

# Study of the Perceived Effects of a Parental Empowerment Project for Parents of Students of Color

Author: Christopher Len Vick

Persistent link: <http://hdl.handle.net/2345/669>

This work is posted on [eScholarship@BC](#),  
Boston College University Libraries.

---

Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2009

Copyright is held by the author, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise noted.

**BOSTON COLLEGE**  
Lynch School of Education

Department of Education

Educational Administration

**STUDY OF THE PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF A PARENTAL  
EMPOWERMENT PROJECT FOR PARENTS OF STUDENTS  
OF COLOR**

Dissertation

By

CHRISTOPHER VICK

submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirement for the degree of  
Doctor of Education

May 2009

© Copyright by Christopher Vick 2009

## ABSTRACT

This study examines the perceived impact of a parental empowerment project on parents of students of color transitioning into high school. The overarching problem addressed is the achievement gap. The study is an investigation of a means to increase the involvement of parents of color at an important transition. This is a gap closing measure because research dictates that this type of intervention can lead to higher academic achievement for minority students. To this end, seven participants constitute the sample group. Each sample member is treated as an individual case in keeping with the study's design as a qualitative case study. This study seeks to determine how these seven parents had their attitudes and behaviors shifted as a result of their participation in the aforementioned project, and which factors supported and inhibited their involvement as their children transitioned into high school.

The researcher finds that all of the sample members perceived some benefit from their participation. These benefits for the parents include fostering a greater role understanding, increased ability to hold their children accountable, and an increased understanding of the high school curriculum. The monthly parent meetings, one of the three elements comprising the empowerment program, were most helpful for parents. Whereas, the scheduling of meetings made it difficult for members of the sample to be as involved as they wanted to be. Ultimately, the study concludes that a program which involves parents during their children's high school transition can help them increase their own sense of efficacy. It suggests opportunities for further research to be done on the impact of such a program on the actual academic performance of students.

## Acknowledgements

To my family,  
your guidance, support, correction, and love give me more  
fortitude than I ever thought possible....

and

Pour Sophia, votre amour rend cela possible, (you HHB).

“I can do all things through Christ which strengthen me”  
-Phillippians 4:13

# CONTENTS

I. OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY	1
Introduction	1
Significance of the Study	7
Theoretical Rationale	10
Design of the Study	13
Research Questions	14
Limitations of the Study	15
Definition of Terms	16
II. Review of Literature	18
Introduction	18
The Achievement Gap	19
Causes	19
Parental Involvement	29
Impact	29
Elements	34
Parental Empowerment	39
Barriers to Involvement	40
Current Involvement Programs	50
Role construction, Efficacy, and Invitation	53
Transitions	57
Factors Making Transitions Difficult	57
Prevalence of Transition Support Programs	60
Impact of Transition Support Programs	61
Conclusion	63
III. Methodology	65
Introduction	65
Research Questions	65
Research Hypotheses	66
Research Methodology	66
Sample and Rationale for Sample	71
Human Subject Considerations	77
Data Collection	77
Pilot Test	81
Data Analysis	83
Formats for Reporting Data	84
Study Limitations	84

IV. Findings	
Respondent One	87
Respondent Two	93
Respondent Three	97
Respondent Four	102
Respondent Five	108
Respondent Six	116
Respondent Seven	124
Summary of Findings	131
Conclusion	139
V. Summary, Discussion, and Implications	140
Introduction	140
Summary of Findings	141
Discussion of the Findings	144
Limitations of the Study	151
Implications for Practice and Policy	152
Implications for Further Research	158
Leadership Lessons	159
Conclusion	163
Appendix	164
Appendix A Informed Consent Form	164
Appendix B Pre-intervention Survey	166
Appendix C Project Interview Protocol	167
Appendix D Project Journal Protocol	170
References	171

## **Chapter One**

### **Overview of the Study**

#### **Introduction**

At most every level of education, there exists a gap in the educational achievement of African-American and Latino pupils and their white counterparts. This divergence in scholastic success is visible at the national, state, and local level and is commonly referred to as the achievement gap. The achievement gap is a problem which harms more than the just the African-American and Latino students that find themselves relegated to the lower ends of the academic achievement spectrum. Rather, it harms the nation both morally and fiscally. Through the examination of a number of data sources, the extent of the racial achievement gap is illuminated.

The achievement gap is a problem at the national level. An examination of evidence gathered by the National Center for Education Statistics gives credence to this. During the 2004-2005 school year, the average white American student taking the SAT exam scored a 532 on the verbal portion and a 536 on the math half (United States Department of Education, 2006c). During this same year, African-American and Latino students scored well below the white students taking the same assessment. For African-Americans, there was on average a 100 point deficit on both the math and verbal sections (United States Department of Education, 2006c). Though Latino students scored better, their performance still lagged well behind that of white students on the SAT in the year 2004-2005. These students, on average, scored 69 and 67 points behind their white peers on the verbal and math sections of the SAT, respectively (United States Department of Education, 2006c). It must be considered that the SAT is but one assessment of



educational success. It thus becomes helpful to examine other sources of data in order to appreciate the full extent of the achievement gap.

In the year 2004, the national high school dropout percentage was 10.3% (United States Department of Education, 2006a). In this year, 11.8 % of all African-American pupils and 23.8% of Latino students left high school without attaining a diploma (United States Department of Education, 2006a). The disproportionately high percentage of Blacks and Latinos dropping out of school is a further manifestation of the achievement gap. Further, by examining educational attainment, disaggregated by race, the extent of this problem can be seen in greater detail.

According to the 2005 United States Census, Latinos and African-Americans together comprise 27.3% of the American population (United States Census Bureau, 2005a). Though this is true, only 13.07% of people over the age of 25 years old that have attained a bachelors degree are either Latino or African-American (United States Department of Education, 2006b). If educational attainment were equal, 27.3% of bachelors degrees earned by people over the age of 25 would be conferred on African-Americans and Latinos because that is the percentage of the American population that they compose. However, the academic achievement gap manifests in such a way that African-American and Latino students earn fewer college degrees than their white peers. It should be noted that this schism in academic attainment becomes even more pronounced when more advanced degrees are considered. African-Americans and Latinos, combined, over the age of 25 years old earned 10.72 % of all master's degrees and 8.23% of all doctorate degrees (United States Department of Education, 2006b). The under representation of African-American and Latino students in higher education

attainment helps to paint the national picture of the achievement gap. The achievement gap, as it is constituted at the state level, is partially illustrated through the examination of the data yielded from the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System.

Each year, Massachusetts students in grades three through eight and 10 take the standardized test referred to the MCAS. According to their performance on math and English language arts, students are assessed as either warning/failing, needs improvement, proficient, or advanced. Of all of the tenth grade African-American students taking the English Language Arts portion of the MCAS in the year 2005, 63% scored in either the warning or needs improvement range (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2005b). On the same assessment, 70% of Latino pupils fell in the needs improvement or warning/failing score range on the English language arts section. Only 29% of white students in the tenth grade taking the same test scored in the lowest two categories (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2005b). The results on the math section of the grade 10 MCAS also point to an achievement gap. Of all of the Black and Latino students taking the math MCAS in the year 2005, 71% scored in the two lowest score ranges (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2005b). This data, yielded from the MCAS, points to an achievement gap at the statewide level in Massachusetts. These figures all create a backdrop against which Williamsburg High School's achievement profile can be viewed and solutions created.

### **Focus of the study**

Williamsburg High School is a large, diverse, suburban high school. It is often referred to as a successful educational institution because over 91% of graduates go on to some form of post-secondary education. The school is situated in a relatively affluent

town bordering a major metropolitan city. The school is the only public high school in the district. As many of the town's residents attended and contribute financially to Williamsburg High School, there is a large amount of community support for this institution. As a result, there are many resources available to the staff and students attending this high school. Moreover, the high level of community support creates a high level of expectation that every student will succeed and go on to college or other "dignified" endeavors. The district is relatively heterogeneous. In the school year 2005-2006, 66.6% of the school population was white (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2006). Nearly 17% of the students body was made up of Latino and African-American young people (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2006). Part of this diversity is enabled by the district's participation in the RAFT Program.

The RAFT Program is a voluntary school integration program that has been in existence for 40 years. Funded by the state, it serves a number of purposes. The first is that it allows students of color residing in the city of Sheffield to attend school in participating suburban districts such as Williamsburg. As many of the public schools in the city of Sheffield are failing, as demonstrated by the fact that Sheffield's high school standardized test scores lag well behind the state average, participation in the RAFT program is an opportunity sought after by many parents and students in the city (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2007). For this reason, families apply for enrollment in the RAFT program soon after the birth of a child. Families complete an application and they are entered into a lottery for admission. Academic screening is not a part of the process. Because the opportunity to attend schools considered better than the public schools of Sheffield is so great, there is a waiting list over eight years long

comprised of students that were selected in the lottery for admission into the RAFT program.

In addition to providing educational opportunity for Latino, Asian-American, and African-American students, the program is designed to help historically homogenous school districts enroll more students of color. By welcoming students from the city of Sheffield, districts such as Williamsburg are able to diversify. The RAFT program also encourages dialogue between parents residing in the city of Sheffield and those residing in the receiving suburbs, another goal of the program.

Nearly 1,000 students, state-wide, participate in the RAFT program. Of all of the receiving suburban districts, Williamsburg has the second largest population of students attending its public schools under the auspices of the RAFT Program with over 300 residents enrolled. Of these students, 100 are in grades nine through twelve. The vast majority of these students have been attending the public schools of Williamsburg since kindergarten.

Though students in the RAFT program have been attending a school district that is considered of high quality, there still exists an achievement gap. As the researcher serves as the coordinator of the RAFT Program at the high school and has ease of access to study participants, parents transitioning to the Williamsburg High School under the auspices of this program are the subject of the current study. Through the examination of methods designed to better support this cohort of parents of students of color, means to remedy the achievement gap can be more ably studied. Before a study of means to close the gap can be made, it is essential to look more closely at the extent of the achievement gap at Williamsburg High School.

The achievement gap is a challenge at Williamsburg High School. The fact that this schism in scholastic performance exists can be ascertained by examining data from the most recent MCAS. At Williamsburg High School, 32% and 34% of Black and Latino students, respectively, scored in the advanced and proficient ranges on the ELA portion of the 10<sup>th</sup> grade MCAS in the year 2004 (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2005a). Contrarily, 86% of white students scored in the top two areas of the English Language Arts Test (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2005a).

A similar gap in achievement can be seen by looking at the results of the math MCAS. Of all of the Blacks and Latinos taking the math MCAS at Williamsburg High School in the tenth grade, 66% and 40%, respectively achieved either in the warning/failing or needs improvement range (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2005a). This is contrasted with the fact that only 16% of white Williamsburg High School students taking the math MCAS scored either warning/failing or needs improvement (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2005a). This data, combined with the previously presented national and state statistics, demonstrates that there is a clear gap in academic performance between African-American and Latino high school students and their white counterparts at Williamsburg High School. The very fact that this gap exists in this or any other setting constitutes a problem. Further, the societal ramifications of the achievement gap demand the implementation and examination of measures designed to eradicate it.

This study will focus on the premise that involving parents of color to a larger degree in the education of their children can increase the possibility of closing the achievement gap. This involvement can only result if parents are able to increase their

sense of efficacy, knowledge of their role, and feel welcomed into schools (Kathleen Hoover-Dempsey, 1997b). These factors do not just materialize without the proper structures. Rather, school personnel must help parents along the path towards involvement and understanding of these factors. The leadership project under study is a response to this notion. The project under study is a parental empowerment program designed to help parents of students of color entering the ninth grade involve themselves to a greater degree in their children's education. The project aims to help parents develop the skills and dispositions they will need in order to be more involved. Because there is a direct relationship between parental involvement and student academic success, the aim is to use parental involvement as a mechanism to spur students to greater levels of scholastic success and eventually close the achievement gap in this context (Ferguson, 2005).

It must be noted that there exist elements which will function to impair the optimal involvement of parents and student success by extension. Thus, this project and study seeks to not only determine which school based supports can help parents of students of color be more involved but also examines the barriers which may impair their involvement as well.

### **Significance of the Study**

There are a number of reasons why it is imperative that educators work to address the achievement gap. It can rationally be assumed that there is no biological factor that dictates that certain ethnic groups would achieve at a higher level than other groups. With this in mind, there is no natural or biologically based reason for Latino and African-American students to achieve at a lower level than their white counterparts on most every

local, state, and national educational assessment used. Because education is a critical element required for social mobility, students that are victimized by the achievement gap are being denied access to an optimal quality of life (Labaree, 1997) . It is imperative that educators and the public at large work to help all students reach equally high levels of educational, and subsequently opportunity. This reason to work towards the eradication of the academic achievement gap is supplemented with a very practical economic basis.

In the near future, if the achievement gap continues as present, the people that are harmed by the achievement gap will compose the numeric majority in America (Ferguson, 2005). If this nation is to maintain a competitive advantage in the global economy, it is imperative that all people are educated to the greatest extent possible (Ferguson, 2005). This nation can not continue as a global economic powerhouse if the preponderance of its citizens and workforce are undereducated. Thus, it is imperative, if for no other reason than its future financial well-being, that this nation works towards educational performance equity for all pupils. This is particularly true when one considers that the global marketplace is an increasingly connected, information-based, and competitive environment (Friedman, 2005).

African-American and Latino pupils are no longer competing with just white pupils in America for an optimal education and the subsequent benefits. Contrarily, the competition for education, jobs and other advantages is now global. The economist and best-selling author, Thomas Friedman, terms this new economy as one that is “flattened” (Friedman, 2005). In the “flat” world, the achievement gap will be particularly crippling to African-American and Latino students. Parental involvement is a vital resource

needed in order to help work towards the closing of the gap and prepare pupils of color for the new economy parents. Friedman proposes (2005), “Helping individuals adapt to a flat world is not only the job of governments and companies. It is also the job of parents” (p. 302). He goes on to state, “They too need to know in what world their kids are growing up and what it will take for them to thrive” (Friedman, 2005, p. 303).

Though this suggestion that parents play an important part in closing the educational achievement gap comes from an economist, there are a number of educational researchers who similarly posit that educational equity can only be achieved by more intentional and informed work with parents. Because this direct relationship exists, it becomes necessary to develop, implement, and study the means to facilitate parental involvement. These methods aimed at increasing the involvement of certain groups of parents will need to be put in place in order to close the achievement gap in Williamsburg and nationwide. This study, thus, will determine how parents perceive of their involvement in a parental empowerment program. Through interventions such as the ones constituted in this project, parents can develop the requisite skills needed to help their children achieve at higher levels. Such gap-closing measures are vital.

As stated earlier, there is no biological reason for the achievement gap to exist. Its continuation in the public schools of Williamsburg deprives certain students access to social mobility and a better way of life. Further, it is a threat to continued fiscal strength of the United States (Friedman, 2005). Means are necessary to ensure that the future members of the workforce are prepared to deal with demands of a global economy. For these reasons, schools must examine and implement means to make sure that Black and



Latino students are able to learn at a level as high as that of their white classmates.

Because it examines the possible impact of one such measure, this study is significant.

### **Theoretical Rationale**

The theoretical rationale for this study is based on a few key understandings. The first being the achievement gap is a societal problem caused by a number of complex and dynamic factors. The second is that schools have the power to close the achievement gap by involving parents to a greater degree. Finally, transition points are particularly critical junctures at which schools have a particular ability to make positive inroads with students. Thus, this study's literature review will be focus on three critical themes, the achievement gap, parental involvement, and the transition into high school for both parents and students.

The achievement gap, which manifests itself nationwide, as well as in Williamsburg, is caused and furthered by a number of factors. The historic denial of educational opportunity to certain groups of people helps explain why the achievement gap exists (Ogbu, 1982). Such historic discrimination led to the development of a collective Black and Latino identity which spurns all values seen as white, including esteem for educational attainment (Ogbu, 1987). This development of an identity spurning advancement through education impairs the achievement of minority students. Further, the difference in quality between urban and suburban schools and the teachers therein helps explain how the achievement gap continues to exist (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999). Teachers in urban school districts, which often service higher populations of students of color, tend to have lower teacher certification examine scores than their peers in suburban schools, as an aggregate (Ferguson, 1991). Further, suburban school

districts, typically, pay teachers more money (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999). This makes it difficult for city districts serving high number of Black and Latino pupils to compete for the most capable teachers. These are a few reasons for the discrepancy in quality between schools that generally serve white students and those that have high populations of Latino and African-American students.

The large social and historical iniquities mentioned above are a few of the reasons for the racial achievement gap. It is beyond the scope of this study to rectify all of these wrongs. This is not to say steps can not be taken in order to address and work towards the closure of the racial achievement gap in the context of Williamsburg High School.

There is a large body of research which stipulates that through work with parents, schools can spur academic gains for pupils. In his metanalysis of previous studies, Ron Ferguson showed that efforts to empower parents resulted in grade gains for pupils of color in high schools (Ferguson, 2005). Similarly, other researchers have put forth that adolescents achieve at a higher level when schools endeavor to more actively involve parents and communicate more effectively (Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996). Sanders, in his research on the academic achievement of adolescents of color, noted that academic self-concept, the ability to see the connection between school and future success, and school adaptive behaviors can all be increased when the home and school work together to give pupils of color the same messages (M. G. Sanders & Sanders, 1998). All of the benefits mentioned in Sanders' study, which stem from increasing the connection between the home and school, result in higher grades for students of color in high school settings (M. G. Sanders & Sanders, 1998). This support is particularly important in the context of this study.

Though all students experience the transition to high school, Black and Latino students experience it in a manner which is different from their white peers. It is true that the grades of the preponderance of students drop as they move into high school (Felner, Primavera, & Cauce, 1981). However, this decline is particularly precipitous for students of color (Seidman, Aber, Allen, & French, 1996). Thus, it is imperative that schools put in place supports that help mitigate this sharp decline in performance by Latino and African-American students as they transition into the ninth grade. Such supports are particularly vital as a number of factors function to impair the performance of students of color moving into high school. With this in mind it is helpful to examine some of the supports that many schools put in place to ease the move from the eighth grade to the ninth.

Many high schools have programs that help students transition into the ninth grade. Generally, schools servicing a large number of students with high socioeconomic status, such as Williamsburg High School, tend to have more programs to help families at this critical juncture (Smith, 1997). Most schools, without regard to the socioeconomic status of most of their students, have programs that focus exclusively on students during the transition process (Smith, 1997). The most popular of the transition aids is having students meet with their guidance counselors (Smith, 1997). These transition programs, however, are not the most impactful. Supports that include parents in the transition process, when controlling for other factors, were most effective in helping students prevent loss of grade point average between grades eight and nine (Smith, 1997). Many of these transitional programs designed for both parents and students included features

such as regular parent meetings and means to help parents access each other for support (Smith, 1997).

### **Design of Study**

The sample of participants used in this study will number eight. This number has been selected because it offers the greatest number of participants which can still be managed in an effective manner. Though all thirty parents transitioning into Williamsburg High School under the auspices of the RAFT Program will participate in the project, only about a third of this group will be a part of the study. Members of the larger group will be asked to volunteer to participate in the study of the effects of the parent empowerment project they will experience. Because the RAFT Program mandates that all participants be students of color residing in the city of Sheffield, all members of the project population and study sample will share certain commonalities. Each participant will be the parent of a child of color moving from the eighth to the ninth grade, and resident of the city of Sheffield. This group will be made up of parents that volunteer to receive the additional parenting support offered by this project. Thus, this sample is a convenient purposive grouping.

Several tools will be used to derive data from participants in this study. Sample members will be surveyed before and after the leadership project in order to ascertain their perceptions of involvement both before and after their participation in this undertaking. Additionally, the researcher will be interviewing participants as they experience the leadership project. The responses from the pre-intervention surveys will be used to design semi-structured interview protocols. As they participate in this project, subjects will also be completing reflective journals. These artifacts will be collected and

analyzed. Data from the surveys and journals will be coded using aspects derived from the review of the literature themes. Information gained from these survey and interview responses together with reflective journaling will be triangulated in order to draw inferences between the particular cases.

There will be a number of supportive interventions which form the bulk of this project. The first will be the creation and use of a “Parent Playbook”. This document, which will be structured in the form of a frequently asked questions manual, will ask and answer many of the important questions parents of new high school students may have. Parents participating in this project and study will receive these manuals which aim to increase their efficacy as parents. Second, new high school parents will be paired with a parent mentor. These mentors, who will be parents of juniors and seniors at Williamsburg High School, will meet regularly with their mentees and help them traverse the transition process. Third, study participants will be meet monthly with an academic department chair from Williamsburg High School with the aim of increasing their familiarity with the high school curriculum and developing their capacity to help their children with class and homework. After each meeting, parents will be provided with time to complete reflective journals. In these journals they will respond to a prompt posed by the researcher.

### **Research Questions**

This research endeavor will address three central questions. This study’s three research questions are:

1. What do parents of students of color perceive to be the impact of their involvement in this parental empowerment project on their own attitudes and behaviors?
2. What factors of the parental empowerment project did parents perceive to be most useful in helping them support their children as they transition into high school?
3. What did the parents perceive to be barriers which may preclude the maximal involvement of parents of students of color as they transition into high school?

### **Limitations of the Study**

There are limitations to this study. One of the first limitations lies in the researcher. In a professional capacity, this researcher serves as the coordinator of the RAFT Program at Williamsburg High School. It is this researcher's most sincere intention to provide parents with the most useful information possible. Further, it is this researcher's intention to make this parental empowerment project as successful as possible. This professional desire is a limitation because it could interfere with the impartiality of the researcher. It is noted that this researcher will have to be cognizant of this desire to create and implement a successful project. Moreover, this researcher will have to be certain to note and address any shortcomings in this project in a fashion as objective as possible.

The sample selection in this study should also be considered as a limitation. Participants will be purposefully selected because they are parents of students of color attending Williamsburg Schools. However, only parents participating in the RAFT Program were chosen to participate. Because this researcher serves as the Coordinator of

this program, there will be greater access to parents participating in this program. Subsequently, selecting parents of students in the RAFT Program provided for greater ease of access and data collection. This created a purposive convenience sample. This is considered a limitation because convenience samples can yield information-poor data if not managed properly (Merriam, 1992).

It should be noted that this study employs a relatively small sample. The relatively small number of sample participants, eight, limits the amount of data yielded and ability to generalize the findings extracted from this data. Moreover, the fact that this project takes place at a single sight has a similar limiting effect.

### **Definition of Terms**

This study will referred to the following terms throughout:

***Achievement Gap:*** A dynamic and persistent schism in academic performance between Latino and African-American students and their white peers which is illustrated through examination of standardized test scores, grades, educational attainment, and drop-out rates (Ogbu, 1987).

***Efficacy:*** A person's feeling that they can be successful at performing a given task (Kathleen Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1987)

***Empowerment:*** A process which conceives of parents as partners to school personnel and is designed to help them perform their role more ably (Shephard & Rose, 1995).

***Parental involvement:*** A multi-faceted construct. It is comprised of a parent's ability to communicate expectations, engage in school activities and programs, create a home structure that supports learning, and communicate with their children about school (Singh, 1995).

***Transition:*** The movement between two different and definable points (Smith, 1997).



## Chapter Two

### Review of Literature

#### **Introduction**

The academic achievement gap is a societal ill which affects Latino and African-American students. This gap in scholastic achievement is the result of long-seated societal and historical iniquities. Despite this fact, there are means which can be employed in contemporary schools which can help make the achievement of students more equitable. One of the paramount means and the one under study in this research undertaking is parental involvement. Despite the fact the Black and Latino students, as a whole, lag behind their white peers in school achievement, parental involvement has been shown, both empirically and anecdotally, to spur these students to higher levels of school success. The current study seeks to identify elements of a parent involvement program which can be useful in creating such a result.

It is important to note that no involvement program can be created without a clear definition of exactly what parental involvement is. The construct of parental involvement is multi-faceted with each portion contributing to students success in a different manner and to various degrees. Despite the various elements which comprise it, parental involvement, as a singular idea, is particularly important for students of color as they begin their high school journey.

The preponderance of students struggle as they begin high school. Challenges such as the increased difficulty of work, unfamiliar physical facilities, the physical and emotional changes brought on by the onset of adolescence, and a host of other factors make the transition into high school difficult for all students. African-American and

Latino students, to a larger degree than Whites and Asians , struggle with this shift all students must undergo. As a result, their grades, attendance, and self-image drop precipitously as they begin the move into high school (Seidman et al., 1996). If this trend is to be reversed and the achievement gap closed, schools have to be purposeful in supporting Black and Latino students and their parents as they begin the ninth grade. Research has shown that transition supports that include parents have been helpful in reversing the negative trends mentioned earlier. With this in mind it is imperative to study how a program can be established that will alter parents' perceptions of their efficacy and increase their abilities to involve themselves successfully in the schooling of their children. Such a study must be grounded in the research which preceded it. Thus, this chapter will examine bodies of literature in direct relationship to its three major research themes, the achievement gap, parental involvement, and the transition to high school for students.

## **The Achievement Gap**

### *Causes*

There are a number of complex factors that contribute to the schism of academic achievement between Black and Latino students and their white counterparts. One of the first arises from the historic discrimination and deprivation of adequate education Latinos and African-Americans have endured. For a substantial period of time, these people were denied access to formal education. When educational opportunities were presented, they were often in schools that were separate from and inferior to those provided to white students. It was not until 1954 in the landmark Brown vs. Board of Education case that the federal government set forth that separate schools were inherently unequal and served

to deprive pupils of color a quality education ("Oliver Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka et al.," 1954). Though this case was a turning point, it did not serve to rectify all of the iniquities visited upon Latino and Black people. Rather, discrimination in other forms persisted and functioned to buttress the achievement gap.

Claude Steele puts forth that negative stereotypes about Latino and African-American students hamper their educational progress. He contends that Black and Latino students often place upon themselves the burden to disprove negative judgments about all of the members of their respective groups. This additional burden compounds the general stress that all students experience as they endeavor to do well in school and causes a great deal of anxiety for students of color. Steele contends that this racially-based academic anxiety, known as *stereotype threat*, serves to interfere with the maximal achievement of these pupils and further widens the achievement gap (Steele, 1992). Other theorists join Steele in pointing out reasons that the academic achievement gap exists and limits the performance of Latino and African-American children.

Some theorists contend that discrimination, particularly in the realm of employment, served to minimize the appreciation Blacks and Latinos have for education. Despite the fact that they have strived to attain high degrees of formal education, discrimination made it difficult and sometimes impossible for Blacks and Latinos to capitalize on their scholastic attainment. Thus, societal discrimination functioned as a disincentive to try to better oneself through education (Ogbu, 1987). Such an attitude that education will not help one advance serves to inhibit the effort of Blacks and Latinos in school and expand the achievement gap. Other factors work towards the same end.

As mentioned previously, Blacks and Latinos have been subject to discrimination in America. It is asserted that the cultures, attitudes, and norms of Black and Latino people developed in a manner which rejected the culture, attitudes, and norms of the group which had oppressed them. As scholastic excellence was seen as a tenant of the prevailing white culture, African-American and Latino culture developed in a manner which rejected this and other values of the dominant group (Ogbu, 1982). It should be noted that this is a blanket statement and any student's academic achievement is largely effected, either positively or negatively, by his or her peer group (Horvat & Lewis, 2003). However, it is plausible that the achievement gap is deeply rooted in historic iniquities. Additionally, it should be noted that this societal ill is furthered by current inequalities.

