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Running Head: PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Parents with Criminal History and Their Experiences Navigating Parental Involvement in an  
Urban Elementary School: A Case Study

by

Stephanie L. White

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of Bellarmine University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

July 2018

## PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

### Abstract

This dissertation examined the experiences of parents with criminal record history who want to participate in their child's education. A convergent mixed methods design aided the researcher to quantitatively measure levels of involvement within a high poverty, urban elementary school with the Parent Survey of Family and Community Involvement in the Elementary and Middle Grades (Sheldon & Epstein, 2007) and qualitatively with an embedded case study (Yin, 2014) with parents (n=3) as embedded units of analysis. Participants in the case study had to navigate around a rejected volunteer background check and restrictive school district policy to be involved in the education of their student. Parental involvement was analyzed through Epstein's (1995) deductive framework of six types of parental involvement. The study was bound by student enrollment in a high poverty, urban elementary school in the Southeastern region of the United States. Findings are presented in three themes to demonstrate how parents experience involvement despite criminal record history and navigating conditions of concentrated poverty.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

### Acknowledgments

This has been a journey of exposure, growth, and scholarship. I am grateful to have the resources and information to undertake the process of completing my Doctor of Philosophy Degree. I do this so I am better equipped to help others gain access to resources and understand how to navigate their own situations to reach goals.

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Last, thank God we are thinking people and have power in our words and actions to make the lives of others better. Our world changes daily and this educational endeavor has made me a better consumer of information. I will use my continued development as a researcher and practitioner to serve our children and families in the pursuit of a society that values each of its members.

# PARENT INVOLVEMENT

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	2
Acknowledgments .....	3
List of Tables .....	9
List of Figures .....	9
Chapter One: Overview of Study .....	10
Problem Statement .....	12
Purpose of the Study .....	15
Assumptions .....	16
Limitations .....	16
Key Terms .....	17
Summary .....	18
Chapter Two: Literature Review .....	20
Parental Involvement Historical Perspective .....	21
Parental Involvement Theoretical Perspective .....	23
Significance of Parental Involvement .....	24
Effects of Parental Involvement .....	26
High Poverty Urban Elementary Schools .....	27
Neighborhood Crime .....	28
Student Mobility .....	28
Poverty and Achievement .....	29
Behavior Issues .....	30
Six Types of Parental Involvement .....	30

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parenting .....	31
Communicating .....	33
Volunteering .....	33
Learning at Home .....	34
Decision-Making .....	34
Collaborating with the Community .....	34
Limiting Factors .....	35
Poverty .....	35
Parental Life Context .....	35
Stigma .....	36
School District Policy .....	39
Volunteer Background Check Denial .....	40
Unintended Consequences of Purposive Social Action .....	42
States and Volunteer Background Checks .....	44
Parents with Criminal Record History .....	46
Conceptual Framework .....	49
The Developing Parent .....	53
Embedded Influence .....	53
Parents and the Involvement Continuum.....	54
Micro-System .....	54
Meso-System .....	57
Exo-System .....	57
Macro-System .....	58

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Chapter 2 Summary .....	58
Chapter 3: Methodology .....	61
Context of the Study .....	62
School District .....	62
Community Context .....	64
Low Achievement Scores .....	65
Behavior Issues .....	66
Mixed Methods Research Design .....	67
Quantitative Sampling and Approach .....	69
Quantitative Data Collection .....	70
Survey Instrument .....	70
Qualitative Research Design .....	73
Qualitative Sampling and Approach .....	74
Qualitative Participants .....	75
Qualitative Data Collection .....	76
Interviews .....	77
Observations .....	79
Artifacts .....	81
Role of the Researcher .....	82
Bias .....	84
Reactivity .....	86
Analysis Design .....	87
Phase 1 .....	88

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Phase 2 .....	88
Phase 3 .....	93
Chapter 3 Summary .....	93
Chapter 4: Results and Findings .....	94
Question 1: Levels of Involvement .....	96
Deacon Elementary .....	96
Survey Results .....	97
The School’s Contact with Parents .....	102
Parental Involvement .....	104
Parental Ideas .....	106
Connections with other Parents .....	108
Survey Summary .....	111
Question 2: Parent Experiences .....	112
Participant Profiles .....	114
Ms. Jackson .....	114
Ms. Taylor .....	123
Ms. Smith .....	131
Common Themes .....	135
Working Around Policy Restrictions and Limitations .....	135
Development of Parent Role Construction and Efficacy .....	140
Active Negotiation of Criminal Record History and Poverty Contexts .....	145
Convergent Findings .....	151



## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Chapter 4 Summary .....	159
Chapter 5: Discussion .....	161
Overview of Chapter 5 .....	161
Discussion of Findings .....	162
Theoretical Implications .....	163
Practical Implications .....	168
Future Research .....	171
Appendix A: Interview Protocols .....	172
Appendix B: Consent Forms .....	174
References.....	178

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

### List of Tables

Table 1: States and Their Requirements for Criminal Background Checks	45
Table 2: Four Methods of Data Collection	69
Table 3: Qualitative Data Collection by Participant	77
Table 4: Data Coding Matrix	90
Table 5: Data Coding Matrix and Conceptual Framework	92
Table 6: Survey Internal Consistency	100
Table 7: The School's Contact with Parents	103
Table 8: Parental Involvement	105
Table 9: Parental Role Construction	107
Table 10: Parental Efficacy	108
Table 11: Connections with other Parents	109

### List of Figures

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework	51
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## **Chapter 1 Overview of Study**

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Research provides evidence that parental involvement has significant positive impact on student achievement in school (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Over the past two decades, researchers (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2003; Jeynes, 2005; Wilder, 2013) have synthesized the literature through meta-analyses and a meta-synthesis reaffirming the benefits of parental involvement. Henderson and Berla (1994) concluded the most accurate predictors of school success for students are the family's ability to set high, but reasonable expectations for learning and careers, create a home environment conducive to learning, and be involved in the school community.

For many families, the ability to create the abovementioned conditions is will, skill and willingness to take advice. For others, who are the focus of this research, the ability to be involved in the school community is hindered by criminal record history. Parents or family members who have criminal record history are in danger of failing volunteer background checks, which are often mandated by the state and school board policy. This study focuses on one urban school district in the Southeastern United States where background checks are required. Parents and family members cannot fully participate in the schooling of their children without participating in these mandated checks (District Volunteer Center, 2012).

Utilizing a convergent mixed methods design within an embedded case study (Yin,2014), the researcher seeks to investigate the experiences of parents with criminal record history who want to fully participate in their children's schooling. A sample of three parents have been identified at Deacon Elementary School. All participants have been rejected for inclusion in volunteer activities as a result of a denied volunteer background check or have chosen not to complete a volunteer background check due to anticipated denial. A survey will measure parental perceptions of school and community involvement at Deacon Elementary through self-

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

report and situate this data in a national context with other studies that utilize this same survey by Sheldon and Epstein (2007).

Information gained in this study may provide a context for educators, families, and policy makers to better assess the role and extent that volunteer criminal background checks play in creating barriers to parental involvement. Context for this study includes description of concentrated poverty within the urban setting in which the study school is situated. For parents and students already negotiating survival in adverse conditions, the criminal background check as a barrier to involvement is especially prevalent in high poverty elementary schools; which are those in the top quartile of poverty – 75% or above (Title I, Part A Handbook, 2016-2017).

Additionally, this research may give voice to a marginalized group and serve as a potential springboard for policy change in regards to the current implementation of volunteer criminal background checks in one urban school district. The current policy in this school district in the Southeastern region of the United States, outlines that parents who have been “...convicted or plead guilty to any drug offenses in the past seven years; sexual offenses; offenses against minors; deadly weapons; violent abusive, threatening, or harassment offenses; or any felony offense...” are prohibited from serving as volunteers (School Board Policy 03.6, 2014, “Basis for Disqualification” para. 1).

Utilizing the theoretical frameworks of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) embedded influence, Epstein’s (1987) expansion of the theory with her overlapping spheres of influence, Erikson’s (1950) eight ages of man, in particular step seven that deals with generativity vs. stagnation, and Goffman’s (1963) work on management of spoiled identity, the researcher plans to investigate the experiences of parents who want to participate with their child’s schooling and have been denied due to rejected volunteer background checks or chose not to submit a background check

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

due to expected denial. Through these theoretical lenses, the researcher aims to gain perspective as to how parents navigate school involvement and how their experiences are impacted by criminal record history. Outcomes may provide implications as to a course of action to assist parents, schools, districts, and policy makers to strengthen the role of school and family partnerships.

### **Problem Statement**

Research consensus (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2005; Wilder, 2014) acknowledges parent involvement as a positive support to school achievement. Federal and legislative support values parental involvement through inclusion in the national Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) and allocation of federal Title Funds to financially support school districts with implementation of parent focused activities that support achievement (Title I Part A, 2017). Title funding is appropriated with the intention of offsetting the deleterious effects of poverty for the nation's most at-risk students. Policy language includes creating a compact between parents and the school as to their dual responsibilities for impacting student achievement (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015).

Approximately 21% of children in the United States live in concentrated poverty and 29% of children have parents without secure employment. Among this percentage, the rate of African American children in poverty triples that of Caucasian children documented at 36% and 12% respectively (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017). Nationally, 35% of children are raised in single-parent households and 14% of children are raised with the head of the family lacking a high school diploma. Last, reading achievement based on the National Assessment of Educational Progress show that only 37% of fourth graders are proficient in reading and 40% are proficient in math. Differences in scores between African-American and Caucasian students

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

showed a 25 point difference in average scores, with African-American children at the deficit end (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

Education has been considered an equalizer and allows access and opportunity for students to build and explore their human capital in preparation to participate in the capitalist society of the United States (Grove & Montgomery, 2003). Hindering equal access are community and institutional inequities that perpetuate minimal resources for high poverty neighborhoods and schools, difficulty with attaining highly qualified and experienced teachers, and perceived low levels of parental support (Lee & Burkam, 2002).

Parent involvement funds supplied by Title programs are allocated to encourage parent engagement in academic processes. Popular types of school involvement for parents has traditionally been volunteering at the school, chaperoning field trips, participating with the Parent-Teacher Association and committees to support school governance, and attending school events. Based on federal legislation to volunteer or work with children, adult volunteers must submit to a criminal background check. The National Child Protection Act (1993) established mandates and funding to create an online database housing criminal history, especially related child physical and sexual abuse.

Intended to deny access to predatory individuals, states implemented the appropriate measures to enforce the background checks. For parents with school-aged children, submitting to and consequently being denied as a school volunteer impacts how parents are involved in their child's education. An unintended consequence of this purposive action, mandating the volunteer background check, in one particular Southeastern state acts a barrier to involvement for parents with criminal record history.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Across the United States there is variation in the implementation of criminal background checks for school volunteers. In many states it is a firm requirement, whereas other states and school districts have degrees of implementation that may leave room for new interpretation for policy makers and practitioners. Among the 50 states, seven require background checks, but with caveats leveraging the degree of supervision and whether volunteers are parents of children within the school. This variation provides an implementation gap that may allow space for changes in practice in the study state to be more inclusive of parents who have criminal record history and want to be involved with their child's education.

In one urban school district, students in high poverty schools are affected by the use of volunteer criminal background checks that eliminate the ability to volunteer if parents have criminal record history. According to data within the study school district, there is significant correlation between the number of volunteer rejections and the poverty level of families within the schools, based on information provided from free and reduced lunch federal applications (Vanderhaar, 2012). Rejections disproportionately affect high poverty schools as some students have parents that are in prison, have served a prison or jail sentence, or have been convicted of a crime without serving a jail sentence. Parents who want to be part of the educational process, may be unable to fully participate due to past criminal record history.

The interest of the researcher concerns the experiences of parents who have either submitted a volunteer criminal background check and been denied as volunteers or chose not to submit a volunteer background check due to anticipated denial.

Parents who are rejected as full volunteers are able to participate in their children's education, but in limited ways. In the study school district permitted participation of rejected, but motivated parents can include having lunch with their student during the school day and

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

attending a field trip with restrictions that they only interact with their particular student and provide their own transportation to and from the fieldtrip. Attending sport and extracurricular events as spectators, and attending events after school hours with their student are permissible. Restrictions include volunteering within the school building or fieldtrips in any capacity that would have them interact with students other than their own and serving on site-based decision-making committees, which require a background check and fingerprinting that assist in school governance (interview, Volunteer Center Coordinator, February 2017). As a principal in a high poverty elementary school, the researcher has experienced the effects of low parental involvement and the whispered confessions of why a parent is unable to chaperone a field trip as these parents struggle with being excluded due to past indiscretions.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of parents with criminal record history who want to participate with their child's schooling. It is the intention of the researcher to explore how parents with criminal record history support their student's education relative to the research literature concerning parent involvement and its positive correlation to student achievement.

Moving forward, voices of families who encounter barriers may add qualitative data to the research literature regarding the impact of state and local school volunteer background check policies on student achievement in high poverty elementary schools. Experiences of parents will be collected in effort to address the following two research questions:

1. What is the level of parental involvement in an urban elementary school navigating conditions of high poverty, neighborhood crime, student mobility, high levels of behavior incidents, and low achievement scores on state assessment?



## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

2. Within this context, for parents with criminal record history, what are parents' experiences of involvement with their child's schooling?

It is hypothesized that levels of parental involvement are relatively low in the study school due to the effects of concentrated poverty and the school district implementation of the volunteer criminal background check. For parents with criminal record history, it is expected they aim to be involved with their children's education, similar to parents without this prohibitive history. As such, students of these motivated parents should also gain positive benefits from involvement due to their parent's expectations for school and career success. Last, it is hypothesized that being an active, involved parent may act as a mediating factor for recidivism for these parents with criminal history. Examining the experiences of parents with criminal record history who want to be involved with their child's education may provide a discrepant lens in which to examine parental beliefs and practices around participation and value placed on education within families from high poverty communities who have criminal record history.

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions for this study include the notion that parents want to be active participants in the education of their children and work in partnership with schools. Volunteer background check policies act as a barrier to participation, as its implementation is exclusionary of those with criminal history. As such, an unintended consequence of implementation is disproportionate exclusion in high poverty schools that work to prevent parents from becoming wholly involved. Thus, students are unable to receive benefits available to those with active parents.

### **Limitations**

A limitation to this study is the small sample size for qualitative data collection. Parents had to voluntarily disclose if they had criminal record history. Attempts at recruiting parents at

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

school events proved difficult due to this disclosure and the few parents recommended to the researcher by the gatekeeper were unresponsive to requests from the researcher. After obtaining district permission to recruit parents through a mass communication system used by the principal to communicate with families, three subjects agreed to participate in exchange for a \$25 Visa gift card for each interview.

### **Key Terms**

**Parental involvement** is the center of this research study. Parental involvement (Reglin, 1993) is defined as any significant member of a child's family being actively involved in and/or visible in the child's schooling. Involvement is viewed through Epstein's (1995) framework for six types of involvement that includes parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community.

Parenting and learning at home involve setting expectations for learning, behavior, and success. Additionally, learning at home includes parental efforts to make a home environment that is conducive to learning, including providing materials, dedicated space, activities and routines that support student learning. Communicating involves school-to-home and home-to-school communication concerning student progress and school events. Volunteering is directly related to time spent completing projects, chaperoning, or providing supervision during the school day or with school-related activities. Decision-making includes participation with school governance and committees to support and advocate for all students within the school building. Last, collaborating with the community involves attending and participating with community events and supports to increase student learning and growth. These six types of involvement will frame the way parental participation is understood in this dissertation.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

**Parental role construction** as it relates to parent involvement in schools is defined by Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, and Hoover- Dempsey (2005) as beliefs parents have regarding what they should do to support their child's education. Also part of the parenting involvement type, parental role construction explores what a parent internalizes as their role in the lives of their children constructed from previous experiences, observations from their upbringing, and observations from others who inhabit the same role.

**Parental efficacy** is a parent's belief that they are able to act on their believed capabilities to support their children in school and their actions will work to produce desired outcomes (Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). Part of the parenting involvement type one, parental self-efficacy is confidence that parents can impact learning outcomes for their children.

**Stigma** refers to a characteristic, attribute, or social identity that makes its bearer devalued within specific social contexts (Goffman, 1963). In this research, stigma is discussed as a negative effect of criminal record history.

### Summary

The literature on parent involvement indicates its positive influence on student achievement. In high poverty schools, student achievement has traditionally been low due to the effects of poverty and other factors that negatively impact student learning and growth. Traditionally, low parental involvement in high poverty schools has been characterized as disinterest or unwillingness to be present in the school. However, for parents with criminal record history, the ability to fully participate or be involved in their child's schooling may be hindered by the inability to pass the volunteer background check. This study aims to add to the literature concerning parental involvement in high poverty, urban elementary schools.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Examining the experience of parents with criminal record history who are involved with their child's education provides voice to a marginalized group and may provide evidence to promote policy changes that are more inclusive of all parents to support student achievement.

### Chapter 2 Literature Review

In this chapter, the review of the literature is based on the problem statement that for parents with criminal record history, volunteer background checks may be a barrier to parental involvement in a high poverty, urban elementary school in the Southeastern region of the United States.

Searches were conducted using print materials and online databases that include JSTOR, EBSCOhost, and ERIC. Search topics for this dissertation included several key terms to investigate *parent involvement*, *poverty*, *criminal record history*, *urban elementary schools*, and *high poverty elementary schools*. Hundreds of articles were returned from these search terms so additional terms were added to filter articles as appropriate.

This chapter will present a review of the literature framing this study. The review begins with the historical and theoretical perspectives of parent involvement in schools. Then the significance and impact of parent involvement, along with contextual factors for high poverty schools are presented to provide a foundation for how parent involvement is understood in conjunction with adverse factors present in high poverty, urban elementary schools. Next, the conceptual framework is presented to demonstrate how parents within this study navigate towards involvement, as defined by Epstein's (1995) framework of six types of parental involvement. The conceptual framework is a mediation model. Parents with criminal record history develop as they interact among four different environments encompassing home, school, work, and society to achieve engagement with their child's education. Mediating involvement are limiting factors including criminal record history, failed volunteer background checks, poverty, and life context.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

### **Parental Involvement Historical Perspective**

Parental involvement as a practice with American schools has been interwoven into the fabric of American life and practices for centuries, dating back to the Puritans. In the following section, the evolution of parental involvement in schools will be detailed to provide a picture of the way involvement has been and is currently understood in schools.

