and shared responsibility*. No organization can be successful without this important construct inherent in its culture.

Sometimes, principals play a crucial role in establishing parental involvement; however, sometimes they are not willing to take the necessary steps to promote parental involvement in their individual schools. The researcher believes that one of the reasons this occurs is due to the fact that principals do not have the skill set to engage parents in the work around student achievement. Furthermore, school districts often fail to provide school leaders with professional development geared towards promoting a culture and climate of partnership. This study underscores the need for designing professional development that is (a) differentiated, (b) culturally relevant, (c) based on the realities of the work environments, (d) the issues in the local communities, and (e) based on the research evidence from urban contexts. Engaging parents in transparent conversations and providing resources will shift the trajectory of the current state of affairs to a collaborative, respectful, highly effective partnership, where students excel socially, emotionally, and academically. Voices of the principals should be included while designing professional development programs.

An important contribution of this study is the development of a model to explain and address the barriers related to low parental involvement. Based on the findings, recommendations were incorporated into the development of Wheeler's Model of Circle

of Continuous Engagement. The new model describes ways to address the barriers to low

parental involvement by building the capacity of the principals, and human and social

capital of the parents in the communities being served by the school district enabling

them to handle challenges in their schools, and the city.

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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Forms for the Principal Participants, Parents, and FCER

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a study of The Principal's Perspective and Experiences about Parental Involvement as it relates to Promoting Parental Participation in Their Child's Educational Process

We hope to develop a new theory to support the current state of affairs that impact our schools and communities at large. The study is being conducted by Dwayne Wheeler of Morgan State University. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of your experiences and perceptions as a school leader in shifting the current trajectory of parental involvement in urban schools.

If you decide to participate, the researcher will conduct a thirty-minute to one hour semi structured interviews with traditional elementary principals in Baltimore City Public Schools, coupled with theoretical sampling, maintain their anonymity, audio tape and transcribe the interview. It should be noted that additional data collection will include document reviews of parent workshop meetings, School Family Council, PTO sessions. Triangulation and member checking will be used to add credibility and trustworthiness (validity and reliability) to this study. This grounded theory qualitative study will further investigate that when parent involvement exists in urban schools the impact can be great and often lead to a downward trajectory.

Parental involvement is in need of a renaissance. Therefore, there is a need to develop a new theory to support the current state of affairs that faces our schools, homes and communities. To minimize any discomforts, the researcher will conduct the interviews and document reviews on the campus of the selected principals, provide refreshments, and review documents in the area assigned by the school leader. The estimated total time of the visit will be 2 hours. There is no foreseen risk of any kind for participating in the interview. This grounded theory study will contribute academically and theoretically to the study of parental involvement, school districts, and school leaders. Academically, educational research journals, leadership scholars, and public-school administrators will be the benefactors. Theoretically, the outcome of this study will allow for the development of a new theory that will allow for replication.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relation with Morgan State University. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us. If you have any additional questions later about the study, please contact Dwayne Wheeler at. The Faculty Advisor, Dr. Omari Jackson, who will be happy to answer them. If you have further administrative questions, you may contact the MSU IRB Administrator, Dr. Edet Isuk.

You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate. You may withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which you may be entitled after signing this form should you choose to discontinue participation in this study.

_____   _____

Signature: Date:

_____   _____

Signature of Parent/Legal Guardian (If necessary)   Date

_____   _____

Signature of Witness (If appropriate)   Signature of Investigator

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a study of The Principal's Perspective and Experiences about Parental Involvement as it relates to Promoting Parental Participation in Their Child's Educational Process

We hope to develop a new theory to support the current state of affairs that impact our schools and communities at large. The study is being conducted by Dwayne Wheeler of Morgan State University. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of your experiences and perceptions as a staff member in the Office of Family and Community Engagement in shifting trajectory of parental involvement in urban schools.

If you decide to participate, the researcher will conduct a thirty-minute to one hour semi structured interviews with Staff of the Office of Family and Community engagement in Baltimore City Public Schools, coupled with theoretical sampling, maintain their anonymity, tape and transcribe the interview. It should be noted that additional data collection will include document reviews. Triangulation and member checking will be used to add credibility and trustworthiness (validity and reliability) to this study. This grounded theory qualitative study will further investigate that low parental involvement in urban schools can negatively impact children's education and often lead to a downward trajectory.