The chasm in teacher/school quality between educational institutions serving mainly minority and those serving white children is one of the paramount reasons the gap exists. Urban schools, which largely educate students of color, and suburban schools, which often educate more white children, frequently vary greatly in terms of quality (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999). Urban schools, generally, offer teachers lower wages, worse working conditions, larger class sizes, less autonomy, fewer supplies, and less input on school-wide matters. Additionally, teachers in urban schools are less likely to receive structured mentoring and must deal with more bureaucracy in the hiring process than their peers working in suburban schools (Darling-Hammond, 2001). These challenges account for part of the reason teachers prefer, as a whole, to work in schools with greater numbers of students having high socioeconomic status (Ferguson, 1991). This choice on the part of teachers makes schools that service large numbers of racial minorities less desirable places to work. Subsequently, there is more

turnover and demand for teachers in urban schools. This constant need to hire, train, and retain teachers harms students. This can be said because principals of urban schools must staff their schools with candidates that may not be considered optimal because there is such a high number of teaching vacancies. As a result, teachers in urban schools are more likely than their counterparts in suburban schools to have lower scores on state teacher certification exams, be uncertified, teach outside of their area of certification, and come into the classroom via an alternative certification program such as Teach For America (Ferguson, 1991; Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999). These facts suggest that teachers serving Black and Latino youth are less skilled.

The aggregate dearth of teacher efficacy in urban schools is a major component of the achievement gap. Teacher skill is a large factor in student scholastic success. In a research study using Texas state standardized test as a measure, Harvard University researcher, Ron Ferguson (1991) concluded that despite all of the other factors affecting student learning, “evidence here presented shows that differences in the quality of teaching account for between one quarter and one third of the variation among Texas school districts in students’ scores on statewide standardized reading exams” (p. 466). Subsequently, Black and Latino students attending urban schools are placed at a major disadvantage because their teachers do not have the same level of skill as those serving predominantly white youth. This lack of collective efficacy combines with other school-based problems.

Nationwide, there are a limited numbers of teachers of color in the classroom. Though they constitute nearly 13% of the American population, only 6.7% of all teachers are African-American (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1994). Similarly,

Latinos are underrepresented as teachers. These people only constitute 4.1% of the American teaching force (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1994). Despite the fact that the children populating America's classrooms are an increasingly heterogeneous group, white women continue to represent a disproportionately large portion of the teaching population (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1994). This is not to say that whites can not effectively teach pupils of color. However, Latino and Black students have an enhanced opportunity to thrive when taught by pedagogues who share their race and heritage. This may stem from the notion that Black and Latino teachers are more easily able to understand the culturally driven learning styles and communication patterns of their minority pupils. Additionally, students of color benefit from having academic role models that share their racial background in the classroom (King, 1993). Despite these benefits, the under representation of Blacks and Latinos in the role of classroom teacher continues (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1994). This results largely from the fact that more professions, outside of teaching, have opened up for talented Latinos and African-Americans looking for employment (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999). Thus, this smaller pool of applicants results in a paucity of Black and Latino teachers. There are other teacher factors which influence the achievement gap beyond the presence of like color.

In a nationally representative study, Roscigno found that teachers tend to have lower expectations for their students coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Roscigno, 1998). There is a direct relationship between teacher expectations and student grades, low teacher expectations of Latino and African-American pupils functions to impair the intellectual growth of these learners (Cooper & Tom, 1984). This difference,

caused by socioeconomic status, is not the only way African-American and Latino students are undereducated in schools.

As a whole, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to be placed on lower academic tracks. This difference in treatment leads to the achievement gap in a number of ways. The first is Blacks and Latinos, as an aggregate, do not have the opportunity to access a curriculum as rich as that presented to their white counterparts. Thus, students of color do not have the opportunity to learn as much. Second, it must be considered that a child's aversion or propensity towards education is largely affected by their peer group at school (Roscigno, 1998). Students placed in lower academic tracks, who happen to be disproportionately African-American and Latino, have diminished access to high achieving peers. Thus, minority students are more likely to be in class with students that have not yet met with educational success. This negative peer association diminishes the will of Latino and Black students to excel. It is thus contended that the curriculum of the school, both stated and hidden, can work towards the same end, underachievement.

Most schools are structured around white, middle class values (Banks & Banks, 2001). "Despite the deepening ethnic texture within the United States, the U.S school college, and university mainstream curriculum is organized around concepts, paradigms, and events that reflect the experiences of Anglo-Saxon Protestant males" (Banks & Banks, 2001, p.225). Students that come from outside of these cultural norms can have a difficult time in school. They may not have the requisite social capital to understand and replicate the student behaviors which are expected (Banks & Banks, 2001). This is supported by Theresa Perry (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). Perry (2003) writes,

“Schools transmit knowledge in cultural codes, which afford automatic advantages to those who already possess cultural and linguistic capital and disadvantages to those who possess little or no cultural capital. Further, such a system serves to decrease the connections that students have with school (p. 67).

Banks (2001) contends that:

If only the standard language, the standard American history, and the voices of White men appear in the curriculum, then the further implicit message (by what is left in and what is left out of the knowledge presented as legitimate by the school) seems to be that the real United States and real schools are only about the cultural mainstream and its establishment ideology. This approach especially marginalizes the students of color who come to school already marginalized by life experience and by the historical experience of oppression in their ethnic or racial communities. (p. 47)

Subsequently, students coming from minority backgrounds are often not able to achieve at a level as high as their peers who come to school imbued with an understanding of the culture and behaviors which more closely align with what the school expects (Banks & Banks, 2001). This school based problem does not take away from the fact that there are problems within the home which can hamper the achievement of Latino and African-American learners.

Black and Latino students are more likely than their white counterparts to live in a home headed by only one parent (United States Census Bureau, 2006). According to United States Census data, 18% of all single parent homes are headed by a Latino person (United States Census Bureau, 2006). Twenty-eight percent of all single parent homes are headed by a person who is African-American (United States Census Bureau, 2006). It should be noted that Latinos and Blacks constitute 14.5% and 12.8% of the American population, respectively (United States Census Bureau, 2005a). They are thus



overrepresented in terms of their status as heads of single parent households. This data has tremendous implications for the achievement gap. According to national data, students that come from homes with two parents or guardians, when using math and reading assessment scores as a measure, outpace students with just one parent or guardian at home (Roscigno, 1998). Because Latinos and Blacks are more likely to come from single parent homes, they are placed at an educational disadvantage (Roscigno, 1998, United States Census Bureau, 2006). This is true for a number of reasons.

Because they do not have the benefit of an additional income to supplement their own, single parents often have to work more hours to support themselves and their children. This mitigates their ability to provide adequate supervision and academic support to their children (Roscigno, 1998). This shortage of funds has a tremendous impact on Black and Latino students as they are disproportionately likely to be raised by a single parent.

According to the United States Census, Latinos and Blacks are more than twice as likely to live in poverty as their white counterparts (United States Census Bureau, 2005b). This difference in fiscal resource levels between Latinos, Blacks, and whites has tremendous educational implications. As a result of their increased likelihood of being impoverished, minorities have fewer options in terms of where they can afford to live (Fuller, 2002). Latino and African-Americans thus, are generally less able to select and afford to live in communities with schools of high quality as a result (Hoxby, 2000). Thus, these pupils are less able to select and attend schools which will give them an education that rivals their more affluent peers. Contrarily, white students, as a whole, have more power to decide where they want to live and what schools they wish to attend

(Fuller, 2002). Additionally, because of a dearth of funds, Black and Latino students are less able to afford the supplemental educational services enjoyed by the children of more wealthy parents. For minority students that wish to further their education beyond high school, it should be noted that the prohibitively high cost of tuition and general shortage of funds can make it difficult for Blacks and Latinos to attend college (K. Taylor, 1998). In this way, barriers are created which preclude the educational attainment of minority students. This relative lack of educational attainment serves to harm other members of the Black and Latino communities.

Research has demonstrated that the students of highly educated parents tend to succeed at higher levels in school (Roscigno, 1998). This brings about a challenge. Earlier mentioned statistics compiled by the United States Department of Education indicate that Latinos and Blacks trail their white counterparts with regard to educational attainment (United States Department of Education, 2006b). As a result, African-American and Latino children are less likely than their white peers to have a parent that has completed college or possesses an advanced degree (United States Department of Education, 2006). This creates a cycle contributing to sustaining the achievement gap. Because parents of color are less likely to attain a high degree of formal education, their children are less likely to succeed in their courses of study (Roscigno, 1998). Such an iniquity serves to impair the educational opportunity afforded to minority students. This researcher contends that this is a problem that must be rectified and can only be done so through more informed work with parents of students of color. The federal government has similarly put forth that the achievement gap can only be closed through greater involvement on the part of parents of color. Federal legislation reflects this assertion.

Because the empowerment of parents is critical in the rectification of the racial academic achievement gap, the federal government, in its central piece of legislation, The No Child Left Behind Act, mandates that schools work to meaningfully engage parents and provide timely notification to parents about the qualification of teachers. In a concrete sense this means that schools, upon request, must furnish parents with the certification information and academic background of their child's teachers. Additionally, schools must publish critical information, such as graduation rates and disaggregated state test scores in an annual "report card" Schools that do not comply are faced with the loss of federal funds ("The No Child Left Behind Act," 2001). The aim of the federal government in implementing such a strategy is to force schools to give parents information which can empower them and help them more ably support their children. It is the goal of the federal government to use this strategy to work towards the eradication of the achievement gap. When schools are not able to make progress towards this aim, the No Child Left Behind Act gives parents other options.

The No Child Left Behind Act mandates that all students meet a certain minimal level of educational proficiency by the year 2014. Schools that are not able to make adequate yearly progress with the entire student body and all subgroups of pupils for two consecutive years or longer are termed "needs improvement". Students attending schools termed "needs improvement" have the option of attending another public school in the district, providing that the receiving school does not also share the title of "needs improvement" ("The No Child Left Behind Act," 2001). The cost of transportation is to be paid by the school that is sending the student to a choice school (United States Department of Education, 2004). The public policy aim of public school choice,

provided by the No Child Left Behind Act, is to use this option as a mechanism to spur schools to better educate all children and give parents even more options. Though the social science is decidedly mixed, it is evident that public school choice, created by the No Child Left Behind Act, endeavors to provide more authority to parents than ever before (Hoxby, 2000:Goldhaber, 1999). The underpinning idea is that only through increased parental empowerment can the achievement gap be closed. It is this same idea which provides the foundation of this project.

Though the achievement gap is a complex problem caused by a number of factors, schools can work towards its closure through more intentional and informed work with parents. It is with this critical notion in mind this leadership project is undertaken. Though it is not within this researcher's power to rectify many of the historical and societal problems which gave rise and continue to perpetuate the achievement gap, the purpose of this study is to empower a group of parents. As skillful parenting is one of the elements that is imperative in closing the gap, it can be assumed that a parental empowerment project would have positive outcomes on students achievement. In order to support this idea, it is helpful to look at the social science research which suggests a correlation between parental involvement and greater student achievement.

### **Parental Involvement**

#### ***Impact***

In a number of studies, it has been demonstrated that schools can cause scholastic gains for students by involving parents in a thoughtful and intentional manner. In a meta-analysis of previous empirical research conducted by Brooks-Gunn, Markman, Epstein, Ballen, Moles, and others, Ron Ferguson was able to demonstrate that increased parental

involvement in high schools led to scholastic gains for students in grades nine through twelve (Ferguson, 2005) . Though more gains were seen in classroom grades than standardized tests scores, Ferguson was able to demonstrate a direct relationship between student academic gains and the degree to which their parents were involved with their academic lives. Similar results have been reported by other researchers.

Timothy Keith demonstrated, by way of a longitudinal study, that parental involvement had a significant impact on the grade point average of high school students (Keith et al., 1998). Though this researcher conceived of parental involvement in a slightly different manner than in the previously mentioned study, his results supported Ferguson. He demonstrated that parental involvement is the source of a large degree of variability of student achievement in high school settings (Keith et al., 1998). These results align with other data yielded by the same researcher in another study. In an analysis of national standardized test data, Keith concluded that high levels of parental involvement led to greater test scores for students in high school (Keith et al., 1993). Though these studies examined high school students as an aggregate, other studies need to cite “other” studies have found that parental involvement increases achievement when only looking at one particular grade cohort.

In a study solely of new ninth grade students and their parents, Paulson showed that parent involvement proved to be critical as students transition into high school (Paulson, 1994). During the ninth grade year of high school, the degree to which a parent is involved had a tremendous impact on a student’s academic achievement (Paulson, 1994). Sharon Paulson’s study demonstrated that parents that were both demanding and supportive were able to spur their children to the greatest academic gains as they

transitioned into high school (Paulson, 1994). This data, gained from just one grade cohort is particularly applicable to this study. The reason for that is because the selected sample in this study is made up solely of parents of new ninth grade students. Thus, it is important to be cognizant of the data yielded by Paulson as it comes from a relatively similar cohort group. There is further research that utilizes very specific sample groups which provides a theoretical backdrop for this study and illuminates the relationship between parental involvement and student achievement.

In a meta-analysis making use of grade point averages and standardized test scores, Jeynes demonstrated that Black and Latino students benefit more from parental involvement than did their white and Asian counterparts (Jeynes, 2005). Jeynes posited that minorities had greater gains when their parents were involved because these students were less likely to come from communities where academic endeavors were highly supported. Thus, Latino and African-American pupils are benefited more greatly when their parents are provided means through which they can increase their involvement. Though all student groups performed better when their parents were involved, the greatest gains, as measured by classroom grades and standardized test scores, were demonstrated by African-American and Latino students (Jeynes, 2005). Other studies have also been helpful in quantifying just how significant the impact of parental impact can be with regard to student achievement.

It has been posited that parental involvement is one of the most important variables in the academic success of high school students (Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988). In one study, parental involvement was shown to have more of an impact on pupil achievement than student sex, gender, family structure, family income, or parental level

of education (Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988). Such results lend further credence to the idea that parental involvement is a critical element in the scholastic success of students. By extension, these results point to the idea that the achievement gap can be combated by working to involve parents to a greater degree in high schools. However, the question of just why does parental involvement result in student gains remains. The answer to this query is quite important.

There are a number of reasons why students with involved parents perform more ably in the classroom and on standardized assessments than their peers with less parental support. One of the first reasons is found in the affective domain. Parental involvement has been shown to help minority students draw a correlation between educational attainment and success later in life (M. G. Sanders & Sanders, 1998). It should be noted that the perception of a lack of a correlation between effort in school and success later in life was one of the reasons the achievement gap exists for Black and Latino students (Ogbu, 1987). With this in mind, it can be seen how parents supporting the idea that success in school will lead to later success in life could work to support the academic achievement of Latino and African-American students. Further, it should be noted that increased parental involvement is tied to greater academic self-concept for students of color. A student must perceive of him or herself as capable if they are to develop a strong work ethic and academic resiliency key elements needed to attain academic success (M. G. Sanders & Sanders, 1998).

Parental involvement has been shown to effectively support students in other ways. Research dictates when parents are more involved, their child's effort in school increases. Additionally, parental involvement has been shown to correlate with higher

feelings of academic motivation for pupils (Keith et al., 1993). These emotional factors are supported by practical benefits which can arise when parents are more involved in their children's education.

Parental involvement, in a pragmatic manner, serves to mitigate some of the factors which serve to hinder pupil academic success. This is evidenced by the inverse relationship between the amount of television that a student watches and the degree to which their parents are involved (Keith et al., 1993). Further, a direct relationship has been demonstrated between the amount of time a student spends studying and the degree to which their parents are involved. These findings are significant because students that spend more time engaged in scholastic activities and less time with leisure pursuits are likely to be at an academic advantage over their peers that do not make the same choices. Parental involvement is a key element needed to support children making the choice to study as opposed to doing things that may be more fun (Keith et al., 1993). As parental involvement has been shown to be a key element in determining just how much a child succeeds in school, it is interesting to note the reinforcing relationship between parental involvement and student academic success.

Parents of higher socioeconomic status and those with children that are achieving at a high level scholastically are most likely to be engaged with the school (Fehrmann, Keith, & Reimers, 1987). Having a high socioeconomic status or a parent that is involved to a great degree is likely to result in academic gains for a student (Fehrmann et al., 1987). As a result, a self-reinforcing cycle is created. Students with involved parents excel to a greater degree. As a result, parents involve themselves to a greater degree and push their children to even greater heights (Keith et al., 1993).



### ***Elements of Parental Involvement***

It should be noted that parental involvement is more than just a singular construct made up of certain activities (Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997). Rather, it is a complex term. The study of parental involvement and its effects has been hamstrung by a lack of commonality amongst researchers in defining this term. Though many studies have been conducted and their results point to the direct relationship between parental involvement and student achievement, there is a dearth of synchronization amongst researchers as to exactly what this term means. Joyce Epstein conceives of parental involvement as a hierarchy involving five elements that parents engage in: basic family obligations, basic school obligations, involvement at school, involvement in learning activities at home, and involvement in school/community decision making (J. L. Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Other researchers dictate that parental involvement is manifested in how often a parent communicates with the school and how often they communicate expectations to their children (Keith et al., 1998). Still others posit that a parent's involvement is defined by their level of and communication of expectations, the manner in which they express interest in their children's studies, their involvement in school matters, and ability to access community supports (Jeynes, 2005a). There is a good degree of overlap amongst all of these definitions, yet a good degree of variance between definitions still exists and makes it difficult to compare data between different researchers studying parental involvement. With this in mind, it is critical that this study move forward with a clear and pronounced definition of the term parental involvement.

The definition of parental involvement that will be used for the sake of this study is the same as that used by Singh (1995). Parental involvement is conceived of as a construct made up of four elements: parent's expectations, their engagement in school activities and programs, their academic support at home, and communication with children about school. These elements will constitute parental involvement for the purposes of this study (Singh, 1995). Singh, by way of meta-analysis points out that "there is both theoretical and empirical evidence that parental involvement improves students learning. Studies indicate higher student achievement when parents participate in school activities, monitor children's homework, and otherwise support the work and values of the school" (Singh, p. 299). Though these elements, when combined, help to support students, it is worthwhile to examine the individual elements of parental involvement to view their individual effects on student achievement.

It has been documented that it is critical that parents both have and communicate high academic expectations to their children (Griffith, 1996a). Of the four elements of parental involvement, a parent's expectations of their child had the most impact on a student's academic performance (Singh, 1995). This could result from a number of factors. Part of the reason is because parents with high expectations of their children tend to be more involved in their child's education (Griffith, 1996b). Thus, this one element of parental involvement, high expectations, serves to reinforce the other three. Additionally, when parents hold their children to high expectations it helps to create, within children, a high academic self-concept (Sanders & Sanders, 1998). This scholastic self-esteem is a factor which is imperative if students are to succeed in school. Since high parental expectations lead to the development of this vital quality in students,

scholastic self esteem, it can be seen how high parental expectations can lead to academic gains for pupils (Griffith, 1996b). Similarly, the other factors which comprise the construct referred to as parental involvement can help pupils achieve at a higher level in school.

The second factor which makes up parental involvement is a parent's engagement in school activities and programs (Singh, 1995). This refers to how often parents come to programs and presentations at school, such as class plays and back to school nights. Though important, a parent's attendance at school functions is the factor least tied to student achievement (Singh, 1995). Theorists disagree as to just how much impact this factor has on student learning. Some researchers contend that parents do not impact student learning just by coming into the school edifice for functions (Jeynes, 2005b). At the same time, others contend that parental engagement in school activities and programs results in some degree of variance in student achievement (Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988). This theoretical schism could be a function of various definitions of student achievement used in the different studies. This researcher is inclined to agree with the school of thought that stipulates parents coming into schools to participate in meetings and activities positively impacts students success. There are a number of reasons to make this assertion.

When parents come into the school for meetings and other school functions, they send important messages to their children's teachers. They communicate, though not explicitly, that they value education and want to be involved. As a result, teachers tend to have higher expectations of the children whose parents they see frequently at school functions (Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988). This has critical implications for student

achievement. There is a direct relationship between teacher expectations and student achievement (Cooper & Tom, 1984). By attending school functions, parents help teachers establish high expectations of their children. Further, teachers tend to believe that the parents they see the most often are most willing to be involved and work in a collaborative fashion with the school. Thus, teachers communicate more frequently with parents that come to school and participate in school activities and program (Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988). Such frequent communication and partnership helps to align the home and school and leads to greater gains for students. Students are best served when the home and school work in concert to send students the same messages (J. Epstein, 1995). This alignment and the subsequent benefits result when parents come to school functions. This element of parental involvement causes gains for students in other ways as well.

When parents participate in school functions, the behavior communicates to their children that school is important (Paulson, 1994). Additionally, school activities can help parents increase their efficacy. Often, parent meetings are designed to provide parent with new techniques and skills they can use with their children to help them excel. By participating in such endeavors, parents increase their skill levels and are better able to provide academic support to their children. School activities also give parents the opportunity to better understand the school experience of their children. It can be difficult for a parent to conceive of the situations and challenges their son or daughter may face in school. However, by attending school functions parents can more ably understand how their children experience school on a daily basis (Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988). This increase in understanding can facilitate better communication between

parents and students. This communication is one of the factors which comprise parental involvement.

Parent communication with their children about school is an element of parental involvement that is necessary if students are to excel (J. Epstein, 1995). By talking with their children about school, parents send the message that school is important. Additionally, this communication helps parents better understand what their children are learning, where they are struggling, and where they need more support. Such discussions provide parents with important insights into how they can more ably be of assistance. These notions help parents establish homes that are conducive to academic pursuits (Paulson, 1994).

In order to excel academically students need a home that fosters conditions conducive to supporting academic study habits. This includes having access to a quiet place to study, academic support when needed, and the proper technological tools. It is incumbent upon parents that they furnish their children with such an academic environment at home. It is quite difficult for a student to do their homework well if there are no books and abundant distractions in their study area. Thus, parental involvement hinges upon parents creating a home environment that is conducive to academic pursuits (Singh, 1995). It is the intention of the leadership project being studied to help parents make their homes even more favorable for learning. Further, the project aims to empower parents with the knowledge and skills to more effectively manage the other three portions of parental involvement (communication of high expectations, engagement in school programs, communicating with students about school). The term empowerment

is used quite deliberately in this context. Further examination of this term sheds light on the nature of this project.

### ***Parental Empowerment***

The goal of this leadership project being studied is to help them along the path to empowerment. In this way, empowerment is conceived of as a process as opposed to a discrete state. One of the key elements of moving along the empowerment process is an understanding of one's role and resources available to help one fulfill their role more deftly. This understanding helps one to assume and perform their role more effectively. School processes that facilitate parental empowerment focus on the strengths of parents and do not look at them as people with problems to be rectified (Shephard & Rose, 1995). These key conceptions of parental empowerment frame the leadership project. The aim of this study is to use an empowerment project to provide parents the means to be more involved in their children's education. The project under study moves forward with one crucial assumption.

One of the critical philosophical underpinnings of this study is that all parents do the best that they can. Certain factors may make it difficult for parents to be involved in the manner that educators would like. However, all parents endeavor to do the best that they can for their children. This idea is buttressed by research. It has been shown in studies that the preponderance of parents, without regard to socioeconomic status, wish to be involved in the education of their children (Griffith, 1996a). Thus, the assumption that certain parents just do not want to be involved does not stand up to scrutiny. Further, the idea that all parents have the capacity to partner with their child's school is critical to the empowerment process (Shephard & Rose, 1995).

The empowerment process relies on mutuality between the school and home. In this process, the faculty member leading the project is not conceived of as “the expert” guiding a parent from ignorance into a state of empowerment. Rather, the teacher or other faculty member, in an empowerment process, sees the parent as a partner with strengths which can be further honed through communication (Shephard & Rose, 1995). Thus, the deficit model which has hindered other endeavors to involve parents is rejected in this study. This is not to say that some parents do not have challenges which can preclude their optimal involvement. The contrary is true. In order to develop a thorough understanding of involvement and how it can be increased, it is helpful to first look at the factors which preclude the optimal involvement of parents.

### ***Barriers to Parental Involvement***

There are a number of barriers to parental involvement which rest with the school. Many teachers are not aware of the strategies that parents use at home to support their children (J. Epstein, 1995). Teachers report even less knowledge of the strategies employed by African-American and Latino parents (Baker, Kessler-Sklar, Piotrkowski, & Parker, 1999). This lack of understanding precludes instructors from using strategies and communication patterns in the classroom which mirror those used in the homes of students (J. Epstein, 1995). Further, this makes it quite difficult for teachers to make suggestions to parents relating which strategies they can use to make their homes more supportive of learning. This is because teachers do not know which strategies have already been tried and which will not work in the context of a particular parent’s home. Such a lack of knowledge functions to break the link between the home and school. There are other challenges which exist and preclude parental involvement.

Because increased parental involvement leads to better academic gains for pupils, a multitude of teachers report wanting to involve parents. The realities of a teacher's schedule, however, make this difficult. As a result of the pressure to prepare students for state tests, the demands of planning effective lessons, and the need to create and evaluate assessments, teachers face a great deal of time pressures. With so many interests competing for their time, teachers must be selective in the endeavors that they pursue. Though extremely valuable, reaching out to parents can feel like another responsibility added-on to already heavily burdened teachers. Thus, a lack of structured time to do so can make it quite difficult for teachers to reach out and involve parents (Chavkin & Williams, 1988). This has implications on the manner and types of communications that parents receive.

Most teachers do not endeavor to communicate with parents until a problem has made itself apparent in the classroom. Thus, the first call to most parents by a teacher is in regards to an academic or attendance problem that a student is having. It is much less frequently that parents are initially contacted with positive news about their son or daughter. This has negative implications for further contact between teachers and parents. Frequently, when a teacher calls home with a concern about a student, they simply share information with the parent about the nature of the infraction. Often this conversation lacks a follow-up discussion about how the school and home can partner together to solve the problem (Leitch & Tangri, 1988). As a result, parents only hear what their child is doing wrong and are not invited to discuss how all of the pertinent players can work together to bring about a solution. Additionally, such negative initial calls function to ward away further parental involvement.



It does not make a parent feel welcome in a school when their first interaction with a teacher is a discussion about how their child is not meeting an academic or behavioral expectation of the instructor. While surveying high school parents Leitch and Tangri (1988) found teachers rarely contacted parents with academic good news. Rather “the reasons for contact were behavior and attendance problems, academic problems, and monitoring children’s progress, in that order” (Leitch and Tangri, 1988, p. 73). Subsequently, many parents feel less welcome in schools because teachers only call on them because their student is not doing well. This feeling is particularly acute for parents of students of color. This is said because parents of minority pupils are much more likely than their white counterparts to receive an initial conversation from a teacher that is a response to a student not performing well (Leitch & Tangri, 1988). Thus, the parents that need to be invited and welcomed into the school in the most intentional manner end up feeling unwanted and less inclined to involved themselves in the schools that their children attend. Bear in mind that parents that are part of a marginalized societal group need to feel that they and their children are welcomed and respected if they are to involve themselves in their child’s school community (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000). When parents, particularly those that are African-American and Latino, do not feel that they and their children are welcomed and respected, they withdraw from the educational process and are often seen as oppositional by teachers (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000). This unwanted result can come about as a result of the limited amount of time that teachers have to reach out to parents. Yet, other factors also exist which make it difficult for school faculty members to involve and partner with parents.

As stated earlier, it is the sincere intention of most teachers to involve the parents of their students to the greatest degree possible. Further, most teachers, in a nationally representative survey, reported wanting to know how to better involve parents. Despite their desires, there exists a dearth of formal opportunities for teachers to learn how to work most effectively with parents. Very few undergraduate teacher preparation programs include a course which provides pre-service teachers with the skills or knowledge needed to reach out most effectively to parents. Even though the majority of teachers feel this would be a valuable part of the undergraduate curriculum for hopeful pedagogues, very few colleges and universities provide students with an understanding of how to better engage parents (Chavkin & Williams, 1988). Thus, many teachers are left to their own devices in finding ways to involve parents. This lack of formal instruction for teachers can be particularly troublesome when considering the demographic profile of most people in the teaching profession.