The Puritans emphasized and believed a strong bond between home and church to be the prerequisite of a child's academic success (Jeynes, 2011). From the earliest European settlements in America, school and family partnerships have been an integral component of education and regarded as necessary for effective instruction. In the early 1800s the New York Free School Society, founded by DeWitt Clinton and Joseph Lancaster, believed parents and schools working in partnership would greatly benefit the moral development of students (Bourne, 1870; Cornog, 1998; Kaestle, 1973). Parents, feeling common schools would denigrate their roles as the primary educators for their children, challenged the common school under the direction of Horace Mann and others in the early 19th century.

These views changed when Johann Pestalozzi, a Swiss educator, contributed to common schools by emphasizing the maternal role of schools and teachers for children while away from home. As a result (Spring as cited in Jeynes, 2011), Pestalozzi spent much of his career "...trying to allay the concerns of parents about the realities of schooling," and honored parents by emphasizing the maternal role of the teacher and schools in the moral training of students in concert with values taught in the home (p. 7). In addition Mann emphasized (Jeynes, 2011) the school's responsibility to uphold the moral values of the home and society.

The growth of common schools throughout the nineteenth century under Horace Mann led to more disciplined training for teachers, oversight by inspectors and school boards, and the

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

regard of teaching as a profession. Consequently, although the concept of parental involvement was still valued, according to researchers (Lindle, 1990; Peressini, 1998) many teachers began to regard themselves as professionals with significantly more experience and education than parents, thereby minimizing the efforts to involve parents in schooling.

School and family partnerships were again scrutinized with the advent of the industrial revolution where family occupations moved from being predominantly agricultural to parents working in factories away from home (Jeynes, 2011). The role of schools, as observed by John Dewey (1990), became a place of specialized instruction to meet the changing demands of the new industry driven economy. Dewey (1990) asserted teachers should teach pupils to think for themselves as opposed to being an extension of the family values within the classroom.

According to Jeynes (2011) this put a wedge in the longstanding partnerships of schools and parents in American education that remained prevalent until the 1960s.

A reemergence of parental involvement (Jeynes, 2011) came about in the 1960s and 1970s as the need to examine family structure, involvement in schools, and their relation to educational outcomes surfaced on the heels of increased divorce rates and emergence of single family households as a normative situation. The release of the Coleman Report in 1966 cited familial factors (Coleman, 1988) as a significant variable that influenced school outcomes. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s educational leaders grew more concerned with the lack of educational support students received at home and the negative effects it had on student success in school since the late 1950s and 1960s. As a result of the Coleman Report and subsequent findings, researchers (Ballantine, 1999; Griffith, 1996; Keith & Lichtman, 1994, & Lindle 1990) suggest parental involvement research evolved from three realities: single parents needed guidance to support their students; intact family structure did not guarantee involvement; and a

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

need for educator strategies to support students from varying circumstances. Thus the emergence of parental involvement research (Jeynes, 2011) became prevalent in the 1980s in response to increased divorce rates from 1960-1973, decreased Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores, and overall decreased academic achievement. During this same time, decreased achievement was also attributed to the dissolution of traditional family structure, the influx of single parent homes with mothers working outside of the home, and parents spending less time with their children (Jeynes, 2011).

### **Parental Involvement Theoretical Perspective**

Theoretical perspectives concerning parental involvement have evolved as being separate, shared, and sequenced contributors of influence as parents, school staff, and community members maintain overlapping responsibilities that contribute to student achievement (Epstein, 2010). Early perspectives recognized the separate, individual contributions of the institution and that of the family. Educational institutions and families were considered most effective when maintaining their independent goals, standards and activities (Alkin, 1992). Parsons (1959) recognized the fundamental partnerships of the family and school through the socialization process of the student once they entered school. Parson (1959) asserted fundamental conditions underlying the socialization process of pupils which consisted of four principles: (1) The emancipation of the child from the familiar emotional attachment; (2) Internalization of societal norms and values one must adopt to be successful in a school setting above and beyond what is learned within the family; (3) Differential rewards based on achievement in school; and (4) Societal point of view regarding selection and value added to human resources based on later adult roles (p. 309). These principles adjusted the lens of familial and societal input towards the education of students.



## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Shared responsibilities between the home and educational institution emphasize cooperation, coordination, and collaboration to communicate common goals, support, and values that are in the best interest of the student in both scenarios that support learning (Epstein, 2010). Epstein (2010) contends the assumption of shared responsibility is likened to the nested connections of human development that cause the individual to grow relative to interactions between self and the various environments of interaction (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

With sequential, but interdependent roles, the educational institution acted as a graduation towards independence of the young student in that the more independent a student was upon entering school, the more adept the student at maneuvering the social system of the classroom and finding academic and/or moral success and achievement (Alkin, 1992). In absence of a partnership, the family served a preliminary role, preparing children to be students and the school assumed the role of educating the student. This sequenced approach required families to take care of preliminary activities in the home to prepare students for the formal educational setting and once students enter educational institutions, the institution assumed the responsibility for the formal education of the student.

The preceding evolution of parental involvement frames the way involvement is understood in schools. Over time the prevalence of separate, shared, or sequenced roles for supporting students in school has fluctuated among the three scenarios and exist today in combinations of all three forms differentiated by the accepted culture of a particular school or community.

### **Significance of Parental Involvement**

The term parental involvement has, itself, evolved to a broader, but more accurate nomenclature of school and family partnerships, thus stressing the importance of a reciprocal

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

relationship with school entities and adults who assume responsibility for students (Alkin, 1992). According to Alkin (1992) using partnership as a component nurtures a formal agreement that contributes to shared goals and resulting benefits of the collaboration between schools and families in the education of students.

Epstein (2010) suggested using the terms school, family, and community partnerships to show that parents, educators, and members of the community share the responsibility of educating students. Although the research references Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence (1987) and framework for the six types of involvement (1995), in this study, the term parental involvement is used to maintain focus on the parent.

Epstein's (2010) model demonstrates the overlap of the spheres of influence consisting of home, school, and the community. These influences overlap and pull apart with time as a continuum, sharing the greatest overlap during the primary or elementary school years. Thus, this study is bound by student enrollment in a particular elementary school.

The degree of overlap is based on time in the historical sense and the experiences and or pressures the three entities exert on one another. For example, if the family is directly involved with schooling and the school reaches out to families for assistance with learning, participation, and homework help, the family and school overlap will be much greater than that of the community. Time, as a continuum, has been found less influential with the overlapping spheres of influence. Epstein (1987) asserts that over time, students will have different teachers and as they grow older, parents feel less knowledgeable about how to help students, causing a decreasing overlap of spheres as the student matriculates through school. Therefore, it is crucial that parental involvement is encouraged and facilitated during the elementary years to improve the achievement trajectory of students.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

### **Effects of Parental Involvement**

Parental involvement as a factor to increase achievement is supported by meta-analysis findings from Henderson and Berla (1994). Other researchers (Epstein 1987; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Jeynes, 2003, 2011) also contend active involvement by parents in their child's schooling led to academic achievement. In a meta-synthesis of nine meta-analyses regarding the impact of parental involvement on student achievement, Wilder (2014) concluded the involvement of parents with schooling has significant, positive effects on student achievement and these results hold across grade levels and ethnic groups.

Fan and Chen (2001) in their meta-analysis reviewing parental involvement and academic achievement surmised the greatest impact that parental involvement has on student achievement is derived from parental expectations for achievement. Jeynes (2003) found that African American students benefitted most among Latino and Asian students from parental involvement after controlling for socioeconomic status. In a study to examine the effects of parent expectations on student achievement for a low income sample, Loughlin-Presnal and Bierman (2017) found bidirectional influences with parental academic expectations and student achievement measures including the *Test of Word Reading Efficiency* (TOWRE) that measures reading fluency and teacher reports of academic progress in the areas of reading and language arts, speaking, and writing skills in elementary school (p. 1697). Their study demonstrated that parent influence was greatest in the early grades and primarily focused on child learning behaviors. As students mature, they shift to self-guided behaviors, gaining academic confidence in the later third through fifth grade elementary years.

As such, this study provided evidence that parent perceptions of their child's ability may become ingrained and less responsive to teacher feedback in the later elementary years

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

(Loughlin-Persnal & Bierman, 2017, p. 1703). Thus increasing and nurturing parental involvement in the elementary grades may act as a support and predictor of student achievement throughout a student's educational career.

The limited research on benefits to the participating parents or family members, include having voice in school based decision making, parent confidence in schools, increased teacher confidence in parents, increased efficacy with homework help, and can also encourage parents to participate in continuing education opportunities for themselves (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Examining the experiences of parents who strive to be involved as part of this study may support assertions by researchers regarding parental benefits and extend the research on benefits to parents with criminal record history as it may also contribute to generative outcomes that mediate recidivism.

### **High Poverty Urban Elementary Schools**

In high poverty, urban elementary schools, students reside in neighborhoods and attend schools that are engulfed in poverty and as such grapple with contextual issues (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014) associated with poverty such as neighborhood crime, student mobility, low achievement scores and behavior issues. Students may enter school with language deficits (Hart & Risley, 2003) of up to a thirty million-word gap by age four that situate them significantly behind their more affluent peers. Measuring performance in math and reading, Morrissey and Vinopal (2018) found that children in high poverty communities perform between one tenth and one fifth of a standard deviation lower than those in low poverty neighborhoods. Within a high poverty elementary school and community, Coley and Baker (2013) found that families may also lack access or have limited access to healthcare, food security, and quality childcare. The compounding effects of poverty provide additional complications for staff to navigate in high

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

poverty, urban elementary schools in order to educate students. Walsh, et. al, (2014) suggest an emerging consensus that non-cognitive barriers, in addition to academic needs, should be addressed by schools and community partners in order to improve academic success in high poverty urban elementary schools.

**Neighborhood crime.** High poverty concentrations within the community and neighborhoods put individuals and families that reside in these neighborhoods at-risk. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2017) 164,000 or 16% of children in the study state are living in poverty. Violence, crime, unemployment, and physical and mental health issues are more prevalent in high poverty neighborhoods (Davies, 2006). Shaw and McKay (1942) suggested that community factors may impact crime and delinquency moving from sole blame placed on individual psychology or biology. Later Kornhauser (1978) added that socially disorganized neighborhoods lack the social control to regulate behaviors of its members. As a result crime happens more frequently and community members start to internalize negative behaviors as normal and a delinquent subculture is formed and perpetuated. Bursik (1988) added that an individual's penchant for criminal or delinquent behavior is affected by individual behavioral factors as well as community level factors including tolerance of delinquency in socially disorganized neighborhoods.

**Student mobility.** Within the K-12 school system, student mobility refers to a measure of how often students move from one school to another within a school year. Sparks (2016) notes this measure affects moves outside of transitional points, for example moving from elementary to middle school, and is often related to residential mobility such as when families move to a new home or become homeless. For students living in poverty circumstances and attending high poverty urban schools, the student population could turn over by almost half in

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

the course of a school year (Sparks, 2016). Mehana and Reynolds (2004) in their meta-analysis analyzed studies over two decades and asserted that mobile students academically lagged three to four months behind their non-transient counterparts.

Gruman, Harachi, Catalano, and Fleming (2008) attribute mobility and poor educational outcomes to a loss in social capital. Social capital represents the relationships and social ties that are linked to children and parents within the school social system (Coleman, 1988). Parents may lose connections with parents of other students that provided resources and information to assist with child rearing. This may also weaken neighborhood ties for students with adults other than their parents that may provide additional support and supervision from what Coleman (1988) refers to as intergenerational closure. Intergenerational closure provides a support system for families so that adults are aware of the parent expectations of their children's friends so they can reinforce these expectations in the absence of the child's parent. With changes in residence and/or schools these weakened bonds may manifest as behavioral problems, further exacerbating academic concerns for students in poverty circumstances (Lleras & McKillip, 2017).

**Poverty and achievement.** Communities of concentrated poverty are at-risk of experiencing crime, violence, health issues, and unemployment (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017). Nationally, 21% of children are living below the poverty threshold. For African American children the rate jumps to 36% of children living below the poverty line. The effects of poverty significantly undermine emotional growth, school readiness, and cognitive functioning (Walsh et. al., 2014). Children living in concentrated poverty are less likely to have consistent cognitive stimulation, are read to less often, and engage in conversation with adults at a lower rate than children in middle-income households (Evans, 2004). According to the national report card from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 37% of

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

fourth grade students are proficient in reading and 40% are proficient in math. In 2017, there was a 28-point difference in reading scores (US Department of Education, 2017) between students eligible for the National School Lunch Program, which acts as a poverty measure, and those who were not eligible. Average reading scale scores for ineligible students was 236, while eligible students had an average score of 208.

**Behavior issues.** Researchers found that children between ages two and four interacted with aggressive children 40% more often in their neighborhood if they were considered low to middle class (Sinclair, Petit, Harrist, Dodge & Bates, 1994). Children from this demographic also experienced 70% more contact with aggressive friends. These aggressive interactions could impact school behavior that results in out of class consequences for students. Family discord and harsh parenting, associated with families in high poverty, affect the socioemotional status of children as well as cognitive development (Evans, 2004). As such, students have more difficulty regulating their behavior, which may manifest into inattention and or outbursts. Evans (2001) adds that crowding and high noise levels in residential spaces, apparent in high poverty neighborhoods, are associated with psychophysiological stress among children. Children in concentrated poverty are forced to grapple with multiple stressors that include harsh or inadequate living conditions, violence, inadequate healthcare and food insecurity.

### **Six Types of Parental Involvement**

Epstein (1995) discussed six types of parental involvement that are typical to interactions among schools, parents, and the community and is the theoretical framework in this study for understanding parental involvement in schools. These six types of involvement have no ordinal significance, the numbers are a means of identifying the different types of involvement and include: (1) parenting, (2) communicating, (3) volunteering, (4) learning at home, (5) decision

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

making, and (6) collaboration with the community. The types help to categorize involvement and allow for individual analysis of components to ascertain levels of engagement by parents, schools, and community members. Additionally they describe the action component on the part of the three entities of school, home, and community as Epstein (1995, 1997, 2010) contributes intervention strategies to assist schools with increasing participation. The following sections describe each involvement type in addition to key attributes that influence the parenting component.

**Type (1) parenting.** Parenting consists of actions or activities that take place in the home of the student including, but not limited to, establishing expectations (Fan & Chen, 2001) for learning, behavior, and achievement. Parenting encompasses taking care of the basic health and safety needs of the child (Brandt, 1989) in addition to their initial socialization (Alkin, 2012) in the home, preparing them to enter a second setting of daycare or school. Within the parenting component parental role construction and parental self-efficacy are key to developing as a parent of a school-aged child. These two constructs support understanding of the parenting role and the belief in the parent's ability to influence the actions and performance of their student.

***Parental role construction.*** As part of the parent knowledge base, parental role construction develops and contributes to how parents embrace the role they fill related to their child's education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Parental role construction encompasses beliefs, attitudes, expectations, and goals that work in concert to construct the ways in which parents perceive their responsibilities for impacting their child's educational performance (Hoover-Dempsey & Jones, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Role theory suggests that roles are socially constructed and influenced by the group expectations of which the parent



## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

is a member, as well as, expectations internalized by the individual that they have for themselves and what the individual thinks others may expect of them (Bandura, 1997).

Hoover-Dempsey and Jones (1997) asserted that through experiences parents develop ideas of how their role may be actualized through memberships with groups based on parenting responsibilities. These experiences among varying groups could include rearing habits from their own parents, peer group observations and advice, demands and expectations based on life circumstances and experiences rearing their own children. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) agree that role construction can be of particular importance to involvement as it can set parameters as to what parents deem as important and the actions they are willing to take as an advocate for their student.

*Parental self-efficacy.* Along with parental role construction, parental self-efficacy contributes to motivation for involvement. Parental efficacy alludes to parents having a strong sense of personal efficacy or belief in their own ability to positively impact outcomes for their child based on the goals and activities set forth in their constructed role as a parent with a “...stronger cognized set of goals for direct parental activity in their children’s education progress...” (Hoover-Dempsey & Jones, 1997, p. 6). These cognized goals imply that parents have purposefully set goals and shared expectations with their children regarding academic outcomes and achievement; this indicator is demonstrated to have significant, positive impact on academic achievement for students regardless of gender and ethnicity (Wilder, 2014). Both constructs, parental role construction and parental efficacy, are related. If parents have strong role construction, they have goals aligned to direct activities to support school success and thus confidence they are able to help their child succeed.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Aligned with the theoretical framework, research supports parental role construction and parental efficacy as contributing factors to the overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein, 1987). The beliefs, values, goals and expectations of parents lead to how they develop over time and categorize their behaviors into those that reflect their primary responsibility to their child's education, the importance of the school's responsibilities in supporting their child's education, and finally the school and family partnership to affect the educational success of their child (Epstein, 2010; Hoover-Dempsey & Jones, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997). In this study, constructs of involvement are measured by parent report (levels of involvement) in a survey that assesses the six types of involvement, along with parental role construction and parental efficacy that contribute to examining parental experiences.

**Type (2) communicating.** Communicating is inclusive of conversations, correspondence, solicitation of participation, and interactions that represent how the school talks and messages parents and how parents respond, request, or converse with the school regarding their student (Epstein, 1995). These exchanges of information may support student achievement and progress, alert entities of growth needs, or maintain the newsfeed of school and community happenings.

**Type (3) volunteering.** Volunteering is the action of participating with the school environment and may be in the form of chaperoning field trips and assisting in the classroom or other school areas. This can also include attending performances, sporting events, and parenting workshops. In this research, this component is especially vulnerable to the volunteer background check as school volunteers are required to submit to the background check and if denied, the potential volunteer is unable to participate in this capacity during the instructional day.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

**Type (4) learning at home.** Learning at home is instinctively linked to type (1) parenting. In creating routines and expectations for learning, behavior, and achievement, parents may support this by creating a home environment conducive to learning. This may include parent initiated or child initiated (Brandt, 1989) scenarios such as providing a quiet place to complete homework/homework help (Mau, 1997), and having books and reference materials for students to utilize. Celebrating success by displaying certificates, diplomas, and student work, planning family educational experiences for children that include visits to museums, historical locations, and activities that engage students in learning (Erion, 2006) such as outreach programs and tutoring contribute to a home environment supportive of learning.

**Type (5) decision-making.** Decision-making involves parent participation in school advisory or support organizations such as the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and committees that contribute to school governance. Similar to volunteering, this involvement type is complicated by the volunteer background check. Since these types of committees and organizations often contribute to the school community during the instructional day, participants are required to pass a volunteer background check to be on the PTA board and complete a fingerprint background check to join the site-based decision making council. Inability to participate in this area further marginalizes parents who are not able to advocate for the school or student body, essentially limiting parental influence in policy and day-to-day school operations.