Parental involvement is in need of a renaissance. Therefore, there is a need to develop a new theory to support the current state of affairs that faces our schools, homes and communities. To minimize any discomforts, the researcher will conduct the interviews and document reviews on the campus of the selected staff, provide refreshments, and review documents in the area assigned by the staff member. The estimated total time of the visit will be 2 hours. There is no foreseen risk of any kind for participating in the interview. This grounded theory study will contribute academically and theoretically to the study of parental involvement, school districts, and school leaders. Academically, educational research journals, leadership scholars, and public-school administrators will be the benefactors. Theoretically, the outcome of this study will allow for the development of a new theory that will allow for replication.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relation with Morgan State University**.** If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us. If you have any additional questions later about the study, please contact Dwayne Wheeler or the Faculty Advisor, Dr. Omari Jackson, who will be happy to answer them. If you have further administrative questions, you may contact the MSU IRB Administrator, Dr. Edet Isuk.

You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate. You may withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which you may be entitled after signing this form should you choose to discontinue participation in this study.

_____   _____

Signature: Date:

_____   _____

Signature of Parent/Legal Guardian (If necessary)   Date

_____   _____

Signature of Witness (If appropriate)   Signature of Investigator

PARENT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

My name is Dwayne Wheeler and I am a (graduate student) at Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland. I am inviting you to participate in my research study titled: "The Principals' Perspectives and Experiences about Parental Involvement as it relates to Promoting Parental Participation in Their Child's Education Process." Involvement in the study is voluntary, so you may choose to participate or not. A description of the study is written below.

I am interested in Understanding Principals' Perspectives and Experiences: Promoting Parental Involvement in Children's Educational Process. You will be asked to share some of the barriers that cause parents to be absent or uninvolved and how school leaders support or fail to support you in being engaged in your children's education. This will take approximately one hour of your time. The risks to your participation in this study are minimal to none. They are not greater than those encountered in daily life. These risks will be minimized by reassuring, through the informed consent agreement that your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw or refuse to participate without any penalty at any time.

Your responses will be anonymous, such that it would be impossible to link your name

with any responses in any published report.

Your responses will be held confidential but not anonymous. This means that your name and responses will be linked in data file(s) retained by the researcher, but with few exceptions, the researcher promises not to divulge this information. All information that is gathered will be kept in a locked file that is accessible only to the researcher. All individual records will be destroyed within one year of the conclusion of this research. The results of this research will only be reported in the aggregate for the total group of participants. The personal identity of any participant will not be revealed at any time. In fact, participants will be assigned fictitious names. During the study, data collected will be kept under lock and key in an encrypted computer in the researcher's file cabinet at home

The study has been submitted to Morgan State IRB and Baltimore City Schools IRB. You can ask question about this research study now or at any time during the study, by talking to the principal investigator or the Faculty Adviser. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or feel that you have not been treated fairly, please call Morgan State University IRB Administrator, Dr. Edet Isuk.

Even though all aspects of the study may not be explained (e.g., the entire purpose of the study), during the debriefing session you will be given additional information about the study and have the opportunity to ask questions.

By signing below, you indicate that you understand the information above, and that you wish to participate in this research study.

_____   _____

Participant Signature   Printed Name   Date

You may consent to having your interview recorded via audiotape or you may decline. Please sign your initials by the appropriate statement below to indicate these wishes.

__ I consent to my interview being recorded via audiotape.

__ I do not consent to my interview being recorded via audiotape.

You may consent to having your name and other identifying characteristics used in the report that results from the research project or you may decline. Please sign your initials by the appropriate statement below to indicate these wishes.

__ I hereby consent to having my name and other identifying characteristics used in the

research report.

__ I do not consent to having my name and other identifying characteristics used in the

research report.

Appendix B

The Interview Schedule

Intended Targeted Audience: Principals, Family Community Engagement Office, and

Parents

Principal Interview Schedule

Time	Day	Participant (Fictitious name assigned)
10:00 a.m.	July 30	Principal Good
1:00 p.m.	July 30	Principal Kind
3:00 p.m.	July 30	Principal Peace

Time	Day	Participant (Fictitious name assigned)
10:00 a.m.	July 31	Principal Gentle
12:00 p.m.	July 31	Principal Hope
2:00 p.m.	July 31	Principal Long
4:00 p.m.	July 31	Principal Joy

Time	Day	Participant (Fictitious name assigned)

Time	Day	Participant
10:00 a.m.	August 1	Principal Love
12:00 p.m.	August 1	Principal Meek
2:00 p.m.	August 1	Principal Control

Family Community Engagement Office Representatives

Time	Day	Participant (Fictitious name assigned)
10:00 a.m.	August 2	FCE Rep

Parent Focus Group Time	Day	Participant (Fictitious name assigned)
11:00 a.m.	August 4	Parent Participant

Appendix C
Interview Guide

Research Question #1: *How do urban elementary principals in the school district describe the barriers to effective family engagement practices at their schools?*

Interview Questions for Research Question #1

How do you define parental involvement? What does it look like in your specific school?