Most teachers, as mentioned earlier, are white women (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1994). Many of these teachers, both male and female alike, may not have had direct experience with Latino and African-American parents prior to entering the classroom. It places them in a difficult position to ask them to reach out to people they may not know much about. This request becomes even more difficult when teachers are not provided with any formal instruction as to how to most effectively work with this population that they may have had limited exposure to. Further, other cultural factors can make it difficult for schools to involve parents.

There are a number of influences which serve to distance teachers from many of the parents they serve. In general terms, teachers serving students in urban school have

social advantages over many of the parents in the community. Generally, teachers tend to be more affluent, older, married, more educated, and more knowledgeable about the school than parents of students in urban schools (Leitch & Tangri, 1988). All of these things give teachers social capital that some parents may not be able to access. Moreover, M. Laruie Leitch and Sandra Tangri write (1988), “These (social capital) differences give the teachers a status advantage quite apart from their role as teacher...It is thus contended that a sense of resentment can be engendered by parents towards teachers that may be more advantaged” (p. 74). Parents may feel that teachers are looking down on them for not being as successful and upwardly mobile as they are. Such a feeling would preclude many Latino and African-American parents from involving themselves in the school. Many schools use formal evenings and events, chief among them back to school nights, to counter this feeling that parents are not welcome in school. Unfortunately, these events can sometimes work contrary to their goals.

Many back to school nights serve to further alienate parents. Just walking into a school building can bring back negative memories for parents and make them feel uncomfortable. Further, the difficulty of managing the unfamiliar layout of the physical building can reduce the confidence of parents and make them feel uncertain. The feeling of being uncertain and unwanted can mitigate the quality of conversations that teachers and parents during these evening meetings. Other factors function to diminish the quality and impact of the discussions that teachers and parents have. Many teachers use back to school night as an opportunity to discuss a student’s problems and transgressions in the classroom. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that these conversations are frequently one-sided. Only the teacher speaks and frequently does not ask the parent for his or her

suggestions or further partnership. These factors can make the first time a parent meets their child's teacher an uncomfortable experience and can lessen their likelihood of being further involved with the school. Further, a teacher's use of professional jargon and discussion of industry specific methods can make parents feel ignorant. This must be considered in concert with the fact that during back to school night, the teacher holds all of the subtle implements of power: pens, pencils, and grade-books. All of these factors can make parents that already sense a social power differential between themselves and the teachers even less comfortable working with the school. Thus, back to school nights, if they are not carefully planned, can serve to work against their intended goal of welcoming parents into the educational process (Walker, 1998). Further, the classes that many African-American and Latino students find themselves in can hinder the partnership between families and schools.

The parents of students in advanced classes tend to take the initiative in contacting their children's teachers (Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988). Though this is true, Black and Latino students are disproportionately placed in lower and special education tracks (Rosignano, 1998). As a result, the placement of minority students in less rigorous academic courses further impairs parental involvement. The deficit model of thought does the same thing.

In some schools, parents are not thought of as partners. Rather, they and their children are conceived of as people that have problems that the school must fix (Cochran & Dean, 1991). In the deficit model, parents are not partners, rather they are perceived of in an adversarial manner (Delpit, 1992). When teachers use the deficit model to think of

the students and parents they serve, they become less inclined to reach out to them in partnership (Delpit, 1992). Delpit writes:

We foster the notion that students are clients of “professional” educators who are met in the “office” of the classroom where their deficiencies are remediated and their intellectual “illnesses” healed. Nowhere do we foster inquiry into what our students really are or encourage teachers to develop links to the often rich home lives of students, yet teachers cannot hope to begin to understand who sits before them unless they can connect with the families and communities from which their students come. (p. 246)

Thus, a bond between the home and school can not be forged when teachers think of parents as people to be fixed as opposed to as valuable partners.

Parents that have a lower socioeconomic status often face challenges which prevent them from being as involved as they would like to be. Their socioeconomic status often means they may not have as many financial resources as other parents. As a result, they are forced to work more hours and often at lower wages than other parents in order to provide for their families. These extended hours at work make it difficult for lower socioeconomic parents to attend school functions and help children with their assignments as they complete them (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000). Some teachers may postulate that these parents do not want to be involved and do not care. The contrary is often true. However, despite their best intentions, economic realities can make it difficult for some parents to be involved in the schooling of their children. Additionally, certain cultural factors may also diminish their capacity to be involved.

Schools, generally, are based on and advance white middle class values. Some parents and students that do not come from this cultural frame could very easily feel isolated by this reality (Banks & Banks, 2001). Banks and Banks (2001) contend:

When issues such as racism, class privilege, and sexism are left silent, the implicit message for people of color appears to be that the teacher and the school do not acknowledge the experiences of oppression exist. If only the standard language,

the standard American history, and the voices and lives of White men appear in the curriculum, then the further implicit message (by what is left out of the knowledge presented as legitimate by the school seems to be that the real United States and real school are only about the cultural mainstream and its establishment ideology. This approach especially marginalizes the students of color who come to school already marginalized by life experience and by the historical experience of oppression in their ethnic or racial communities. (p. 47)

This reality pushes many students and parents away from the teaching and learning processes and makes them less likely to engage the work of the school. Such is the case for some lower socioeconomic parents as they experience schools which do not validate and respect their culture. Rather than partner with these schools, parents become adversaries. However, this opposition can be overcome by teachers seeking to understand and appreciate the home culture of students and their parents (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000). Though this is true, there are some factors that teachers do not have within their power to address.

As mentioned previously, parents of a lower socioeconomic background may not have the same financial resources as other parents (United States Census Bureau, 2005b). This is exemplified by the fact that Black and Latino parents and students are more likely than their white counterparts to live in poverty (United States Census Bureau, 2005b). This has implications for the involvement of minority parents. In addition to having to work more hours, parents without much money are less able than their wealthy peers to pay for tutors and other forms of educational assistance for their children (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000). This impairs their ability to provide academic assistance. Further, a lack of funds can make it difficult for parents to purchase items such as computers and other tools students need in order to achieve to their greatest potential as they advance through school. Though they may have the will, a lack of wealth can inhibit the

involvement of parents. Similarly, a language barrier can disconnect some parents from schools.

As America becomes more heterogeneous, so does the student body in most classes. Many students come to school speaking a first language that is not English. Similarly, a good number of parents of American school children speak a first language which is not English. A problem is created when schools do not provide communications to these parents in a language they can understand. If parents can not understand the language in the communications sent to their home, they can not access the school to the greatest extent. Further, it must be noted that schools rely generally on letters and e-mails as forms of communications with most parents (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000). These forms of communication may not always be the best way to reach a diverse group of parents. Even when communicating with parents whose first language may be English, schools must be mindful of the language they select.

The use of jargon and other academic language can serve to distance some parents from schools (Walker, 1998). Thus, schools must ensure that the language in their communications is accessible to all of their parents. The necessity of this accessibility means schools must ensure a translation is sent for parents that do not speak English and the language is “plain speak” (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000). To do otherwise is to distance parents from the school community. This must be avoided as other factors, both physical and cultural, can minimize the empowerment of parents.

Physical distance from the school can make some parents feel like they are not part of the school community (Gaffney, 1999). As Latino and African-American parents, speaking in general terms, are less affluent than their white peers, the availability and cost

of transportation can make it difficult for them to attend school functions (United States Census Bureau, 2005b). This notion of physical isolation is particularly important for this study. All of the participating subjects live outside of the community in which their children attend school. It is only because of their participation in a voluntary school integration program that their children are able to attend the Public Schools of Williamsburg. Though the distance between their home and school may not be great in terms of physical miles, it may be too great for some parents to manage on a consistent basis. Because they may not be able to come to the school often, certain parents miss out on many of the community building activities which create strong and mutually supportive parent cohorts (Gaffney, 1999). This can lead parents to a sense of cultural isolation from school

Cultural isolation results when parents do not feel they are welcome or appreciated in school settings because of who they are. As mentioned earlier, most schools are grounded in white middle class values (Banks & Banks, 2001). Some parents may feel that these schools do not view their culture as important. As a result, Latino and African-American parents are more likely than their white counterparts to report feelings of social and cultural isolation from the schools their children attend (Calabrese, 1990). This feeling of isolation can make parents feel less inclined to involve themselves and access their children's teacher. This notion manifested itself in Griffith's findings that parents of lower socioeconomic backgrounds were less likely to seek out their child's teachers for clarification of difficult academic topics (Griffith, 1996a).

Distance as a factor hindering parental involvement is not the domain exclusively of parents. Rather, as students age, they seek more independence. With the transition to



adolescence, the peer group gains in importance and students are less likely to ask for the support and involvement of their parents (Horvat & Lewis, 2003). Thus, students in the development of their own identity push their parents away from the school. Often, schools do the same thing as students age.

As students age, schools are less frequent to invite parents into the building and send communications home to them. As pupils grow and develop, schools increasingly operate under the idea that students are responsible for their own academic careers. Thus, schools sometimes put distance between themselves and parents as students grow older. Moreover, there are fewer programs to involve and empower parents in higher grades (J. L. Epstein & Dauber, 1991). This scarcity of programs in higher grades constitutes a barrier to involving all parents. In planning the researcher's leadership project, which is the current topic of study, it was critical to be cognizant of these impediments.

It is equally important to examine parental involvement projects which have met with success in different school settings.

### ***Current Parental Involvement Programs***

There are a number of programs in place in a number of different schools designed to involve parents. The programs all vary in their scope. Some of these structures to involve parents are traditional and make use of standard techniques to invoke the support of parents such as newsletters and bake sales. Contrarily, other programs give parents much more authority and empower them to take on roles they had not previously undertaken in schools. For the purpose of context, it is helpful to look at some of these programs and the elements which comprise them.

The Community Unit School District 400 in Carpentersville, Illinois, as part of their parental involvement initiative, provides parents with more influence on school decisions than most other districts (Cavarretta, 1998). In this system, all major school decisions are made by a team of parents and school administrators and are ultimately ratified or rejected by the school committee. Thus, parents greatly impact major decisions such as the hiring of teachers, selection of books, and adoption of a schedule. A parent in that district says (1998), "It (the movement towards sharing power with parents) is a distinct move away from the traditional school district organization in which administrators make all hiring and curriculum decisions, and parent participation is limited to fund-raising, "teacher helper" roles, and parent-teacher organizations that lack the power to make meaningful decisions" (p. 13). The Community Unit School District 400's vision of parental involvement focuses on trust, collaboration, and shared decision making. Further, it involves parents in a manner which is novel and fundamental. Other schools have parental involvement programs which involve parents without ceding so much authority to them.

The Saltonstall Elementary School of Salem, Massachusetts is more traditional in its means to involve parents. The school places its focus on communicating with parents frequently and bolstering their understanding of the school's curriculum (Fowler, 1996). To this end, at the beginning of each academic year, the school sends a copy of its curriculum to each parent. Further, a weekly newsletter, written in both English and Spanish, is sent to parents on a weekly basis highlighting the achievement of students and providing parents with important dates and opportunities for them to be involved in school activities. These activities often take the form of school programs designed to

highlight the success of students and invoke the presence and involvement of their parents. The school has also hired a full-time parental involvement coordinator to interface with parents of students and solicit their support. This coordinator and the school's other measures have been effective in creating greater levels of parental involvement. The example of this particular school shows that with concerted effort, a school can reach this parental involvement goal. By looking at the National Network of Partnership-2000 consortium of schools, it can be seen that this end can also be attained in a broader setting.

The National Network of Partnership-2000 is a countrywide group of over 1,200 schools, based out of Johns Hopkins University, devoted, in large part, to increasing parental involvement in the member schools (M. G. M. Sanders, 1996). Member schools in this organization seek to involve parents in the five ways specified by Joyce Epstein. As a result, each member school has a committee designed to elicit parent collaboration, communication, volunteer opportunities, help parents support their students school work at home, and decision making. All teachers in Partnership schools must serve on one of these committees. Additionally, parents also serve on these groups designed to support an element of parental involvement. In addition to establishing these committees, schools that are a part of the National Network of Partnership host frequent workshops to help parents better support the learning of their children. These schools also invite parents in to speak and solicit the support of adults outside of just the nuclear family. Thus, grandparents, aunts, and uncles are also considered important partners to be involved in the education of children. Monthly newsletters and "parent liaisons" are used in Partnership schools to keep partners up to date and involved. All of the means used in

National Network of Partnership schools and the two school examples mentioned previously are designed to aid in the involvement of parents. In order to come to a more full understanding of this concept and how it can ultimately be edified, it is necessary to be aware of three factors which serve to frame it.

### ***Parental Role Construction, Efficacy, and Invitation***

Kathleen Hoover-Dempsey, in her writing, makes mention of three elements which serve to facilitate or retard the involvement of all parents. Parental role construction, parental efficacy, and the manner in which parents are invited into partnership provide the foundation for a parent's involvement (Hoover-Dempsey, 1997b) It is thus critical to examine each element individually.

Parental role construction is the first element which frames a parent's involvement. A person's role encompasses their values, goals, and expectations (Hoover-Dempsey, 1997a) It is a person's role that tells them what is valuable and what their position in society determines is important and worth involving themselves with. All people strive to achieve what their role tells them is important. In much the same way, parents endeavor to attain what their role tells them is valuable and worth pursuing. It is important to note that roles are socially determined by the groups that one belongs to (Hoover-Dempsey, 1997a). As people belong to several groups at once, roles can sometimes conflict. This is seen by examining how parents from different cultural backgrounds perceive their roles.

Latino parents are less likely to seek out communication with their children's teachers. This is not because Latino parents are disinterested and want to be separate from the educational process. The rationale for their actions is found in their role

perceptions. Latino culture propagates the view that teachers and other school faculty members are “experts” (Drummond & Stipek, 2004). In an effort to be respectful of their position and avoid being seen as rude or pushy, many Latino parents develop a role which does not encourages them to take the initiative to seek out teachers. However, a teacher with a different cultural background and different role perception may take this as a sign that Latino parents are disengaged (Griffith, 1996a).

Parents of higher socioeconomic status are often seen as more involved (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1987). This is because their role has developed in a manner different from minority parents. Parents that come from high socioeconomic backgrounds view themselves as partners and equals to the teachers serving their children. Subsequently, these parents conceive of their roles as partners to teachers. This spurs them to take more initiative to contact and communicate with their children’s teachers. Because schools are based on middle class norms and roles, parents that are active in communicating are seen as more involved and those that give deference are perceived as disengaged. It thus becomes necessary to be aware of a parent’s socially constructed role. All people do the best that they can to abide by their defined role, though these roles may differ from the ones validated by schools (Hoover-Dempsey& Kathleen 1997). This notion of role construction is an element which frames parental involvement. It is furthered by the notion of parental efficacy.

Efficacy refers to the degree to which a person believes they can be successful in a particular endeavor. This notion of feeling successful in a given undertaking has tremendous implications for parental involvement. People tend to avoid situations in which they have a perception of a low degree of efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey et. Al. 1987).

This is particularly true for parents. Parents that do not believe they are able to successfully involve themselves or believe that their efforts will not result in greater achievement for their children are not likely to engage the school (Grolnick et al., 1997). Parents that are highly educated, tend to higher senses of personal efficacy because they often have learned more skills they can use with their offspring (Hoover-Dempsey, 1997). It is important to note that for these and all parents, their sense of parental efficacy usually decreases as students age (Drummond & Stipek, 2004). This happens because the work students are doing becomes harder and parents become less able to provide academic support as time goes on (Grolnick et al., 1997). Additionally, schools provide less and less explicit direction to parents about what they can do to support their children as these pupils age (United States Department of Education, 1996). The United States Department of Education puts forward a number of measures a school can undertake in order to support the involvement of parents. These steps include school based actions such as helping parents understand what their children are like at that age, letting parents know how their students are doing between report cards, making them aware of opportunities to volunteer in the school, help them help their children learn at home, and provide information about community services. Whereas, parents of children in grades 1 through 3 report that schools do 3.9 things very well in order to involve them, parents in grades 9-12 report that schools do only 2.3 things very well in order to involve them. This shows that fewer supports are put in place in order to increase the efficacy of parents of older students. In return, only 37% of parents put forth that schools provide information that helps them create a home that is conducive to study (United States Department of Education, 1996). This minimal amount of supports provided for parents

is in sharp contrast to the fact that parents of all ages want more information as to how they can better support their children (Epstein and Dauber, 1991). For this reason, it is imperative that schools provide for parents concrete information about how they can support their children as they age and progress through school. This functions to support the development of efficacy in parents. There is a large degree of interplay between teacher characteristics and the ability to create parental efficacy.

Teachers who believe themselves to be more successful are more capable of involving parents. Additionally, teachers are more inclined to reach out and provide information to parents when they believe their administrators perceive parental involvement is important (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). These instructors do more to reach out and invite parents into partnership. This invitation of parents to participate is a critical element which frames the involvement of parents (Hoover-Dempsey, 1997)

The more frequently a parent is invited into partnership, the more likely they are to involve themselves in the educational process (Hoover-Dempsey, 1997b). This results from the fact that multiple invitations make parents believe they are welcomed and have inputs that will be welcomed (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). This feeling of being welcomed into the school is particularly important for parents of minority students (Hoover-Dempsey, 1997b).

Parents of students of color, in particular, need to feel that they are welcomed and invited into their children's schools. Because they may not be held in the highest of esteem in other contexts, parents of students of color have to be made to feel that their input is valuable if they are to involve themselves in the work of the school. Thus, Latino and African-American parents are much more involved when they are repeatedly

welcomed into schools (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000). Though multiple and positive invitations to parents are helpful in invoking their involvement, all schools do not make use of these redundant messages.

As students grow older, schools invite parents into the building and into partnership with less frequency. As a result of being called upon less, parents of older students participate less in the educational process (Paulson, 1994). This fact is manifested in the way that schools push parents away as students transition into high school (Hoover-Dempsey, 1997). An analysis of transitions bring this point further into focus.

## **Transitions**

### ***Factors Which Make the Transition to High School Difficult***

The term transition is described as a movement between two different and definable points (Smith, 1997). Students transitioning into high school, have a number of concerns which they need support from their parents to handle. New high school students worry about the difficulties of navigating a new physical environment and achieving to high academic standards. Additionally, these students often are afraid of being bullied and are not sure how to make new friends while maintaining old relationships (Felner, Ginter, & Primavera, 1982). These fears make the transition to high school difficult for many students. Other transitions that students are experiencing concurrently make this a particularly difficult period for young people.

As they transition into high school, many students are simultaneously experiencing adolescence. During this period, young people are experiencing great change, both emotionally and physically. As a result, pupils begin to seek out more



autonomy in order to define the roles they will undertake in their adult lives. This pushing away of adults occurs at a juncture when pupils are entering a school environment that is more complex both socially and physically. Thus, at a time when parents are more needed than ever, their children push them away (Iver & Epstein, 1991). As a result of this confluence of transitions, the move to high school can be harmful to some students and necessitates explicit support for parents at this juncture.

The transition into high school is a critical point for students. This can be said because of the many negative changes which often occur in the affective and cognitive domains at this point. Mizelle (1999) points out “As young adolescents make the transition into high school, many experience a decline in grades and attendance. They also view themselves more negatively” (p. 2). In a similar vein, student academic confidence drops as they move into high school. Motivation to succeed in school decreases in students as well (Reyes, Gillock, Kobus, & Sanchez, 2000). Students entering the ninth grade are more likely to believe that their schools do not support them (Reyes et al., 2000). These changes in attitude and perception of self-efficacy manifest themselves in the increase of truancy that is seen in students as they transition into high school. With these factors in mind, it is not surprising that students transitioning into the ninth grade are at an increased risk to display maladaptive behaviors (Felner et al., 1981). Such challenges in the affective sphere, resulting from the transition into high school, further manifest themselves in the academic realm.

Most students earn lower grades in grade nine than they did in grade eight (Simmons, Black, & Zhou, 1991). While this decline could result from the fact that the work is more difficult, Mizzele also points out that there are cultural and organizational

differences between middle schools and high schools which make transitions difficult and impair pupils performance (Simmons et al., 1991; Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). Simmons (2000) writes, "As they (students) make the transition to high school, many young adolescents experience a larger, more impersonal, more competitive, and grade-oriented environment than they experienced in middle school" (p.2). This is combined with the fact that schools make fewer and fewer attempts to involve parents as their children age (Simmons et al., 1991). This decrease of parental involvement holds true across socioeconomic lines. Though this is true, there are factors which are unique about the way students of color experience the transition to high school.

### ***Differences in the Ways Black and Latino Students Experience Transitions***

Though most all students experience a drop in grades as they move into high school, this decline is particularly sharp for Latino and African-American students. On average, all students experience a decrease of half a letter grade, per subject, when moving from the eighth to the ninth grade (Felner et al., 1981). However, Latino and Black students, on average, experience a drop of one full letter grade, per subject, as they move into high school (Reyes et al., 2000). This decrease in academic performance is more precipitous than the one experienced by white students (Felner et al., 1981). Further, students of color transitioning into high school have been shown to be more susceptible than their white peers to display behaviors which are punishable by suspension. Additionally, Black and Latino students report liking school less and less as they move into high school. There are a number of reasons this pattern holds true. As the average academic achievement of students of color, as a group, trails that of white students, the increased academic expectations of high school places Black and Latino

pupils even further behind their white peers (Simmons et al., 1991). Moreover, it should be considered that the relationship between students and teacher is particularly important for students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1994). As students move into high school, teachers often place less emphasis on their relationships with students. Rather, students new to high school find much more emphasis is placed on what is taught as opposed to the connection with the person teaching it. Because the interpersonal connection is so important to students, it is reasonable to conclude that students of color would find less satisfaction in the classroom as they transition into the high school. As a result, Black and Latino students report more challenges than their white peers as they move into high school. The challenges that Black and Latino students face as they move into grade nine places them at higher risk for dropping out (Reyes et al., 2000).

As mentioned earlier, students of color experience an acute drop in academic performance as they begin their high school careers (Felner et al., 1981). As a result, they begin their high school experience behind many of their peers. This places African-American and Latino students in the perpetual position of having to catch up to their white peers. Such a feeling of being consistently behind can be quite frustrating and place students along the path to dropping out. Moreover, this sharp decline in grades can be quite embarrassing and causes many Latino and Black students to consider dropping out of high school (Reyes et al., 2000). Because the transition to high school can have such dire consequences on minority learners, it is critical that schools put structures in place to support these students and their families in moving from one grade to the next.

### ***Prevalence of Transition Support Programs***

Because the transition into high school is a predictable and common part of American schooling experience which can often have negative consequences for many students, it is critical that schools devise supports to help these students entering the ninth grade and their parents (Felner et al., 1981). Though this is true, schools vary largely with respect to the supports they afford students and their parents as they transition into high school (Smith, 1997). Schools, such as Williamsburg High School, which have a high aggregate student socioeconomic status, tend to offer more programs to help parents and students adjust to the realities of high school. Though this is true, there still exists a large degree of variance between schools in terms of how they provide transition support programs. The largest bit of variance comes in relation to the degree parents are utilized in preparing for the transition process. Most schools gear their transition programs strictly towards students. These schools, most commonly have students come in and tour their new school and have them meet with their guidance counselors in order to help them ease into the ninth grade (Smith, 1997). This strategy is helpful, however, it is the more comprehensive transition support programs that yield optimal results.

### ***Impact of Transition Support Programs***

In a study by Smith (1997), transition support programs that were more successful provided help to parents as well as students. Students that had a parent participate in a program to help them transition into high school experienced advantages that their peers whose parents were not afforded such programs did not have access to. By way of her meta-analysis using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey and over 1035 schools, Julia Smith (1997) concluded that:

[transition] programs that combined student, parent, and staff focus on the problem of student transition to high school appeared affective. In the

preliminary effect, which assumes no other differences between students or schools, students who had access to a full or partial transition show a higher grade point average when compared with students who did not have such a program in their middle school. (p. 154)

Additionally, pupils that had a parent participate in a transition support endeavor reported fewer incidences of truancy. In an empirical study, Felner reported that random selected urban students with parents participating in a program to help them transition into high school were absent, on average, eight fewer days than during their peers that did not participate in the same program (Felner et al., 1982). Such a positive result points to the fact that students benefit when their parents are included in the efforts to help them move into the ninth grade successfully. This notion is magnified by another factor.

During the middle school years, parents form supportive bonds with other parents. When the transition to high school occurs, these bonds are often broken because their children move to different schools. Thus, the transition into high school often functions to break apart the supportive bonds that parents build. This challenge, along with a host of others, confronts students and parents as they begin the move into high school. Because of this aforementioned difficulty, the ambiguity around the role of the high school parents, increased social and academic pressures, and the difficulty of navigating a new physical facility, it is critical for schools to put structures in place that help parents connect with other parents for the betterment of students. This is especially true as parents begin their journey through their children's first year of high school. Schools that are able to engage parents as they move into the ninth grade are able to increase the chances of future parental engagement and students scholastic success. Mizelle (1999) says, "The importance of the parents being involved in their young adolescent students' transition from middle to high school can hardly be overestimated. When parents are

involved in their student's transition to high school, they tend to stay involved in their child's school experiences " (p. 4).

### ***Conclusion***

It can be seen by examining a number of data sources that Black and Latino students, as a group, are not achieving at a level as high as that of their white counterparts. This achievement gap is deeply rooted in historical and current societal and inequities. The achievement gap constitutes a contemporary injustice for all students. Dr. Robert Starratt (2004) writes, "The whole polity as well as individual groups suffer when equal opportunity to learn the common curriculum is denied to some" (p.35). It should thus be considered that one of a school leader's most important responsibilities and moral imperatives is to be proactive in removing all of the barriers which impede the learning and success of students (Starratt, 2004). Starratt (2004) continues:

"It (the responsibility of leaders) primarily means using institutional resources to open up new possibilities for people...(when you are able to) get past your responsibility of preventing harm to specific groups of students, you begin to open up to your responsibility to do good, not simply by being nicer to these kids-although that is a good place to start-but by exploring how to use institutional resources to improve the good that schools are supposed to be providing-namely quality learning for all kids (p 39).

This quote highlights the necessity of being purposive in designing means to attack the achievement gap. As the resources available to a school leader are very much finite, it is imperative that these people think of assistance available to them and junctures particularly packed with either peril or possibility. It is for this reason the previously presented research dictates that the current study is so important.

It has been shown that parental involvement is a critical element in the success of students. If students of color in particular are to achieve, it is imperative that schools

make a concerted effort to involve their parents. Attention should be paid to the idea that the juncture between ninth and eighth grade is a particularly important time for school leaders to reach out to parents and seek to work with them as partners. Because this time period, research points out, can be exceptionally difficult for Black and Latino students, it is critical that school leaders seek out these students' parents and design programs to support their involvement during the transition into high school. This raises the question of what elements of a parental empowerment program can be particularly efficacious in positively altering parents' perceptions of their skill and practice as parents. The need to answer this vital question necessitates the current study and calls for a thorough analysis of the methodology found therein.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

With a well-established body of research established as a backdrop, this chapter will describe the design of the study of intended to measure the effects of a parental empowerment project on participants. This chapter will specify the type of case study to be used in this research endeavor and clarify why this approach was the best manner to answer the specified research questions. In addition to presenting the aforementioned research questions, this chapter will also detail the methodology, sample, sample selection rationale, pilot test, the data gathering procedures, methods of data analysis and limitations found in this study.