**Type (6) collaborating with the community.** Collaborating with the community involves interaction among school, home, and community partners to support students. This could be after school programs, parent workshops, arts activities, visiting the public library, and healthcare services. The school may communicate to parents to promote community programs or parents may seek out and attend events within the community. Community partnership could

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

also include funding and facilitation of trainings and programs to support parenting and economic development, such as the work of the local Urban League, health services, arts, charitable organizations, and other agencies that have direct impact with families and schools.

### **Limiting Factors**

Detracting from involvement are limiting factors such as poverty, parental life context, stigma, district policy, and denied volunteer background checks. As the parent develops and moves toward involvement, these forces may negatively impact their path or complicate the feasibility of being involved. In the next sections, limiting factors will be discussed as it applies to parents working to be involved despite these complications or barriers.

***Poverty.*** Parents with criminal record history often struggle more to secure employment and may be relegated to low wage employment. In many states across the nation, completing applications for employment, housing, and government benefits are hindered with admission of criminal record history and inversely impact employment opportunities. Residing in impoverished neighborhoods lessens social capital and resources compared to more affluent neighborhoods (Evans, 2004). Linked to low-wage employment, parents may lack transportation to attend school functions, not have flexibility in their work schedule or may work multiple jobs that limit their time (Evans, 2004).

***Parental life context.*** Parents navigating involvement are essentially displaying their sense of efficacy and role construction. Beliefs and practices regarding how they parent and provide support for education are derived from their experiences over time with groups and individuals and the social influence those experiences exert on the decision making of parents (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007). The past experiences of parents within a school setting also dictate actions and may have positive or negative influence.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) in their model for the parental involvement process, examined motivation for involvement concerning three key components: motivational beliefs, invitations to the school, and life context variables. The life context variables include knowledge and personal experience of parents, their availability to participate, and the willingness to exert time and energy to participate. Knowledge and experience are indicative of how parents are able to support students, for example, if a parent is comfortable with their math knowledge, they are more likely to help with math homework or projects. Inversely, parental negative educational experiences may cause parents to avoid the school and assisting with school based activities due to discomfort in this setting. Availability, time and energy are indicative of employment status, schedule constraints, and physical ability to participate with the education of students through school visits and or homework help.

***Stigma.*** Individuals or groups grappling with stigma have a characteristic or social identity that has been devalued based on labeling, stereotypes, loss of status, or discrimination based on situations of power (Goffman, 1963; Link & Phelan, 2001). In this study, stigma is operationalized as a social blemish caused by criminal record history that negatively effects parents who want to participate in the education of their child. The power structures include the criminal justice system and the local school district as an agent of the state who controls public education. Criminal record history directly affects employment opportunities, housing, and in some cases, opportunities for government-based aide that may assist with supporting families (Mauer & Chesney-Lind, 2002).

Conceptualizing stigma, Link and Phelan (2001) extend Goffman's definition based on a convergence of "...elements of labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination co-occurring in a power situation that allows the components of stigma to unfold" (Link &

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Phelan, 2001, p. 367). Link and Phelan (2001) differ from Goffman in his use of the term attribute, which they replace with label. Utilizing the term attribute allows an acceptance or validity that is universal as opposed to Link and Phelan's (2001) assertion that labels are given or affixed to those who powerful members of society have deemed stigma worthy. Labels are oversimplified and taken for granted, which contributes to the power they have in separating individuals or groups from what is proper, appropriate, or accepted in a given society relative to time and place. Examples of oversimplification include calling a group white, black, gay, straight, etc.

Stereotyping allows for joining labels with undesirable characteristics that lead to group stigma. Stereotypes have been documented as providing cognitive shortcuts for people as they attempt to classify and categorize individuals and groups of people (Fisk, 1998). Labels given culturally provide subconscious shorthand for people, so they do not spend as much time making decisions at individual levels. As such, this may be indicative of label use with those with criminal records, reducing their identity to criminal and stigmatizing their existence.

One major component of Link and Phelan's (2001) research is the assertion of the difference power makes. Groups and individuals are stigmatized when an imbalance of power is in play, based on society, economics, and politics. Individuals with criminal history are susceptible to this imbalance due to incarceration (living outside of mainstream society), barriers to reintegration (inability to secure employment, housing, post secondary opportunities) and potential loss of political participation such as losing the right to vote (Mauer & Chesney-Lind, 2002).

Separation provides an "us versus them" mentality. Goffman (1963) deduced the more allied an individual is with the normal, the less stigmatized the individual will feel or perceive

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

himself to be. LeBel (2012) concluded that measures for targets' perception of stigma fall into one of three conceptual approaches:

(1) What an individual thinks most people think about the stigmatized group in general [perceived stigma]; (2) How an individual believes society views him or her personally because he or she is a member of the group [self-stigma]; and (3) Actual instances of stigmatization and discrimination due to one's status as a member of the group [enacted stigma]. (p. 91)

Throughout history, especially in the United States, there have been numerous examples where groups were separated into us-and-them categories such as Native Americans, African slaves and other immigrants in juxtaposition to European settlers in America.

In their discussion of labeling and the harm it can do towards separating individuals or stigmatized groups, Link and Phelan (2001) deduce:

Other components of the stigma process -the inking of labels to undesirable attributes - become the rationale for believing that negatively labeled persons are fundamentally different from those who don't share the label-different types of people. At the same time, when labeled persons are believed to be distinctly different, stereotyping can be smoothly accomplished because there is little harm in attributing all manner of bad characteristics to "them." In the extreme, the stigmatized person is thought to be so different from "us" as to be not really human. And again, in the extreme, all manner of horrific treatment of "them" becomes possible. (p. 370)

This labeling and devaluation leads to discrimination and consequent status loss. In the case of parents with criminal record history, not only can parents be labeled as criminals, but even more disastrous in the school environment, they could be considered uninterested. Without the

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

physical presence in the school building or frequent sightings at school events and committee meetings, school staff may assume that parents are not interested in being part of the school community and may even be reluctant to extend invitations for involvement. Within urban elementary schools, staff members often do not reside in the same community as the school and this may result in cultural and social disconnect creating a barrier between the school and the community (Noguera, 1996). Lipman (1998) adds that this disconnect can add to the development of bias as staff members may begin to view parents negatively and their involvement as a hopeless situation.

Parent involvement is part of child rearing and supporting educational achievement and success. Language in school policy for an urban school district in a Southeastern state does not differentiate between the roles of school volunteers. The policy refers to “school volunteers” with no language mentioning “parent volunteers.” With Title funds and mandates provided by ESSA to support parent involvement for at-risk students, the exclusion of specific language and consideration of parents has created an unintended consequence of exclusion, again putting our most vulnerable students at further risk of school failure.

***School district policy.*** School districts across the study state are governed by a local board of education that sets policy, binding the actions of schools and setting expectations for school operations and governance. Policies are developed and voted into action by board members and carried out at the school level. According to this urban school district’s policy, individuals who have been convicted or plead guilty to sexual offenses, drugs (within last seven years), deadly weapons, abuse, threats, harassment, or any felony offenses may not volunteer within the school district (District Volunteer Center, 2012). Denial as a volunteer directly impacts parent ability to participate as a volunteer during the school day, including chaperoning



## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

field trips or other events and daily activities, thus limiting access to the school, disallowing participation with governing bodies, and stunting potential social networking opportunities.

Based on the number of rejections from district volunteer background checks, this may also act as a disproportionate barrier to involvement in schools that have free and reduced lunch rates over the district 62% threshold in the study state that denotes a school eligible for federal Title funds to support schools affected by high poverty rates. In a brief regarding outcomes of volunteer background checks across the urban school district involved in this research, Vanderhaar (2012) found a significant correlation between the number of rejections and the poverty level of families.

***Volunteer background check denial.*** Students in high poverty schools are disproportionately affected by volunteer background checks that eliminate the ability of parents to volunteer if they have failed, thus denying access to information networks that could increase student achievement and upward mobility (Coleman, 1988). Already impacted by the effects of living in poverty circumstances, parents with criminal record history with students in a high poverty urban elementary school may gain a label of uninvolved or uncaring by teachers and staff members who do not encounter parents within the school building or at school sponsored events.

Wilder (2014) attested that school and family relationships towards involvement are most productive when parental expectations for students are evident. These expectations are a reflection of parental beliefs and actions towards success in school and educational attainment. When volunteer background checks disallow parental participation, this may inadvertently stymie this outward sharing of expectations for student educational success due to minimal parent-teacher interaction. For parents re-entering society following incarceration, family and

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

community support are crucial to the process of re-entry. Visher, Bakken, and Gunter (2013) suggested strong family connections and community engagement, such as participation with child rearing and supporting students in school may reduce the likelihood of recidivism.

Criminal record history complicates generative tendencies that allow parents to share knowledge and skills with their maturing student. A study by Visher, et. al. (2013) suggested generativity, a developmental stage in adulthood that drives individuals to shape the younger generation, may serve as a mediating factor for recidivism (Erikson, 1950). Their research suggested that fathers who cared for, actively participated, and had strong relationships with their children were more likely to be employed and less likely to commit crimes, violate their parole and return to prison. Arditti (2012) adds that former prisoners have lower rates of recidivism if they are able to maintain or develop close family ties. An assumption of this research is that the documented benefit of increased student achievement will lead to post-secondary opportunities and employment that diminishes poverty as students mature. For parents with criminal history, increased access to participation may decrease the likelihood of further criminal activity and may provide a space for transcending past indiscretions and decreasing life contextual factors that limit opportunities.

Federal law provides mandates, guidance, and Title funding (Title I Part A, 2017) for parental involvement as part of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) to support those at- risk of failure due to poverty disadvantages. Policy in the current study school mandates the use of volunteer background checks, essentially criminal background checks, for all school volunteers. Policy language refers to school volunteers and does not delineate language for parents as opposed to the community volunteer that does not have a student within the school.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

The National Child Protection Act (1993) established a national criminal history background check system to report child abuse crime information for the purpose of background checks for childcare workers. The bill was initially introduced in 1991 and championed by billionaire talk show host, Oprah Winfrey. A survivor of abuse, Ms. Winfrey sought to help create a national database of sexual predators and those who commit crimes against children to keep offenders from moving undetected from state to state, victimizing children.

The National Child Protection Act (1993) established mandates, funding, and timelines for all states to establish and maintain an online data base containing criminal history, especially related to child abuse, sex crimes and crimes against children to be used for background checks for childcare workers and volunteers. Over time, databases have evolved to contain criminal record history in any state, creating a national database. Intended to deny access to those who have committed crimes against children and vulnerable adults, unintended consequences of this purposive social action (Merton, 1936) have resulted in a barrier to accessing school involvement for parents with criminal record history.

### **Unintended Consequences of Purposive Social Action**

In this situation, the purposive social action was to create a bill and consequent database to track information so that predators were unable to move from state to state and have access to occupations or role groups that engage with children and vulnerable adults. With the demographic of parents with criminal record history within this study, the background check meant to shield children has also become a barrier to school participation for parents with students in high poverty, urban elementary schools.

Merton (1936) explored unintended consequences resulting from purposive social actions and brought forth three factors that contribute to these consequences: ignorance, error, and

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

“imperious immediacy of interest” (p. 901). Ignorance is explained as not having complete knowledge of phenomena. Error represents a mistake or involuntary omission of information that may prove pertinent to future outcomes following the initial outcome of the action. The third factor, “imperious immediacy of interest” results from the actor’s immediate primary concern superseding future consequences of the act. Losing access to school involvement due to criminal record history is an unintended consequence impacted by all three factors.

Elaborating on ignorance, Merton explains, “...the importance of ignorance as a factor is enhanced by the fact that exigencies of practical life frequently compel us to act with some confidence even though it is manifest that the information on which we base our action is not complete” (p. 900). In this scenario, knowledge of the impact of stigma or status loss on the individual with criminal history who has not committed a crime against a child but is excluded from participation acts as a factor or ignorance. Whether policy makers did not know, did not understand, or did not foresee parents as a role group affected by this policy, ignorance could be a component to this unintended consequence.

Error and immediacy of interest could also be contributing factors to an unintentional barrier to school access for parents. Merton (1936) offers the following concerning error.

Error may intrude itself, of course, in any phase of purposive action: we may err in our appraisal of the present situation, in our inference from this to the future objective situation, in our selection of a course of action, or finally in the execution of the action chosen. A common fallacy is frequently involved in the too-ready assumption that actions which have in the past led to the desired outcome will continue to do so (p. 901). In this example, policy makers may have erred in not projecting issues that derive from school volunteer policies that exclude all who do not meet specified criteria, consequently denying

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

access to students' parents whom research confirm as integral partners in education. In addition the immediate interest of the actors to implement the criminal background check for all who work or volunteer with children, superseded the possibility of parents having criminal record history and the impact of their exclusion from school involvement activities.

### **States and Volunteer Background Checks**

To date there is no comprehensive list of which states within the United States of America require criminal background checks for school volunteers. Reviewing the department of education websites for each state, 38 states require the use criminal background checks for school volunteers. One state does not require background checks, seven states do require criminal background checks but with restrictions (dependent on the degree of supervision, random checks) and four do not require them, but leave it up to individual districts. Table 1 identifies states and their requirements of criminal background checks for school volunteers. With the degree of implementation among states, there is precedent to evolve or amend policies to be more inclusive of parents. For example, in Maryland, Tennessee, and Virginia, the degree to which parents will be in a supervisory role over students is considered in conjunction with the background check. Georgia requires background checks only for overnight trips and Arizona lifts the requirement of background checks for parents of students within the school.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Table 1

States and Their requirements for Criminal Background Checks (CBC) for School Volunteers

Yes	No	Yes (restrictions)	No (restrictions)
AL, AK, CA, DE, HI, ID	AL	AZ (parent exempt)	CT (district discretion)
IL, IN, IA, KS, KY, LA, ME		CO (random)	FL (sex offender check)
MA, MI, MN, MS, MO, NE		GA (overnight trip)	OH (district discretion)
NV, NH, NJ, NM, NY, NC		MD (degree of supervision)	VT (district discretion)
ND, OK, OR, PA, RI, SC		MT (district discretion)	
SD, TN, TX, UT, WA, WV		TN (degree of supervision)	
WI, WY		VA (degree of supervision)	

*Note.* Random = parents complete CBC form, but checks are randomly submitted by the districts; Degree of supervision = level of supervision volunteers will have regarding students; District discretion = individual school districts choose screen process for volunteers; Sex offender check = criminal background checks are not mandatory, but districts must check volunteers against the sex offender registry.

Current school board policy denotes “school volunteers” as the language of the policy, not delineating between parents and other potential volunteers. Based on data in Table 1, 11 states have degrees of implementation that may serve as a model for ways to review the policy and perhaps allow caveats for parents or create some sort of sliding scale to permit more access to parents based on the research that parental involvement is known to benefit student achievement.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

### **Parents with Criminal Record History**

Within the 40 years following the Great Depression, the incarceration rate hovered around 100 inmates per 100,000 residents in the United States; but since 1985 the incarceration rate has increased at almost five times that rate. The number of state prisons alone has risen from 592 to approximately 1,020 (Moffa, 2009). With over two million Americans serving jail or prison sentences (Mauer & Chesney-Lind, 2002), society is heavily burdened with the collateral consequences of mass incarceration. Mauer and Chesney-Lind (2002) describe collateral consequences as invisible punishments that can include denial of public housing, benefits and government assistance, loss of parental rights, and access to educational grants and loans as well as diminished employment opportunities. Of those released after serving prison terms, some often return to prison due to structural inequities that make it difficult to reintegrate into society. In 2002, more than 47 million Americans (Mauer & Chesney-Lind, 2002) had criminal records and approximately 13 million Americans had been convicted of felony offenses.

Costs for housing inmates averages approximately \$29,000 per year and up to \$1.5 million for those serving life sentences. Comparatively, the average yearly cost of state colleges for in-state students is \$9,139 and \$22,958 for out-of-state students, and \$31,231 for private non-profit colleges (College Board, 2015). In actuality, our government is spending more to house inmates than the cost of sending students to college – three times the amount of in-state tuition. Efforts to change this trend begin with parental access to involvement to support student success, helping to mitigate the cycles of generational poverty, crime and recidivism.

According to data from the Federal Bureau of Prisons (July 2016), approximately 181,642 people are currently serving federal prison sentences in the United State, with 46% of offenders incarcerated on drug offenses. This does not include the individuals in jails run by

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

local government agencies. Following release, it is estimated (McKean & Ransford, 2004) that almost two-thirds of former prison inmates are rearrested within three years.

Research by Visher, Bakken and Gunter (2013) has also shown parents who have strong relationships and reside with their children before and after prison are less likely to return to prison than those without these relationships. Their study about re-entry of fathers into society following incarceration evidenced that those who were actively involved with their children worked more hours per week, were less likely to use drugs, and less likely to commit a crime or violate their parole eight months following their release from prison.

For parents with criminal record history in a particular school district located in the Southeastern United States, the ability to be involved with their child's schooling is complicated by district policy that mandates the use of background checks for all school volunteers. Policy language rejects volunteers who have plead guilty or been convicted of felonies, sexual offenses, drug offenses within the past seven years, violent crimes, crimes against children, or any harassment or threatening offenses (District Volunteer Center, 2012). Full participation includes volunteering within the classroom, chaperoning educational field trips, and fulfilling supervisory roles within the school building (lunchroom, library aide, etc.). Parents and family members who are unable to pass the volunteer background check are consequently denied this opportunity, thereby denying the child the opportunity to have a fully involved parent.

Without dismissing the severity of crimes against minors or violent felony offenses, students could benefit from a parental appeals process or a less restrictive policy on background checks, since positive outcomes have repeatedly been associated with parental involvement (Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). Teachers and educational psychologists contend parental involvement is particularly important to assist students who



## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

already face disadvantages that place them at-risk for school failure (Jeynes, 2005). Many levels of academic achievement are affected by parental involvement (Jeynes, 2005) including standardized testing and student grades. Involvement by parents may also work to reduce downward trends with achievement for students that grapple with divorce, single-parent homes and other adverse childhood conditions, including the incarceration of a parent (Sacks, Murphey, & Moore, 2014).