What are some activities that you currently embedded in your yearly schedule to promote parental involvement?

What do you think are the major barriers that keep parents from being involved?

Research Question #2: *To what extent has leadership played a role in addressing low levels of family engagement at their schools?*

Interview Questions for Research Question #2

How would you describe your leadership style?

How do you use your leadership style to influence parents in your school community to become involved?

Research Question #3: *How do urban elementary school principals describe their experiences as it relates to professional development and parent engagement?*

Interview Questions for Research Question #3: 1. Have they been adequately prepared/trained to address low levels of family engagement or the challenges associated with urban communities at their schools?

Please provide specific examples of leadership development activities and how is parent accountability factored in the process?

Is there anything that you would like to share? Are there any questions that you might have for me?

Interview Guide continued-

Research Question: *How do urban elementary principals describe the barriers to effective family engagement practices at their schools?*

Sub-questions:

Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to have a conversation with me around the topic of parental involvement. Please tell me a little bit about yourself? How long have you been in the field of education? How long have you been an administrator? How long have you served at your current school? What is your highest degree earned?

How do you define parental involvement? What does it look like in your specific school?

What are some activities that you currently embedded in your yearly schedule to promote parental involvement?

What do you think are the major barriers that keep parents from being involved?

Research Question: *To what extent has leadership played a role in addressing low levels of family engagement at their schools?*

Sub-questions:

How would you describe your leadership style?

How do you use your leadership style to influence parents in your school community to become involved?

Research Question: *How do traditional urban elementary school principals describe their experiences as it relates to professional development and parent engagement?*

Each interview will begin with a definition of terms followed by the research questions.
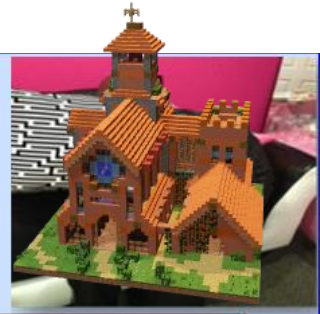
Focus Group on Addressing the Barriers

of Low Parental Involvement in Urban

Schools

Elementary Middle School

Saturday August 4, 2018 @ 11am

Lunch will be provided

For more information contact:

Dwayne T. Wheeler @ dwwhe1@morgan.edu

Appendix E
Field Notes

Interview Date	Pseudonym	Field Notes
July 30th	Principal Good	Principal Good was extremely comfortable in his dress down attire. He had on capri shorts and a t-shirt with a pair of sneakers. He had an extremely engaging personality but I could see that he was zero tolerance. He multi tasked with utmost professionalism and it was evident that he was committed to student success. He handled everyone that he encountered with care and I could see his passion and commitment to the advancement of his students and overall school community. Principal Good had quite a bit going on but made our conversation a priority upon handling some school related business. There was need for assistance in the office but I was impressed with the way he balances a number of overlapping concerns but made me comfortable in the midst of the ongoing interruptions.
July 30th	Principal Kind	Principal Kind was very dapper and engaging upon my arrival. He was so happy to see that I followed through on my promise of lunch despite the fact that I told him that I was providing fat back, hog mog, and chitlins. The lunch menu really lightened the moment and prepared the climate for a rich and engaging conversation. He was open,

		charismatic, passionate, and sincere. As he delved into the crab cakes, he would lean back in the chair and I could see the light bulb clicking as he provided real life experiences that have shaped his leadership style and overall perspective of the district.
July 30th	Principal Peace	Principal Peace had been waiting for me as he was preparing to leave for his vacation. But he was committed to supporting me with my research and I was indeed grateful for his flexibility and support. Principal Peace was excited to share as he was in restructuring is outlook on parent engagement and wanted to do more to prepare his staff in engaging parents despite the challenges that the community faces. He was candid, funny, accommodating and passionate.
July 31st	Principal Gentle	Principal Gentle was extremely warm and inviting. She had done quite a bit of ordering so her office had an abundance of resources. She had such a motherly personality, and she continuously apologized for the clutter. She cleared a space on the conference table to host lunch and to accommodate the interview and she wanted to clean with wipes and polish. It was good to see a glimpse of what the students receive every day. Principal Gentle was relaxed, honest and