#### **Research Questions**

This study had three central research questions. They were:

1. What do parents of students of color perceive to be the impact of their involvement in this parental empowerment project on their own attitudes and behaviors?
2. What factors of the parental empowerment project did parents perceive to be most useful in helping them support their children as they transition into high school?
3. What did the parents perceive to be barriers which may preclude the maximal involvement of parents of students of color as they transition into high school?



## **Research Hypotheses**

1. Parents of students of color will perceive a positive impact on their views of themselves as capable parents and themselves as more able to support their children transitioning into high school as a result of their participation in a parental empowerment program.
2. Participants will perceive the monthly parent meetings and parents playbook as most useful in helping them support their children as they transition into high school.
3. Study participants will perceive a lack of communication from their children's teachers and a lack of time as factors inhibiting their maximal involvement.

## **Research Methodology**

This study was qualitative in nature. There are a number of reasons why such an approach was optimal for this investigation as opposed to a more quantitative manner of study. Qualitative research is described by Merriam (1992) as, "an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that helps us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible" (p.5). Such an approach to research is inductive in nature. Using the researcher as the primary data collection and analysis agent, a qualitative study aims to build theory or abstractions predicated on the phenomenon observed. This form of research, generally, takes place in

the field with the researcher engaging with the matter under study in its natural state or setting (Merriam, 1992). Rather than seeking to numerate something under study, the aim of qualitative research is to understand the very nature and essence of an investigated phenomenon. In a similar vein, the aim of this study was to determine the nature of parental involvement in the particular setting of Williamsburg High School. Thus, a qualitative research design was most useful.

Whereas quantitative studies are useful in determining the pieces of a particular experience, qualitative methods are preferred for assessing how disparate pieces come together to constitute a whole in a particular context (Patton, 1985). Patton (1985) speaks to this fact when he says:

[Qualitative research] is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting....The analysis strives for depth of understanding (p.1).

Subsequently, the totality of the effect of a parental empowerment program amongst parents of the RAFT Program at Williamsburg High School was best viewed using a qualitative method. As there are several types of methodologies which come under the heading of qualitative, it is useful to specify exactly which manner of qualitative research was employed in this study.

This study was designed as a qualitative case study. The researcher drew upon the definition of a case study offered by Yin. Yin (1994) defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life

context, especially when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). This context provides for greater detail (Yin, 1994). In the context of the current study, the cases were used to illuminate the factors that precluded and perpetuated parental involvement. In order to do this, the study examined rich detail describing which factors helped and which retarded the involvement of parents in the education of their children as the pupils transitioned into high school. This detail according to Patton (1990) is grounded in “detailed descriptions of people’s activities, behaviors, actions’ recorded in observations and excerpts quotations, or entire passages extracted from various types of documents”(p.10). It is this high level of detail and context which make case studies useful means of investigation. For this reason, a qualitative case study was the preferred method to gain the data needed to answer this study’s research questions. There were other reasons which supported the use of a qualitative case study.

A case study was also most appropriate for the study because it allowed the researcher to observe, “naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings, so that we have a strong handle on what ‘real life’ is like” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.10). In this way, the researcher was able to observe how a parental involvement program impacted the particular people in a very particular context. This stood in stark contrast from data gathered in a contextual vacuum. The use of a case study provided a rich description of the context in which a particular phenomenon, in this case parental involvement, existed. Moreover, as it provides a good deal of holism, a case study can be useful in helping readers understand how parental involvement did and did not exist within Williamsburg High School (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The use of a case studies allows the researcher

to present a phenomenon in a holistic fashion (Kenny & Grotelueschen, 1980). Kenny and Grotelueschen (1980) speak to the necessity of holism and virtue of qualitative methodology in measuring programs when they write, “When it is important to convey a holistic and dynamically rich account of an educational program, case study is a tailormade approach” (p.5).

One of the strengths of analyzing a phenomenon using a case study approach was that the researcher was allowed to see how the situation changed and developed over a period of time (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As opposed to studying how the parental empowerment project impacted parents at one juncture, the use of a case study allowed the researcher to see how sample members grew and changed over time. This provided more data and a broader view of the phenomenon under study. As a result, the researcher was able to make judgments predicated upon a wider and richer scope of findings. Further, the length of the study allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study. As opposed to viewing the parental empowerment program at one discrete point, the researcher was able to view and analyze the program and the way participants responded to it from its inception to its conclusion. Examining data gathered over a sustained period of time allowed the researcher to develop a more a more substantive understanding of peoples’ reactions and how they correlated with the intervention (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

As the researcher was the primary data-gathering instrument, this study was granted a greater degree of responsiveness and flexibility. The researcher was able to change the means used to gather data, manage data in the moment, and investigate anomalous respondent responses (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Further, the researcher was

able to amend the times and places where data was gathered, making it easier for sample members to manage the process of providing data. Thus, the responsiveness of the researcher created greater confidence in the accuracy of the data as a true measure of the phenomenon under study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Though this is true, it is important to note that the conclusions drawn as a result of the study are a product of an interpretation by the researcher of the views of others (Merriam, 1992). It should be noted that the researcher's interpretations were intended to be evaluative.

The project under study was an innovation in the Public Schools of Williamsburg. It was vital to judge whether parents believed their participation in this project was worthwhile and helpful in their practice as parents. Further, the intention of the study was to determine whether the intervention worked in achieving its goal of increasing parental involvement. Thus, this case study was designed with the intention of producing an evaluation. Merriam (1992) describes an evaluative case study as one that “involves description, explanation, and judgment” (p. 39). The goal of such a case study is to produce information which can yield a conclusion. Such case studies are helpful in determining whether a program has been successful. Such results are yielded from a study that makes use of a high degree of descriptive detail while also focusing on producing information that can be used to assess and evaluate a program (Merriam, 1992). Merriam (1992) writes, “(a)case study is the best reporting form for evaluations. Case study is best because it provides thick description, is grounded, is holistic and life-like, it simplifies data to be considered by the reader and can communicate tacit knowledge” (p. 39). This richness of detail which can be used to provide a judgment was well suited for an assessment of the program under study. For this reason, an evaluative

case study was the best research methodology. The strength of the data therein was strengthened by a critical factor.

The study made use of data triangulation by including surveys, interviews, and journals to yield data. This use of multiple data sources, coupled with the rich description which is a necessary element of qualitative case study, functioned to make the study's findings more valid and reliable (Merriam, 1992). This use of multiple data sources, coupled with the rich description which is a necessary element of qualitative case study, functioned to make the study's findings more valid and reliable (Merriam, 1992).

### **Sample and Rationale for the Sample**

This study made use of a convenience sample. Convenience sampling falls under the umbrella of purposive sampling methodology. Purposive sampling is a form of nonprobability grouping. A probability sampling was not used for this study intentionally. Merriam (1992) dictates that, "Since generalization in a statistical sense is not a goal of qualitative research, probabilistic sampling is not necessary or even justifiable in qualitative research" (p. 61). Purposive sampling is the most common form of nonprobabilistic sampling. This method of sample selection requires the researcher to create a clear set of criteria upon which sample members will be selected. Units of study are only included in the sample if they meet the criterion outlined by the researcher. It is helpful at this juncture to note why a convenience sampling was the method of purposive grouping used in this study.

A convenience sampling as specified by Merriam (1992) "is just what is implied by the term- you (the researcher) select(s) a sample based on time, money, location,

availability of sites or respondents, and so on” (p. 63). The researcher’s professional capacity provided him access to a cohort of potential sample members. In his professional capacity, the researcher served as an administrator with the RAFT Program at Williamsburg High School. Thus, he had ease of access to a group of sample participants. This ease of access provided the researcher inroads into a cohort of possible sample participants which could provide information about the phenomenon under study. With this in mind, parents transitioning into Williamsburg High School under the auspices of the RAFT Program were selected to participate in this study.

There were 21 parents with students transitioning in to Williamsburg High School under the auspices of the RAFT Program. Of this group, all parents were asked to volunteer to join the sample group. Seven participants volunteered to join the sample group. Researchers believe that there are no exact rules as to a precise number of participants to include in a study (Merriam, 1992). The use of a third of the transitioning group provided a large enough sample population to answer the research questions and yield rich, descriptive data.

The use of parents with children transitioning into high school was by design. Research dictates that the ninth grade is a pivotal year for all students. This is particularly true for students of color (Simmons et al., 1991). At the precipice between eight and ninth grade, students are provided with unique opportunities to either falter or excel (Felner et al., 1981). Thus, the transition into high school is a unique point pregnant with opportunity that can be realized if students and their parents are provided the correct support (Felner et al., 1981). It was thus important to study means to assist in the transition of students and parents to the high school. In order to do this, the parents of

students entering the ninth grade had to be selected to participate in this project. It should be noted that there was a specific reason for including parents of students of color.

Students of color, disproportionately, struggle as they enter high school. This difficulty during the ninth grade depresses the scholastic achievement of students of color and can lead to the academic achievement gap. In order to combat this, it was imperative that the researcher included parents of color into the sample to ascertain how the representative group perceived programs designed to aid their children during the transition to high school.

All parents transitioning into Williamsburg High School under the auspices of the RAFT Program were made aware of the program at an evening meeting led by the researcher. This meeting was held in the spring preceding the actual transition of students and parents. The researcher verbally specified the nature, objective, and time commitment participation in the parental empowerment project would entail for subjects. It was made clear that the entire cohort of 24 parents transitioning into the high school would be able to participate in the project designed to support them. All parents during this session were provided with a letter specifying the particulars of the study and the human subject considerations they would be provided as participants and encouraged to consider participating in this venture. A letter from the researcher was sent to the home of all of the parents that did not attend the aforementioned gathering providing the salient information about the parental empowerment project and asking for their participation in the project and the study. This invited them to volunteer to participate in the study. The letter included the researcher's contact information to be used in case parents decided to volunteer for the study. As study participants were extracted from the population of



parents of students participating in the RAFT Program, it is helpful to examine a bit of the history and goals of the program in order to gain a fuller understanding of the sample members.

The RAFT Program is a voluntary school integration program that has been in existence for 40 years. The program has three overarching goals,

1. To provide educational opportunity for students of color residing in the city of Sheffield.
2. To promote demographic diversity in suburban school districts such as Williamsburg
3. To promote communication between parents in urban and suburban school districts.

With the mission of the program as a backdrop it is helpful to examine the two communities served by the program.

Though the people comprising the sample had students attending the public schools of Williamsburg, they were actually residents of the city of Sheffield. Access to the Williamsburg School was provided under the auspices of the RAFT Program which enrolled, using state funding, about 300 students from Sheffield into Williamsburg Public Schools.

Williamsburg is a small and relatively affluent suburb in the northeastern United States. It is a neighbor to the City of Sheffield. One of the hallmarks of the town is its appreciation for education. Though according to the most recent information from the state department of education, the town ranks 55<sup>th</sup> in the state in terms of per pupil spending, \$11,107 per student, the district continuously reports standardized tests scores

near the top of the state rankings. According to the most recent state standardized test, 86% of students from Williamsburg high school were writing at an advanced or proficient level. On the math section of the same test, 84 % of Williamsburg High School student scored at the advanced and proficient level. These pupils greatly outpaced their peers in the rest of the state who scored 70% and 67%, respectively, on the same test.

In addition to its high level of educational achievement, Williamsburg is regarded as a rather wealthy town. According to census data from 2000, the median household income in Williamsburg is \$75,300, which is \$18,116 more than the state median. Because only 6.2% of the town's population is comprised of Black or Latino people, the town is often considered relatively homogenous, with Caucasians making up the majority of the town residents.

The city of Sheffield, where all of the sample participants resided, is considered more heterogeneous than Williamsburg. Sheffield is a large city with a very heterogeneous population. The city's population was 40% African-American and Latino. Despite the fact that it was more diverse than Williamsburg, the city of Sheffield was less affluent than its suburban neighbor. The median household income, according to the 2000 census was \$39,629. This is \$17,555 below the median for the state.

Sheffield's large size required a high number of public schools to serve children. In contrast to the nine public schools in Williamsburg, there were 145 public schools in Sheffield. Student achievement, using the state standardized test at the high school level as a measure, was lower in Sheffield than in Williamsburg. According to the most recent state standardized test scores, 51% of 10<sup>th</sup> grade students in Sheffield scored in the

proficient and advanced score ranges in language arts. On the math section, 53% of students earned scores that placed them in the advanced or proficient ranges. These math and language arts scores were both below the state average. The data about the city municipalities can be combined with the data about the individual sample members to provide a more full understanding of the study.

The sample group was selected with the aim of providing the researcher with the greatest opportunity to discover, understand, and gain insight as to how parental involvement existed in a particular context. To this end, a third of the parents of the students transitioning into Williamsburg High School under the auspices of the RAFT Program participated as members of the sample group. Amongst the group, there was variation in the highest level of educational attainment. One of the members possessed an advanced degree. Three members possessed a bachelor's degree. An associate's degree was possessed by one member. For four members of the sample, a high school degree was the highest level of education attained. Amongst the sample group, there were differences in other demographic factors.

All of the members of the sample group worked outside of their homes. Of the eight sample members, one worked in the field of education. This subject was also the only white parent involved in the study. She was employed as a paraprofessional at one of the elementary schools in Williamsburg. None of the other sample members worked in the field of education.

One member of the sample had taken part in the RAFT Program as a student. Though she had not attended Williamsburg High School, she did have the experience of leaving Sheffield to attend school in a suburban district. Though no other sample

participants had participated in the program, some of the other members of the groups had other ties to the RAFT Program and Williamsburg High School.

Two members of the sample group were parents of students that had previously transitioned into Williamsburg High School and were attending the high school under the auspices of the RAFT Program. One other sample member was the parent of a child in high school. However, this student did not attend Williamsburg High School.

### **Human Subject Considerations**

Numerous human subject considerations were taken into account during the course of this study. Initially, permission to conduct this project was obtained from the district director of the Raft Program for the Town of Williamsburg and from the principal of Williamsburg High School. Both parties were made aware that care would be taken to ensure the confidentiality of the RAFT program as well as the school district. Moreover, they were made aware that particular human subject considerations would be put in place to protect study participants.

Members of the sample group were informed that their participation was voluntary. Further, they were allowed to leave the study at any time without consequence. Sample participants were informed that their anonymity would be maintained throughout the course of their participation.

### **Data Collection**

#### Survey

A survey was initially used to gain baseline data on participants before the first meeting of the researcher and participating parents. The survey asked questions relating

to how efficacious parents felt, what barriers if any made it difficult for them to be involved in the education of their children, their understanding of their new role as soon-to-be high school parents and in what areas they required more support from Williamsburg High School and the RAFT Program. To gain this data, the survey made use of 17 questions. For 16 of the 17 questions, participants were asked to give their level of assent to statements using a Likert scale. A Likert scale was the preferred tool for gaining this data because it allowed attitudes and responses to be interpreted on a metric scale in order for a scientific study to be conducted (Ubersax, 2006). The survey's 17<sup>th</sup> question was open ended and asked respondents to provide a response to an ideal position question (Merriam, 1992).

Sample participants met with the researcher monthly at Williamsburg High School. The first meeting occurred in the August before the students transitioned into Williamsburg High School. This meeting, like all of the other parent gatherings began at 6:30 p.m. and was held at Williamsburg High School. This gathering was led by the researcher. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce parents to the Williamsburg High School staff they would be working with for the next four years. To this end, the high school's principal and dean of ninth grade students were present to give a welcome and description of their duties to parents. The rest of the meeting was conducted by the researcher. He spoke and answered parents' questions for an hour and a half. The main topics of consideration were the differences between elementary and high school, the necessity of parental and student advocacy, and the means parents can undertake in order to help their students build good schedules. Upon the completion of the meeting, parents were provided with a "RAFT Program Parent Playbook". This document, structured in

the form of a frequently asked questions manual, provided responses to many of the most common queries of new high school parents. Parents were asked to read and keep these manuals at their homes. Once they received their manuals, sample participants completed the pre-intervention survey and returned them to the researcher. The next meeting took place in the month of September once the participating parents' children had actually begun attending Williamsburg High School.

### Participant journals

Between the months of September and December, parents participating in the project met with the researcher on a monthly basis. Each meeting was lead by the researcher and a coordinator of one of the traditional academic disciplines at Williamsburg High School. Each month, the researcher and academic coordinator shared advice on techniques participating parents could make use of as they helped their children transition into the high school. The researcher spoke to important dates coming up for new parents and pitfalls to be cognizant of as the sample participants' children entered Williamsburg High School as students for the first time. The new high school parents were also encouraged to dialogue with each other during these meetings in order to exchange parenting ideas.

Participant journals were used to determine how participants reacted during the course of the parental empowerment program in which they participated. Sample members responded to a journal prompt posed by the researcher at the conclusion of each monthly parent meeting. The journal prompt remained the same over the course of the ten parent meetings. These questions were:

1. What did I learn tonight that I can use to help me be even more effective with my child?
2. What information about Williamsburg High Schools could be presented at the next meeting that would help make you an even more successful parent?

Sample participants wrote in their journals at the conclusion of each meeting with the researcher. At the conclusion of each meeting, these journals were collected and analyzed by the researcher. As journals were kept during the course of the project, these documents gave evidence of the changes in attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of parental efficacy of study participants.

During the fifth month of the RAFT Program's Parental Empowerment Project, the group of new parents merged with the pre-existing group of parents of 10<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students that also met on a monthly basis. This larger group met each month with the researcher leading the sessions. These meetings continued until the end of the school year in June with project and study participants writing in their reflective journals at the end of each month. The project concluded the final month of the school year.

### Interviews

Once the participants finished participating in parents meetings, they were subject to semi-structured interviews. The interviews made use of hypothetical, ideal position, and interpretative questions (Merriam, 1992). The use of semi-structured interviews was intentional. It allowed the researcher to ensure, for the sake of consistency, that all participants were asked the same base questions and gave each the chance to provide information to answer the research questions. This helped reduce instrumentation error which can sometimes occur when interviews are used (Merriam, 1992). Additionally, the

semi-structured nature of the interviews provided the researcher the ability to probe respondents with follow-up queries (Merriam, 1992). This allowed the researcher to gain more information without sacrificing consistency.

The researcher conducted these interviews in his office at Williamsburg High School. Each interview took place over the course of a half of an hour. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher into Microsoft Word. Upon the completion of interviews, typed transcripts were given to interviewees in order for them to check the transcripts for accuracy. All tapes were destroyed after the conclusion of the study.

These transcripts were coded, and analyzed by the researcher. Codes were created according to themes, patterns, and trends surfacing from the data. Additionally, codes were developed in a manner reflecting the research themes of the achievement gap, parental involvement, and the transition to high school. Codes, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), are a “tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (p.56). They provide meaning to data and allow for analysis (Merriam, 1992). Codes, in the context of this study, were used to assess participant perceptions as they engaged in an empowerment program. These data were compared and contrasted with the baseline data gathered by way of the initial surveys to answer the research questions. The use of three manners of data collections functioned to triangulate the results gained from this evaluative case study. This provided it more strength and reliability (Merriam, 1992).

### **Pilot Test**



In order to ensure that they were easily understood, free of jargon, and could be completed in a time efficient manner, the survey, interview protocol, and journal prompts used for this study were subjected to pilot testing. Pilot testing was particularly important because it made the instruments and as a result study more valid and reliable (Merriam, 1992). Pilot testing ensured face validity of the instruments in the present study.

During the course of their creation the pre-intervention survey was submitted to the researcher's doctoral mentor and chair. Their advice resulted in changing of the order and phrasing of seven of the statements on the form. In a similar manner, the journal prompts were subject to review.

The researcher's journal prompts were submitted to his doctoral mentor. The mentor's feedback led to the refinement of several of the questions. Similar input was utilized in the refinement of the interview protocol which was used to gain information from members of the sample.

During the course of its creations, the interview protocol was reviewed by the researcher's doctoral mentor. As a result of the mentor's suggestions, three questions were omitted, two questions were added, and eight questions were rephrased to provide greater clarity. Once these changes were completed, the interview protocol was piloted with two parents that participated in the parental empowerment project but were not part of the study of its effectiveness. The researcher's aim was to determine whether the questions were written clearly, interviews could be conducted in a timely fashion, and supplied the information required in order to answer the research questions. Upon completing the two pilot interviews, and having the three preceding questions answered

in the affirmative, the researcher was able to consider the interview protocol ready for use as a data gathering tool.

### **Data Analysis**

Data was culled from interviews, journals, and surveys. These data were placed into categories known as codes constructed by the researcher. Codes can be defined as the concepts which unfold from the data (S. J. Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The use of codes provides a means of assigning units of meaning to inferential information being studies (Miles & Huberman, 1998). Codes were devised according to research themes in order to answer the research questions. The themes were constructed as a result of the review of the literature, research questions, and themes emerging as data were collected. With the data organized into codes, it could be analyzed.

To exemplify, the code T was assigned to record respondents' perceptions of their children's' transition to high school. -T referred to factors negatively affecting this shift and +T referred to factors making transition easier. The code, PI referred to parental involvement, with +PI stipulating factors which stimulated this construct for sample members and -PI referring to factors which inhibited the involvement of parents. AG was a code to refer to the achievement gap. +AG was the code for measures which close the gap and -AG as the code for measures which made the academic achievement gap larger. Code analysis was used to assess themes and compare and contrast results across themes. Moreover, theme analysis was used in order to draw attention to trends and anomalous results.

A phenomenological analysis was the primary means of analysis (Merriam, 1992). Because a phenomenological form of analysis is useful in developing a stronger

understanding of an occurrence and the factors which set the stage for it, it was ideal for this study. The overall aim was to gain a greater understanding of the general construct of parental involvement within the particular context of Williamsburg High.

### **Formats for reporting the data**

Text was the primary means used to report data. Miles and Huberman (1994) contend that “Words, especially organized into incidents or stories, have a concrete, vivid, meaningful flavor that often provides far more convincing to a reader.....than pages of summarized numbers” (p.1). This demonstrates the strength of using words to describe phenomenon and themes. Further, text was quite helpful in providing the rich descriptive detail which is vital in case studies. Though this is true, words alone are not the best way to report data. Miles and Huberman (1994) go on to speak about text alone being a less than powerful means of displaying data. For this reason, the researcher also made use of data displays, such as charts and graphs, to report his findings.

Visual methods of data presentation were used to counter the monotony and tedium which can sometimes accompany reading a great deal of text. Data displays were particularly useful because they provide an alternative visual means through which a reader can understand the relationships between variables.

### **Study Limitations**

The researcher was a participant-observer in this project. The researcher’s role included the creation of “RAFT Program Parent Playbooks”, and devising the agenda for parent meetings. The researcher also served as the Coordinator of the RAFT Program at Williamsburg High School. In this position, the researcher had a vested interest in ensuring that the Parental Empowerment Program was successful and helped the parents

being served operate more effectively. Thus, it was the intention and professional obligation of the researcher to create a program that could be effective. This inclined the researcher to remove elements of the program which could have impeded its success before they could be studied. However, by documenting all changes to the program, the researcher was able to mitigate the effect of this limitation.

The single site nature of the study was a limitation as well. The fact that all data was yielded from only one school context makes it more difficult to generalize the results to other settings.

The duration of the study constituted a limitation. The study took place over the course of one school year. This limited the span of the phenomenon under study. In this way, the ability to generalize the findings could be compromised.

Participant bias was another limitation to be mindful of. The parents participating in the sample group were aware that they were under study. This knowledge could have altered the way that they would normally behave. This alteration could skew the phenomenon which was studied and mitigate the study's internal validity.

It is recognized that the sample size was relatively small. The use of only eight participants in this study did not ensure data and findings that can automatically be considered generalizable. Though this is true, a high degree of internal validity was provided through the use of data triangulation and instrument piloting.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Findings**

This chapter is designed to present the data obtained in this study and answer the three research questions. These questions are:

1. What do parents of students of color perceive to be the impact of their involvement in this parental empowerment project on their own attitudes and behaviors?
2. What factors of the parental empowerment project did parents perceive to be most useful in helping them support their children as they transition into high school?
3. What did the parents perceive to be barriers which may preclude the maximal involvement of parents of students of color as they transition into high school?

The chapter begins by presenting the data derived from the seven respondents. A survey, journal, and semi-structured interview were the instruments used to attain this information. The information gained from the three tools is woven into the presentation of data for each respondent. Findings for each participant are extrapolated from the data yielded from each study participant. These findings are presented, by research question, for each individual respondent. Their changes in attitude and belief pre and post study are presented.

After the presentation of data for individual sample members, the author will illustrate the findings for that sample member, from the analysis of the three instruments, for each of the research questions.

The chapter will conclude with a summary of the study's overall findings. Data gathered from the seven respondents will be combined and analyzed to answer the overarching queries of the study. The findings, presented by question, will be used to provide a summary of the study's results. The assembled information is helpful in assessing the impact of the intervention.

### ***Respondent 1***

Respondent 1, Mary, is a white woman. She is a married college graduate. She has four children, currently enrolled in Williamsburg's chapter of the RAFT Program, with one having graduated two years ago. Mary is a college graduate and works for the Public Schools of Williamsburg as a classroom aid in an elementary school.

On the initial survey, Mary indicated that her involvement makes a big difference in the academic performance of her child. Though she specified that her involvement is important, she also strongly agreed with the contention that time constraints make it difficult for her to be as involved in the academic life of her child as she would like to be. Previous to the involvement project she was keenly aware that it is critical to advocate for her child as a high school parent, however she did not know who the people she should contact in order to do so. This initially was perceived as a barrier to her involvement as a high school parent. Additionally, the scheduling of the meetings made it difficult for her to be involved. She stated:

The times themselves were not bad. The challenge was the number of competing meetings. I try to make my PTO and elementary meetings. Sometimes they competed and I had to make choices. It wears you out and you feel bad for missing something that is probably important at the meetings you didn't go to.

Despite the difficulty of making it to all of the meetings, she agreed that Williamsburg High School was a welcoming place to her. She did not have the same feeling about the school her child had been attending previously.

As Mary works in the school district and had children who had graduated from Williamsburg High School, she is a unique member of the sample. She has had much more experience as than many of the other members of the sample cohort. Mary indicated that this high level of experience was a crucial in helping her be the involved parent she wished to be. She stated, “The thing is my experience, I have a better ability to play the game and be an advocate”. She went on to say, “I have been through this before. I know how the system works, the said and unsaid rules. I know I have to be his best advocate”.

During her interview which was conducted after she participated in the project, Mary repeatedly reported how important it was to have personal connections with the people that would be guiding her son through his high school journey. This is demonstrated in her quote given during the interview, “I think just knowing the right people is so important....It is critical for me to know that my son will not get lost and he has some people that have their eyes on him”. This understanding came after participating in the project. Before she participated in this empowerment project, she reported not knowing who these important people were. During her post-intervention interview, she spoke of how the program enabled her to meet members of the staff. She stated during the interview, “Even though Maressa [her older daughter] went through the high school, her counselor and dean were on the other [administrative] team. So it was good for me to meet her counselor and dean [through the parental involvement

program]”. Thus, the intervention helped her contact the people she viewed as very important to the education of her child. This parent’s preferred method of communication was email. It was a useful tool in helping her stay abreast on her son’s academic progress. Mary stated, “The program and my work in the district tell me that email is critical so I use it once a week to contact Gavan [her son’s] teachers and it really helps”. Thus, providing teacher and administrator contact information helped this parent more ably understand and support of the academic progress of her child. Other elements of the program achieved the same end.