In addition, the stigma of having a criminal record may solicit a moral judgment by members of society that view the presence of a criminal record as an indication of future criminal probability (Denver, Pickett, & Bushway, 2017). Gelman and Heymann (1999) discussed language labels and deduced the use of noun labels such as offender and felon could alter how individuals with criminal record history are perceived within society. The Department of Justice (2016) made a policy change to use person first language moving from referral to an individual as a criminal to using language discussing a person with criminal record history. Wheelock (2005) asserts these collateral consequences or sanctions may act as a perpetual system of disadvantage that exacerbates the ability to have economic well-being and participate as part of the citizenry.

Uggen, Manza, and Thompson (2006) estimated that approximately 16 million people make up a “felon class” (p. 288) consisting of those who are currently serving a jail or prison sentence in addition to those convicted but not serving time and those who have completed their sentences, thus representing 7.5% of the adult population. Consequently, individuals that make up this felon class grapple with stigma and diminished status that impacts their community engagement and participation in the political process (Uggen, et. al., 2006).

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

For African American students, approximately 1 in 14 children have a parent in prison and with the logistical issues of visiting prisons, more than half have not seen the parent since being sent to prison (Mauer & Chesney-Lind, 2002). Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) data indicates that children experience stress as a result of traumatic events, such as having an incarcerated parent that may manifest as physical or mental limitations that may impact school performance (Sacks, 2018). Approximately 10 million children across the nation have experienced parental incarceration (Mauer, Nellis, & Schirmer, 2009). Fifteen percent of children in the study state have an incarcerated parent. This rate is the second highest in the nation and almost doubles the national average (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017).

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study consists of three components that capture the dynamics of parental involvement for parents with criminal backgrounds. The first is the theory of embedded influence framing the development of the parent as they navigate and are affected by environments such as home, school, work, and society (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). As parents move towards involvement, embedded influence follows the developing parent on this involvement continuum and provides a lens to view the nuances of each environment for each of the three participants that are part of the qualitative measures of parental involvement. The second component is the limiting factors, which inhibit or mediate involvement. These factors reflect the context of this study and the challenges faced by parents and urban elementary schools in high poverty neighborhoods. To be involved parents must work around or transcend these factors to participate with the education of their child. The third component is Epstein's (1995) model of six types of parental involvement, which frames the ways in which parents are involved with their child's schooling. The six components of parenting, communicating,

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community create a deductive lens to view participants' experiences as they participate with their child's education.

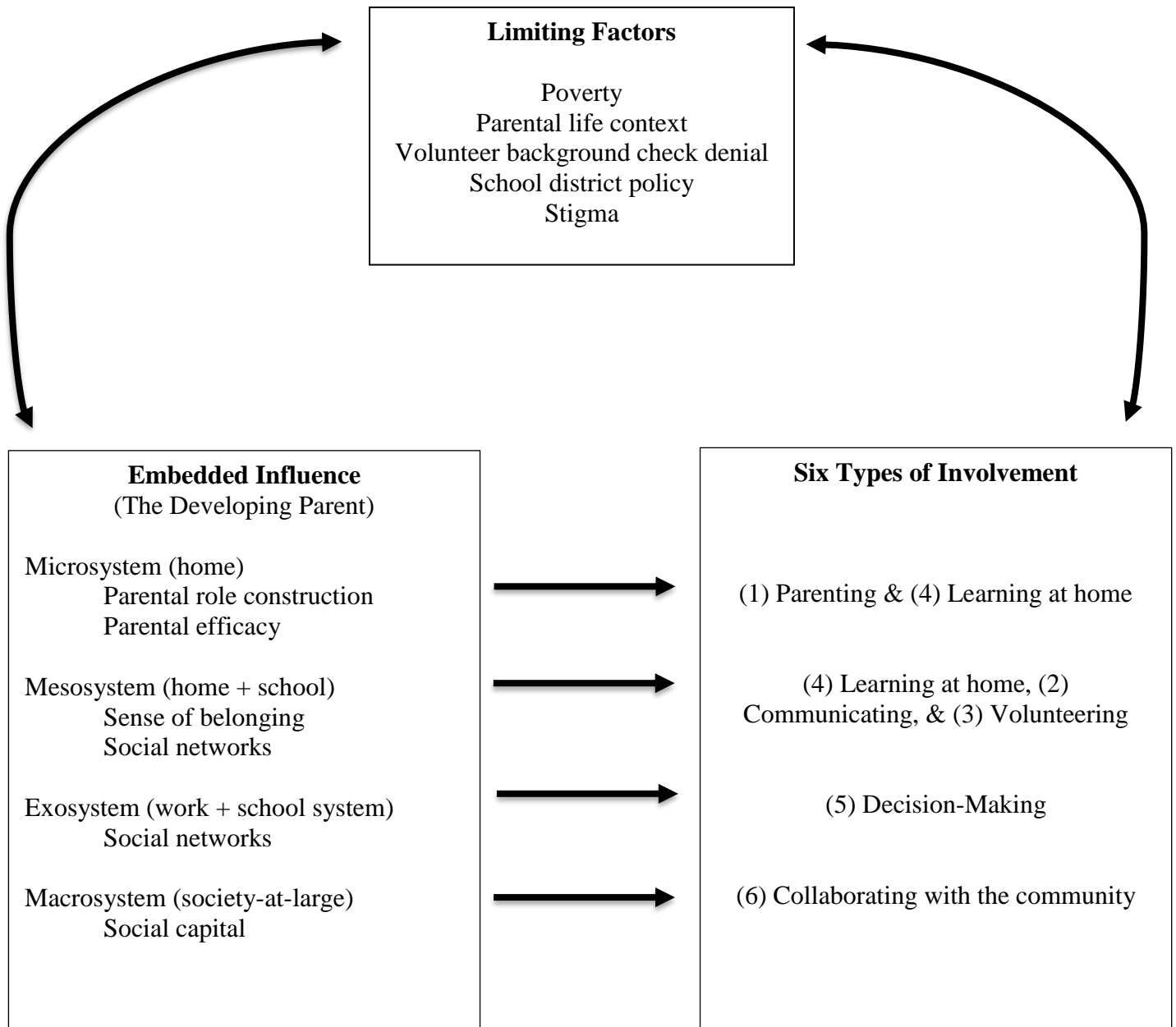
Figure 1 depicts the conceptual framework. As parents develop through embedded influence and move towards involvement, limiting factors may mediate their involvement or exert an influence on the ways in which parents participate in the education of their student.

Drawing upon theories of embedded influence (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to follow the path of individual parent development and overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein, 1987) to assess partnerships among home, school and community, involvement is studied based on parent actions and consequent results of participation. Generativity (Erickson, 1950) acts as a motivator for involvement as parents desire to pass on skills, work ideals and expectations to their student to increase chances at success. Last, stigma is operationalized as a limiting factor that may detract from involvement due to implementation of the criminal background check that restricts participation and negatively labels parents in the school setting; thus marginalizing their advocacy and ability to interact among the school community (Goffman, 1963; Link & Phelan, 2001). The researcher seeks to answer two questions.

1. What is the level of parental involvement in an urban elementary school navigating conditions of high poverty, neighborhood crime, student mobility, high levels of behavior incidents, and low achievement scores on state assessment?
2. Within this context, what are the experiences of parents with criminal record history as they participate with the education of their child?

# PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



In the involvement continuum, parents with criminal record history act as the developing individual in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of embedded influence. Beginning with the home environment or micro-system, parents act as a first teacher, preparing students based on their knowledge prior to enrolling in school. Development of the parent follows navigation

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

through multiple environments with parents being affected by these environments as well as exerting an effect on the environment as part of their participation moving from the micro-system (home) to the macro-system (society).

Moving towards involvement, parents may be motivated by generative tendencies that influence their decisions to share skills and knowledge with their children and support educational endeavors (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). Within this study involvement is relegated to six components in the Epstein (1995) framework that categorizes involvement as parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. Adversely impacting involvement are limiting factors including poverty, parental life contexts, school district volunteer policy, volunteer background check denial, and stigma as it relates to criminal record history.

School, family, and community partnerships are known to produce positive effects with achievement and sense of belonging of students and families, consequently providing positive achievement results for educational institutions (Epstein, 2010). As parents are involved in educational endeavors, their interaction and participation among home, school and community entities to support student success expand and contract based on beliefs that contribute to parental role construction and parental self-efficacy.

This study seeks to measure levels of parental involvement in an urban elementary school, based on self-reports of parental role construction, parental efficacy, sense of belonging, and existence of social networks. Within this same school, the researcher sought to also investigate the experiences of parents who must navigate criminal record history and school district policy to be fully involved in the education of their child.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

**The developing parent.** Within the conceptual framework, the parent develops as they negotiate multiple environments moving towards involvement in their child's education.

***Embedded influence.*** Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of nested connections contributed the embedded influence approach to family and school partnerships. The ecological model is focused on individual development impacted by influence from numerous settings of which an individual is part and the residual effects on the broader cultural and social system. Regarding parental involvement, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) calls attention to the ways in which relations between settings may affect happenings within settings.

The ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) within the ecology of human development involves the nested connections that contribute to the progressive mutual dependency of the developing human and the diverse properties of the immediate, changing surroundings in which the developing person lives; and is affected by relations between settings and by the greater contexts of which the settings are surrounded or embedded (p. 21). The nested ecological environments, referred to as the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro systems, are thought of as concentric circles nested within the next, much like Matryoshka dolls.

Bronfenbrenner's model (1979) represents the developing person, the parent, as a dynamic, growing entity that is not only affected by their environment, but also brings about change to the environment in which they exist. In Bronfenbrenner's model, the microsystem is patterned activities and roles within interpersonal interactions experienced by the developing person within a given setting (p. 22). In this research, the microsystem consists of the parent interactions within the home environment and direct contact with their student. The meso-system comprises interrelations among parent participation in two or more environments, such as

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

home, work, school, or the community (p. 25). In addition to the experiences of the parent, communication and social norms and expectations within and among the environments contribute to development.

The exo-system refers to settings in which the developing person does not actively participate but is affected by actions and decisions happening in that setting. This would be indicative of situations involving policy development and governing rules and regulations; such as employment flexibility or restrictions, social networks, school boards, and both local and federal government. The macro-system is the "... consistencies in the form and content of the lower order systems (micro-, meso-, exo-) that exist or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies" (p. 26). In this context, schools, homes, and communities all exist in the United States with similar buildings, dwellings, and social order, yet may have extreme diversity depending on socio-economic status, location, and environmental attributes. In conjunction with this diversity; religious beliefs, attitudes, values, ethnicities, and culture shape the individual contexts of each system making them unique to specific groups.

As parents move along the involvement continuum, negotiating the four environments (micro, meso, exo, and macro) is impacted by life experience; thus, those who have criminal record history have an additional obstacle that may stymie their development and affect they can exert on their multiple environments.

**Parents and the involvement continuum.** The six types of involvement (Epstein, 1995) are associated with the four systems parents navigate as part of their development towards active parental involvement.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

***Micro-system.*** Parent involvement types (1) parenting and (4) learning at home are prevalent in the micro-system. As such, parent role construction and sense of efficacy may contribute to generative factors that increase their need to be involved with the education of their child. Generativity (Erikson, 1950) is part of the seventh stage in the theory of psychosocial development that discusses generativity versus stagnation. In this stage, man has a need to be needed and to shape and help develop the younger generation. Erik Erickson's theory of psychosocial development (1950) identifies eight stages of man as he ascends from infancy to mature adult. The generative stage is when adult man has a need to be needed and desires to pass on information and skills to the next generation. In opposition, stagnation is to be without desire to pass information on or denied the opportunity to share skillsets with the younger generation. In this research an assumption is that generativity may act as both a motivator towards parental involvement and a mediating factor for recidivism. As it relates to the problem statement of volunteer background checks limiting parental access to schools, parents who are denied access or choose not to complete the volunteer background check due to anticipated denial are themselves at-risk for stagnation, hindering maturation.

In their attempt to provide a conceptual and methodological construct for generativity, McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992), used multiple measures to assess individual differences in generativity, as it relates to concern, action, and narration. Three qualifiers are derived from a list of seven features (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992) the researchers proposed as a conceptual configuration: (1) Cultural demand (2) inner desire, (3) concern, (4) belief in the species (5) commitment (6) action and (7) narration. An outcome of the aforementioned study was that young adults, in addition to mid-life adults identified by Erikson, can have experiences with



## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

generativity before reaching the mid-life stage as would be appropriate for younger parents who have students in elementary school.

The opposing side to this seventh stage is stagnation (Erikson, 1950), which holds the individual in a selfish, self-indulging state, unconcerned with anyone or anything outside of self (Erikson, 1950). The stagnant individual would not have the inner desire to lead the next generation or care for society's youth; thus purposeful sampling was used to solicit parent participants for this research project with criminal history who want to participate in their child's schooling.

Within the microsystem, types of involvement (Epstein, 1995, 2010) parents are likely to experience are (type 1) parenting and (type 4) learning at home. Parenting behaviors shape the daily activities of their child as well as their moral and social behaviors and learning at home which begins to shape the educational experience of the child. Learning at home is significant as parents create an environment conducive to learning, such as having materials in the home to assist such as books, supplies, access to technology, and a quiet space and or routine for homework completion.

As the developing parent begins to transition to the meso-system, they experience interactions between the home and school environments. The construct of social networks (Coleman, 1988, 1990) gain prevalence as parents may begin to discuss school education with others and possibly shape their actions based on these conversations and experiences as they begin to negotiate both environments. Social theory (Coleman, 1988) concerns social systems of behavior and the functioning of those systems. Over the years, social science research has concentrated on explaining individual behavior utilizing the effects of individual behavior and the connections to characteristics of the individual's social environment in relation to the larger,

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

societal context. Social networks are the last construct that endures throughout parental development in Bronfenbrenner's model (1979) of embedded influence.

**Meso-system.** In the meso-system, social networks contribute to involvement activities including communicating (type 2), volunteering (type 3), and learning at home (type 4). Within these types of involvement (Epstein, 1995), parents report how the school encourages parent-child interactions, are involved with helping students with homework, their invitations to the school, and communication regarding student progress. Volunteering includes parents coming into the school building and supporting learning during the day. This could involve helping in classrooms and other areas of the building, as well as, sharing expertise from their careers or assisting with events during the school day.

Impacting involvement are factors that may limit participation including parental life contexts and poverty. Parents working in low-level or blue-collar positions tend to have less flexibility with work schedules that may prevent or seriously hinder participation with the school community. Low levels of educational attainment or experiences from school that are negative could impact parents and their willingness to participate.

**Exo-system.** Next, the developing parent must interact in the exo-system, which includes their employment or source of income, the school system, and still maintain home and school expectations and activities. Involvement with their student's education may be dependent on the flexibility of parent work schedules and availability to support school functions and activities outside of work hours or within a flexible work schedule. In employment situations for low-wage workers, flexibility may be difficult and parents may work more than one job, which can significantly impact their available time to participate with school events and volunteer support.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Involvement (type 5), decision making is impacted in the exo-system as parents who have not passed the volunteer background check are unable to fully participate with parent organizations such as being a board member of the Parent Teacher Association or being part of the school council for stakeholder input that helps to govern the school. In this particular urban school district, parents who participate on the school council have the additional requirement of having a fingerprint background check completed.

**Macro-system.** Last, the developing parent interacts within the macro-system as part of society. Again, social networks (Coleman, 1988, 1990) are prevalent as parents may benefit from interaction with other parents and community members to help support their child's education. Involvement (type 6) is collaboration with the community, as organizations and community outreach programs support the instructional programs of schools. Tutoring services, community-learning events, collaboration with health agencies, and other entities support learning and growth of students. Limiting involvement at this level is the impact of stigma on the parent with criminal record history.

### Chapter 2 Summary

Within this conceptual framework, the involvement continuum demonstrates how parents with criminal record history may navigate involvement in the education of their child. The developing parent is both influenced and influences the environments to which they are part as they move through multiple environments within the Bronfenbrenner (1979) ecological model of embedded influence. The limiting factors of poverty, neighborhood contexts, parental life contexts, volunteer background check denial, school district policy, and stigma work in an adverse manner to involvement for this particular parent population. These additional factors

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

may act as a barrier to involvement that must be overcome or mitigated in some way for parents to be active participants in their child's education.

Parental role construction, parental efficacy, and social networks are constructs that contribute to the ability of a parent to support their efforts and growth as they move through environments comprising the micro to macro-systems (Epstein, 2010; Hoover-Dempsey, et. al., 2005; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Parental role construction and parental efficacy may contribute to generative tendencies that could act as a mediating factor for recidivism for parents re-entering society from incarceration. According to Ackerman, Zuroff, and Moskowitz (2000), generativity may also lead to increased psychological adjustment and life satisfaction.

In conclusion, parental involvement has evolved to include partnerships among parents, schools, and the community. As the developing individual in Bronfrenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of embedded influence, the parent negotiates the various environments from parenting in the home environment as the child's first teacher (microsystem) to parenting school-aged children and incorporating school expectations (mesosystem), along with home, work, and school district contextual factors (exosystem) to addressing society-at-large (macrosystem). Partnering, the parent, school, and community overlap in their spheres of influences as they exert some influence on one another in the quest to positively impact student success (Epstein, 2010).

Last, generativity contributes to this research as an influential factor that asserts parents, by nature, want to pass on information to the younger generation, representative of their children and can in return be affected by the mediating effects that generativity has on recidivism (Erikson, 1950; Visher et. al., 2013). Visher et. al. (2013) asserted fathers experiencing societal re-entry following incarceration were less likely to violate parole or commit a crime if they were actively engaged with raising their children. School district implementation of the criminal

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

background check for school volunteers has created a barrier to participation for parents with criminal history and inadvertently decreased opportunities for the active engagement.

### **Chapter 3 Methodology**

In an urban school district in the Southeastern United States, district policy mandates the use of volunteer background checks, essentially criminal background checks, for all persons wishing to volunteer in public schools. For parents with criminal record history, this step may serve as an obstacle to school access and their involvement with the education of their child. As stated in the previous review of the literature, federal funds (Title I Part A, 2017) are earmarked to support parent engagement for students who are at-risk for school failure due to poverty circumstances, stressing the accepted knowledge that parental involvement in schools has positive impact on student success.

Epstein (1987, 1995, 2010) contends with her theory of overlapping spheres of influence that students experience a positive benefit when families, schools, and community work in concert to support learning structures. Griffith (1996), Jeynes (2011), and Wilder (2014) have documented the positive role parent involvement plays in the educational career of a student. Parents who support student learning and achievement both at school and within the home and community see benefits of increased achievement, greater sense of self-efficacy, increased attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002) and lower dropout rates and grade retention (Barnard, 2004). It follows that parents with rejected volunteer background checks may be unable to support their student with the benefits of full involvement and consequently place students already at-risk for school failure at greater disadvantage.