		was insistent on showing me the data to support what she shared.
July 31st	Principal Hope	Principal Hope is extremely mild mannered, humble, quiet and reserved. He was dressed down with the shorts and t-shirts but the loafer added a flare that was reflective of his personality. The colors he wore were calming and his office is reflective of strength, but yet tranquil and soothing at the same time. He processed every question and incorporated all of his experiences to give me a holistic perspective of leadership.
July 31st	Principal Long	Principal Long has a powerful personality that exudes spirituality and power. He walks with authority and commanded respect just by the way he entered the office area and interacted with the individuals that he engaged. He was extremely articulate but also spoke from the heart. It was evident that his position as a leader was connected to his convictions and sense of purpose. I could see that he held himself accountable and had no fear to operate in any capacity within the school. His leadership style captures and encompasses who he is. I left feeling empowered and motivated to complete my assignment because the work is greater than the title.

July 31st	Principal Joy	Principal Joy was extremely passionate about her role as an instructional leader. She preferred to host the conference in the data room which displayed every student's data. It was unique to her personality and she was confident in her response to the questions that were posed. She operated in total transparency and was not afraid to address any of the questions. She spoke with a sense of urgency and added a lot of humor to the conversation.
August 1st	Principal Love	Principal Love has an extremely huge personality. She was inviting, passionate, engaging, and professional. Principal Love is committed to the work. She loves her school community but she is aware that there are some deeply rooted challenges that plague the community that are greater than her position. She believes in transparency and empowering the parents about the reality of the work. She believes in doing whatever it takes to get the job done. She seeks to connect to the parents and the community in an effort to impact positive change. She believes in serving the whole child inclusive of the family and she listens to the community and finds a way to address their concerns.
August 1st	Principal Control	Principal Control was very energetic, personable and poised. There was a sense of ownership that created a positive tone in the room and he had a strong sense of

		urgency. His office is inviting, yet sets a tone of virility. There is a story in his office that describes his journey to leadership and he is able to connect to different areas of the school intentionally without making anyone aware. He was vibrant, engaging and processed every question before responding.
August 1st	Principal Meekness	Principal Meekness greeted me with such a warm hug. She had been dealing with a few community challenges but she was determined to demonstrate leadership in the midst of her hardship. The interview was emotional as she tried to talk through her tears. But she had something to share and she remained focused on the issue at hand. She had quite a bit of traffic as the community was in transition but she closed everything out and focused on giving the best responses possible. Her responses were thoughtful and deliberate. She is highly knowledgeable and believes in administrators supporting administrators because the district doesn't do it.
August 2nd	FCE Rep	The FCE Rep was an extremely humble individual. The greeting that I received was extremely warm and inviting. I could sense that the timing of this conversation was good because I could sense a burden to fix all of the broken areas that is currently plaguing the city. I could see the desire to

		provide principals with the knowledge and no how to address the parent's needs and to build strong children. I could see her desire to empower parents to make decisions that are centered around their children's' success. I could see her desire to develop a stable team that is focused on the work of changing the current trajectory of city schools. I could hear in her voice the pain of the parents that have shared unimaginable stories about living in abandoned homes, no lights or heat during the winter with children in the home. As she spoke about the challenges of the parents it was definitely something that needed to be lifted off of her and I could tell that this experience was twofold. It was to provide me with the data that I needed to complete this project, but it was also provided a platform where the individuals in the heart of the work also recognize that they also need support.

Appendix F

Completed Data Summary Forms: Life Issues

Table: *Sample categories and subthemes*

Principal Participant	*Community*	*Crime and Violence*	*Unemployment*
Participant I: Love Academy	I have parents that are mentally ill Parent primary goals are just survival		Then the parents who are not working are not showing up because they either had negative experiences with schools
Participant II: Peace Academy			There are times when parents are unable to purchase shoes for the children

Participant III: Meekness Academy	At one point they were homeless	student was shot in a car	
Participant IV: Longsuffering Academy	I'll ask for school police to be called to report for an irate, irrational and nonresponsive parent.	We have children in households where family members are being killed	
Participant V: Kindness Academy	Adults need to fix inequity, adults need to fix diversity, adults need to fix racism t	Parents are compelled to bring their children through gang, drugs, violence and poverty to his school.	I had a parent who wanted to coach basketball but had seven pages of criminal activities and he had to be denied.
Participant VI: Hope Academy	No new developments, no new housing, not even the shopping		The excuse that the resources are not available to the community

	center in the community has seen any new businesses in decades.		
Participant VII: Joy Academy	However, they do not consider the school to be a priority.		The majority of the families that we serve are currently not employed
Participant VIII: Goodness Academy	parents that are not supportive of the school and that can be manifested in the behavior of the child	In Baltimore, the reality is that the violence here is pretty unprecedented, substance abuse with opioids are unprecedented	
Participant IX: Self-Control Academy	they are laws that are in place,	of a parent who was struggling with drug	

	systemic racism that are in place	addiction and she would come up to the school cussing, yelling and fussing	
Participant X: Gentleness Academy			