Mary specified that the program’s emphasis on helping parents better understand the BHS curriculum was helpful. Though it did not provide her with a stronger awareness of particular facts taught in various classes, the program gave her a better knowledge of what students are expected to know and be able to do at the end of their first year of high school. This is shown in Mary’s statement:

It [the parental involvement program] gave me a greater understanding of what he should be doing and when. In terms of the day to day, no [I could not help]. I’m sorry, but I can’t do physics. But it helped me stay on him and make sure his assignments were getting done.

In a similar manner, this respondent’s participation in this intervention helped her clarify her role as a high school parent.

Mary began the program with few questions about how her role would change as her child transitioned to the high school. She reported strong disagreement with the idea of having questions about how her role as a parent would change as her son made this transition. This notwithstanding, she reported expanding her understanding of her responsibilities as a parent as her child made the move into ninth grade. Mary said:



It [the intervention] helped me know that I have to stay plugged in with what is going on with him as a high school student. You know kids try to tell you they are in high school and they don't know you anymore....The program kind of reinforced for me that he is not done yet and he still needs me to stay on top of him and his teachers.

Though Mary reported role clarification as a positive aspect of the parental involvement program, she indicated that the program was not helpful in helping her understand some of the strategies other parents in the RAFT Program make use of. This knowledge is something that could be fostered if the program did more to connect parents with each other in order to form a greater community. Mary captures the desire for greater connection amongst this cohort in her statement:

I really don't know many of the high school parents. That's something that is missing. We used to really have a community of parents. I called them the mothers. We used to watch out for each others kids. If they were doing wrong, we all corrected them. When they did right, we praised them. We really don't have that now. I don't really know many of the RAFT high school parents anymore. It would be good to but I really haven't had the time to meet them. I used to know the parents from the pierce but Gavan [her son] is doing basketball and other stuff now so I don't see them much anymore.

Participants' perceptions of the parental involvement strategies varied in terms of their perceived effectiveness. When queried, this respondent reported that the monthly parent meetings were the most helpful. She stated, "I think the most helpful was the parent meetings. Previously, all of us used to meet together. That was a blessing and curse for me. It was great because I had and have kids at pretty much all levels. Having the meetings together made it easier for me to get all of my RAFT information in one shot. However, just making it high school added another meeting for me. However, it was worth it because the information was really good. It was nice to have information tailored just to me as a high school parent. I always got stuff out of the other meetings but this allowed me to focus just on what Gavan was going through as a high school

student. Of course some of the stuff I knew from before but you know how fast the stuff changes. So it was good to have just high school meetings despite the time”. She went on to state, “The monthly meetings let me know what he [her son] should be doing at that part of the year. It also let me know what things were new at high school and how I could help”. Conversely, the parent playbook, though still useful, was not as helpful as the monthly meetings. When asked about its effectiveness, Mary said:

I would have to say the playbook was the least helpful not because the stuff wasn't useful but because I knew a lot of it. I used it as a resource in terms of phone numbers but most of the stuff I knew already. Having a daughter already graduate, I knew how vital most of the stuff in the book was. I guess I'm weird because I have more exposure to this system than most people.

Mary indicated a high degree of satisfaction with the program. It helped her stay in close contact with her child's teachers, clarify her role as a parent, and support with his homework. The central challenges of the program, for her, arose as a result of scheduling. Mary said:

I am a huge fan of the program. It has been good to my family. My only complaint is the number of meetings and the synchronization of times. I don't know how you have less meetings and keep the high school content but that would be helpful.

#### *Findings for Respondent 1:*

##### *Research Question 1*

*What do parents of students of color perceive to be the impact of their involvement in this parental empowerment project on their own attitudes and behaviors?:*

This parental empowerment project had an impact on the attitudes and behaviors of this participant. Her participation helped her develop a better awareness of the teachers and administrators that would be working with her child. Mary came to understanding the

significant learning standards her child should be meeting as a child. Most importantly, this project helped this study member clarify her role as a high school parent. She came to see that her role is to continue to learn and support her daughter as she made the move into high school.

*Research Question 2:*

*What factors of the parental empowerment project did parents perceive to be most useful in helping them support their children as they transition into high school?:*

For Mary, the most useful element of the parental empowerment program was the monthly parent meetings. She perceived these sessions to be helpful because they were narrowly tailored to provide information that was pertinent only for new high school parents. Additionally, they were useful in providing this parent with information about what her child should be learning as he began his journey through high school.

*Research Question 3:*

*What did the parents perceive to be barriers which may preclude the maximal involvement of parents of students of color as they transition into high school?:*

There were three factors which made it difficult for this respondent to be as involved as she would have liked in supporting the high school transition of her child. The first issue was time. This parent has a number of other children and the time she had to supporting her new high school freshman was limited. The second factor was the times and dates of the RAFT Program meetings. The sessions often convened on dates and at times that were not optimal for this parent. This limited her ability to participate in meetings at the level she would have liked to. The third barrier to Mary's maximal involvement was her disconnect from other parents. There was a time when she collaborated with other

parents to support her children. However, this respondent bemoaned the fact that this supportive network no longer exist as her son is now in the high school.

### ***Respondent 2***

Respondent 2, Tammy, is a Black woman. She is the divorced parent of two children. Both attend the Public Schools of Williamsburg under the auspices of the RAFT Program. She possesses an advanced degree and works as a teacher in the City of Sheffield.

Before her participation in the intervention began, Tammy indicated on the pre-intervention survey that her involvement in the education of her child makes a large difference in his academic success. She put forth that Williamsburg High School was a place that welcomed her and where her ideas were respected as valuable by teachers and administrators. Though this was true, she also spoke to the fact that she was not sure of whom she should contact at Williamsburg High School to advocate for her child. This was compounded by the questions she had about how her role would change as her son entered high school. In going through the parental empowerment project, many of these questions were answered for her.

Tammy reported during the post-intervention interview that the initial parent transition meeting in June was most helpful for her. She stated that the session provided, “a chance to experience what our child would be doing”. Moreover, the meeting was important because it introduced the project participants to the people that would be working with their children over the next four years. As Tammy entered the project without an awareness of the identity and roles of these critical people, this was an

important step. In reference to that meeting she stated, “I feel [now] that I definitely know all of my son’s people. It was good that I got to meet them in June. It helped me know who the people calling me were. That was really helpful for me”. The other parent meetings which helped constitute the empowerment program were also of use to her.

This respondent described the monthly meetings as “helpful”. Tammy liked that the meetings took place at Williamsburg High School as it helped her better understand the physical space where her son spent so much of his time. She said, “it was nice to come to where the child is located and to see some things because if its in another town then you have a tendency, if you don’t come to meetings, to never come to the school”. She also specified in her interview that “the materials we walked away with were great”. During the sessions, she reported learning more about her role as a parent in general and about the math and physics curriculums at Williamsburg High School. It was particularly advantageous that information was conveyed in a way that was exclusive to high school parents. This allowed the group to feel more, “intimate and personal”. This increased sense of group belonging made the meetings more beneficial for this subject. However, there were challenges which made the parent meetings less than optimal for Tammy.

The meeting dates and times were quite difficult for this respondent. Because she belongs to a number of school organizations, the RAFT parent meetings became another time commitment. Tammy spoke to this overwhelming number of meeting responsibilities, exacerbated by having multiple children, when she stated:

Most of the meetings like the PTO meetings for the high school were the same times as the elementary meetings. School PTO was the same night as my constable meetings...I could only go to the elementary school forums and it was still difficult. I think the timing of the meetings and the days they were held were

difficult...I used to find myself out five nights a week going to meetings. It was crazy. It cost me a divorce, my husband said I can't do it. I knew what I was doing but I had to taper back to three days.

In addition to the difficulty of having a number of different meeting dates, the times of those meetings made participation difficult. Tammy stated, "most of the meetings were just after work...It is really difficult when you have two kids".

The parent playbook was useful, however to a lesser degree than the parent meetings. This parent used it primarily as a resource to find contact information. Thus, the playbook provided valuable technical information for Tammy.

Before participating in this project, Tammy stated that she would strongly like to connect with other parents and hear about successful strategies they employ with their students. Unfortunately, in the post-intervention interview, she indicated that, "I never really connected with another parent". This precluded her from accessing some of the techniques of parents in a similar situation. In responding to how the program could be made better, Tammy stated, "I would like to get to know more RAFT parents. I know more town [Williamsburg] parents than Sheffield parents".

It is interesting to note that this Tammy stated in the post intervention that the parental involvement project did not give her the content skills to help her son with his homework. However, she did acquire knowledge of who he could contact if he did have a problem to get homework support. This knowledge acquired during parent meetings, helped her support his homework completion and academic growth. This was compounded by another important factor.

The personal connection that this parent had with the staff of the high school was paramount in supporting her child during his first year of high school. It helped her feel

that there was a proverbial tight loop and community of adults supporting her child. She reported:

[the RAFT Program Coordinator] played a very big role. He knew [my son]. Every time he [her son] went down the hall and saw [the RAFT Program Coordinator] he knew someone was watching him and could fall back on or just talk to if he had any problems. He knew there was always someone watching in a good and supportive way.

This participant was able to acquire this personal connection for her child by way of her participation in the parent empowerment program, most expressly the monthly parent meetings.

*Findings for Respondent 2:*

*Research Question 1*

*What do parents of students of color perceive to be the impact of their involvement in this parental empowerment project on their own attitudes and behaviors?:*

This parent developed a strong understanding of just who she should contact if she needed help with her child at Williamsburg High School and how to reach out to them. Further, the parental empowerment program gave her the opportunity to form professional bonds with these important school staff members. Her involvement in the program also helped her develop a better understanding of the physical space of Williamsburg High School. The program also helped her clarify her understanding of her role as a high school parent. She came to see that she is a member of a scholastic community that works, optimally, in concert for the betterment of her son.

*Research Question 2:*

*What factors of the parental empowerment project did parents perceive to be most useful in helping them support their children as they transition into high school?:*

Tammie perceived the pre-transition parent meeting in June to have been the most helpful part of the program. It was at this time, she was introduced to the administrators that would be working with her son throughout his high school journey. It was important for respondent 2 that she meet and get to know these people as they would be playing a critical role in the next four years of her son's academic life.

*Research Question 3:*

*What did the parents perceive to be barriers which may preclude the maximal involvement of parents of students of color as they transition into high school?:*

The dates and times of RAFT parent meetings made it difficult for this parent to be involved. On a few occasions, these meetings conflicted with other engagements for this respondent. This forced her to make difficult decisions and limited her ability to participate fully in her child's transition. In a similar way, this parent perceived her disconnect from other parents limited her ability to be involved in her child's high school transition. Tammy reported that it would be nice to connect with other parents of children in the RAFT Program to know who they are and what strategies they put in place to support their children.

### ***Respondent 3***

The third respondent is a college educated white woman named Marcie. She is a college graduate and works for the same school system as Tammy. Her step-son, whom is transitioning into Williamsburg High School, is an only child.

Before beginning her participation in the parental empowerment project, Marcie felt strongly that her involvement was an important factor in the academic performance



of her son. She also had questions about some elements of the high school transition. On the pre-intervention survey, she reported having questions about how her role as a parent would change during this pivotal year. Many of these questions centered around how to advocate for her son while also helping him advocate for himself. She stated:

The transition was made difficult by having to figure out the balance of advocacy and having him advocate for himself and worrying that if he has not yet learned how to advocate for himself and the general message that you [the parent] shouldn't be as strong of an advocate. I worried about whether he would fall through the cracks because he is not yet ready. So how do you scaffold a student's self-advocacy and what's the role of the parents.

The program was important in helping her clarify her responsibilities as the parent of a high school student. After completing her participation, this subject had a better understanding of her place at Williamsburg High School and continued value as a partner in the education of her son. After participating in the project she said:

I was glad the school let us know we were welcome and still had a big role to play in our child's school life. It was just really natural to feel like yes, call us, come in, talk to us. The door is open you are welcome and we care about you as parents.

Despite starting the parental empowerment program with a good understanding of the important people in her son's schooling, Marcie did not know how to get in contact with these important people. The parent playbook was helpful in remedying this problem. This respondent reported using the playbook as a tool useful in helping her gain quick access to information such as phone numbers and email addresses. The meetings in June and during the school year served a broader purpose.

The parent meeting in June and those subsequent to it were important in helping Marcie forge strong working bonds with the administrators and teachers that would be shepherding her son through his high school journey. To this end, she stated:

What was most helpful was developing relationships with you [staff members] and the other faculty members at Williamsburg High School. So to me the meetings were a vehicle to do that. So some of the meetings, like the content was helpful but really being able to know that you [the high school staff] know my child [was most important]. I can work with you to make sure his transition is smooth... That whole thing like how kids feel when there is someone on site who knows you and is looking out for you a little bit, I think that is the bottom line for what helped the transition.

Though the meetings were helpful in this way, there were challenges.

For Marcie the times of meetings were a challenge. Though she felt welcome at the high school, and liked the meeting location, the times of the parent meetings sometimes made it difficult to attend. However, the information she received was useful.

For this participant, the most important message received during the meetings was not about particular pieces of curriculum. When interviewed, she said, “It [the parent meetings] were not specific in terms of content”. Rather, the greatest benefit for this parent, as stated earlier was for her to develop tighter bonds with high school administrators and teachers to support her son. Marcie expressed the vital nature of these relationships when asked what made the transition to high school easier for her and her child. She said:

Knowing that there were people that were also looking out for him because I think as a parent, at least in my experiences, if you know your child, you know there is a group of people that will step forward when you step back so he won't fall if he's not ready to step up for himself. That allows me to feel much better.

Despite this positive aspect, weaknesses in other elements of the move to high school made this parent's transition a bit more difficult.

Marcie strongly agreed with the idea that it would be helpful for Williamsburg High School teachers to keep her abreast of how her son was performing scholastically.

Though this is true, she reported receiving less information than she would have liked from her sons' teachers as he made the shift into high school. During an interview, she said, "The communication about the academics could be better. I feel like that loop was not tight enough to be really on his ass about how he really is doing and the depth of the reading, writing, and homework attention he needed to get". Marcie reported another area where the parental empowerment program did not fully meet her expectation. Before beginning her participation in the project, Marcie specified that she would like to receive help in figuring out strategies other parents in the RAFT Program put in place. This notwithstanding, she stated that the program did not really help her discover the strategies of other parents and the means they employ to help their students complete their school work.

Marcie stated that the program had a substantial impact on her and her child.

When queried about the program's benefits for her son, Marcie responded:

I think it really helped him. It showed him that we are going to be here for him and do all we can to help him do well at the high school. It also helped him connect with the important people here. Because we know who he should go to, he knew who to go to. That helped him find people to help him organize himself and other things like that.

She went on to say:

For him it is important to feel that his world is connected. Both school and home. Like anybody, you don't want to feel like you have one part of your life here and another part of your life there and they are not supporting you in the same ways. Especially when me and his dad would come home and say we learned about this, it made him feel that everybody is on the same page.

Thus, the program was able to help Marcie construct a uniform set of expectations between home and school for her child.

*Findings for Respondent 3:*

*Research Question 1*

*What do parents of students of color perceive to be the impact of their involvement in this parental empowerment project on their own attitudes and behaviors?:*

This program had a significant impact on the attitudes and behaviors of this participant. It helped her develop collaborative relationships with the administrators at Williamsburg High School. This was furthered, because the parental empowerment project helped this parent more ably identify and contact important people at the school. Moreover, it helped this parent clarify her role and continue to feel welcome as an educational partner as her child moved into high school. Because of the project under study, Marcie felt that there were people at the high school that would support her and her child. This enabled her to create a uniform set of expectations for her child which aligned with those of the high school.

*Research Question 2:*

*What factors of the parental empowerment project did parents perceive to be most useful in helping them support their children as they transition into high school?:*

The monthly meetings were the most helpful this parent. These meetings were important because they gave her the chance to interface and learn from the people responsible for her child at Williamsburg High School. This personal connection to staff, helped the parent create a sense of community for her child in a relatively large school.

*Research Question 3:*

*What did the parents perceive to be barriers which may preclude the maximal involvement of parents of students of color as they transition into high school?:*

Before beginning participation in this project, this parent had a number of questions about how her role would change as her child would enter high school. This limited her involvement as a parent because she began the program unsure of just how much she should advocate for her son and how much was his responsibility. The meetings helped her find clarity around this idea. However, the times of the meetings made it difficult for this parent to attend. Further, she felt that the teachers did not do a great job of providing her information about her child's academic progress and performance. This made it difficult for Marcie to maximally provide her child academic support. This problem was exacerbated by the fact that Marcie did not perceive herself as connecting with other parents and discovering what strategies they put in place to support their children.

#### ***Respondent 4***

Barbara, the fourth respondent, is a divorced mother of five children. All of these children either are or have been enrolled in the Public Schools of Williamsburg via the RAFT Program. One of those children has already graduated from the high school and is currently attending college. Barbara is a college graduate.

During the pre-intervention survey, Barbara indicated that she believed her involvement makes a big difference in the academic performance of her daughter. As she has had a child take part in this transition previously, she did not question how her role would change as her second child entered Williamsburg High School. Further, she stated that she knew who her freshman child's support people were at the high school and how to contact them.

The initial transition meeting in June was quite useful for this parent. It gave her the opportunity to meet the people that would be working with her ninth grade daughter. This was very important for Barbara. She said, “I always like seeing the people who are going to work with my child. You kind of get a better vibe from who they are”. The meeting in June provided her the opportunity to meet and reacquaint herself with these people. This personal connection with the staff is particularly important for her

One of the greatest transition supports for this parent was the close working relationships she had with the staff of the high school, most particularly those that worked for the RAFT Program. By way of the parental empowerment program and experience with her older daughter, Barbara knew just how important these people were and to what extents they would go to support students. Barbara captured this idea when she stated:

You know me. I didn’t hesitate to call [when I had a problem]. It is helpful to always have someone from RAFT I can always get in contact with to help me solve a problem and stay on top of things. I think that personal touch more than anything else has helped me and my children.

The parental playbook, though to a lesser degree, was also helpful.

This parent described the parent playbook as a handy reference. It provided useful contact information and reinforced the things stated in the parent meetings. The inclusion of the high school schedule was helpful for this parent as well.

For Barbara, the monthly meetings were the most important element of the project. She described these sessions as, “very helpful”. She stated:

Every time I come to a meeting, I learn new stuff. Just as important, it is good for me to know that there are other people struggling with children just like me. Jessica [her transitioning daughter] never gives me any real problems but I wrestle

with her taking that next academic step. It is nice to see that there are other people going through that and people here going through that with me.

The meetings, thus served as a vehicle to help her meet other parents and form informal support networks. She continued:

It's a crucial thing to stay networking and connecting...I felt like I wasn't getting the information so I stated to parent network. If I can't go to a meeting, that's something that should be in the playbook, if you can't go to the meeting, then find another parent to parent network. I have a few parents and now we built this network. We share ideas and talk about the meetings if one of us can't make it. It's important. If I can't make it, I still want to be connected with RAFT to keep my child in the loop.

It is important to note that this parent was able to use this program to help her develop her parent network at a time her child's social network was changing greatly.

For Barbara, the most difficult element of her child's transition to high school was understanding her daughter's new social network. She stated:

Once the kids got here, the dynamics changed. The kids they were with, they bridged off to new friendships. So you don't know your child's peer group as well. I'm a parent that has to know. My child can't just tell me I'm going to such and such place. I have to know the other parent, talk to the parent. So there were times when we butted heads about that...So that was the hardest part for me.

The program helped her continue to set healthy boundaries on her child and know that other parents do as well.

The parental empowerment did not necessarily give Barbara the skills to help her daughter complete Williamsburg High School homework. Before beginning participation in the project, this participant stated she knew how to make sure her child always completed her homework. During the course of the program she did not pick up more skills to help her do this in this way. When asked during the post-intervention

interview whether the meetings helped her daughter complete her homework, Barbara said:

I felt it [the series of parent meetings] was more of an overview of what departments expect and the expectations of your child. I can't say it helped me help her do the work but still...I can't do some of the stuff these kids do. I could help with some of the science because I was a science major. When it came to some of the other stuff, I couldn't do it.

The times and dates of the meetings made participating in the parental empowerment project difficult for Barbara. She said:

The times made some of the meetings difficult. For me, sometimes, because I work a four day compressed work week so I work longer hours than most people but if I have notice [about the meeting date] what I'd do is shift around a few hours during the week to make it to the meeting. The conflict comes in when the schedules are not coordinated and I see I have three meetings in one night and have to get 37 miles in one night and I have to choose which meeting is the most important to participate and there are so many hours in the day.

Moreover, she stated that she only felt marginally comfortable at Williamsburg High School. Though individual teachers are relatively supportive, she did not perceive the community at large as accepting of parents and students of color all of the time. This was relayed in an anecdote she gave during the post-intervention interview. Barbara said, "They [members of the Williamsburg community] look at you as if you don't belong. You know that song, I think it's Donnie McClurkin, get used to me I belong here, it's not wrong here... I feel like there are some that are accepting and others that are not". Because this parent does not feel that the community of Williamsburg is always accepting of parents of color, the manner in which parents in the RAFT program are invited into partnership and to attend meetings becomes particularly important.



The leadership of the RAFT Program plays an important role in helping parents feel welcome in the receiving school district and in the role of educational partners. This respondent was specific in mentioning that the former leadership of the RAFT Program did not successfully engage her as a partner. She spoke of being scolded in meetings by program administrators. She said that this less than hospitable invitation to partnership made her feel, “unwelcome and like I didn’t matter”. However, she felt the parental empowerment project did a much better job of inviting and welcoming her. During the post-intervention interview she said, “I am so happy now that the people running the [parental empowerment project] meetings really make you feel like they want you there and are not trying to push you away”. This comfort made it easier for this respondent to participate in the program. However, the uneven level of feedback she received from teachers during her daughter’s freshman year made it a bit more difficult for her to be involved.

Before the program began Barbara pointed out that it would be really helpful if teachers would keep her informed about how her daughter is performing in class. Barbara indicated after the program that teachers were not consistent in keeping her abreast about her child’s performance. She said:

If I am doing something wrong as an employee and you wait until the end of the year to write all this stuff down you can’t talk to me about it now on my performance review. I look at my child’s report card as their performance review...If she [her daughter] is not turning in any homework or doing work, her autonomy is shut off. You need to bring in the bigger autonomy, which is the parent.

For Barbara, the empowerment program would have been more helpful if it could build in a mechanism for consistent teacher feedback.

The parental empowerment project had an impact on Barbra's practice as a parent. The impact of the program was complimented by her experience as the parent of a child that has already graduated from Williamsburg High School. She said, "Jasmine [Barbara's youngest daughter] seeing me yell at her sister wanted to do better. So I haven't had to really stay on her too much this year. But through this program, I know how to do it".

*Findings for Respondent 4:*

*Research Question 1*

*What do parents of students of color perceive to be the impact of their involvement in this parental empowerment project on their own attitudes and behaviors?:*

Barbara perceived the program as helping her form supportive working relationships with the teachers, counselors, and administrators that worked with her freshman daughter. Though she knew many of them, the program helped her reacquaint herself with some of them and connect new names with faces. In a similar manner, via the program, this participant was able to form bonds and network with other parents in the RAFT Program. The program also helped respondent four establish healthy boundaries for her child as the student entered the high school.

*Research Question 2:*

*What factors of the parental empowerment project did parents perceive to be most useful in helping them support their children as they transition into high school?:*

The monthly parent meetings were them most helpful for Barbara. The information presented during these sessions was helpful. Of paramount importance for Barbara,

however, was the opportunity these sessions provided for her to get to know other people and figure out what strategies they use with their children.

*Research Question 3:*

*What did the parents perceive to be barriers which may preclude the maximal involvement of parents of students of color as they transition into high school?:*

As her daughter moved into the ninth grade, Barbara's daughter changed her peer group. Understanding and managing her daughter's new social network was a challenge for this respondent. The dates and times of the meetings also made it difficult for this parent to be involved. Parent meetings sometimes conflicted with other important meetings forcing Barbara to choose which gathering to attend. This problem with the meetings was compounded by another factor. Under the previous leadership of the RAFT program, all parents did not feel welcome at parent meetings. There was a history, for Barbara, of not feeling welcome at RAFT parent meetings. This feeling was a barrier to her participation in meetings and the education of her child. This feeling of not always being comfortable was magnified by Barbara not always feeling welcome in Williamsburg because she was a woman of color. Finally, the spotty feedback she received about her daughter's performance served as a barrier to this parent being involved in her daughter's transition to the fullest degree possible.

***Respondent 5***

The fifth member of the sample, Felisha, is a Black woman. She is a married high school graduate with three children. One of her children has already graduated from a Sheffield Public high school. The youngest child is attending elementary school in a

neighboring town by way of the Raft Program. Her middle child, a male is making the transition into Williamsburg High School.

Before the parental empowerment project began, this parent reported that she agreed strongly with the idea that her involvement makes a big difference in the academic performance of her child. She also had questions about how her role would change as he began the movement into high school. Though time constrains, reportedly made it difficult for to be as involved as she would like to be, Felisha knew what strategies she could put in place at home to make sure her son always completes his homework. She knew how to contact the teachers and administrators at Williamsburg High School. However before beginning participation in this project she was not sure which ones could help her. The preponderance of Felisha's questions and concerns about her child's transition into high school were answered during the course of the parental empowerment program.

As mentioned previously, this respondent was not sure how her role would change as her child entered high school. The program gave her aid in continuing to hold her child accountable. This is a challenge especially as she has 3 children. She said:

When you have 3 and 4 children and you have one in high school and one about to go, you are all over the place. For me, my husband is a firefighter and works 24 hours a pop. So a lot of the time I'm home alone with the kids and everybody comes at me with tons of paper. Sign this. Sign this...Out of all of the schools, this is where I feel most comfortable because I know my child is doing what he has to do. He is being held accountable. He is worried that if I don't do what's right, mom can be contacted in a split second and it will be corrected.

Thus, the program helped Felisha see that she still needs to hold her son accountable for his behavior and academic performance. However, it helped her discover the partners she had at Williamsburg High School in this process. It is helpful to assess how the three elements of the parental empowerment project helped her come to this understanding.

For Felisha, the June meeting was the most helpful of the program's three elements. The program was important to her for a number of reasons. The first being that it allowed her to meet the people that would be important in the schooling of her son. Felisha spoke a number of times about how critical and helpful it was for her to have these working relationships with the administrators and teachers that worked with her son. Additionally, the meeting in June helped her in establishing healthy boundaries for her son as he entered the high school. Further, the meeting gave her an expectation of how the scholastic and behavioral expectations of the high school were different than the ones held in the elementary school her son had attended. When asked, she said:

The most helpful was definitely the June meeting. I had no idea where Williamsburg High School was. Just the whole talk about what to expect...Kids sometimes will tell you things which are not true. Just to see what they can get away with. It was really helpful to see who my contacts are. I can contact the teachers. That whole interaction was the best.

It was important for this participant that meetings were held at Williamsburg High School. She felt comfortable in the community, both before and after participating in the project. Additionally, it was helpful for her to see the resources available in the building for her son. She spoke of one in particular. Felisha said of the space where meetings were held:

I am proud of the resources I see going into the RAFT Program at Williamsburg High School...When I came here, I was thoroughly impressed with the career center and you let them know what's out there for you [the children]. This is critical because kids need visuals. They see success day in and day out [at Williamsburg High School]. They have resources...It keeps kids focused because when they do get back home to the hood, they have negativity.

For this parent, the playbook was also quite helpful. Its greatest use as a resource was to furnish contact information. When asked, Felisha said about the parent manual, "I

wouldn't change the book. I can always go back to it for information. It let's me know real quick who to call for what and for me that is really helpful". This was particularly important as Felisha began the project unaware of who to contact at the high school if her child needed help. The monthly parent meetings were of less use for this respondent.