Research consensus (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2011; Wilder 2014) has provided rationale for parental involvement as a necessity to improve academic outcomes. This research study was designed in effort to ascertain current levels of involvement in a high poverty urban elementary school facing contextual issues associated with concentrated poverty including the

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

potential exclusion of parents and students from this support structure (Walsh, et. al., 2014). The particular demographic of parents with criminal record history, a plight often associated with concentrated poverty, may be denied access to the school due to current implementation of the school district volunteer policy (Peterson & Krivo, 2010; Vandahaar, 2012; Walsh, et. al., 2014). A denied volunteer background check acts as a collateral consequence, thus another obstacle parents must navigate to support their student to the best of their ability (Mauer & Chesney-Lind, 2002). This study aimed to capture the levels of involvement in a high poverty urban elementary school and understand how parents with criminal record history experience involvement with their child's education. This chapter describes the methodologies used to answer the following two research questions:

1. What is the level of parental involvement in an urban elementary school navigating conditions of high poverty, neighborhood crime, student mobility, high levels of behavior incidents, and low achievement scores on state assessment?
2. Within this context, what are the experiences of parents with criminal record history as they participate with the education of their child?

The research design is a convergent mixed methods study. Quantitatively, a survey was used to capture parental involvement levels within a high poverty elementary school.

Qualitatively, the researcher captured the experiences of parents with criminal record history with an embedded case study (Yin, 2014), bound by a student enrollment within the aforementioned school.

### **Context of the Study**

**School District.** This research was conducted in the Southeastern region of the United States, within an urban school district. Statistical data gathered by the school district were taken

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

from the district data book published in 2017, which captures current data and trend data. The district serves over 100,000 students, including 45,800 elementary school students, employs slightly over 17,000 people and has a demographic representation that consists of 36% African American, 44% Caucasian, 12% Hispanic, and 8% other races. Elementary school demographics in the district mirror those for the whole district at 35%, 43%, 12%, and 10% respectively. The past ten years has shown steady increase in the number of students who qualify for free or reduced priced lunch, which is used as a poverty measure in schools. The district currently has 62% of students who qualify for free or reduced price lunch with the majority of schools now qualifying for free lunch under federal programs for community eligibility. At Deacon Elementary School,<sup>1</sup> 95% of the student population qualify for free or reduced priced lunch. This 33% discrepancy compared to the 62% district average is due to the high poverty community in which the school resides.

Through an open records request submitted to the school district, information regarding the number of background checks submitted, how many were approved or denied, and those numbers disaggregated by school levels and poverty rates were provided to the researcher. Across this urban school district, in 2014-15 and 2015-16, 14,896 volunteer background checks were submitted. Of those, 672 parents were denied as volunteers, approximately five percent of applicants. Five hundred and thirty-one rejections were at the elementary level (K-5), a time where Epstein (2002) notes parents are most involved; 107 were at the middle school level (6-8), and 34 were at the high school level (9-12). Examining differences between high poverty schools and those that are not (District Data Center, 2017), the same years yielded 488 rejections

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<sup>1</sup> Names were changed to protect participant and school district identity



## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

for high poverty elementary school parents versus 166 rejections from schools not classified as high poverty.

**Community Context.** Both African American and Caucasian residents inhabited the community in which Deacon Elementary is situated dating back to the early 1900s. As more African American residents attempted to move into the neighborhood, a residential ordinance was passed in 1914 to prohibit them from buying property in majority Caucasian neighborhoods, claiming it would cause devaluation of the property (Aubespain, Clay, & Hudson, 2011). Through involvement of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the U. S. Supreme Court ruled the ordinance unconstitutional in 1917 and African American residents began moving further west within the neighborhood.

In opposition to the unconstitutional ruling, Caucasian residents passed legislation to change the names of streets that ran east and west designating a boundary where the names changed so that if Caucasians had to live on the same street as African Americans, they would at least have different street names (Aubespain et al., 2011). During this same time African American leaders were emerging in the community and two African American newspapers were established as well as a surge with African American owned businesses. As a result, the neighborhood shifted to become predominantly African American.

In the spirit of the Harlem Renaissance in New York, the neighborhood (Community Revitalization Project, 2016) thrived in the 1940s as a hub for African American businesses, schools, and other city landmarks that recognized African American culture. Apartment housing was developed and at the time provided improved conditions and better access for many African American residents who had previously been subjected to dilapidated housing and poor access to

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

medical services (Aubespain, et al., 2011). Later, the same housing developments became known as project housing for families in poverty.

In the 1960s, urban renewal projects carried out by city government decimated buildings and structures within this community (Aubespain et al., 2011). African American owned businesses were marginalized and razed along with dilapidated structures and essentially were unable to recover or reopen in new locations, depleting the once thriving local business areas within this neighborhood.

Over the years, the community has continued to experience economic decline. Seventy-three percent of families within this community earn less than \$25,000 annually. A cause of this could be related to statistics revealing that 50% of residents in this community are below the age of 25, compared to 39% in the city-at-large. The area has three times the number of single-family households and nearly twice the number of residents with disabilities. Nine percent of residents have an associate's degree or higher and the community unemployment rate (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017) is currently at 31%, compared to the national rate of 4.4%

In the study state, 135,000 or 13% of students (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017) have a parent who has been or is currently incarcerated, consequently the second highest rate in the nation. Within the community surrounding the study school, Deacon Elementary, the crime rate is 2.8 times the rate of the metropolitan city. With high crime and poverty rates for this community, it is likely that criminal record history will also be prevalent and affects the lives of the students and families at Deacon (Arditti, 2012).

**Low achievement scores.** School achievement is measured based on state assessments given to all students at specific intervals to measure learning and growth. In the study state, achievement is measured based on state assessments and in elementary school it is given at

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

grades three, four, and five. These assessments measure reading, math, social studies, language mechanics, and on-demand writing. Science achievement is typically measured but has not been in the past two years as the state is revising the science standards and how measurement will occur.

In the study state, the average proficiency scores in 2015-2016 as measured by the state assessment system hovered at 56% in reading and 51% in math, compared to the study school's performance at 17% and 15% respectively in 2015-2016 and 10% and 7% in 2016-2017. The effects of poverty are known to hinder academic achievement and growth and negatively affect school readiness and cognitive development (Dearing, 2008; Walsh et al., 2014).

**Behavior issues.** School behavior resolutions are identified for each school within the study state. At the school level, individual behavior incidents are recorded in an online database that also houses student demographic information, attendance records, transcripts, health information, and other student level factors. As such, this aggregate data is shared publicly by number of incidents as part of the school report card disseminated to parents and searchable on the department of education website.

Behavior information such as numbers of out-of-school suspensions, in-school removals (such as time-out), restraints (when students are physically managed by trained staff persons, seclusions (students are alone in a calm down room monitored from the outside), assault, weapons, harassment, drug and tobacco use, and other infractions such as physical altercations and disruptive classroom behaviors are recorded and shared publicly absent student identifiers other than gender and ethnicity. School data from Deacon Elementary for the 2016-17 school year revealed a 16% student mobility rate, 147 incidents of out-of-school suspensions, and 50

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

incidents of student restraints. Comparatively, these incident totals place Deacon Elementary in the top 5% of elementary school suspensions in the school district.

This information is used to provide a snapshot of the school behavior, labeled as school safety, and is part of the achievement profile of a school and district in conjunction with achievement, teacher-level factors, parental involvement as it relates to parent-teacher conferences, equity, and goals for achievement set by the state accountability system.

### **Mixed Methods Research Design**

A mixed methods research approach (Creswell 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018) allows the collection and integration of both quantitative and qualitative data that may yield greater insight to phenomena than utilizing a single approach. Mixed methods has been used in various research disciplines including education and federal funding initiatives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and is appropriate for this study of parental involvement in schools and potential implications for policy change. Quantitatively capturing the levels of parental involvement at Deacon Elementary was relevant to understand the context of involvement in this particular school that is facing extreme conditions daily to educate students. The case study qualitatively allowed for an in-depth look at a sample of parents grappling with criminal record history and how it impacts their ability to be involved based on current school district policy. Table 2 outlines the type of data collection used in this dissertation. Beyond the table, the upcoming sections delineate data collection first quantitatively and then discuss collection of qualitative data components.

Specifically, a convergent mixed methods design was utilized to support independent collection of quantitative data, use of a survey, and qualitative data, which included interviews, observations and collection of artifacts, with separate analysis of each (Creswell & Creswell,

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

2018). The convergent mixed methods design allowed both quantitative and qualitative data collection independent of one another and then findings were compared in effort to confirm or disconfirm results of each approach. A key component to the convergent design is the use "... of the same or parallel variables, constructs, or concepts..." (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 218). This study utilized same and parallel constructs in both the survey and the deductive lens through which parental involvement was viewed using Epstein's (1995) six types of involvement.

Through a convergent mixed methods research design (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018), the researcher used The Parent Survey of Family and Community Involvement in the Elementary and Middle Grades (Sheldon & Epstein, 2007) to quantitatively capture the levels of involvement in a particular high poverty, urban elementary school in the Southeastern region of the United States, Deacon Elementary School, through parent self-report using this Likert style questionnaire. In conjunction with the questionnaire, the researcher qualitatively examined the experiences of parents with criminal record history with an embedded case study (Yin, 2014) using interviews, observations, and artifacts obtained from participants as they participated in their child's educational experience at Deacon Elementary School.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Table 2

Four Methods of Data Collection

<b>Data Collection Form</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
<b>Survey</b>	Parents	Parent report of involvement
<b>Interview</b>	Parent	Description of involvement
	Principal	School involvement goals
	District Representative	District involvement policy
<b>Observation</b>	Parent at home	Parenting/Learning at home
	School Events	Parent/Staff interaction
<b>Artifacts</b>	Parent	Parenting/Learning at home
	School	Communication/Invitations
	District	Policy Implementation

**Quantitative sampling and approach.** To answer question one regarding levels of involvement, the Parent Survey of Family and Community Involvement in the Elementary and Middle Grades was distributed to all students to carry home in envelopes for parents to complete and students returned them to school during March and April 2017 (Sheldon & Epstein, 2007). In conjunction, an online version of the survey was created in April 2017 in an effort to increase the response rate. The link to the online survey was sent to parents using a mass email application typically used by the school to send reminders and messages regarding upcoming events. The survey was used to determine the level of parental involvement at Deacon Elementary School through parent self-report, responding to domain specific items (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005; Sheldon & Epstein, 2007;) linked to measuring parental involvement.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

**Quantitative data collection.** The use of Sheldon and Epstein's (2007) survey to capture the level of involvement was based on previous research studies that assessed levels of parental involvement, using constructs of parental role construction, parental efficacy, sense of belonging, and participation and utilization of social networks (Epstein & Salinas, 1993; Sheldon, 2006; Sheldon, 2007). In this study, the same constructs are used to measure and discuss parental involvement at Deacon Elementary School and how parents rate themselves regarding their levels of involvement. The constructs also provide insight as to how parents navigate the involvement continuum that acts as the conceptual framework for this study.

In addition, the researcher utilized data obtained from the parent survey as a validation tool to accompany the experiences of individual parents and provide additional context; discussing the feedback of parents captured by the survey in conjunction with those participating in this study. The addition of numbers to qualitative components of research adds validity (Maxwell, 2013). Maxwell (2013) asserts, "...appropriate use of numbers not only allows you to test and support claims that are inherently quantitative, but also enables you to assess the *amount* of evidence in your data that bears on a particular conclusion or threat..." (p. 124). Numbers are also useful to identify and convey diversity of perspectives and actions within this study.

**Survey Instrument.** Survey items from the Parent Survey on Family and Community Involvement in the Elementary and Middle Grades (Sheldon & Epstein, 2007) are adapted from an earlier survey by Epstein and Salinas (1993) and include subsets of questions that relate to five of the six types of parental involvement identified, excluding decision making, by Epstein, et. al, (2002). Subscales were tested for reliability and the authors provided Cronbach's alpha for each subset (Sheldon & Epstein, 2007), which were used to compare split-half reliability performed in SPSS Statistics Version 24 by the researcher to verify scale reliability.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

The questionnaire aligns with five of Epstein's (1995) six types of parental involvement: (1) parenting, (2) communicating, (3) volunteering, (4) learning at home, and (6) collaborating with the community, to collect data on how well a school is partnering with parents and the community to facilitate involvement and support student success. This information allows schools to create action steps (Epstein, 2010) following data disaggregation to increase family and community involvement that may positively impact student success – as it the work of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University. For the purpose of this dissertation, the questionnaire provided a context to discuss school demographics and parental views and expectations based on self-report answers during the 2016-17 school year. Further, the researcher provided aggregate data to the principal at Deacon Elementary School to inform efforts to increase school, family, and community partnerships.

To answer the question, what is the level of parental involvement in an urban elementary school navigating conditions of high poverty, neighborhood crime, student mobility, high levels of behavior incidents, and low achievement scores on state assessment, parents answered questions pertaining to domains of parental role construction and efficacy (type 1), communication (type 2), invitations to the school community (type 3) and to participate with committees (type 5), homework help and monitoring student progress (type 4), and information pertaining to community events and offers of support (type 6).

*Parental role construction and efficacy.* Investigating motivating factors that encourage parental involvement in schools, Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins, and Closson (2005) suggested parents' motivational beliefs, perceived invitations, and life context contribute most to their willingness to be involved. Beliefs about how children should be reared and what constitutes effective parenting influences decisions related to how parents are



## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

involved in the education of their child. A socially constructed phenomenon, role theory (Bandura, 1997) examines how an individual defines self and how they interpret expectations of what they expect from themselves, what others expect from them, and what they should do as dictated by these expectations (Hoover-Dempsey, et. al., 2005). Within the survey, questions in this domain represented what parents expect to do in their role to support school success (e.g. homework help, reaching out to the teacher when a student needs additional support, monitoring progress) and how often they engage in these practices.

Invitations for involvement initiated by the school community (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997) can act as an important motivator for parents, demonstrating they are welcome and valued within this community and that their participation is expected as part of their child's learning, also leading to engagement from more passive parents who may not ordinarily seek involvement opportunities.

*Communication.* Questions within this domain examine parent perceptions of communication from the school and invitations to participate as a volunteer, on a school committee, or provide information on community engagement activities and events. Additionally, communication is recorded in the context of social networks (Coleman, 1988) and the frequency with which parents connect with other parents within Deacon Elementary as well as parents with children that attend other schools.

*Involvement.* Sheldon and Epstein (2007) solicit information regarding how parents are directly involved in their student's learning through questions to determine the frequency of engagement with homework help, preparing for tests, reading with their student, discussing student progress with the teacher, and attending family learning events, performances, or sporting events hosted by the school.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

**Qualitative Research Design.** To answer question two and examine the experiences of parents with criminal record history navigating involvement, a case study (Yin, 2014) with parents as embedded units of analysis is appropriate. Qualitative research best captures descriptions, anecdotes, and paths taken by each individual parent who works to participate with their child's schooling. Creswell (2013) discussed qualitative research as the process of moving from assumptions to addressing problems of society and human experience through the use of theoretical or interpretive frameworks. Within this study, an assumption is that parents want to be involved in the education of their student and a societal issue is that criminal record history can hinder parents from being approved as school volunteers, thus limiting their ability to be involved. Creswell (2013) noted that qualitative data is taken in natural settings. As part of this study, data were collected in the school and home setting, both being natural environments for children and parents.

Case study research (Yin, 2014) supports questions that require explanation or when the researcher seeks to understand social phenomena, such as examining parental experiences in research question two of this study. Further, a case study design will allow for investigation among a small sample size bound by a common location, while maintaining a holistic view of society and how participants are situated within the larger societal context. In this research, the case is bound by student enrollment in Deacon Elementary School and participant criteria of having criminal record history and the desire to be involved in the education of their student.

Case study research is also a method commonly employed in education and sociology (Yin, 2014), as are the categorical areas for this dissertation. Examining the experiences of parents, with each parent acting as a unit of analysis, bound by context of the school and criminal record history is a contemporary issue that can be studied through interviews and direct

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

observation with the addition of other sources of evidence such as artifacts, previous literature, and day-to-day adjustments to the context of the phenomena being studied (Yin, 2014). This examination may provide a differing lens to view seemingly common practices to inform district policies that produce unintended consequences for marginalized groups. Implementing a policy that supports background checks to protect students within the school is an understandable safety measure, yet an unintended consequence would be exclusion of parents who fail the background check. Parents affected by exclusion from their child's school create a barrier to access and participation that denies students the positive benefits of parental involvement. Additionally, parents as the embedded units of analysis within this case study maximizes the study sample through the use of purposeful sampling to examine a particular demographic of parents with possible variance in how each may navigate parental involvement (Yin, 2014).

**Qualitative sampling and approach.** Within this embedded case study (Yin, 2014), in conjunction with a school-wide parent survey, the researcher will focus on the experiences and consequent concerns of parents who want to participate in their child's schooling but are met with a barrier to access. Purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002) was utilized to ensure voice to parents from this demographic. Selective criteria for the participant sample consisted of having a child that attends Deacon Elementary School, which binds the case study, presence of criminal record history for the parent, previous completion of the Parent Survey of Family and Community Involvement in the Elementary and Middle Grades and had either submitted a volunteer background check and was denied due to criminal record history or chose not to complete a volunteer background check due to expectation of denial. The use of purposeful sampling allowed an in depth look at individual parents as they navigate access in order to fully participate and engage in their student's schooling (Patton, 2002).

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Following failed attempts to recruit parents at Deacon Elementary parent involvement events, the researcher obtained permission from district personnel to have the principal send a mass message on a system traditionally used to send information regarding upcoming events. The message contained a note from the researcher stating the purpose of the research, qualifications for participants, and offering a \$25 Visa gift card in exchange for participation. From this mass message, three parents consented to participate with the study. Later, participants received a second \$25 gift card for a second round of interviews and observations. Two of the participants received \$50 and one received \$25 in gift cards since she declined a second interview.

**Qualitative Participants.** Three participants were selected for this case study. All female head of households, two participants were mothers of boys attending Deacon Elementary and one a grandmother with a granddaughter attending Deacon for whom she was the primary custodian. Names of participants were changed to pseudonyms to protect the identity of parents, students, and the school. The researcher contacted interested parents to discuss the study criteria, what was involved with participation and sought consent to participate. The names of chosen participants were not disclosed to school administrators to ensure participant anonymity.