Appendix G
Sample Document Review Forms

Name or Type of Document: _School Performance Plan____ Document No: ____1____

Date Reviewed: _____July 2018_____

Date on Document: _____September 2017_____

Event or Contact with which Document is Associated:

___Office of Achievement and Accountability /Title I and Family and Community Engagement

Descriptive

Evaluative

Other_____

Page #	Key Words/Concepts	Comments: Relationship to Research Questions
42 39 41	Data driven Teaching and Learning Parental Involvement	Parent Engagement

Brief Summary of Contents:

Comprehensive plan that captures school data and the strategies collaboratively identified to increase student achievement. It is inclusive of budget, programs, and curriculum and accountability measures to ensure that schools are addressing the needs of the whole child in partnership with the district office and family and community.

Significance or Purpose of Document: Document is significant as it is the blue print for capturing and monitoring parent engagement through diverse methods and strategies.

Salient Questions/Issues to Consider: Time of the identified activities are not mentioned on the plan. There is a budget available for refreshments, but why should parents have to be fed in an effort to engage them as it relates to their children.

Is there anything contradictory about the document? Nothing visually contradictory

Additional Comments/Reflections/Issues: There is representation from the parents and community that participated in the development of the plan according to the signature page.

Additional Comments/Reflections/Issues: Review of the documents left the researcher puzzled as to why there was not one parent to show up for the trip to Annapolis? I guess that I have nothing else to say but ZERO, ZILTCH, NONE.SMH_____

Document Summary Review Form

Name or Type of Document: _Agenda/Flier_____   Document No: _____7_____

Date Reviewed: _____July

2018_____

Date on Document: _____February 2018_____

Event or Contact with which Document is Associated: _Daddy/Daughter_____

Descriptive

Evaluative: Other_____

Page #	Key Words/Concepts	Comments: Relationship to Research Questions
17	Engagement Relationships	Leadership style and influence by building capacity through innovative activities

Brief Summary of Contents:

The flier, agenda, and sign in sheets show an overwhelming outpour of parent presence at

the Father/Daughter Dance. There was evidence of a DJ, light refreshments, prizes,

flowers and a photographer. _____

Significance or Purpose of Document:

  Researcher found the document significant as it captures the school leader

differentiating strategies to engage parents by addressing the social aspect of parent

relationships_____

Salient Questions/Issues to Consider:

 Do social events have a greater impact on engaging parents? How can school leaders

use this platform to incorporate social events to educate parents with content? Can social

events inclusive of parents be counted as parent engagement?

Is there anything contradictory about the document?

 Nothing visually contradictory

Additional Comments/Reflections/Issues: Review of the documents caused the

researcher to analyze the outpour of parents from two perspectives, are parents

prioritizing social events over academics? Or does the school need to redefine parental

involvement inclusive of social events?

Appendix H
DEBRIEFING FORM

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for participating as a research participant in the study The Principal's Perspective and Experiences about Parental Involvement as it relates to Promoting Parental Participation in Their Child's Educational Process. It was a pleasure to work with you and to hear your views and input. Your time and participation are both valued and appreciated.

Parental involvement has been a longstanding issue; however, there are complex and unique concerns that continue to plague urban communities. The goal of our time together was to capture your experiences and perceptions as a school leader that is confronted daily with many of the challenges as it relates to motivating parents to become involved in their children's education.

Much research suggests that, while many parents want to be involved in their children's education, there remain many barriers that hinder them from being involved. As school leaders, we explored leadership styles and sought to identify if leadership style can encourage or disenfranchise parents from being involved.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us. If you have any additional questions later about the study, please contact Dwayne Wheeler. Faculty Advisor, Dr. Omari Jackson, who will be happy to answer them. If you have further administrative questions, you may contact the MSU IRB Administrator, Dr. Edet Isuk.

You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

Your decision to participate is most valued. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate. You were informed that you may withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which you may be entitled after signing this form should you choose to discontinue participation in this study.

_____   _____

Signature: Date:

_____
_____

Signature of Parent/Legal Guardian (If necessary)   Date

_____
_____

Signature of Witness (If appropriate)   Signature of Investigator

Thanks again for your participation.