Felisha liked the fact that the parent meetings were just high school parents. She stated, "We did the k-12 meetings and they were a disaster. They had us all in one room and they were talking to you and its general stuff". She enjoyed the specificity of just targeting issues in the lives of high school students. In a similar way, she would have liked meetings that focused on the needs and issues of her particular child. She offered suggestions as to how the meetings could be more useful for her. She said:

I need to be in contact with the teacher more than having us all in a room. Parents asking question after question and yet they all have their needs but that's a one on one thing...I'm not worried about other peoples' kids. The whole general thing didn't work. And then they have the math meeting and this and that. Well ok, my son is doing work and this meeting is not for me.

Thus, Felisha would have liked to have seen greater focus on her individual child during those meetings and less focus on students in the RAFT Program in general. This is not to say she did not benefit from the sessions. During the meetings, she indicated that she learned about how the math curriculum is structured, the availability of the RAFT Program homework support center and how students in the program are transported to Williamsburg. It would have been helpful for her to hear less of this general information and more about how her son was performing. This parent had other critiques of the monthly parent meetings.

The times and dates of the monthly meetings made it difficult for this parent to participate. As she has a number of other children, it was difficult for her to commit to a

monthly meeting. Moreover, the 6:30 p.m. convening time made it difficult for Felisha to make it to meetings and have her youngest child in bed at a reasonable hour.

Subsequently, this respondent stated that time was the factor which made it most difficult to be involved as her child made the transition into high school.

Felisha was quite adamant in stating that the previous leadership of the RAFT Program in Williamsburg was less than successful in inviting her into partnership. In fact, these administrators pushed her away. Felisha mentioned that under the previous leadership of the RAFT Program parents were punished when they were not able to attend meetings. Rather, than spurring people to be involved, this functioned as a disincentive for parental engagement. She elaborated on this point in saying:

We get punished because we weren't coming to the meetings and that whole thing just sent me off and that was one reason my youngest son didn't get accepted into Williamsburg [s chapter of the RAFT Program] because I didn't go to the meetings. I just kept getting punished. I just said I'm not doing it. I got berated in the meetings. I watched other parents get berated...I can go home and be with my child...So why am I rushing to get to Williamsburg to be berated. I didn't want to do that and then you get punished for not showing up.

Because parents had not been invited into partnership effectively, it became important in this project, to be especially welcoming in order to draw them into this parental empowerment project. However, once she began her participation, this parent gained some skills she perceived to be quite valuable.

This parent's child did much to test his social and academic boundaries during the transition to high school. His mother, described his biggest difficulty as "just growing up" and determining what he could and could not get away with in high school. The parental empowerment project helped this parent develop supportive relationships with the teachers and administrators at the high school. Additionally, by way of her

participation, this parent learned how and when to contact these important people. This information helped her close the proverbial loop on her son and hold him accountable for his academic performance and social choices. During the post-intervention interviews she spoke repeatedly about how important it was to get constant feedback from teachers and other school leaders. One quote in particular sums up how critical this dialogue was. This was captured when Felisha said:

I lost my father in March and was out of town but the thing that I appreciate is I was able to get in contact with the teachers. I was in Kentucky and Ohio and I'm still getting texts and emails from the deans and teachers. It was very comforting. My husband was at home dealing with three children and kids know what they can get away with and with who. They knew I wasn't in town but I had email. I could tell my son you have to do xyz, he was like oh crap...If your child knows mom isn't paying attention, they know they can do what they want. Because they try you. You have to hold them accountable.

By providing access to teachers and administrators, the program helped this parent involve herself more effectively in the schooling of her son. For this reason, this parent perceived email as the factor which made it easiest to be involved as her child made the shift to high school. This parent perceived that this tool, along with this intervention led her to more effective parental involvement and higher academic achievement for this student.

When asked whether the program helped her child meet with success as a freshman, Felisha responded emphatically in the affirmative. She said, "It definitely affected him [her son]. He knew he couldn't slack off or give people the little attitude he used to". She also stated, "In the very beginning, he tried to see what he could get away with and as you know I had to come here. He benefited from that. He is happy now that he is earning the grades he can". This positive scholastic result, in part, came from this



parent using the parental empowerment program to her develop a community at Williamsburg High School to support her son. Though it didn't provide a more substantive understanding of the Williamsburg curriculum, the program did help her make sure her child was completing all of his homework. It did this by helping him hold her more accountable.

Before the project began, Felisha stated that though she already knows how to ensure her child will complete his homework, it would be helpful to learn strategies other Williamsburg High School parents use to support their children. The parental empowerment project did not help Felisha reach this goal. After the conclusion of the project, she indicated that it would be nice to meet other RAFT Program parents. She suggested that the program hold events like a pot luck dinner to bring parents together in order to exchange ideas. This notwithstanding, this participant reported having a positive experience in the program. She stated that it changed her practice as a parent for the better. When queried, Felisha responded:

It [the parental involvement program] makes me feel that I have partners. The Program Coordinator, myself, Mr. Vim, [her son's dean] we all want the same for my son. We all have high expectations and we all hold him accountable. So just knowing that there are other people in this big school that are going to support me has helped me feel a lot better.

*Findings for Respondent 5:*

*Research Question 1*

*What do parents of students of color perceive to be the impact of their involvement in this parental empowerment project on their own attitudes and behaviors?:*

For this respondent, the parental empowerment project helped produce a greater understanding of a high school parent's role. She came to see her responsibility

continues to be holding her son accountable for his school work even though he was pushing for more independence. The program also helped her discover who her child's support people were in the building and how to get in contact with them. This enabled her to close the proverbial loop on her son and ensure he was completing all of the work he was assigned. Felisha was greatly aided in this endeavor by the consistent feedback she received from her child's teachers. The program, thus helped her know that she had partners in the schooling of her child. Moreover, the parental empowerment project helped introduce Felisha to the actual physical facility of Williamsburg High School.

*Research Question 2:*

*What factors of the parental empowerment project did parents perceive to be most useful in helping them support their children as they transition into high school?:*

The pre-transition meeting in June was most helpful for Felisha. This session provided her face time with the people that would be responsible for her child as he became a freshman. This was the first step in building the collaborative working relationships which was so important for Felisha in order for her to support her child as he became a freshman. Additionally, this first meeting helped Felisha anticipate what she could expect as the parent of a freshman child.

*Research Question 3:*

*What did the parents perceive to be barriers which may preclude the maximal involvement of parents of students of color as they transition into high school?:*

Before beginning participation in this project, Felisha was not sure of how her role would change as she became the parent of a high school student. This lack of role clarity was a barrier to her full involvement as a parent. Time constraints were also a major

impediment to the maximal involvement of this respondent. As she has a number of other children, the time she had to spend with the one that was transitioning was finite. The timing of parent meetings was also a problem. Felisha perceived that there were too many parent meetings and the times and dates they were scheduled for made it difficult for her to participate. The actions that took place at some of the earlier meetings also made it difficult to participate. This parent reported that the previous leadership of the RAFT program did not invite her into partnership in a welcoming manner. As a result, it was more difficult for her to engage in her child's transition and the meetings which were part of this program. For this parent, it would have been better if the meetings were more specific to the issues her child was facing. Though the issues were designed to focus on the experience of high school students, Felisha stated that she would have benefited from more emphasis on her particular child.

### ***Respondent 6***

Respondent six, June, is a married mother of three children. It is his youngest child which is beginning the transition into Williamsburg High School. June had a child graduate from Williamsburg High School in 2004. This member of the sample is an African-American high school graduate.

Before beginning participation in this project, June strongly agreed with the idea that her involvement made a big difference in the academic performance of her child. Quite possibly as a result of having another child go through Williamsburg High School, she did not have questions about how her role would change as her youngest child entered the high school. Thus, the parental empowerment project did not cause this parent to fundamentally shift the way she perceived her role as a parent. However, it did

help her see that it is important to remain involved as her child ages and continue to edify her knowledge base and skill set. June remarked during the post-intervention interview that:

It [the parental empowerment project] let me know that I still belong here and am not finished yet. I think that some parents have gone through here [the high school] believing that things and children don't change. That is true in some ways. However, I am still learning things and the program helped me add some new things as a parent. Just learning about things like the math center and the new schedule were things I couldn't have done without the meetings. So I guess the program showed me that I have to keep learning along with my child.

June's position as a "veteran parent" availed her of knowledge many other parents did not have access to. Before the program began, this parent indicated that knew both who the important people were in her child's schooling and how to contact them. June came to these understandings as she guided an older child through Williamsburg High School. Though this is true, the parental involvement project helped her connect with some staff members she had not yet had the opportunity to meet. This occurred, initially, during the parent meeting in the month of June. She had this to say about the meeting in June:

That meeting was good. I knew Kaleena's dean already. They worked with my older child. It was nice to be able to meet her guidance counselor. I didn't know him. It's always nice to be able to put a name with a face. With my other daughter, when she started the high school, we just got a schedule with a dean and counselors name on them. We didn't get a chance to meet until well into her freshman year when there was some stuff going on. It was nice to be able to meet early. I am the type of parent that likes to be really active and involved with my daughter. She is my priority. I like her team members to know that.

As can be seen, June highly values professional bonds with the people on her child's schooling team. Because it helped her create some of these new connections, the meeting in June was helpful. The parent playbook was less helpful for her.

Of the parental empowerment project's three elements, the playbook was the least helpful for this parent. She stated:

I would have to say the playbook was the thing I used the least. I am not saying it didn't help but I got the least out of it. I would say it was more of a resource. I didn't pour over every page but there were a lot of resources in there. It was helpful to be able to go to it for phone numbers, email addresses, the high school schedule and things like that...It wasn't my Bible. You know. I didn't go over it with a fine comb but it was helpful to go back and get answers to some of my questions.

Contrarily, this parent found the monthly parent meetings to be most helpful for her.

June found the monthly parent meetings to be quite useful. She liked the fact that meetings were held in Williamsburg High School and were exclusively for freshman parents. It allowed for more information specifically about the ninth grade experience for both students and parents. June stated:

I would have to say that the parent meetings were the most helpful. Before when Jalessa [her older daughter] was here, a lot of the information was so general. It was nice to here about what the parents in other grades were doing. But I sometimes felt there was not enough information specifically about what my child was doing or should be doing. It was nice to have meetings specifically about the freshman year. I learned a lot.

This parent also perceived the meetings to be helpful because they provided her a solid understanding of what her child was expected to learn and whether her child was meeting appropriate benchmarks. This parent went on to say:

They were really good. It was nice to have the teachers there. You always wonder what my child is learning. Are they behind? It was nice to have them come and talk about what the freshmen should be doing. I wouldn't change that.

Despite these positive elements, there were things that June would have changed about the parent meetings.

For June, the time of the meetings was fine. As she was finished with work at five and did not have any young children at home, the 6:30 p.m. start time of the meetings worked well for her. However, the dates of the meeting posed a significant challenge. June said:

The dates were more of a problem than the times. There were a couple of times when the meetings were on the same nights as freshman Parent Teacher Organization nights. I am proud to be a RAFT parent but I know we also have to be vocal in the larger Williamsburg community and let our voices be heard. That was hard for me because I had to make a decision of which community to support and I felt like I sold both groups short when I had to do that.

Thus, because of scheduling, participation in this empowerment project served to limit this parent's involvement in other important endeavors. Though not as important, there was another problem with the structure of the monthly meetings.

This parent would have scheduled the meeting agendas to allow for more discussion time amongst parents. When asked how meetings could be altered, she responded:

The only thing that could be different is if we had a little more time to talk to each other. The meetings, which were good, had really full agendas. People would bring up good points for discussion but we didn't really have a lot of time to go over and discuss them amongst each other.

This discussion could have fostered a greater awareness of some of the techniques and strategies other parents make use of with their children. Because of her experience this was not as vital for June as it was for some other parents.

This parent began the project perceiving herself capable of communicating to her child that she holds high academic high expectations for her. June also began the parental empowerment project perceiving herself as being highly able to ensure her

daughter completed her homework every evening. This is important because June specified that the program did not help her discover what other parents did in order to help their children complete their homework. Rather, there were two factors which helped her support her child in completing her homework and marshalling academic assistance, experience and the help of her older child.

Experience as the parent of a child that had already graduated from Williamsburg High School helped June support her youngest daughter's homework completion. When asked whether she learned through the parental empowerment project how to better help her daughter in this way, June replied:

I didn't really. I think, and I hate to say this. I learned a lot through trial and error. Going through this place before, I learned what people do and how to use them to support my children. So by the time my youngest daughter got here, I think I knew a lot about this place and I don't really know a lot of the other parents. I remember a couple from the elementary but I don't know the rest of the RAFT parents. We only really see each other that one time a month and there isn't much time for discussion then.

Having the help of an older child was also beneficial for this parent. She said:

I am lucky. My elder daughter would call Kaleena [the youngest daughter] and help her with her homework. She went to the high school so she could really help with that stuff. I don't know how to help Kaleena with all of the math and science they are doing now. So I had that help and it wasn't part of the program but it was helpful for me to know when major projects and things like that were due. Her teachers were really good about telling me when those kinds of things were coming up. That let me check in with my daughter and see if she was finishing up like she could.

Thus, it can be seen that while the program did not help this parent with the content of the school work, it helped her access teachers and provide greater academic accountability for her transitioning daughter. This is important because all parents in the study did not have access to older children to help with homework and other pieces of the transition.

For June, one of the most helpful pieces of support for her as a parent was constant communication with her child's teachers. Whether the student was struggling or excelling, teachers did much to keep her mother informed of the child's progress. June said, "I always knew how Kaleena was doing or how to find out. Her teachers were very responsive when I reached out to them". It is important to note that June knew she had to take the first steps in reaching out to teachers. She went on to say:

They know I am a parent that likes information and they went out of their way to call and email me. I don't know if that would have happened if I didn't call them first but they were always very good about giving me information I asked for and coming to meetings and things like that.

Through the program, it was reinforced for June that it is acceptable and quite encouraged to be pro-active about seeking information from teachers and administrators. Because she internalized this message, June was able to obtain more of the useful information she desired about her child's performance.

The factor which made the transition to the role of high school parent most difficult for June was her health. During the interview after the project, she stated, "There were some times when I was sick this year. You know I have asthma real bad and it kept me out of work a few days. On those days, it was tough for me to really focus on Kaleena's school. When I felt better, I was able to pay my full attention". Because she was sometimes able to give this child's schoolwork her complete focus, it became even more important that teachers work to provide this parent with the most current information possible. This was also needed because the child was facing her own challenge during the movement to high school.



Like many students at the same juncture, June's daughter experienced a change in her peer cohort as she entered the ninth grade. Leaving behind the familiar friends and making new ones was what her mother perceived as the student's greatest challenge as she entered high school. June said that the program helped remind her that it is part of the normal maturation process for students to shift peer groups and it is not, necessarily, something she needed to worry about.

June perceived the parental empowerment project as having a positive impact on her practice as the parent of a new high school student. Through her experience as a parent, she had a keen understanding of many of the technical aspects of parenting a new student at Williamsburg High School, for example who to contact, when report cards were available. However, June reported that the program's greatest impact was reinforcing her understanding of her role as a parent. She came to see that her continued strong parental involvement was needed even though her child was entering the ninth grade. She said, "It [the parental empowerment program] didn't change it [practice as a parent] fundamentally but it add new stuff. I always am going to be involved. The program showed me how to be effectively involved". The program's impact extended beyond just the parent. June perceived her participation in this project as having a positive impact on her daughter as well.

Through her participation in this program, June sent the message to her child that school is important. Moreover, she communicated the message that she will continue to be involved in her schooling. June said:

I think she [her daughter] saw it [June's participation in the project] as me saying that I am going to stay involved as she goes through high school. I don't know or think she may have been hoping I would kind of fade away as she came to the high school. But I think she saw me coming to the high school for RAFT and

teacher meetings, she saw that I was always going to be there for her and would not let up on her.

Such statements are helpful in spurring students to academic success. Subsequently, June went on to say, “I think this was good for her. She knows that school is serious business and she is working hard this year”.

*Findings for Respondent 6:*

*Research Question 1*

*What do parents of students of color perceive to be the impact of their involvement in this parental empowerment project on their own attitudes and behaviors?:*

This program was important in helping this parent clarify her role. Though she knew much by way of her experience with her older child, June came to see, by way of participation in this project, that she has to continue to be involved in the schooling of her youngest daughter. Further, she came away from the program with greater understanding of how to be involved effectively as a parent. The parental empowerment project also helped her form working bonds with the people at the high school responsible for her daughter’s education. Having these working relationships empowered June to solicit and receive constant feedback about how her child was performing in the classroom. This information was beneficial for June as she decided how to support her child in her studies.

*Research Question 2:*

*What factors of the parental empowerment project did parents perceive to be most useful in helping them support their children as they transition into high school?:*

The monthly parent meetings were the most helpful for June. She liked that they focused exclusively on the issues of freshman students and their parents. Additionally, these sessions provided this parent with information about the academic milestones her daughter should be meeting during her freshman year.

*Research Question 3:*

*What did the parents perceive to be barriers which may preclude the maximal involvement of parents of students of color as they transition into high school?:*

The dates of the meetings were a challenge for this parent. There were sometimes scheduling conflicts which made it impossible to participate in everything she would have liked to. In addition, June would have liked more time during the meetings to discuss ideas with other parents. This could have served to mitigate some of the disconnect she felt from other parents. This dearth of a parent network made it difficult for June to expand the range of techniques she could employ with her daughter to support her. Finally, this parent's health precluded her maximal involvement. There were stretches of time where it was physically impossible for her to be as involved as she would have liked to have been.

***Respondent 7***

Respondent seven, Angela, is an African-American single parent. She has completed some college. Her only child was entering Williamsburg High School via the RAFT Program.

Before beginning her participation in this project, Angela perceived her involvement to be quite important in the academic performance of her child. Though this was true, she also stipulated that there were some factors which made it difficult to be as

involved as she would like to be. The thing that made it most difficult for her to be involved was her questions about how her role would change as her child entered the high school. This respondent reported that she had a number of questions about how she should be involved as her child became a high school student. During the post-intervention interview Angela spoke of how her daughter's seeking of independence pushed her to take a less active role as a parent. Angela said, "She [her daughter] is not a little girl anymore. She is becoming a young adult and there is pressure and you are not sure where you fit in anymore. They have issues, concerns, and you have them as a parent".

The biggest benefit of the program for this parent was helping her clarify her new role as a high school parent. Angela spoke a few times, about how her daughter pushed her away as the child entered high school. Angela said:

She [her daughter] is trying to establish her independence and she sees me as prying and being overprotective. Whereas, I see it as being firm and sensible. So I could use help in striking that balance. I had to be alert but also give her space.

The parental empowerment project helped her find this balance she was seeking and let her know that her involvement as a parent was still needed. When asked how the program affected her perception of her role, this Angela responded, "It made me aware that I needed to be more involved in Jacky's [her child's] education and what's going on in her high school life and what's going on in the high school". More than providing any one piece of technical information, this program reinforced for this parent how critical her continued involvement was. That is why Angela went on to say:

I think the program made me aware that I need to get more involved in Jacky's education and the school community itself...It didn't change any one particular

thing but it increased my awareness of what I need to do. I know I have to be involved but it showed me just how important it is.

It was because she had a solidified understanding of her role, this parent was able to support her child in completing homework.

Before the project began, Angela stated that she was not sure of strategies she could put in place at home to make sure her child always does homework. Moreover, her daughter often rejected her assistance in this area. However, through her involvement in the project, this parent came to see that she must be pro-active in providing her daughter with homework help. When asked about this, Angela stated:

I try to help Jacky with her homework. She says you don't know what it is like to be a teenager. I get that when I try to help. She says the teacher wants me to do it by myself, or the teacher will correct it when I get to school. So you don't have to look at it. She says I am doing nosey. So those are the battles we have over her homework. But the program told me that I have to keep fighting these battles even though they are draining. I know that she still needs me even though she says she doesn't. It also showed me the resources she could use at school for support.

Such an understanding came through her taking part in the parental empowerment project. Each of the three pieces of the program had a different impact on this parent.

The initial parent meeting in June helped reduce some of the anxiety Angela had about her daughter's high school transition. She said, "When I got here, I was nervous about Jacky's transition to high school. I felt out there. I was more stressed than her really. She seems to be fine. Just that meeting in June told us what to expect and how things are. It was helpful". It was particularly important to provide Angela information about what she could expect as a high school parent because she did not feel like she had been provided with much useful information about the changes she could expect in her

child as she moved into the ninth grade. Thus, it was important to use the June meeting as a medium to do this before the child began classes at Williamsburg High School.

Angela found the monthly parent meetings to be beneficial. They provided this parent a better understanding of the scholastic landmarks her child should be meeting as a high school student. When asked, Angela said of the meetings:

They were very helpful. It helped me know more about the curriculum and what she should be learning. No, I wouldn't really change them. I thought they were nice because the meetings were just for us freshman parents and so you dealt with just our issues.

In addition to the specificity allowed by just discussing the issues of freshmen parents, this respondent liked the location of the meetings as she felt quite comfortable and welcome and Williamsburg High School. As she worked until 6 p.m. at a job close to the high school, the meeting times were good for Angela. She did not mention the scheduled dates of the meetings as an impediment to her participation.

The parent playbook was a helpful reference for this study participant. She mentioned that it, along with the other two elements of the program, helped reduced her stress level as her child started high school. It should be noticed that this parent did not indicate which of the three interventions were most helpful as she participated in the parental empowerment project. Rather, she stated "everything" about the program helped her. This help was important for this parent because she began her participation with a number of serious questions.

Before she became a high school parent, Angela reported that she did not know who the members of her child's team were at the high school. Moreover, she was not sure how to get in contact with the teachers and administrators at Williamsburg High

School that would be working with her child. By way of participating in this program, Angela was able to find out this important information. She specified that the program helped her discover and contact her child's support people. However, the program was not as successful in assisting this parent in gaining some other important pieces information.

Angela, before beginning participating in this transition support program, stated that it would be very helpful if the teachers at the high school kept her informed about how her child was performing in class. She stated that the program did not help her receive this consistent feedback. She stated:

That component [a mechanism for consistent teacher feedback] was sort of missing. Initially, I emailed all of her teachers and I don't know if the addresses were wrong or what but they did not get back to me. I didn't know if they didn't get it or what. Again, I can't blame them because it was up to me to follow up with a call or appearance when I didn't get a response. So I can't blame it all on the teachers.

Because of the academic challenges, specifically an increased work load, the child faced as she entered the high school, this feedback for the parent would have been helpful.

Angela perceived the biggest hurdle her daughter faced during the transition as the increased work load. Angela said:

I think maybe the work being more difficult was tough for her. I don't think for Jacky the social thing was difficult. She knew many of the kids she transitioned with. She knew a lot of kids from her elementary school and some from other schools. That's the social piece. I don't think she realized how much harder she would have to work academically. She didn't understand the extra effort it would take. I think that part has been difficult.

In light of this, it would have been helpful for this parent to come to a better understanding of some techniques she could use to help her daughter scholastically.

Before she began the transition into the role of high school parent, Angela stated that would like to learn some of the strategies other high school parents employ in order to support their children. She did not believe that she received it during the course of her participation in the parental empowerment project. She mentioned that the program did not help her connect with other parents and learn what they do. This idea was captured when she said:

I haven't really connected with anyone personally, either Williamsburg or RAFT. I don't know if that is because of schedules, time constraints or stuff. I used to know another elementary school parent but since Jacky came to the high school, I haven't talked to her. We really don't keep up anymore. I think I guess that is because our kids don't hang out anymore and because of our schedules and time constraints.

Though this was true, Angela perceived the program, overall, to have been helpful.

For Angela, the most important result of the program was that it helped her construct her role as a high school parent. She came to see that though her daughter may be pushing her away, her involvement as a high school parent is still important. Angela said, "I think RAFT overall helped me transition really well. Myself, I think this support has been great". She continued, "I really appreciate the help. This means constant help and support". The academic impact of this constant help and support on Angela's child could not yet be determined. This parent stated:

I don't know if she likes me being so involved. She calls it nosy. I like to get involved because when I was in high school, my mother could not really be involved in my education, it was something I did on my own without any support, so I try to be there as much as possible.

It can be seen that Angela perceived this program as helpful in clarifying her role and improving her practice as a parent.



*Findings for Respondent 7:*

*Research Question 1*

*What do parents of students of color perceive to be the impact of their involvement in this parental empowerment project on their own attitudes and behaviors?:*

The parental empowerment program helped this parent solidify her understanding of her role as a high school parent and the people that would be working with her family during the next four year. She came to perceive that despite the fact that her daughter was pushing her away, it was imperative that she remain involved in the schooling of the child. The program also introduced Angela to the resources available at Williamsburg High School to support her and her child. This helped reduce much of the anxiety she experienced as her child moved from grade eight to nine. Her participation also helped Angela become aware of the academic benchmarks her daughter should be meeting during her freshman year of high school.

*Research Question 2:*

*What factors of the parental empowerment project did parents perceive to be most useful in helping them support their children as they transition into high school?:*

Angela did not specify a preference as it relates to the three elements of the parental empowerment. She maintained that the meeting in June, monthly parent meetings, and playbook were all equally useful.

*Research Question 3:*

*What did the parents perceive to be barriers which may preclude the maximal involvement of parents of students of color as they transition into high school?:*

This parents transition was made difficult by her child pushing her away. The student was insistent that she no longer needed nor required her mother's help. Initially, this caused this respondent to question her role as a high school parent and mitigate her involvement. Additionally, she was not clear about what strategies she could put in place to help her child complete her homework. Further, she was not aware of the strategies other parents used to achieve this end. The lack of feedback Angela received from her child's teachers made it difficult for her to be involved in supporting the transition of her daughter to the greatest degree possible.

### **Summary of Findings**

#### *Research Question 1*

*What do parents of students of color perceive to be the impact of their involvement in this parental empowerment project on their own attitudes and behaviors?:*

All of the participants in this project perceived that it had some impact on their attitudes and behaviors. Sample members were unanimous in a few of their responses. All respondents reported that the parental empowerment project helped them meet the members of their child's support team. By way of their participation, each of the seven parents was able to better identify the teachers, deans, and guidance counselors that would be responsible for their children. This was important as many of the parents entered the program without this knowledge. Further, it helped sample members believe that these teachers, deans, and counselors were there to support their children.

In addition to helping participants know who to contact in order to advocate for their children, the parental empowerment project also showed sample members how to contact Williamsburg High School staff members. All of the parents reported that as a

result of their participation, they had a better understanding of how to use the telephone or email to get in contact with their child's support people. This information enabled them to better support their children in important ways.

Knowing who to contact and how to reach out to them allowed all of the parents participating in this project to form collaborative bonds with the staff of Williamsburg High School. Each of the seven participants said that they were more able to cultivate working relationships with school staff members as a result of their participating in the program under study. These working relationships were important because parents needed these bonds in order to create a bridge between home and school. Such a connection was vital for parents as it allowed them to create consistent expectations for their children and hold them to standard.

For four of seven the respondents, the program helped them hold their children accountable. Because they were able to contact teachers and determine which assignments were due and when, these parents felt they were better able to monitor their children's academic progress. This enabled them to follow up on their children and ensure they were making scholastic progress. Moreover, they were able to contact deans and teachers immediately after any problems occurred at school. This resulted in an attitude shift. Parents perceived that the school staff members were giving them accurate information quickly. This information fostered certain behaviors for parents. This quick access to information helped sample members rectify any problems with their children once they returned home. The program also supported parents in other ways.