Ms. Jackson is a grandmother raising one of her grandchildren. She raised her children as both a married and single woman. During the study she decided to transfer her grandchild from Deacon Elementary to another school due to issues with the teacher from the previous school year and perceived lack of administrative support. Due to medical retirement, she is able to participate more with her granddaughter than she did with her own children who are now adults.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Ms. Taylor is a single mother of four; one has graduated high school, a second dropped out but promises to get an equivalent diploma, one is in middle school, and the youngest is a student at Deacon Elementary. Ms. Taylor was not employed at the start of the study, found and lost a job due to criminal history and has since started a new position.

Ms. Smith is a single mother of two and was not employed. One child attends Deacon Elementary while the other attends a different elementary school. Ms. Smith relies heavily on community programs and has participated with parent advocacy seminars and a community outreach program to assist her own growth and take advantage of opportunities for family engagement.

In addition to parent participants, the principal of Deacon Elementary School was interviewed, observed during school-wide events, and provided artifacts to demonstrate how the school participates with parents regarding support of students attending Deacon. A district representative who works with the department charged with managing the volunteer background check process was interviewed and provided information and artifacts that outlined the process and explained district policy and implementation of the policy for school volunteers.

**Qualitative Data Collection.** Data collection took place between March and October 2017. Collection consisted of interviews, observations, and artifacts for a total of twenty hours. The use of multiple data sources provides opportunity for triangulation (Maxwell, 2013) and strength of evidence (Yin, 2014) through targeted interview questions to specifically address experiences.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Table 3

Qualitative Data Collection by Participant

Participants	Parent Survey	Semi-structured interview	Observation	Artifacts	Time in the Field
Ms. Jackson	X	X	X	X	5 hours
Ms. Smith	X	X	X	X	2 hours
Ms. Taylor	X	X	X	X	4 hours
Principal		X	X	X	6 hours
District Representative		X		X	3 hours

*Note.* District Representative represents an interview with the coordinator for the volunteer center and data obtained from district resources.

**Interviews.** Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) interviewed parents to ascertain why they choose to be involved in their child’s education and found that interviews provided opportunity for open dialogue, which led to information regarding parental beliefs and expectations towards parental efficacy and role construction. The three participants were interviewed individually, using a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix A) developed by the researcher. Interviews delved into the six involvement types from the parent perspective. The interviews were conducted in two of the participants’ homes and the third took place at Deacon Elementary School by parent request. Two of the participants were interviewed twice and one participant completed one interview and declined the second.

Interview questions asked participants to describe what parental involvement meant to them, how they operationalized their involvement, their own history with involvement as a student, and future aspirations for their children. Examples of questions include, *How do you define active parental participation in school and what is your experience participating with your child’s schooling?* These topics were addressed through straightforward open-ended questions that allowed participants to share their experiences.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

The researcher followed up with prompts and additional questions to deepen understanding for each individual. Interview data were relevant to collect the experiences of parents and their histories as it related to school involvement. Yin (2014) discussed interviews as one of the most essential sources of information in a case study because the process is less rigid and allows for multiple modes of questioning, alternating from questions following a line of inquiry, surface non-threatening questions, and those of more depth to discover how a process works or delve into a particular claim or idea.

In addition to parent interviews, the principal of Deacon Elementary and the district representative from the office charged with conducting and maintaining information on volunteer background checks were interviewed. They, too, were asked questions in a semi-structured interview process to inform this study based on their specific roles within the school and school district (See Appendix A). Information from the principal was sought to gain perspective on her views of parental involvement and how she led the school in purposeful attempts to engage parents and solicit or encourage their involvement. The district representative was interviewed to gain the district perspective regarding parental involvement and the vetting process of potential school volunteers, in addition to parameters for involvement available to parents with criminal record history who had denied volunteer background checks.

Interviews were audio recorded to assist with transcription and the researcher recorded notes during the process. The initial interview provided information as to how each experienced involvement both as a parent and when they were a student. During this time, participants were asked and agreed to follow up questions and participation with respondent validation used to solicit feedback on data collected through interviews (Maxwell, 2013). Respondent validation assisted the researcher to draw accurate conclusions based on the participants' statements and

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

intended meanings. A second round of semi-structured interviews were conducted approximately two months following the first round to probe two of the participants on questions that were vaguely answered or required additional information to capture the parent experience.

***Observations.*** Along with interviews, two rounds of observations were conducted for two of the three participants. One participant, Ms. Smith, declined a second interview and observation, citing she "...had too many personal things going on..." (Personal communication, September 6, 2017). Using direct observation the researcher was able to gain information in real-world settings and consume information in a natural setting (Yin, 2014). Observations for two of the participants took place in their home and the third observation was at Deacon Elementary.

Though parents have criminal record history, an assumption is they strive to create an environment for their student that supports school success. During in-home observations, the researcher did not interfere with actions of the parent or child, or conversations of the parent and child. The researcher took field notes, recorded behaviors, environmental features and the level and nature of engagement between the parent and child. Participants signed a consent form (See Appendix B) for both interviews and observations that included the following look-fors during in-home observations.

- Parent-child interactions (Evidence of routines, conversation, questioning, proximity)
- Engagement (Collaboration, tutoring, sibling/other family member as tutor, duration)
- Environment conducive to learning (Presence of books/reading materials/reference items, designated place to work, school supplies, noise level, presence of distractors)
- Direct reference to school (Teacher/school expectations, parental expectations, activities, graduation, post-secondary education, future career)



## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Observations of parents and children in the home were concurrent with semi-structured interviews. During this time, the researcher recorded notes of behavior, the setup of homework space, and presence of artifacts in the home including certificates, diplomas, school supplies, and school communication documents. Interactions were noted between the student, parents, and other siblings, specifically language and parenting style to support routines, procedures, and communication of parental expectations.

Last, school event observational data provided an additional data source for use in triangulation and allowed for observing families within the construct of the school building (Fielding & Fielding, 1986). Observations of school functions, Parent-Teacher Conference day and Math Night, allowed for interactions among staff and families and demonstrated strategies employed by the school to engage, entertain, and inform families on school practice, achievement goals, and provided opportunities for students to showcase their work. The researcher performed observations at school-based events without interference, maintaining a journal to record descriptive notes.

Observations of the principal included her interaction with staff, parents, students, and community support including mental health partners and staff members from the Urban League. During Math Night a community partner from a mental health agency that supports students with counseling and behavior modification during and outside the school day was present to disseminate information to parents regarding services offered and provided snacks to support the learning event. The Urban League provided a presentation to parents regarding an upcoming Parent Academy to solicit participation and provided high school student ambassadors to support math groups and assist staff with setting up the physical space. The principal solicited the community partners to attend Math Night and be additional resources for parents, attempting to

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

support the challenging needs of students and build upon parental capacity through the Parent Academy.

During Parent Teacher Conference day, the principal moved throughout the building greeting families, checking in with teachers, and monitoring the turnout to discuss student progress. In each case the principal was visible and present throughout the building, greeting visitors and engaging in conversations with families.

In the case of high poverty schools, research affirms that African American and recent immigrant families may be treated with disregard by staff members or administration in some schools (Noguera, 2001); counterproductive to building a sense of belonging for all families. At Deacon Elementary, 80% of the student population is African American, 13% of students are Caucasian, 3% Hispanic, and 4% are identified as other races. Thus, according to Maxwell (2013) observing interactions among families and school staff may provide additional descriptive information and insights that may be explored further during parent interviews and enable the researchers to draw inferences about perspectives based on multiple data sources. Following each observation, all recorded notes and collected data were stored and locked in the researcher's home office.

***Artifacts.*** Parental artifacts included photos taken by the researcher of certificates, diplomas, classroom newsletters with homework assignments, and researcher notes regarding how parents create a home environment conducive to learning. During interviews and observation in the home, the researcher noted visible artifacts available in the home such as hanging certificates, presence of school supplies and backpacks, and parent identification of space designated for homework. The researcher also asked parents to see their refrigerator under the assumption that this space is frequently visited by all family members and often serves as a

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

bulletin board for celebration and posting of reminder documents and upcoming events. For Ms. Smith particularly, she was asked to describe verbally what is currently hanging on her refrigerator since the interview and observation took place over the phone and at Deacon instead of her home. School documents were reviewed as evidence of how communication exists from school to families. Documents (newsletters, parent informational letters, website posts, student/parent handbook, policies related to parent engagement, school specific calendars, sign in sheets, etc.) were included as data artifacts to evidence whether communication exists among school and families and to what extent it happens. Site-Based Decision Making Council meetings minutes were reviewed from the school year to gain insight into attendance and active participation by parents on the council as they participate with school oversight and governance. Documentation and archival records were crucial in corroborating evidence (Yin, 2014) derived from interviews and observations to illustrate the experiences of parents and how Deacon Elementary facilitates parental engagement.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Maxwell (2013) discusses three different goals for completing a research study: personal, practical, or intellectual (p. 24). Embarking on this dissertation study, this researcher has a combination of all three goals. As an elementary school principal in a high poverty school, I have experienced inviting parents to volunteer and being told they could not due to their history. I have been privy to hushed conversations and embarrassed admissions from their past. Practically, it is during the elementary years that research identifies parents as most directly involved in their child's education and within the school building (Epstein, 2002). From a scholarly standpoint, research provides evidence that students benefit from parental involvement through increased academic achievement (Epstein 1987; Lee & Bowen, 2006; and Jeynes, 2011).

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

I am an African American woman and grew up in this same Southeastern city and matriculated through the urban school district as well as local university. I am a principal in the same urban school district and also work in a high poverty elementary school that is predominantly African American. As such, I feel this puts me in a unique position to talk with parents, as they understand that I work at a school similar to the one their student attends. On the other hand, the fact that I am a principal may put some people at a level of discomfort as I also represent an established institution they may or may not have had positive experience with.

My personal and professional experiences allow me to identify with the school and with the African American population in the community, however I do not have children of my own, so I do not fully have a grasp of the parental perspective. I do have a strong moral imperative to uplift the community in which I serve and to promote education and participation among students and families.

Growing up, I lived in a two-parent home in a neighborhood ten minutes away from the study community. Although my family had a comfortable life, our financial security was dependent upon my father's income from a local automobile manufacturing plant. In the summers we went to the park and had what we referred to as free lunch, but I now recognize as the modern day summer feed programs to support low-income students while school is not in session. I have family members who have been incarcerated and consequently grapple with constraints of criminal record history. Conducting this study, I used memos to record my thoughts and reactions in attempt to strip away my sense of normal and experiences in effort to see and record rich descriptions of observations.

As an educator, I am charged with being the instructional leader of my building, which mandates I constantly analyze data and plan next steps to increase and maximize student success.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

With this, I am aware of achievement and proficiency gaps students experience in the school district as well as data regarding behavior, special education, diversity in teaching staff, staff turnover rates, district initiatives, and I am friends/colleagues with the principal of the school at which I am conducting this study.

Threats to validity in this study include researcher bias and reactivity. Maxwell (2013) discussed researcher bias as that which may cause a researcher to fit conclusions to preconceived notions based on experiences and knowledge of the researcher on the topic of study. In addition, reactivity is a potential threat causing participants to be influenced by the researcher and as such answers to interview questions could be impacted or led by the language or actions of the researcher. With the researcher's experience as an educator in a similar setting as this bound case study, it is with great purpose that this researcher bias threat to validity is minimized (Becker, 1970; Fielding & Fielding, 1986) through the use of rich data (multiple sources – interviews, observations, collection of artifacts), triangulation (looking across multiple data sources), respondent validation (making transcribed data available to the interview participant for review and confirmation of data and conclusions), and the use of numbers to compare survey results.

The threat of reactivity was minimized through the use of open-ended semi-structured interview protocols for interviewing parent participants as well as other stakeholders (principal and district personnel from the office who processes volunteer background checks). Interviews were recorded using an audio recorder and transcribed by the researcher (Maxwell, 2013) to ensure I captured the specific language and nuances used by parents to share their experiences.

**Bias.** As a principal working with an already vulnerable population, it is my charge to promote academic achievement and parental involvement is a crucial component. The goal of

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

this research is twofold. One goal is to provide voice to a marginalized group and secondly bring awareness to an issue that affects access for many families. This impaired access potentially prevents opportunity to fully participate in educational programming, which is a cornerstone to democracy and our republic in the United States of America.

Through reflection working on this study, I had to adjust my lens as the researcher. In my professional role as a principal, my focus is to consistently make decisions and determinations based on what is best for students. It is through this lens that I shape leadership within my school and dictate the actions of my staff in regard to what our collective engagement of students will be. Building the conceptual framework for the study, I realized I was still looking through a student-focused lens and made the adjustment to focus attention on the parents within the study, as it should have been.

A second adjustment made is an attempt to expose the nuances of a reality of which I am so deeply involved. Working as a principal in a high poverty elementary school with demographics and factors that mirror Deacon Elementary, I attempt to strip the normalcy from my experiences in effort to examine the individual experiences of participants in this study. My professional bias that I bring to the study is a result of the day-to-day interactions and planning required in support of both students and families that attend our school. The student demographic at the school where I am the principal includes 94% of students engulfed in poverty circumstances, many who have been exposed to traumatic situations, some of which derive from parental incarceration. A developed understanding of situations families encounter as a result of generational poverty, single-family homes, extended family as primary custodians, health concerns, behavior challenges, and potentially negative past experiences with school and academic achievement all combine to represent my reality as a principal within this

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

demographic. During this research study, I used reflexive memos to record my reactions to information so that I could review it and determine if my analysis of a situation was derived from my experience or from the experience of the parent.

However, in spite of these challenges that are often present within my job responsibilities, I am and have always been determined to assist families with gaining resources to overcome challenges and develop habits that build capacity and positively impact student outcomes, thus my personal reason for embarking on this research study. Maxwell (2013) asserts the impossibility of completely removing theories and experiences of the researcher during a study but supports revelation as a counter measure to improve integrity of the project. To counter act my bias as a professional working with a similar demographic of students and families, I used reflexive memos to write about my reactions to information obtained through interviews and observations of participants. Through memos, I was able to relate information to my experiences and reflect on my reaction to information. Also utilizing critical friends, I was able to discuss my process and findings, questioning my understanding related to information provided by participants versus my experience with parents within my job description.

**Reactivity.** The greatest threat to reactivity in this study is my role as a principal. In the school setting and within the community, the role of principal is revered as a position of respect and observed accordingly by those who have had positive or negative experiences with a principal or school setting. As the head of a school, I am viewed as the person with the final say and one who sets the expectation for not only students, but staff and how all actions will be facilitated within the context of school whether in the building or as a member of the school community. According to Maxwell (2013) a study that involves interviewing participants will

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

certainly be affected by reactivity and the influence the interviewer exerts during the interview process as the facilitator.

In effort to minimize reactivity, I introduced myself as a researcher first and a principal second. The reason for this was to impress upon participants the goal of improving outcomes for all families through exposure of barriers to access for parents with criminal record history that influence parental involvement in schools. Secondly, I disclosed my principal status from the perspective of working in a school very much like Deacon Elementary; close in physical proximity and operational strategy to support students and families similar to those at Deacon. My attempt was to bring comfort to participants that I empathize with situations that may occur in a high poverty, urban elementary school and work with students that look like their children. Based on my experience building relationships with families, I have found this particular connection to be beneficial for African American parents. Being an African American woman and working in a school with predominantly African American children provides me a credibility that strengthens my rapport with parents, especially when I discussed sensitive issues, such as the study topic of parents with criminal record history.

### **Analysis Design**

Analysis of data was completed in three phases (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) as appropriate for a convergent mixed methods design. First, data were analyzed quantitatively, entering data into SPSS Statistics Version 24 and looking at frequency distributions from the survey responses. This information was provided to the principal of Deacon Elementary in aggregate form to be utilized as a measure of current involvement and parent perspectives regarding involvement. Quantitatively, frequency response data were used to ascertain levels of



## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

involvement at Deacon Elementary and inform the interview protocol used with study participants involved in the case study.

Qualitatively, the second phase of analysis examined the experiences of parents with day-to-day or typical interactions with the school and home activities that may cater to learning and student navigation of the educational system. Transcribed interviews, observational data, and collected artifacts were coded and a within-case analysis conducted to identify potential themes, describe practices and share experiences of parents within this purposeful sample.

In the third phase of analysis, convergence of both quantitative and qualitative data provided insight into involvement patterns of parents at Deacon Elementary and how the experiences of participants involved in the case study shaped their involvement despite having criminal record history.

**Phase 1.** During the first phase of analysis, quantitative data were entered into SPSS Statistics Version 24 from the Parent Survey of Family and Community Involvement in the Elementary and Middle Grades (Sheldon & Epstein, 2007). SPSS was used to obtain frequency data among parent reports of involvement based on Epstein's (1995) six types of involvement.

**Phase 2.** The second phase of analysis included reviewing qualitative data collected through an embedded case study of parents with criminal record history as the units of analysis bound by student attendance at Deacon Elementary School. The researcher organized data by each participant individually. Throughout the analytic process, the researcher relied on theoretical propositions and a descriptive framework to guide data analysis (Yin, 2014). The theoretical propositions, embedded influence (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein, 1987), stigma (Goffman, 1963), and generativity (Erickson, 1950), create a

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

profile of the three parents based on how their parenting impacts their individual experiences navigating involvement with their child's schooling.

The data were provisionally coded (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 1994) using Epstein's (1995) six types of involvement as a deductive framework. Miles, Huberman and Saldana (1994) suggested the use of provisional codes as a "start list" when the researcher has a pre-generated list of codes prior to data analysis (p. 77). In the first round of coding, eight codes were used. Six were part of the deductive framework from Epstein, one for limitations that impact involvement, and one for the overall impact parents feel from being involved.

In the second cycle of coding, 39 causal codes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 1994) were added to the deductive codes to explain how the participant experience fit the involvement type or limitation. Causal codes are useful as the researcher creates labels from the participant data as to why data are attributed to specific codes. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (1994) suggested causal codes capture, "...complexities of influences and affects on human actions and phenomena" (p. 79). Next, viewing data and codes inductively across the three participants, the researcher reduced the data and looked for commonalities among causal codes to represent common experiences as well as outliers to include any unique situations.

Following the second cycle of coding and analysis, a third cycle was completed in effort to further condense the data and look across participants for meaning, resulting in 27 causal codes. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (1994) asserted that within-case analysis helps to understand, describe, and explain what is happening in the case study (p. 101). Further reducing the data, 22 causal codes were used to align the data to the conceptual framework and theoretical propositions. Below, Table 4 provides a snapshot of cycles of coding during the analysis and reduction process. Decision-making was included in the deductive codes as it is part of the six

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

types of parental involvement. However, participants within this study did not acknowledge being part of school governance or decision-making committees.

Table 4

Data Coding Matrix

Deductive Codes	Causal Codes Individual participants	Causal Codes Reduction	Causal Codes Across Participants
Parenting	Advocacy Caregiver Behavior Efficacy Expectations Resilience Role construction Routines	Advocacy Caregiver Efficacy Expectations Resilience Role construction Routines	Advocacy Efficacy Expectations Resilience Role construction Routines
Communicating	School to home Home to school Loose ties Networking	School to home Home to school Networking	School to home Home to school Networking
Volunteering	Chaperone School visits	School visits	School visits
Learning at home	Educational shows Homework help Summer activities	Educational shows Homework help	Educational shows Homework help
Decision Making	-----	-----	-----
Collaborating w/community	Activities Mentors Advocacy	Activities Mentors Advocacy	Activities Mentors Advocacy
Involvement	Impact	Support	Support
Limitation	Absent parent Employment access Black males CRH CRH & employment Death/tragedy	Absent parent Employment access CRH Neighborhood context Parental experience Policy	Employment access CRH Neighborhood context Policy Poverty Stigma

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Table 4

Data Coding Matrix

Deductive Codes	Causal Codes Individual participants	Causal Codes Reduction	Causal Codes Across Participants
	Economic	Poverty	
	Food insecurity	Stigma	
	Health	Work Schedule	
	Incarceration		
	Neighborhood context		
	Parental experience		
	Policy		
	Poverty		
	Stigma		
	Strained relationship		
	Teen parent		
	Work schedule		

Note. Criminal record history is abbreviated as CRH.

Constructing the ontological perspectives of parents with criminal record history navigating involvement in schools, theoretical propositions were used to describe how parents develop along a continuum of involvement. Outlined in the conceptual framework for this study, parent development as part of embedded influence (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein, 1987) and generativity (Erikson, 1950) were detailed through their individual and collective experiences.

Data that represented how involvement was limited were classified according to significance of impact and labeled through the theoretical proposition of stigma (Goffman, 1963). Table 5 shows the relationship and classification moving from deductive codes, to inductive causal codes, to alignment with the theoretical propositions of the conceptual framework for this study.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Table 5

Data Coding Matrix and Conceptual Framework

Deductive Codes	Causal Codes Across Participants	Conceptual Framework Theoretical Propositions
Parenting	Advocacy Efficacy Expectations Resilience Role construction Routines	<p>Embedded influence &amp; Generativity</p>
Communicating	School to home Home to school Networking	
Volunteering	School visits	<p>Overlapping spheres of influence</p>
Learning at home	Educational shows Homework help	
Decision Making	-----	
Collaborating w/community	Activities Mentors  Advocacy	
Involvement	Support	<p>Stigma</p>
Limitations	Employment access Criminal record history Neighborhood context Policy Poverty Stigma	

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

**Phase 3.** In phase three of analysis, convergence of quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed collectively to identify patterns of involvement present within the school across the parent population represented by survey results compared to individual accounts of parents affected by criminal record history and their involvement patterns.

### **Chapter 3 Summary**

Chapter three has described the methodology utilized to answer two questions concerning the levels of involvement and experiences of parents with criminal record history in an urban, high poverty elementary school in the Southeast Region of the United States. To assess the levels quantitatively, parents from the study school completed The Survey of Parent and Community Involvement in the Elementary and Middle Grades (Sheldon & Epstein, 2007).

To examine the experiences of parents with criminal record history who want to be involved in their child's schooling, qualitative assessment through interviews, observations, and collection of artifacts was conducted to detail experiences of parents as they navigated the involvement continuum towards educational involvement.

Use of a convergent mixed methods approach allows greater depth of data interpretation representative of the parent population of a high poverty, urban elementary school compared to the individual experiences of three parents comprising a purposeful sample of parents who strive to be involved in their student's education and endure complications based on their criminal record history. Federal legislation purports the significance of parental involvement in schools as a factor for increasing student achievement and designates funds to support the most at-risk student population to in attempt to offset the effects of poverty. The voice of the parent sample is relevant to ascertain if the current implementation of volunteer background checks thwarts participation for students and parents legislation and funds aim to serve.

### **Chapter 4: Results and Findings**

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of parents with criminal record history who want to be involved with their child's education. Participation of parents is complicated by school district implementation of volunteer background checks that parents completed and were denied as volunteers or they chose not to complete the background check due to anticipated denial. Thus, the volunteer background check required by the school district may act as a barrier to access for those with criminal record history, a condition often associated with concentrated poverty (Mauer & Chesney-Lind, 2002).

A convergent mixed methods design allowed the researcher to use both quantitative and qualitative data independently and then converge the data to seek results to the research questions in this study. Quantitative data were obtained to ascertain the levels of parental involvement in a high poverty, urban elementary school utilizing the Parent Survey of Family and Community Involvement in the Elementary and Middle Grades (Sheldon & Epstein, 2007). In addition, the researcher sought to qualitatively examine the experiences of parents with criminal record history as they participated with their child's education using an embedded case study. The following questions were examined:

1. What is the level of parental involvement in an urban elementary school navigating conditions of high poverty, neighborhood crime, student mobility, high levels of behavior incidents, and low achievement scores on state assessment?
2. Within this context, for parents with criminal record history, what are parents' experiences being involved with their child's schooling?

The conceptual framework for this study models how parents may move towards involvement, developing in their parental role construction among various environments that

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

make up our society. Within the conceptual framework, limiting factors such as criminal record history, poverty, and district volunteer policy mediate involvement and led motivated parents to work around these factors in effort to participate in their child's education.

Theoretical propositions of embedded influence, overlapping spheres of influence, generativity, and stigma were used to examine parental experiences. Embedded influence (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) was a lens to view parents and how they navigate the various environments in which they are participants and influencers through their roles as parent and member of society. Overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein, 1987) was used to identify the ways in which the environments of home, school, and community interacted or overlapped to support student achievement and parental development. Generativity (Erikson, 1950) was theorized to act as a motivating factor for parents' desire to be involved and influence the educational paths for their children. This stage of development in Erikson's (1950) eight ages of man suggests that a developing adult has a desire to pass on knowledge and skills to the younger generation. Last, stigma (Goffman, 1963) was hypothesized as a limiting factor for involvement due to criminal record history.

In this chapter, study results based on the survey, interviews, observations, and artifacts will be presented. The survey provided information as to the levels of parental involvement at Deacon Elementary School to answer question one and question two was answered based on qualitative data from interviews, observations and artifacts. Three themes were identified that captured the experience of parents:

- Working around policy restrictions and limitations
- Development of parental role construction and efficacy
- Active negotiation of criminal record history and poverty contexts



## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Answering question two, the three themes are explicated with evidence across the three participants to describe how motivated parents with criminal record history are involved with their child's education. The three themes will be expounded further in the section on qualitative findings. Last, convergent findings will be reported, relying on quantitative data derived from the survey and qualitative data garnered from the embedded case study to compare results for supportive and non-supportive findings.

### **Question 1: Levels of Involvement**

**Deacon Elementary.** Deacon Elementary School is part of a large urban school district in the Southeast Region of the United States. Deacon is situated in a community of concentrated poverty (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017) that grapples with a crime rate that is 2.8 times higher than that of the metropolitan city, a 31% unemployment rate compared to the 4% national average, and a median income of \$25,000 for a family of four. Ninety-eight percent of Deacon's 345 students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch, a poverty measure used by the federal government. Achievement scores measured yearly with state assessment indicate that 10% of students in third through fifth grade performed at proficient and distinguished levels in reading, while 7% performed at the proficient and distinguished levels in math.

The principal communicated the school mission in an interview and expounded on her philosophy of how she embraces parental involvement within Deacon Elementary.

The mission of Deacon is to be a positive and caring community that fosters high performing independent learners that are prepared for middle school. My philosophy is the more parents the better. And for our population that we serve at Deacon, the barrier with our parents is that they didn't have a positive experience with school themselves, so my philosophy and my work is surrounded around breaking down the barrier for them so

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

that they know they are welcome and that we are not there to judge, and that we can learn and grow from each other and help their kids learn and grow in the process. (interview, March 8, 2017)

**Survey results.** All students at Deacon Elementary School were asked to carry home the Parent Survey of Family and Community Involvement in the Elementary and Middle Grades (Sheldon & Epstein, 2007) by backpack with instructions for parents to complete the survey and return it to school, sealed in the envelope provided.

The survey was administered during late March and early April 2017 and 98 parents responded. To estimate the level of involvement at Deacon Elementary, parameter estimation was used. The sample of  $n=98$  results in a confidence interval of 95% for the estimates with precision at  $\pm 10\%$  (Cochran, 1977). Respondents were instructed on the document to only complete the form once. If a respondent had multiple children, they were asked to complete the survey for the oldest child in the school. Based on a review of class rosters, 35 groups of sibling were identified with 29 sibling pairs and six groups comprised of three or more siblings. The researcher was unable to account for siblings that did not share an address. The number of respondents equate to a 42% return rate, on par with the 40% return rate for a previous parent survey administered at Deacon Elementary as part of a school audit in 2016 (principal interview, March 8, 2017).

Of the completed surveys 44.9% of students were girls and 45.9% were boys. Within the demographics section, approximately 10% of parents did not provide responses. Ages of students ranged from 5-12, appropriate for kindergarten through fifth grade students. Mothers completed 74% of surveys, fathers completed 8%, and grandparents completed 7%. Parental education levels had greatest representation with the high school diploma (26.5%) and some

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

college (28.6%), with 9.2% of respondents holding a college degree and 2% with a graduate degree or credits. Vocational and technical college represented 11.2% of respondents and 11.2% did not complete high school. According to 2016 United States Census data, 28% of people aged 25 and older have a high school diploma, 17% have attended some college, 5% have associate degrees, 21% hold a bachelor's degree, 9% have a master's degree, and 1.4% and 1.8% have professional and doctoral degrees respectively.

When asked how much schooling respondents think their child will complete, 36.7% checked college degree, 31.6% checked graduate degree or credits, 7% high school diploma, 7% some college, and 4% predicted vocational or technical college.

Sixty-nine percent of respondents described themselves as Black or African-American, 12.2% White or Caucasian, 2% Hispanic or Latino, and 7% other. Twenty-one percent of respondents were married, 9% divorced, and 60% never married. With employment, 40.8% work full time, 12.2% work part time and 38.8% are not employed. According to the National Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017), the national unemployment rate is 4.4%, making this sample of parental unemployment rate nearly ten times the national average. Last, when asked to offer free response as to how the school could help parents support their child's education, 28% of respondents provided a response, such as more fieldtrips, smaller class size, understanding each child and how to reach them, more administrative presence, and a complaint on teacher assumptions about a child's performance.

The questionnaire provided an opportunity for parents to report how they support students and their perspective of how the school supports family involvement addressing five of Epstein's (1995) six types of parental involvement: (1) Parenting; (2) Communicating; (3)

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Volunteering; (4) Learning at home; and (6) Collaborating with the community. Type five, decision-making, was not addressed through the questionnaire.

Within the survey handbook and documentation, Sheldon and Epstein (2007) provided reliability scales and sample sizes to assist researchers and offer a comparison for measures of Cronbach's Alpha. The questionnaire offers parent reports of how well the school communicates in relation to inviting parental participation and providing information on student progress towards learning in school (type 2), encourages interaction among parents and children with homework activities (type 4), and promotes ties with in the community at large (type 6). Additionally, reports on parental role construction and parental efficacy provide information regarding type 1, parenting (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005; Sheldon, 2002). Hoover-Dempsey and Jones (1997) found small but significant findings in their analysis of three components of parental role construction; (1) parental values, beliefs, and goals related to education and development; (2) ideas regarding day-to-day responsibilities; and (3) ideas related to behaviors and responsibilities for decision making in the course of educational trajectories. Their findings supported assertions of behavior and responsibility pairings that suggested relations to day-to-day operations and decisions to support education and long-term decision making along students' educational trajectory. These assertions are consistent with case study findings that support sharing parental expectations, communication and accountability, and structures around learning at home. Table 6 provides internal consistency estimates from Sheldon and Epstein (2007) and the current study.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Table 6

### Survey Internal Consistency

Involvement type	Number of items	(n) Sheldon & Epstein	Cronbach's Alpha Sheldon & Epstein	(n) current study	Cronbach's Alpha current study	Split-halves correlation coefficient current study
(1) Parenting	Role construction (10)	396	.882	89	.916	.931
	Efficacy (8)	384	.822	89	.690	.836
(2) Communicating	School invites (5)	395	.841	90	.853	.824
	Progress information (5)	376	.873	83	.898	.895
(3) Volunteering	School involvement (4)	404	.763	90	.662	.725
(4) Learning at home	Parent/child HW (2)	386	.649	93	.742 <sup>1</sup>	
	Involvement at home (10)	392	.897	86	.908	.849
(6) Collaborating w/community	Information community events and services (2)	407	.737	92	.827 <sup>1</sup>	

Note. Type (5) decision-making was not assessed in the survey.

<sup>1</sup> Split-halves correlation coefficient values are not included as a result of small number of items.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

The internal consistency of the data produced from the survey was estimated using SPSS Statistics Version 24. Sheldon and Epstein (2007) provided their reliability findings and Cronbach's Alpha with subscales in supporting documentation to assist with analysis of questionnaire results. Comparing the reliability estimates provided by Sheldon and Epstein (2007) to internal consistency within the subscales of the current study results in small differences. These differences are likely attributed to a smaller sample size and interpretations of parent involvement among participants at Deacon Elementary. In the analysis of results from Deacon Elementary, Parental Role Construction (type 1), Parental Involvement at Home (type 4) and Topics of Conversation with other Parents had high reliability with  $\alpha = .916$ ,  $.908$ , and  $.992$  respectively. Reliability was lower in subscales Parental Efficacy (type 1)  $\alpha = .690$  and Parental Involvement at School (type 3)  $\alpha = .662$ . Split-halves correlation coefficients were in line with Cronbach's Alpha with the highest discrepancies at Parental Efficacy and Parent Involvement at School.

This survey provided normative data for parental participation and acted as an external validity check for Deacon Elementary parents who participated as part of the embedded case study. To examine levels of involvement at Deacon Elementary, frequency data from parental reports were reviewed and analyzed in SPSS Statistics Version 24 from survey subsections: The School's Contact With Parents (*How well has your child's teacher or someone at the school done the following this school year...*), Parental Involvement (*How often do you do the following activities...*), Parental Ideas (*How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about what parents should do*), Connections With Other Parents (*social networks*), and Family (*demographic information*).

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

*The school's contact with parents.* Within this subsection, questions involved the school's communication with parents regarding student progress, invitations to school, encouragement for parent-child homework interaction, and community connections. Table 7 details the extent to which parents agreed with statements of how well the school communicates.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Table 7

### The School's Contact with Parents

Statements <i>(How well has your child's teacher or someone at the school done the following this school year)</i>	Percent Agree
Helps me understand my child's stage of development	93.8%
Tells me how my child is doing in school	91.6%
Asks me to volunteer at the school	73.0%
Explains how to check my child's homework	73.1%
Sends home news about things happening at school	93.8%
Tells me what skills my child needs to learn in math	86.6%
Tells me what skills my child needs to learn in reading	82.4%
Tells me what skills my child needs to learn in science	79.3%
Provides information on community services I may want to use with my family	78.5%
Invites me to PTA/PTO meetings	74.0%
Assigns homework that requires my child to talk with me about things learned in class	82.6%
Invites me to a program at the school	85.6%
Asks me to help with fundraising	64.2%
Has a parent-teacher conference with me	92.6%
Includes parents on school committees, such as curriculum, budget, or improvement	66.0%
Provides information on community events that I may want to attend with my child	81.6%

Note. Survey used a four point Likert scale and percent agree represents combined percentages of "strongly agree" and "agree."

Regarding student progress, 91% of the parent sample reported the school communicates well or OK. Eighty-five percent of parents reported receiving invitations to school programs,



## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

with 81% of parents reporting they receive information on community events. However, invitations to participate with activities to support school operations, such as volunteering, attending PTA meetings, joining committees, and fundraising were less common with 73%, 74%, 66%, and 64% of parents, respectively, that agreed with those statements. These percentages could be indicative of expectations for parents in a high poverty school as they were less likely to receive invitations to be part of the school operational structure.

Communicating her goals with disseminating information to staff, students, and families, the principal addresses how she personally relays messages.

Typically in our faculty meetings and when we have family nights, I always speak and I always ask and reach out to them to be involved. I share data with them in our newsletter. I always write letters to our parents talking about what's happening, whether it's [testing] data, upcoming events, ways to keep their kids active and ready for school during breaks and those types of things. (interview, March 8, 2017)

***Parental Involvement.*** This subsection examined parental involvement at both school and home. Involvement at school included volunteering within the classroom, visits to the school, talking with the teacher, and attending school events. Involvement at home includes monitoring homework and working with students at home on school related activities. Table 8 outlines parent responses within this subsection. Answers were based on a four point Likert scale where parents chose whether they participate in activities everyday/most days, once a week, once in a while, or never.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Table 8

### Parental Involvement

Statements <i>(How often do you do the following activities)</i>	Frequently	Once a in a while
Read with your child	84.7%	13.3%
Volunteer in the classroom or at the school	10.2%	29.6%
Work with your child on science homework	52.1%	20.8%
Review and discuss school work your child brings home	89.2%	8.6%
Help your child with math	89.8%	9.2%
Visit your child's school	46.9%	42.9%
Go over spelling or vocabulary with your child	81.4%	11.2%
Ask your child about what he/she is learning in science	82.8%	6.5%
Talk to your child's teacher	48.9%	46.9%
Ask your child about what he/she is learning in math	88.2%	9.7%
Help your child with reading homework	87.6%	8.2%
Help your child understand what he/she is learning in science	64.2%	17.4%
Help your child prepare for math tests	76.8%	13.7%
Ask your child how well he/she is doing in school	94.8%	5.2%
Ask your child to read something he/she wrote	87.7%	9.2%
Go to a school event (sports, music, drama)	31.3%	52.0%
Check to see if your child finished his/her homework	95.8%	2.1%

Note. Survey used a four point Likert scale. Frequency represents combined percentages of "most days" and "once a week".