Of the seven participants, six responded that, as a result of the program, they had a clear understanding of their role as high school parents. This is important because these

parents started the transition without an awareness of how their roles would be different with their children entering a new school. Though six of seven of participants stated a stronger awareness of their new responsibilities, it should be noted that one sample member felt otherwise. This participant, respondent 4, was a veteran parent. Having helped another child through the transition to high school, she stated that she did not have questions about how her role would change. Thus, the program did not help her edify a greater awareness of her role as a high school parent. However, for all of the other participants, increased role awareness was fostered through participation in this project.

There was less uniformity in other responses to this particular research question. Parents participating in the project reported that the program contributed to changing their attitudes and behaviors in various ways. For two out of seven of respondents, the program helped them by providing them academic benchmarks, which enabled the parents to more closely monitor the academic performance of their children. These parents perceived that the Parental Empowerment Project gave them a better understanding of what their sons and daughters should be learning as high school freshmen. It is interesting to note that this same number of parents, two out of 7 perceived that the program helped them gain consistent feedback from Williamsburg High School teachers about how their children were performing in class. In a similar way, this information helped parents hold their children accountable, scholastically. Information about how to hold children to high academic standards was not transmitted from parent to parent.

All of the parents began the study saying they would like to know about strategies other parents use to support their children academically. However, only one of the seven

sample members reported that the Parental Empowerment Project helped her meet other parents and figure out what they do to help their children learn. This parent came away with greater connections to the RAFT Program parent community and with a greater understanding of some of the techniques these parents employ with their children.

In summary, the Parental Empowerment Project had an impact on the attitudes and behaviors of parents. It enabled them to determine who was important at the high school and how to quickly contact them. With this information, parents were able to forge working relationships with school staff members. These bonds provided parents quick access to information which allowed them to hold their children to a high and uniform set of expectations. Moreover, the project provided parents with information about what their children should be learning at certain junctures. This information allowed parents to determine whether their students were making sufficient academic progress. Thus, the project did affect the attitudes and behaviors of sample members

*Research Question 2:*

*What factors of the parental empowerment project did parents perceive to be most useful in helping them support their children as they transition into high school?:*

The Parental Empowerment Project was made up of three factors, a meeting in June before students transitioned into high school, a RAFT Program Parent Playbook, and monthly parent meetings. Six of the respondents reported that they had a preference amongst the three elements of the empowerment program. One respondent did not specify a particular element as most helpful in supporting her during her child's transition. Of the six sample members indicating a choice, four dictated that the monthly

parent meetings were most helpful for them. They made this selection for a number of reasons.

For four out of six respondents indicating a preference, the monthly parent meetings were the most helpful as their children entered into high school. They perceived this for a number of reasons. These four parents indicated that the monthly parent meetings were most helpful because they helped them build relationships with members of the Williamsburg High School staff. Additionally, these sessions helped parents understand the academic expectations of the high school and determine what their children will be expected to learn. A number of parents also specified that they received similar information by way of another source.

Among the six parents specifying a preference, two chose the parent meeting occurring the June before their students started high school as the factor which most helped them support their child during the movement to ninth grade. Parents indicated that this gathering was helpful because it allowed them to meet some of the deans, counselors, and teachers that would be working with their children for the next four years. Moreover, during this meeting, many of the academic and behavioral expectations for new high school students were laid out. In providing this information, the June pre-transition meeting was most helpful for two parents.

Though no sample participants selected the parent playbook as most helpful, a number said it did provide some assistance. For these parents, the manual served as a handy reference. It allowed them to quickly access the names and contact information for Williamsburg High School staff members. The book also helped reinforce some of the things discussed during the monthly parent meetings.

In conclusion, the majority of sample members indicating a preference believed the monthly parent meetings were the element of the Parental Empowerment most supportive for them as their children began high school. They voiced this preference because of the relationship building and conveying of pertinent information which occurred at these sessions. A smaller number of respondents also found the meeting in June to be valuable. They selected this factor as most important because it helped them learn the expectations of the high school and meet important staff members.

*Research Question 3:*

*What did the parents perceive to be barriers which may preclude the maximal involvement of parents of students of color as they transition into high school?:*

There were a number of factors which the majority of participants perceived as precluding their maximal involvement in the transition of their children into high school. The first issue entailed the dates and times of the monthly Parental Empowerment Project meetings. Though they found the monthly meetings most helpful, the timing of these meetings made it difficult for parents to participate. Six out of seven sample members reported that meetings were scheduled on dates or at times which were difficult for them. For some, the meetings conflicted with other gatherings participants needed to attend. For other members of the sample group, the selected meeting dates and times made it difficult for them to come home and tend to family obligations. Because the program meeting times and dates sometimes conflicted with other parental obligations, all members of the sample were not able to fully participate in all sessions. There were other obstacles which made it difficult for all sample members to be fully involved in the transition of their transition to the high school.

Five out of seven of sample members felt disconnected from other parents with children in the RAFT Program at Williamsburg High School. This prevented their maximal involvement in an important way. Before transitioning to the high school, these parents had developed parent networks at their respective elementary schools. However, once their children moved to the high school, the social networks of the children changed and many of these parental connections were dissolved. Previously, parents used their networks to swap ideas and strategies to assist their children. As the parents were no longer able to connect with each other, their ability to exchange ideas was also mitigated. Thus, the disconnection participating parents felt from each other, made it difficult for them to exchange new parenting ideas. Greater connections between parents could have helped them answer some of the questions they had as their children entered the high school. This is important because many parents had questions about how their roles would change at this important juncture.

Before beginning participation in this project, five out of seven sample members reported that they had questions about how their roles would change as their children entered high school. This served as a barrier to their full involvement. These parents started their participation without a clear understanding of how they could and should best assist their children. They were not sure of how to best reach out to their children's teachers. Though many of them received this information during the course of their participation in the project under study, they did not begin with this important information.

Three of seven respondents indicated that teachers did not provide them with consistent feedback about the academic performance of their children. They perceived



that teachers only provided them with information when they were prompted. This spotty feedback made it difficult for parents to be fully involved because they did not have consistent and accurate information about how their children were performing in school. Such a lack of information made it difficult for parents to have authentic dialogues with their children about their scholastic performance. It would have been helpful for the teachers of Williamsburg to be more consistent in providing information to parents. Similarly, it would have been helpful for leaders of the RAFT Program to be intentional in welcoming parents into partnership.

Of the seven sample members, two reported that the previous leadership of the RAFT Program in the town of Williamsburg did not make them feel welcome. They reported feeling marginalized and disrespected by the leader of the program. This made them reticent to join into partnership with the new leader of the program. This was a barrier to their involvement in the transition of their children. These two parents had to overcome their previous negative experiences with program staff in order to participate in this project. This factor, along with the three previously mentioned, served as a hurdle for members of the sample to transcend as they sought to be involved in the transition of their children. The aforementioned factors were more general reasons it was difficult for some parents to be involved. There were other factors which were more particular to individual parents and did not present amongst the majority of sample members.

There were several other factors which limited the involvement of certain parents. For one sample member, health challenges made it difficult to be fully involved in her daughter's transition. Another respondent indicated that it was harder to be involved because she did not always feel welcome at Williamsburg High School. Respondent

number five mentioned that it was hard for her to be fully immersed in the parent meetings because the sessions were not specific to the issues of her child. In a similar way, one parent mentioned the limited amount of discussion time allotted for at the parent meetings as a barrier to her participation. Each of these barriers presented in one respondent, respectively. In order to answer the research question it is helpful, again to summarize the general factors which parents perceived made it difficult for them to be maximally involved in their children's transition to high school.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter began with a presentation of the three research questions this study sought to answer. Pursuant to a presentation of the three data gathering instruments, the findings were presented by respondent tracking their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors both before and after the intervention. Findings were articulated according to the study's three research questions. The findings were then summarized in order to answer the overarching queries.

Chapter five will repeat a synopsis of chapter four's major findings. This information will be compared and contrasted with the previous research in the field. Moreover, the next chapter will speak to the instructional and educational practice and policy implications which arise from the findings. Suggestions for further research and the researcher's reflections will follow this piece. Finally, the limitations of the study and the researcher's leadership lessons will conclude the fifth chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Summary, Discussion, and Implications

#### **Introduction**

Chapter five will conclude this study of the perceived impact of a parental empowerment program for parents with children of color transitioning into high school. The purpose of this chapter is to further discuss and evaluate the findings of chapter four. Such an analysis will make it possible to compare the findings of the study with previous research endeavors in order to produce implications for practice and suggestions for further research.

The chapter will commence with a summary of the study's findings. The author will provide a summary of the answers to the research questions posed initially in chapter one. From this point, the author will discuss the findings and compare and contrast them with previous research in the field. After this, the limitations of the study will be presented. A discussion of the practical and policy implications of this research will follow. Particular attention will be paid to these elements as they provide suggestions for the processes of teaching and learning and provide the true "so what" for the project and study. The chapter will conclude with implications for further research and leadership lessons learned by the researcher respectively. The fifth chapter is organized as such:

1. **Summary of Findings:** In this section, the major findings of the study are presented by research question.
2. **Discussion of the Findings:** In this section, the study's findings are discussed using the research themes of chapter two as reference points.

3. **Limitations of the Study:** In this section, the limitations of the study are reiterated.
4. **Implications for Practice and Policy:** In this section, the researcher presents suggestions for educational practice which unfold from the findings of this study.
5. **Implications for Further Research:** In this section, areas of future research which arise from the present study are presented.
6. **Leadership Lessons:** In this section, the researcher provides a discussion about the lessons he learned about leadership through the conducting of leadership project and this study.
7. **Conclusion:** In this section, the researcher concludes the study. He provides a final invitation for the reading audience to consider the vital nature of parental involvement.

### **Summary of Findings**

The project under study focused on supporting parents of students of color as their children transitioned into high school. To this end, a parental empowerment program was created for parents with students soon to enter Williamsburg High School. The program was composed of three elements: a meeting for parents and students in the June preceding the transition to high school, a parental playbook, and monthly meetings for parents once their children began attending high school. Findings of the perceived impact of these three factors were attained using surveys, participant journals, and semi-structured interviews as the three data gathering instruments. These tools allowed the researcher to answer the three research questions.

1. What do parents of students of color perceive to be the impact of their involvement in this parental empowerment project on their own attitudes and behaviors?
2. What factors of the parental empowerment project did parents perceive to be most useful in helping them support their children as they transition into high school?
3. What did the parents perceive to be barriers which may preclude the maximal involvement of parents of students of color as they transition into high school?

#### *Summary of Responses to Question One*

Every participant indicated that their involvement in the parental empowerment program impacted their attitudes and behaviors in some way. Most reported that the project helped them meet the deans, teachers, and guidance counselors that would be working with their children. The program helped parents learn how to most effectively contact these important people. This information helped participants develop the idea that the members of the Williamsburg High School were there to support them. Developing this awareness was a critical step which allowed most of the participants in the study to forge collaborative working bonds with the members of the Williamsburg High School faculty. Parents perceived that these relationships with the staff, in addition to the information about what students should be learning and when, allowed them to more successfully hold their children academically accountable. Further, the program helped this same group of parents come to a better understanding of their role as parents of high school students. These understandings all had direct influence on the attitudes and behaviors of the respondents.

The parents participating in the study were more able to form collaborative bonds with school teachers and administrators as a result of the intervention. Additionally, parents were better able to hold their children accountable for their school work and behavior. Finally, parents developed clearer understandings of their roles as high school parents because they participated in this parental empowerment project.

#### *Summary of Responses to Question Two*

Amongst study participants, the monthly parent meetings was perceived to be the most useful in terms of helping them support their children as they started high school. The parent playbook was considered least helpful, though it was still perceived as a handy resource. This notwithstanding, the monthly parent meetings were thought of as most useful because they allowed parents to connect with members of the Williamsburg High School staff and they helped parents to develop a stronger understanding of what their children should be learning as freshmen.

#### *Summary of Responses to Question Three*

Most of the sample members indicated that the timing of meetings constituted a barrier to their involvement. They noted that parent gatherings, in time and date, often conflicted with other meetings they needed to attend. This made it difficult for many sample members to fully immerse in the empowerment program. This exacerbated the feeling of disconnection the sample members had between each other. The sample members did not feel connected with the other project participants. This made them less likely to exchange parenting ideas amongst themselves. It should be noted that many of the parents began their participation in the project without an understanding of how their role would change as their children entered high school. Once the project began, many of

the parents still felt that teachers were not consistent in providing them with feedback about the academic performance of their children. All of these were factors which members of the sample detailed as limiting their maximal involvement as their children began high school.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

Previous educational research is useful in providing a context for the findings of this study. The preponderance of this study's findings support theories put forth by other educational researchers, although some findings for this sample group do not necessarily match those of educational researchers.

Though there may have been some barriers, the vast majority of parents want to be involved in the education of their children. This notion, demonstrated empirically by the work of Griffith, is an outgrowth of the central idea that all parents do the best that they can for their children (Griffith, 1996a). This idea was soundly supported by the findings of this study. The seven sample members were all very clear that they wanted to be involved in the education of their children. Moreover, they all reported on the survey conducted before the project that they felt their involvement made a difference in the academic life of their children. This is a fundamental point. As stated earlier in this work, this research endeavor operated under the assumption that all parents want to help their children and do the best that they know how to do.

In her research, Epstein found that the preponderance of parents want more information about how they can scholastically support their children and with this increased know-how, parents are able to increase their sense of efficacy and successful involvement (J. Epstein, 1995). A similar finding was suggested in the current study.

Many of the sample members participating in the project reported starting with relatively high levels of efficacy as parents. They felt able to communicate high academic expectations and ensure that their children completed their homework. However, as they went through the empowerment project, they learned even more about Williamsburg High School and what their children should be learning. This helped the participants feel even more able. The information they gained about the high school's curriculum and their children's individual progress further increased their collective sense of efficacy and enabled them to be even more involved than they otherwise probably would have been. This study falls in line with the studies of other educational researchers, particularly Horvat & Lewis (Horvat & Lewis, 2003).

A significant number of the parents in this study began the project without a clear understanding of their role as parents. This was exacerbated by their children pushing them away as they entered high school. Because the children were seeking more autonomy, they sought to reduce the role of their parents in their school lives. This challenged the participants' previously held understandings of their roles as parents. This conundrum is addressed in the writings of Horvat and Lewis (2003). Their research suggests that as students enter the high school, they often seek to diminish the role of their parents. Because diminished role understanding for parents is so prevalent, it was important that the project under study help parents clarify what it means to be a high school parent. Kathleen Hoover-Dempsey's writings are emphatic in stressing the need for parents to come to a solid understanding of their new role as their children enter the ninth grade (Kathleen Hoover-Dempsey, 1997a).



Kathleen Hoover-Dempsey (1997a) writes extensively about how important it is for parents to understand their role as it relates to the schooling of their children. Understanding of one's role frames expected behavior and helps people understand the values and goals of a group. To be fully efficacious, one must have a complete understanding of their role. Increased understanding of role leads to a greater understanding of one's duty and increased ability to fulfill it. This notion was supported in this study. According to the pre-intervention survey, many of the participants in this study started the project without a full understanding of their role as high school parents. As the project went on, these parents, by way of the empowerment program, came to see more accurately just what the role of a high school parent was. With this information, they felt that they were more able to live up to the expectations of their role as high school parents. Role clarification was the fundamental step in helping these parents see themselves as more able. Such results are in line with the writings of Hoover-Dempsey (1997a).

This project was titled intentionally. The empowerment program sought to live up to the standard penned by Shephard & Rose (1995). They dictate that empowerment is a process that can only occur when school leaders work with parents as partners rather than as a people with deficits to be corrected (Shephard & Rose, 1995). Their writing goes on to stress the value of partnerships in helping parents become even more involved in the schooling of their children. This study supported this line of thinking. For the sample members, the partnerships they forged with members of the Williamsburg High School staff were critical. The meetings served, for a number of participants, solely as a forum to help them build these collaborative relationships with teachers, deans, and

guidance counselors. The parents felt empowered as a result of having built partnerships with these important people. Such partnership could not have happened without the sample members feeling welcomed properly. In this project, this feeling of welcome came from a number of sources. The project leader was intentional in stating to the participating parents on a number of occasions that they were partners and their involvement was vital and welcomed. Further, the other administrators that spoke to the parent group spoke the same welcoming message. Finally, providing childcare at the meetings helped parents feel welcome and invited.

Kathleen Hoover-Dempsey researched the idea of welcome as it relates to parental involvement (1997b). One of her central ideas was that parents are more likely to come into partnership and be involved when they are welcomed repeatedly and viewed as equal partners. The study of this project upholds that idea. Before this project, the RAFT Program made a number of parents feel like less than equal partners. By scolding them during meetings, some sample members indicated that some of the leaders of the RAFT program made them feel less than welcome. This diminished their desire to be involved. Conversely, through this empowerment program, they reported feeling more welcomed. Thus, they were more willing to be involved in the education of their children. Such a finding is in accordance with research done by seminal researcher, Kathleen Hoover-Dempsey (1997b). The current study's findings suggest results which match that of writers researching other elements of parental involvement and the transition to high school, particularly Mizelee & Irvin (2000).

In a study of the transition to high school, it was noted that the movement into the ninth grade breaks up student social networks (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). Because students

were selecting new friends, parent networks also often broke up when students entered high school. In their study, many parents lamented the destruction of many of the supportive bonds they had developed as a parent community. Without these structures, parents were less able to exchange ideas and communally devise strategies to help their children achieve high levels of academic performance. This was also seen in the current study. Sample members were nearly unanimous during their interviews in stating that they wanted help in building relationships with other parents. They felt that they were not unified as a parent group and did not know many of the other parents, much less what strategies they used with their children. Thus, they would have liked to have had help connecting with other parents in their same situation, transitioning into high school under the auspices of the RAFT Program. Given the way information came, or sometimes did not come, from teachers, these parent-to-parent relationships would have been particularly helpful.

Some of the parents participating in the project reported during the post-intervention interview that teachers were not consistent about reaching out to them. They stated that teachers were not always proactive about extending information about the academic performance of their shared students. Chavkin & Williams concurred in their writing that such a situation often occurs (Chavkin & Williams, 1998). Their research says that teachers are frequently inconsistent about reaching out and contacting parents with information about student performance (Chavkin & Williams, 1988). With this in mind, it is important to help parents figure out how to advocate for their children and acquire information effectively. This understanding of how to be an efficacious parent in

high school can take place during a transition support program. However, too few transition support programs include parents.

Most high school transition programs only include the student (Smith, 1997). However, the most effective involve the parent as well. The results of this study support this idea. All of the sample members indicated some positive shift in their attitudes and behaviors as new high school parents because they participated in the parental empowerment project. They all reported learning new things either about their role as high school parents or about their child's new school. Further, participants learned about the important people at Williamsburg High School, how to contact them, and began the process of building working relationships with them. It is doubtful that such new understandings and relationships would have come about if parents had not been involved in the transition support program under study. Thus, the research of Smith is supported by the present research undertaking. A transition program involving parents gave supports to families that would not be possible if only students were involved in the program. It is helpful to examine the benefits parents perceived as a result of their involvement in this project in order to support the previous idea put forth in the writings of Smith (1997).

A study by Epstein posits that students are best served when the home and school are working in unison to send students the same message (J. Epstein, 1995). Such an idea is supported by the participants in this study. The majority of parents participating in this project felt that their involvement helped them hold their children accountable. Because the program helped the school and home create a common language and set of expectations, participants perceived that they were more able to hold their children to a

uniform standard. Participating parents believed that this helped them hold their children to task and help these young people achieve higher, scholastically. Though they were not examined, it is possible that students earned higher grades than they would have had their parents not participated in this project.

A metaanalysis conducted by Ferguson, suggests that students earn higher grades when their parents are involved, particularly as these students and parents enter the high school (2005). Again, this study did not examine student marks, rather it examined parent perceptions. However, the perceptions of parents in this study could quite reasonably support those studies which say increased parental involvement, particularly during years of transition, lead to greater student grades. As parents participating in this study felt more able to hold their children accountable, access information about academic performance, and develop supportive bonds with faculty members, it is reasonable to surmise that they were able to help their children earn higher grades. However, such a result can not be definitively supported as a result of the design of the current project and study. Thus, a study of the grades students earn after their parents participate in a transition support program could be a good topic for further research.

In their writings, Banks & Banks put forth that many schools are based on white values and can often make most parents of color feel unwelcome as a result (2001)(Banks & Banks, 2001). While it is beyond the scale and scope of this study to assess the values of Williamsburg High School, it can be seen that the findings of this study do not fall in line with those of Banks & Banks (2001). Of the seven sample members, only one reported sometimes feeling unwelcome at Williamsburg High School. The other parent that reported any feelings of discomfort felt that way as a result of the leadership of the

RAFT Program not as a result of any feelings of discomfort in Williamsburg. Such results do not comport with those of Banks & Banks (2001).

In his 1999 study, Gaffney dictated that distance from school is often a problem which mitigates the involvement of parents. As all of the parents participating in this study live outside of the bounds of the town where their children are students, it was logical to assume that distance from school would be an issue which limited parental involvement. Though this is true, none of the participating parents reported the distance between the homes in Sheffield and the town of Williamsburg as reasons they were less involved than they would like to be. In fact, several participants specified that they were glad meetings were held at Williamsburg High School as it was either more convenient for them or gave them the opportunity to see the building where their children attended school. It was not determined whether these feelings arose as a result of not feeling culturally in line with the community. However, it can be seen that most sample members felt quite welcome in the predominantly white town of Williamsburg and its predominantly white high school.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were a number of limitations to this study. They served to threaten its internal validity. The first is the relatively sample size. Seven parents constituted the sample group. This relatively small sample group makes the findings less able to be generalized. The researcher's position constitutes another limitation to this study.

The researcher is an administrator with the RAFT Program. This is a benefit in that it gives him knowledge of the program and participants that others researchers may not be able to access. This also forms a limitation because it may have inhibited

respondents' perceived ability to answer survey and interview questions openly and honestly. As respondents were speaking about an initiative of the researcher and the program which employs him, they may not have felt comfortable to be entirely forthright about the program's shortcomings. Moreover, it is possible that respondents may have felt that providing the researcher with the answers they believed he was seeking may have netted some benefit for their children.

A degree of researcher bias was possible as the researcher was studying a program he created and wanted to succeed. It is thus possible that he would have shown bias by highlighting positive participant responses. Further, it is feasible that he could have downplayed negative elements which did not support the success of the project he designed.

Another limitation of the study was in the designing of the data gathering instruments. All instruments, surveys, interview protocols, and journal prompts, were created by the researcher. It is possible that threats to the internal and external validity of these tools could have existed. In order to mitigate these threats, the tools were reviewed by the researcher's dissertation chair and research colleagues. Further, the triangulation of data gathering tools was used to advance the internal validity of the study.

### **Implications for Practice and Policy**

The findings of this study provided the researcher with a number of suggestions for ways teachers and other school leaders can better their practices and policies in order to more effectively involve parents and by extension improve student learning. The first implication for practice is for school leaders to be intentional about actually listening to parents. This study showed that parents want to be involved in the education of their

children. They are their child's first teachers and know them best. Thus, parents are wells of information which schools can tap in to in order to better educate children. This is particularly significant as students enter the ninth grade. Since teachers in the high school are receiving new students who they know nothing about, it would be very helpful for them to listen to those stake-holders with important background knowledge. Thus, it becomes incredibly important for schools to make it a priority to actually listen to the input, questions, concerns, and criticisms of parents. This flow of information should be reciprocal. In the same way that school personnel should listen to parents, they should also ensure they have ways to provide parents with information as well.

The parents in this study were not satisfied with the initiative teachers took in contacting them and in providing academic feedback about their shared children. They felt it was spotty. A number of the sample members reported that they wanted faculty members to more frequently contact them in order to tell them how their children were performing in the classroom. With this information, sample members contend they could have corrected small problems before they became large. This would have allowed their children to earn higher grades. For this reason, school leaders and teachers should formulate systematic ways to ensure parents receive consistent information about how their children are performing.

This goal should be advanced in a pair of ways. First, schools need to create cultural norms that dictate feedback is important for parents. School culture must specify that reaching out to parents is "just how things are done around here". Second, school structure should support this work. Structures such as teacher evaluation and scheduling should support the work of parental outreach. Through the aligning of school structures,



school leaders must communicate that feedback to parents is important, expected and teachers will be supported in this work.

As the life of a teacher can be quite busy, connecting with parents sometimes does not happen until things reach a problem phase. At this juncture it is often too late for parents to be helpful in formulating a solution. However, if teachers know that their success as employees hinges, in part, on their ability to reach out to parents, they very well may be more motivated to be more effective about this important area of their practice. Thus, it could be helpful to make parent outreach a criteria teachers are evaluate on. Many districts specify fulfillment of professional responsibilities as a standard teachers are measured against. By stipulating that the involvement of parents is an important professional responsibility, school leaders can spur pedagogues to contact parents more frequently. However, it should be noted that teachers and other school leaders will need to be particular about just how they reach out to parents.

It is important that schools think about how they actually welcome parents into partnership. A few of the parents in this study stated that they had not previously been fully involved because they did not feel welcome by prior members of the RAFT Program staff. Once they were invited in a different manner, more welcoming manner they came into partnership with the school. This demonstrates the power of welcome. If they are to fully involve parents, school leaders must examine the ways that they ask parents to be involved. Officials must assess whether they are actively welcoming to parents and whether they communicate this message prominently and repeatedly. In order to have maximal involvement structures to invite parents must be created. By communicating to parents that they are not only welcomed but needed partners, schools

can increase their involvement. Further, in order to help facilitate this, school leaders should look at their meeting schedules.

Most of the parents in this study complained about the schedule of meetings. Though they felt that they were receiving good information, many of the sample members could not be fully engaged in these sessions because of scheduling conflicts with other meetings. It is reasonable to assume that the same thing happens in other school districts. Meeting conflicts make it impossible for parents to make it to all meetings. For this reason, faculty members should be careful about how meetings are scheduled. To the greatest degree possible, leaders of different departments and special programs in a school district should come together prior to the beginning of an academic year to plan the calendar of parent meetings. Attention should be paid to ensure that parents do not have to attend two meetings in the same night. This will eliminate the choice between meetings that some parents have to make, thus eliminating a barrier to involvement for some. In addition to examining how meetings are scheduled, school personnel should examine the content of parent meetings.

One of the things that all of the parents in this study found important was connections with teachers and administrators at the Williamsburg High School. They felt it was extremely helpful and sometimes comforting to have someone at the high school they could call in and have a working relationship with. It is very important that school leaders find ways to build relationships with parents. The first step is for school leaders to let parents know who they are and what they do. It is equally important that school leaders show parents how to contact them. The same is equally true for teachers. They too should let parents know who they are, what they do, and how to contact them.

Parents need to develop these personal working relationships if they are to be fully involved. It is helpful to know that at least one person has their family's best interest at heart. Thus, schools should be intentional about connecting administrators and families. Further, schools should provide avenues for parents to connect with each other.

Parents devise and implement strategies they believe will be helpful with their children. They rely on a number of sources of information in designing these techniques. However, this study showed that parents often feel disconnected from each other as they struggle to design more effective techniques to help their children achieve at high levels. For this reason, school leaders should create avenues which allow parents to converse with each other and co-construct strategies together. The collective wisdom of the parent group is greater than that of any one member. For this reason, schools should create structures which allow members of this group to communicate with each other. Further, these structures should be designed with the objective of helping parents communicate and network with the goal of devising strategies which can better support their children. Greater knowledge of strategies will lead to more efficacious parenting and greater student achievement by extension. By helping parents develop other types of awareness, schools can foster greater student achievement.

The researcher's review of the literature and study of the current project underscore the idea that parents are less sure of their role as their children enter high school. In order to rectify this, school leaders must be explicit in communicating to new high school parents their new role. Whether it is through periodic newsletters, emails, or through meetings, as was the case in this transition support program, school leaders have to let parents know that their job is not finished just because their children have entered

high school. A diminished understanding of one's role makes a person less likely to engage in a particular task. Thus, a lack of role clarity often serves to limit the involvement of parents with students entering the ninth grade. To counter this, school officials must take steps to help these parents clarify their roles. It is not enough to hope parents come to this understanding by themselves. As the research has shown that the transition to high school is a critical juncture, this support in clarifying parent role is needed for parents while their students are making the move into high school. This necessitates a final suggestion by the researcher.

All high schools should have some kind of transition support program for the parents of soon-to-be high school parents, particularly students of color in a majority white school. This can be said because the research highlighted in chapter two shows that after the transition to high school, the grades of many Black and Latino students drop precipitously. However, the research also dictates that high school transition support programs, particularly those involving parents in the process, help to mitigate these declines in positive behavior and academic performance. Through transition support programs which include parents, they can learn to involve themselves in the education of their children more efficaciously.

Since such parental involvement has been shown to promote student gains, school structures and cultures should be aligned in order to facilitate parental empowerment and involvement. Though the current study did not measure student performance, it did look at the effect a transition program had on parents. It showed that, with this sample group, the program had a positive effect on their ability to hold their children accountable, their knowledge of the Williamsburg High School curriculum, and their ability to build

working relationships with staff members. For this reason, it can be seen that transition support programs can be helpful in supporting the effective involvement of parents and quite possible support students in earning better grades.

### **Implications for Further Research**

This study has produced implications for future research. Chief amongst them would be assessing how students felt about the participation of their parents. While this study spoke to how parents felt about their participation, it would be interesting to note whether the students felt the involvement of their parents benefited them. As the work of a school leader ultimately comes down to student learning, it would be worth while to note whether students thought their parents going through a transition support program helped the young people achieve academically. This could lead to study in another area.

Future research could measure the impact of a parental empowerment project on the actual grades of students. This study measured parental perceptions. The effect these perceptions would have on student achievement was predicated on past educational research. However, in order to further document the connection between parental involvement, transition supports, and actual student achievement, a future researcher could look at how, if at all, a parental empowerment project influenced student achievement. Again, school leaders should look to bolster student achievement. In order to do this in a more informed manner, it could be helpful to determine whether a parental empowerment project impacted student grades.

It should be noted that all of the members of the sample used in this study were women. It is possible that men would have had different reactions to the intervention under study. To make this determination, it would be helpful to conduct a similar study

involving males as members of the sample group. Such information would be helpful in determining how both genders react to a parental empowerment project. This information would be helpful in designing a program which could be useful in serving the needs of both genders of parents as their children enter the ninth grade.

Altering the sample in another way could also yield useful information. Due to convenience, parents with students enrolled in the RAFT program were used as sample members. It would be useful to study how a transition support program would affect parents that actually reside in Williamsburg. Their needs may be different from those of parents residing in Sheffield. If school leaders are to design programs which offer maximal benefit in involving parents, they must be mindful of the needs and strengths of different parents groups.

### **Leadership Lessons**

The researcher learned a great deal about himself as a leader in conducting this project and study. One of the first lessons affirmed a previously held idea. Through the course of completing this project and study, the researcher came to see, more than ever, that parents are of critical importance in the education of their children. To make all of his students successful, the researcher must engage their parents. Parental involvement can take a number of shapes. It does not necessarily even mean parents have to come into the school edifice for meetings. However, the needs of an increasingly diverse student body dictate that the leader must find partnership where possible. This means it is vital to work with parents. This study highlighted this lesson for the researcher. Further, he came to see that the manner in which parents are invited in is vital.

Completing this project showed the researcher that he must be mindful of the way he invites parents into partnership. It must be genuinely and repeatedly communicated to parents that they truly are partners and schools need them. To view parents as subordinates or people with deficits will not yield greater involvement. The researcher now understands that he must be mindful about asking parents to collaborate as partners in the educational process. This will require the researcher to be explicit about what involvement looks like and how parents can do it optimally. It is this idea of making the implicit explicit which also came out of this study.

The researcher came to see that as a school leader it is vital he be explicit about things which are thought to be commonly “understood”. Previously, it was assumed by the researcher that parents knew what it meant to be involved and they understood what their role was as their children entered high school. However, through the completion of this project and study, he came to see that these things were not common knowledge. The terms “role” and “parental involvement” are bandied about so much, the researcher found it easy to assume that all people know fully what they mean. However, he came to see that this was simply not true. The researcher came to the understanding that it is impossible and unfair to ask parents to be truly involved if there is no common definition of the term, much less an understanding of how to do it successfully. Thus, for the researcher as a leader it is important to make no assumptions about what people know. Instead, it will be helpful for him to be explicit with parents about the behaviors and actions which aid the work of the school. In a similar way, he came to see that it is not helpful to assume that teachers know certain things.

The researcher had previously assumed that all teachers knew the value of parental involvement or that they knew it was extremely important to provide up to date information for parents. However, this was not true. He learned that it is helpful to be explicit with teachers as well. The researcher learned that it is important to communicate to teachers how exactly they are to reach out to parents and how often. Further, the researcher came to see that he has to communicate to his followers just how important it is that they involve parents as well.

As stated earlier, parents are a child's first teacher. They know them better than any teacher. Teachers have to listen to parents. Thus, the researcher developed the understanding that it is vital to listen to the input of parents, even when their feedback may be difficult to listen to. This is important to the researcher for a number of reasons. The first is that it will allow him to gain important information about his students. The second is that by listening to parents, the researcher can validate their concerns and ideas. This will help the researcher as a leader communicate to parents that he is genuine about seeking partnership. This is particularly important as students transition into high school.

The transition to high school is stressful for both students and parents. Subsequently, the researcher learned that it is important to listen to the concerns that parents have as their children start high school. By conducting the present study, he learned that parents may feel alone at a time when productive relationships are more vital than ever. This showed the researcher that he has to provide a forum to help parents build relationships with school personnel and other parents. These connections can help parents stay afloat during this trying time. The designing of these structures takes time. However, it is time well spent. As a leader, the researcher came to see that time spent



cultivating relationships with parents and helping them be involved is rewarded exponentially. The idea of investing time on the front end of a problem also presented itself in another way.

One of the chief barriers to involvement seen in this study was the conflict of meeting times. The different service providers did not communicate and coordinate to make sure parents did not have these conflicts. Such work would have prevented this problem. This was instructive for the researcher. He learned that his job as a leader, above many other things, is to coordinate the different people and groups which serve a particular interest. Like a conductor in a symphony, the leader's role, in part, is to help all of the various pieces which work to serve parents to be in harmony. In this case, that would have meant devising a schedule with the RAFT Program, Parent Teacher Organization, and various class officers to ensure that meetings did not overlap.

The leader of the project learned a number of lessons about himself as a person. He came to see the value of being fully authentic and present to the challenges and concerns people present. These critical notions are written about by Robert Starratt (2004). However, in conducting this project, the researcher was able to fully extract meaning from these words and see how important it is to be empathetic and acknowledge the full of humanity of both parents and students.

In summation, conducting this project and study taught the researcher many lessons about leadership. He came to see, more than ever, that parental involvement is critical. For a leader to get parents involved effectively, he or she must be mindful about the manner in which parents are invited into collaboration. Further, in order for this collaboration to work, it will be important for the leaders to make the implicit explicit.

This must occur for both teachers and parents. Finally, through listening to parents fully and placing importance on working relationships, the leader in his professional capacity can more successfully engage parents, particularly at a critical point for students.

## **Conclusion**

The goal of this study was to understand how a parental empowerment project would impact parents of color as their children transitioned into high school. The findings of the study are largely in line with those of previous research. This lends credence to the data yielded from this study. All parents, in some shape, form, or fashion, believe themselves to have benefited from participation in the project under study. Either by developing a clearer understanding of their role as high school parents, building a working relationship with a member of the high school staff, or coming to a better understanding of the curriculum, the participants in the study perceived themselves as more efficacious because they participated in this project. Research conducted indicates that this group is more likely to remain involved as parents because they now view themselves as more able. With this increase in parental involvement, research would suggest an increase in student achievement is probable.

In conclusion, this study showed that parents want to be involved. They just need help in figuring out how to do so effectively. Parental involvement can be fostered if schools are intentional about exactly what it means and how it should be practiced. This involvement will come to be even more critical as the needs of learners increase and resources become scarcer.

## Appendix A

Informed Consent for the Research Study On:

*The perceived impact of a parental empowerment project on parents of students of color.*

You are invited to participate in a research study that is aligned with my dissertation at Boston College. This project, **conducted under the supervision of Boston College faculty member Dr. Irvin Blumer**, seeks to gain an understanding of how schools can better support parents of students of color as they transition into high school. The purpose of this study is to determine how we can work more successfully with parents with the ultimate aim of helping our common students excel at greater heights.

As a participant in this study, several things will be asked of you. **You will be asked to complete an initial pre-test. This survey should take you between 10 and 15 minutes to complete. Additionally, you will be asked to participate in monthly parent meetings. These sessions will last about an hour each and will take place at the high school. During these sessions you will meet with myself, the BHS academic department chairs and other parents to discuss strategies useful in supporting children as they transition to school. Additionally,** you will be asked to complete a pair of confidential surveys. Finally, you will take part in a 10-15 minute interview upon the completion of the study if you choose to participate. All of the data yielded from these sources will be held confidential and anonymous.

There are a number of benefits of participating in this voluntary study. Your information will help the program understand how we can be more effective in working in partnership with parents. It is hoped that we can learn how to provide parents with more information, tools and skills they can use at home. It is my belief that this will have positive results on student learning.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Because time is a valuable resource, I will respect the time commitment that you will put towards this effort by not asking too much of you. Because participation in this endeavor is voluntary, you may withdraw from the study at any time with no questions asked. Names and information provided throughout the study are withheld and confidentiality of responses is ensured.

**Though this study may include risks that are unknown at this time, there are no foreseen risks inherent to participating in this study.** Further, there is little chance of discomfort for you as a participant. The previously mentioned confidentiality safeguards will ensure that your identity will be withheld in the penning of this dissertation. This will inoculate you from any potential loss of reputation in the community. There will be absolutely no repercussions should you choose to opt out of this study at any time.

**Please know that I will make every effort to keep your research records confidential, but it cannot be assured. Records that identify you and the consent form signed by you, may be looked at by the following agencies:**

- 1. Federal agencies overseeing human subject research**
- 2. The BC Institutional review Board**
- 3. The results of this research may be presented at meetings or in published articles. However, your name will be kept private**

If you have questions or concerns regarding this invitation, please feel free to contact me through e-mail at [christopher\\_vick@brookline.k12.ma.us](mailto:christopher_vick@brookline.k12.ma.us), or through phone: 617-713-5171. **Moreover, you are welcomed to contact the Boston College Office of Human Research Participant Protection at 617-552-4778 for more information about your rights as a participant in this study.**

I understand the conditions of this study and agree to participate. I understand that I will be audio taped and that I have the right to review the transcriptions for accuracy. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time.

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

Name \_\_\_\_\_

The goal of the METCO Program is to help all of our shared students enjoy academic success while attending the Public Schools of Brookline. We believe that young people can only be successful if their parents are supplied with all of the information and support possible. Thus, as a program, we in Brookline METCO, are seeking to gain information about how we can serve you better as a parent in order to help the children we share. With this in mind, we ask that you take a few minutes to fill out the survey below. Your responses will be kept confidential and help us work with you more effectively.

**Please place an X in the box that indicates your response: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. My involvement makes a big difference in the academic performance of my child				
2. I have questions about how my role as a parent will change as my child enters high school				
3. I feel welcomed and appreciated at my child's current school				
4. I know how to get in contact with the teachers and administrators at the high school				
5. I feel the teachers and administrators at the high school value my ideas				
6. Time constraints (job/other responsibilities) sometimes make it hard to be as involved in my child's education as I would like to be				
7. It would be helpful to hear what strategies other Brookline High School METCO parents use to support their children				
8. I feel that the high school is welcoming and inviting to me				
9. It would be helpful if the teachers at the high school would keep me informed about how my son or daughter is performing in class				
10. I am sure that I know how to most effectively communicate to my children that I have high academic expectations of them				
11. There are things which sometimes keep me from being as involved in my child's education as I would like				
12. I feel that I have been provided with a lot of useful information about the changes I can expect in my child as they move into the ninth grade				
13. I know the proper people at Brookline High School to contact in order to advocate for my child				
14. I know what strategies I can use at home to make sure that my child always completes their homework				
15. It is difficult for me to attend some school functions because of transportation challenges				
16. I would benefit from having an experienced Brookline High School parent to mentor me				

**Please complete the following short answer question.**

17. In a perfect world, what supports would you like the METCO Program and Brookline High School to provide for you as you and your child transition into a new school.

---



---



---

## Appendix C

### Project Interview Protocol

Dissertation Title:

**Study of the perceived effects of a parental empowerment project for parents of students of color.**

#### Research Questions

1. What do parents of students of color perceive to be the impact of their involvement in this parental empowerment project on their own attitudes and behaviors?
2. What factors of the parental empowerment project did parents perceive to be most useful in helping them support their children as they transition into high school?
3. What did the parents perceive to be barriers which may preclude the maximal involvement of parents of students of color as they transition into high school?

#### Interview Protocol:

1. The METCO Program made use of a number of supports for our new high school parents. They included a transition workshop in June, a parent playbook, and monthly meetings. Of these three, which was the most helpful for you as a parent? Which was the least helpful? Please specify why.
2. In what ways, if any, was the initial transition meeting in June helpful? In what ways would you change it?
3. In what ways, if any, was the parental playbook helpful? In what ways would you change it?

4. In what ways, if any, were the monthly parent meetings helpful? In what ways would you change them?
5. Was it difficult to make it to meetings held in Brookline? If so, please specify why.
6. Did the meeting times make it difficult to attend parent meetings? If so, please explain why.
7. What was the most difficult element of your child's high school transition? How, if at all, did the parent empowerment project help you meet this challenge?
8. What factors, if any, made it difficult for you to be involved as your child transitioned into high school?
9. What were the factors that made it easier for you to be involved as your child transitioned into high school?
10. Do you feel welcomed and comfortable at Brookline High School? If so, has this program helped develop this sense of comfort and belonging at BHS?
11. Over the past few months, do you feel that you have developed a stronger idea of who are the member's of your child's team and how to contact them? If so, how did you develop this understanding? If not, how could the program make this information available to you?
12. As your child made the transition to high school, do you feel the METCO Program provided you with enough information about how your child was doing in his/ her classes? Did your participation in this program help you more actively obtain this information?
13. In what way, if any, has this program helped you better understand some of the strategies other METCO parents use with their children?
14. Did the parental involvement program help you provide your child with greater support in completing their homework assignments? To what extent do you, as parent, see this aspect of homework as important?
15. How, if at all, did this program affect your view of your role as a BHS parent?
16. How, if at all, has your participation in this project affected or changed your practice as the parent of a high school student?
17. How did your participation in this program affect your student? Do you think your participation helped your child meet with success during the first half of his/her freshman year?

18. If you were to go through this transition process again, how could the METCO Program better support you as a parent?

Thank you very much for participating in this interview process.



## **Appendix D**

### Project Journal Protocol

1. What did I learn tonight that I can use to help me be even more effective with my child?
2. What information about Williamsburg High Schools could be presented at the next meeting that would help make you an even more successful parent?

## References

- Baker, A. J. L., Kessler-Sklar, S., Piotrkowski, C. S., & Parker, F. L. (1999). Kindergarten and first-grade teachers' reported knowledge of parents' involvement in their children's education. *The Elementary School Journal*, 99(4), 367-380.
- Banks, J., & Banks, C. (2001). *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives* (4 ed.). New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Calabrese, R. L. (1990). The public school: A source of alienation for minority parents. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 59(2), 148-154.
- Cavarretta, J. J. (1998). Parents Are a School's Best Friend. *Educational leadership*, 55(8), 12-15.
- Chavkin, N., & Williams, D. (1988). Critical issues in teacher training for parent involvement. *Educational Horizons, Winter 1988*, 87-93.
- Cooper, H. M., & Tom, D. Y. H. (1984). Teacher expectation research: A review with implications for classroom instruction. *The Elementary School Journal*, 85(1), 76-89.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2001). Standard Setting in Teaching: Changes in Licensing, Certification, and Assessment. In V. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Teaching* (4 ed.). Washington D.C.: American Educational Research Association.
- Darling-Hammond, L., & Berry, B. (1999). Recruiting teachers for the 21st century: The foundation for educational equity. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 68(3), 254-279.

- Delpit, L. D. (1992). Education in a multicultural society: Our future's greatest challenge. *The Journal of Negro Education, 61*(3), 237-249.
- Dornbusch, S., & Ritter, P. (1988). Parents of high school students: A neglected resource. *Educational Horizons, 75*-98.
- Drummond, K. V., & Stipek, D. (2004). Low-income parents' beliefs about their role in children's academic learning. *The Elementary School Journal, 104*(3), 197-213.
- Epstein, J. (1995). School/family/community/partnerships. *Phi Beta Kappan, 76*(9), 703-707.
- Epstein, J. L., & Dauber, S. L. (1991). School programs and teacher practices of parent involvement in inner-city elementary and middle schools. *The Elementary School Journal, 91*(3), 289-305.
- Felner, R., Ginter, M., & Primavera, J. (1982). Primary prevention during school transitions: Social support and environmental structure. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 10*(3), 277-301.
- Felner, R., Primavera, J., & Cauce, A. (1981). The impact of school transitions: A focus for preventive efforts. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 9*(4).
- Ferguson, R. (1991). Paying for public education: New evidence on how and why money matters. *Harvard Journal on Legislation, 28*(1), 465-479.
- Ferguson, R. (2005). *Toward skilled parenting and transformed schools inside a national movement for excellence in equity*. Cambridge, Ma: Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University.
- Fowler, R. (1996). Linking Families, Building Community. *Educational leadership, 53*(7), 24-26.

- Friedman, T. (2005). *The World is Flat*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
- Fuller, H. (2002). Educational choice, a core freedom. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 71(1/2), 1-4.
- Gaffney, P. (1999). *Mentoring parents: Support for families of early adolescents*. Paper presented at the National Conference of the American Educational Research Association.
- Griffith, J. (1996a). Relation of parental involvement, empowerment, and school traits to student academic performance. *The Journal of educational research*, 90(1), 33-41.
- Griffith, J. (1996b). Test of a model of the organizational antecedents of parent involvement and satisfaction with public education. *Human Relations*, 49(12), 1549-1560.
- Grolnick, W. S., Benjet, C., Kurowski, C. O., & Apostoleris, N. H. (1997). Predictors of parent involvement in children's schooling. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 89(3), 538-548.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1981). *Effective Evaluation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Hoover-Dempsey, K. (1997a). *Parental role construction and parental involvement in children's education*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Education Research Association
- Hoover-Dempsey, K. (1997b). Why do parents become involved in their children's education? *Review of educational research*, 67(1), 3-42.

- Hoover-Dempsey, K., Bassler, O. C., & Brissie, J. S. (1987). Parent involvement: contributions of teacher efficacy, school socioeconomic status, and other school characteristics. *American Educational Research Journal*, 24(3), 417-435.
- Horvat, E. M., & Lewis, K. S. (2003). Reassessing the "burden of acting white": The importance of peer groups in managing academic success. *Sociology of Education*, 76(4), 265-280.
- Hoxby, C. M. (2000). Does competition among public schools benefit students and taxpayers? *The American Economic Review*, 90(5), 1209-1238.
- Iver, D. J. M., & Epstein, J. L. (1991). Responsive practices in the middle grades: Teacher teams, advisory groups, remedial instruction, and school transition programs. *American Journal of Education*, 99(4), 587-622.
- Jeynes, W. H. W. (2005). A meta-analysis of the relation of parental involvement to urban elementary school student academic achievement. *Urban education*, 40(3), 237-269.
- Keith, T., Keith, P., Quirk, K., Sperduto, J., Santillo, S., & Killings, S. (1998). Longitudinal effects of parent involvement on high school grades: similarities and differences across gender and ethnic groups. *Journal of School Psychology*, 36, 355-363.
- Keith, T., Keith, P., Troutman, G., Bickley, P., Trivette, P., & Singh, K. (1993). Does parental involvement affect eighth-grade student achievement? Structural analysis of national data. *School psychology review*, 22(3), 474-504.

- Kenny, W. R., & Grotelueschen, A. D. (1980). *Making the Case for Case Study*: Occasional Paper, Office for the Study of Continuing Professional Education. Urbana-Champaign: College of Education, University of Illinois, 1980.
- King, S. H. (1993). The limited presence of African-American teachers. *Review of Educational Research*, 63(2), 115-149.
- Labaree, D. (1997). *How to Succeed in School Without Really Learning: The Credentials Race in American Education*. New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The Dreamkeepers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Leitch, M. L., & Tangri, S. (1988). Barriers to home-school collaboration. *Educational Horizons*, Winter 1988, 70-90.
- Massachusetts Department of Education. (2005a). *2005 MCAS Results by Race, Gender, Special Education, Low Income & Migratory Status - Brookline*. Retrieved June 4, 2007, from <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/mcas/subgroups.asp?district=046&school=&mcasyear=2005>.
- Massachusetts Department of Education. (2005b). *Spring 2005 MCAS Tests Summary of States Results*. Retrieved June 4, 2007, from <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/2005/results/summary.pdf>
- Massachusetts Department of Education. (2006). *2005-2006 NCLB Report Card-Brookline High*. Retrieved June 4, 2007, from <http://bhs.brookline.k12.ma.us/NR/rdonlyres/0FFCC21A-294D-461A-B28E-37252CFC5C20/0/BHS1.pdf>.

- Massachusetts Department of Education. (2007). *Boston MCAS Test Results*. Retrieved June 4, 2007, from [http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/mcas/performance\\_level.aspx?linkid=32&orgtypecode=5&orgcode=00350000&fycode=2008](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/mcas/performance_level.aspx?linkid=32&orgtypecode=5&orgcode=00350000&fycode=2008)
- McDermott, P., & Rothenberg, J. (2000). *Why urban parents resist involvement in their children's elementary education*. Retrieved August 9, 2007, from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR5-3/mcdermott.html>
- Merriam, S. (1992). *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*. San Francisco: Josey Bass.
- Miles, M., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Mizelle, N. B., & Irvin, J. L. (2000). Transition from middle school into high school. *Middle School Journal*, 31(5) 69-79.
- National Center for Educational Statistics. (1994). *America's Teachers: Profiles of a Profession*. Washington D.C.: United States Department of Education.
- The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 20 U.S.C. § 6319(2001).
- Ogbu, J. U. (1982). Cultural discontinuities and schooling. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 13(4), 290-307.
- Ogbu, J. U. (1987). Variability in minority school performance: A problem in search of an explanation. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 18(4), 312-334.
- Oliver Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka et al., 347 483 (United States Supreme Court, 1954).

- Patton, M. Q. (1985). *Quality in Qualitative Research: Methodological Principles and Recent Developments*: Invited address to Division J of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, April 1985.
- Paulson, S. (1994). Relations of parenting style and parental involvement with ninth-grade students' achievement. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 14*(2), 250-271.
- Perry, T., Steele, C., & Hilliard, A. (2003). *Young Gifted and Black: Promoting High Achievement Among African-American Students*. Boston: Beacon Press Books.
- Reyes, O., Gillock, K. L., Kobus, K., & Sanchez, B. (2000). A longitudinal examination of the transition into senior high school for adolescents from urban, low-income status, and predominantly minority backgrounds [1].(Statistical Data Included). *(Statistical Data Included), 28*(4), 519.
- Roscigno, V. (1998). Race and the reproduction of educational disadvantage. *Social Forces, 76*(3), 1034-1051.
- Sanders, M. G., & Sanders, M. G. (1998). The effects of school, family, and community support on the academic achievement of African-American adolescents. *Urban Education, 33*(3), 385-409.
- Sanders, M. G. M. (1996). Building Family Partnerships That Last. *Educational Leadership, 54*(3), 61-66.
- Seidman, E., Aber, L. J., Allen, L., & French, S. E. (1996). The impact of the transition to high school on the self-system and perceived social context of poor urban youth. *American Journal of Community Psychology, v24*(n4), 489.
- Shephard, R., & Rose, H. (1995). The power of parents: An empowerment model for increasing involvement *Education, 115*(3), 373-389.



- Simmons, R. G., Black, A., & Zhou, Y. (1991). African-American versus white children and the transition into junior high school. *American Journal of Education*, 99(4), 481-520.
- Singh, K. K. (1995). The effects of four components of parental involvement on eighth-grade student achievement: Structural analysis of NELS-88 data. *School Psychology Review*, 24(2), 299-317.
- Smith, J. B. (1997). Effects of eighth-grade transition programs on high school retention and experiences. *Journal of Educational Research*, 90(3), 144.
- Starratt, R. J. (2004). *Ethical Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Steele, C. (1992). Race and the schooling of black Americans. *The Atlantic Monthly*, 269(4), 68-78.
- Sui-Chu, E. H., & Willms, J. D. (1996). Effects of parental involvement on eighth-grade achievement. *Sociology of Education*, 69(April), 126-141.
- Taylor, K. (1998). The high cost of college is dampening the interest of many blacks in seeking higher education. *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, Winter 1998-1999(22), 44-45.
- Taylor, S. J., & Bogdan, R. (1984). *Introduction to qualitative research methods: The search for meanings*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Ubersax, J. (2006). Likert Scales: Dispelling the Confusion. Retrieved June 1, 2007, from <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/jsuebersax/likert.htm>.
- United States Census Bureau. (2005a). *General Demographic Characteristics*. Retrieved June 4, 2007, from <http://censtats.census.gov/data/US/01000.pdf>.

United States Census Bureau. (2005b). *Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months*. Retrieved June 4, 2007, from [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/STTable?\\_bm=y&-geo\\_id=01000US&-qr\\_name=ACS\\_2006\\_EST\\_G00\\_S1701&-ds\\_name=ACS\\_2006\\_EST\\_G00\\_](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/STTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=01000US&-qr_name=ACS_2006_EST_G00_S1701&-ds_name=ACS_2006_EST_G00_).

United States Census Bureau. (2006). *America's Families and Living Arrangements: 2006*. Retrieved June 4, 2007, from <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2006.html>.

United States Department of Education. (1996). *Parents' reports of school practices to involve families*. Retrieved May 28, 2007, from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2006041>.

United States Department of Education. (2004). *Public School Choice: Non-Regulatory Guidance*. Retrieved June 4, 2007, from <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/schoolchoiceguid.pdf>.

United States Department of Education. (2006a). *The Condition of Education*. Retrieved May 28, 2007, from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2006071>.

United States Department of Education. (2006b). *Number of persons age 18 and over, by highest level of education attained, age, sex, and race/ethnicity: 2005*. Retrieved June 4, 2007, from [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables\\_1.asp#Ch1Sub3](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables_1.asp#Ch1Sub3).

United States Department of Education. (2006c). *SAT score averages of college-bound seniors, by race/ethnicity*. Retrieved June 4, 2007, from <http://nces.ed.gov/FastFacts/display.asp?id=171>.

Yin, R. K. (1994). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (2 ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.