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Ten percent of parents reported they volunteer frequently, while 30% reported they volunteer once in a while and 58% of parents reported never volunteering. Parents fared better on visits to the school, with 46% reporting they visit frequently and 42% reported visits once in a while. Parent reports of talking with the teacher and attending events happen most frequently once in a while at 45% and 52% respectively.

Home involvement showed the greatest participation related to questions of how students are doing in school. Eighty-six percent of parents reported asking this question everyday or most days, followed closely by helping with math (82%), reviewing and discussing work brought home (76%) and asking your child to read something they wrote (72%).

*Parental ideas.* This subsection drew upon parental ideas towards parental role construction and parental efficacy. Parents were asked their level of agreement and disagreement with statements that encompass responsibility and expectations. Table 9 details the percentage of parent agreement with statements of role construction.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Table 9

### Parental Role Construction

Statements <i>(It's a parent's responsibility to...)</i>	Percent agree
Make sure their child learns at school	92.8%
Teach children to value school work	95.9%
Show child how to use dictionary or encyclopedia	93.9%
Contact teacher about academic problems	89.8%
Test child on school subjects	93.8%
Track student progress in school	96.0%
Contact teacher regarding student struggle	93.9%
Show interest in student work	94.9%
Help child understand homework	96.0%
Recognize trouble in school	91.8%

Note. Survey used a four point Likert scale and percent agree represents combined percentages of “strongly agree” and “agree.”

High levels of agreement with statements of parental role construction highlight parent understanding of their role in shaping the educational experiences of their children.

Parental efficacy was measured using eight statements from which parents rated how strongly they agreed or disagreed with efficacious behaviors. Parent reports from Deacon Elementary indicate that over 90% of the parent sample had confidence with helping their student attain academic success. Table 10 reports the percent of parents that agree with statements of efficacy.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Table 10

### Parental Efficacy

Statements (How much do you agree or disagree...)	Percent agree
I know how to help my child do well in school	95.9%
I never know if I'm getting through to my child	40.8%
I know how to help my child make good grades in school	91.8%
I can motivate my child to do well in school	93.8%
I feel good about my efforts to help my child learn	93.9%
I don't know how to help my child on schoolwork	16.4%
My efforts to help my child learn are successful	91.8%
I make a difference in my child's school performance	92.8%

Note. Survey used a four point Likert scale and percent agree represents combined percentages of "strongly agree" and "agree."

***Connections with other parents.*** Parent social networks were represented in this subsection as parents reported the frequency in which they spoke with other parents of Deacon Elementary School or parents they knew of students attending other schools about school related topics. These topics included talking about schools, teachers, parenting advice, information on content specific items such as reading and math, and behavior. Frequency was much lower, with less than 30% of parents reporting they talk often with other parents. Twenty percent of parents surveyed left this section of questions unanswered. Table 11 outlines parent responses across this subsection.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Table 11

### Connections With Other Parents

Statements <i>(How often do you talk with parents who have children at your child's school about topics listed below)</i>	Very often	Once in a while	Few times a year	Never
Talk about activities at your children's school	28.8%	17.5%	5.0%	48.8%
Talk about your children's teacher(s)	25.3%	20.3%	2.5%	51.9%
Provide each other advice about parenting	22.8%	11.4%	6.3%	59.5%
Share helpful information about your child's reading	28.2%	14.1%	3.8%	53.8%
Share helpful information about your child's math	25.6%	17.9%	0%	56.4%
Share helpful information about your child's science	23.7%	18.4%	0%	57.9%
Share books or book titles to read with your children	25.3%	15.2%	5.1%	55.1%
Talk about your children's behavior or misbehavior	29.5%	10.3%	5.1%	55.1%
Talk about where to send your children to school	32.9%	10.1%	1.3%	55.7%
Share information about community events	21.1%	22.4%	2.6%	53.9%
Talk about the school's policy and rules	26.9%	12.8%	3.8%	56.4%
Share information about extra-curricular activities	24.7%	16.9%	3.9%	54.5%

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Table 11

### Connections With Other Parents

Statements <i>(How often do you talk with parents who have children at your child's school about topics listed below)</i>	Very often	Once in a while	Few times a year	Never
Talk about how to become involved at the school	23.1%	16.7%	6.4%	53.8%
Share games or the names of games to play with your children	28.6%	10.4%	5.2%	55.8%
Talk about how your children are changing	25.6%	11.5%	5.1%	57.7%
Provide each other with advice about helping with homework	29.9%	14.3%	3.9%	51.9%
Talk about your children's accomplishments in school	33.3%	10.3%	5.1%	51.3%

Note. Survey used a four point Likert scale.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parent reports of volunteering frequently (10%) and visiting the school (46%) may diminish opportunities to interact with other parents. Low levels of parent social interaction impacts information networks that could support parent knowledge of school processes and access to information to adult societal resources.

**Survey Summary.** Parent involvement levels at Deacon Elementary varied across involvement types. The greatest amount of interaction involved communication with the school regarding student progress. Ninety-one percent of respondents reported the school communicated well or OK regarding student progress and 85% reported being invited to school events. Parent involvement was greatest in the home with 86% of parents reporting to question students about learning in school. Thirty percent of parents reported volunteering once in a while, demonstrating low interaction among parents within the school building. Consequently, 58% of parents reported they have never volunteered in the school building, although 73% report being invited to volunteer.

Ideas of parental role construction and parental efficacy showed that over 90% of respondents agreed with responsibility statements consistent with the parent role to support achievement and that they display efficacious behaviors to assist their student. Last, the survey results showed low levels of networking or social engagement among parents at Deacon Elementary, with only 20% of parents reporting they talk very often with other parents. Survey responses from Deacon Elementary demonstrate efforts by parents to be involved with their student's education and the school's efforts to engage parents through invitations to the school and purposeful attempts to discuss student progress.



## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

### **Question 2: Parent Experiences**

An embedded case study (Yin, 2014) was used to examine the experiences of parents with criminal record history who want to be involved with their child's education. In the following sections the researcher describes experiences of each parent as they navigate towards involvement. Parents within this study found paths around limiting factors, such as poverty, life and neighborhood context, volunteer background check denial, and stigma to achieve involvement as defined by Epstein's (1995) six types of involvement: (1) parenting; (2) communicating; (3) volunteering; (4) learning at home; (5) decision-making; and (6) collaborating with the community.

The case study participants had involvement patterns consistent with normative data provided by the self-report survey of parents at Deacon Elementary School. These parents worked around the failed or non-submitted volunteer background checks by substituting volunteer opportunities for visits to the school, including activities such as having lunch with their student, attending evening learning events, and communicating with staff during student drop off and pickups. These same motivated parents made efforts to communicate in written and verbal form with teachers and staff members, leveraged community happenings, and set expectations for learning and achievement with their children.

Analysis yielded three themes that addressed question two: What are parents' experiences being involved with their child's schooling? The three themes include working around policy restrictions and limitations, development of parental role construction and efficacy, and active negotiation of criminal record history and poverty contexts. Themes across all participants demonstrated how parents used their resources to work around the restrictions of the district volunteer policy to be involved with their students. Each recognized the need to develop in the

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

role as a parent and continue to become more efficacious. Due to their criminal record history and living in concentrated poverty circumstances parents also had to contend with and work to overcome obstacles and limitations in their life contexts that inhibit involvement. Individual participant profiles introduce the reader to each parent through a description of their experiences, followed by exploration of the limiting factors that complicate involvement and last how they are involved in their student's education. Profiles are presented first to enable the reader to identify the varying situations that manifest from common limiting factors associated with concentrated poverty.

With each participant profile, the researcher will discuss how each parent developed as they have negotiated the various environments of the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems theorized by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) embedded influence. Within each system interaction with the parent among environments of home, school, work, and society shape their development as they move towards being an involved parent.

In conjunction with development, each of the participants is affected by the limiting factors of criminal record history, poverty, and neighborhood contexts, but the source of poverty and its reflection in their daily lives and approaches are not universal. Therefore individual, thick pictures of each participant as an individual participant profile will provide the reader with nuanced context. In addition to common limiting factors, each participant had compounded factors that limit their involvement including health issues, parental life context, and stigma. The third participant, Ms. Smith, provides a partial picture of parental experience due to limited data. However, Ms. Smith's profile is included to highlight how she leveraged community programs to support her role construction and efficacy through voluntary participation in a parenting academy and on-going engagement with an organization aimed to support families and deter

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

violence. Participant profiles are explicated with quotations from participant interviews and vignettes that reflect my experiences in the field.

Across participant analysis results will follow to demonstrate collective limiting factors and patterns of parental development, involvement, and how parents work around limiting factors to be actively involved in their child's education. As stated previously, names have been changed to provide anonymity to participants.

### **Participant Profiles**

**Ms. Jackson.** Ms. Jackson is a 46 year old grandmother, raising her six-year-old granddaughter, Sarah. Ms. Jackson raised four of her own children and has had custody of Sarah since she was an infant. Sarah's mother had aspirations of attending college and working in forensics but got in some trouble and never made it to a college campus. Incidents of criminal activity and reluctance to change problematic behaviors have kept Sarah's mother from regaining custody.

Raising Sarah, Ms. Jackson strives to be involved with school despite having criminal record history of her own that affects her participation. The goal is to ensure Sarah has opportunity to learn and be successful, "I just want my baby to be able to go to school and learn and not be pushed to the side, like I said, I do not want her to come out of school and not be able to read...she's so intelligent." (interview, June 13, 2017). This statement followed admission that two of her four adult children struggle with reading and her conscious efforts to improve educational outcomes for her granddaughter.

***Personal limiting factors.*** In addition to criminal record history, poverty, and neighborhood context, Ms. Jackson has a limiting factor of disability. She receives checks from Social Security Disability Insurance as a result of nerve damage in her hands and feet that restrict

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

her ability to work and puts her on a fixed monthly income. Ms. Jackson has enlisted the help of Sarah's aunt to help out when she is sick or hospitalized, stating in an interview " Sometimes I be sick, meaning I be in pain so I don't want to go nowhere..." (interview, June 13, 2017).

Health concerns limit Ms. Jackson's ability to get out as much as she would like and sometimes becomes an extra expense. Unable to do a significant amount of walking, when visiting the zoo, Ms. Jackson will have to rent a scooter- an additional \$30. This cost has kept Ms. Jackson and Sarah from visiting the zoo this year, despite Sarah's love of animals and her aspirations of being an "underwater scientist" (interview, June 13, 2017) or marine biologist.

Ms. Jackson's SUV sits in the driveway, a testament to reliable transportation despite years of economic hardship, "This is the first time in my life, I feel like I have a reliable car...I'm 46 years old and two years ago I was able to buy a spank brand new car" (interview, June 13, 2017). With her adult children living on their own, Ms. Jackson was able to afford a new vehicle and attain a status of reliable transportation that enables access in a way she was unable to experience while raising her four children. During the course of the study, Ms. Jackson married and became a two-income household; her new husband is a cook at a downtown five-star hotel.

Over the years, she worked in different capacities to support her family during times where she was married and single, Ms. Jackson laments:

I took care of my kids, I didn't do drugs, wasn't an alcoholic, there were times when I struggled- when I was not on Section 8 (aid to subsidize rent), paid regular rent where there has been a couple of times when our [gas and electric services] was cut off. We didn't live like that, I struggled and got it cut back on, you know when I was a single parent by myself. (interview, June 13, 2017)

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Poverty has continued to be a limiting factor over the years as Ms. Jackson worked to take care of her children and extended family members. Complicated by criminal record history, employment options were narrow and now with health issues Ms. Jackson's source of income is disability checks and government aid from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, commonly known as food stamps.

*Neighborhood limiting factors.* Ms. Jackson voiced her concerns about her neighborhood during an interview as we discussed outside playtime:

It's bad over here, we live in a bad area, right here is horrible and I think the reason that nobody has broke into my house is because my family back here has a little clout, people know who they are. So I let her ride her bike with them right here (points outside to area), but I don't let her turn the corner. (interview, June 13, 2017)

Ms. Jackson's street, like others in the neighborhood was littered with paper, cups, bottles, cigarette and cigar butts and debris. This neighborhood houses the working poor with some houses subsidized to support families receiving government aid. Poverty as a limiting factor is compounded by neighborhood context, such as crime, which is mediated by Ms. Jackson's family's reputation.

A seemingly normal activity such as kids playing and riding their bikes outside has become a logistical issue that is interpreted as permissive due to her family status in the neighborhood that allows access to play. Her acknowledgement of this informal organizational structure in the neighborhood demonstrates how she navigates this adverse factor to create opportunities for her granddaughter. Immediately prior to interviewing Ms. Jackson, I witnessed an example of the challenge Ms. Jackson shared.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Sitting in my car waiting on the interview to begin, I was approached by a bright-eyed vagrant who asked for a dollar. Struck by the smooth skin and blue eyes of this brown-skinned woman haggard by habits that brought her to the car for money, my mind reimagined her life under better circumstances. Her demeanor was upbeat, but I was sad for her, outside in the sunshine begging for money instead of enjoying the weather or finishing up work for the day. She walked away from my vehicle, no richer than when she approached and blended into the unease of the neighborhood, then disappeared around the corner (observation, June 13, 2017).

Ms. Jackson's neighborhood has traditionally been African American. Attempts at neighborhood revitalization over the years have riddled streets with newer construction homes among those built in the 1950s and 1960s. Each house had a small lawn, consisting of more mud than grass. Ms. Jackson's red brick house is newer construction, with the same mud and grass composition as her neighbors. A charcoal grill, bicycle, scooter, and a few other toys surrounded the porch.

*The developing parent and involvement.* Ms. Jackson as a developing parent navigates multiple environments as she is working to be involved with the education of her granddaughter. The environments progress from the home (micro-system), to home and school collaboration (meso-system), then on to include the parental work environment (exo-system), and finally society-at-large (macro-system). Ms. Jackson's development through these environments has been impacted by her parental role construction and parental efficacy. Role construction for Ms. Jackson began with observations of her mother who had her at 13. Ms. Jackson described her mother's involvement as horrible; "I was into sports and nobody never came to see when I

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

participated and that's a hurtful thing" (interview, September 8, 2017). Ms. Jackson went on to say that it was if her mother did not care.

*Micro-system.* Raising four children of her own, Ms. Jackson reflected on her participation, which was impacted by work as a single mother. Then she had no time to volunteer but was sure to show up to school if there was an issue or concern. As a mother, Jackson decided her involvement would not mirror that of her mother's and encouraged her children to participate in sports, although none of them developed the interest. Three of her four children completed high school. Her son dropped out of school in the second semester of his senior year and has yet to earn his high school diploma. Two of her children finished high school without having strong literacy skills and continue to struggle with reading and writing to date. These facts greatly impacted Jackson's need to be more involved in Sarah's education, stating "As a parent, it is a hurtful thing that your grown kids can't read or understand something" (interview, June 13, 2017), testament to Ms. Jackson's sense of purpose with ensuring success for Sarah.

Now raising her granddaughter, Ms. Jackson's role construction has evolved based on her own experiences raising kids and reflection on the success of her children. Through this growth, her sense of parental efficacy has matured as well. Parental involvement has developed as Jackson negotiates the various environments of which she is part that exert influence on her and is consequently influenced by her participation.

In the micro-system or home environment, parenting involves Ms. Jackson setting expectations and advocating for Sarah's success. Expectations in this household include building confidence and life skills as well as prioritizing learning and promoting school success:

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Right now, I explain to her that when someone calls her ugly don't listen to nobody, I always tell her she's a beautiful little girl, a princess and I talk to her about that and how little girls are supposed to keep their self clean. Everyday you have to wash yourself and change your underclothes, brushing her teeth and all of that. (interview, June 13, 2017).

These statements highlight the expectations Ms. Jackson sets for Sarah. At this age, she is concerned with her being a little girl- building confidence and hygiene habits.

*Meso-system.* Moving into the second environment of home and school (meso-system), school success is influenced by Ms. Jackson's advocacy and setting parameters to facilitate learning at home. Ms. Jackson supports Sarah through homework help, televised educational programming, and attending community events and activities with the use of a cultural pass paid for through a city funding initiative to engage low-income students over the summer months. The cultural pass allows students free admission to museums and events around the city to enhance learning. Discussing how television is monitored for Sarah, Ms. Jackson explains:

Only this year, a few months ago...Sarah was able to watch certain stuff on TV. What I watch, she can't watch. She can only watch Nick Jr. and Disney Jr. For six years, Sarah watched Sprout and only Sprout and that's how she learned stuff. (interview, June 13, 2017).

Setting expectations and boundaries for Sarah is in effort to support learning both at school and at home.

During the course of the study, Ms. Jackson transferred Sarah to a different school based on issues with a teacher the previous school year. Her advocacy was sparked by frustration with the number of times the teacher was absent, bullying from a classmate, and ineffective communication. Ms. Jackson thought it best to move from Deacon Elementary and attend



## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

another school. The new school is still near the home due to Jackson's health issues and reliance on Sarah's aunt to help support her during any hospital stays or bouts of illness. The new school is another situated in concentrated poverty and grapples with similar issues as Deacon. In this instance, the school to home communication was lacking and continued to become more sporadic throughout the school year. Ms. Jackson expressed her disappointment with Deacon's poor communication and it became overwhelming for Ms. Jackson and she requested a transfer to a different school.

Advocating for Sarah while still at Deacon, Ms. Jackson questioned the lack of homework in all subjects and claims by the teacher that Sarah was reading below grade level and falling behind her peers in class:

Although Sarah reads pretty well, you know how you got to read every night, I don't read to her she reads to me. And if she has problems with a word, we go through it and sounds it out, reads signs when we're out, she reads stuff on television, so how are you telling me my child needs improvement? She was just in the first grade. (interview, June 13, 2017)

Other obstacles included Sarah being placed in a kindergarten class each time the class was split due to a shortage of substitute teachers to fill teacher vacancies, a complication associated with schools in high poverty areas. On several occasions, Deacon had no substitute teacher to cover Sarah's absent teacher. Administrators split the first grade class of students and assigned Sarah to a kindergarten class. Ms. Jackson was upset by this news when Sarah came home and told her about her days in kindergarten. Sarah was a first grader yet was put into a kindergarten class on multiple occasions throughout the school year. This placement also exacerbated teacher claims

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

that Sarah had difficulty reading. Ms. Jackson, infuriated by the claim, witnessed Sarah's reading nightly and is confident in her ability.

In addition, Ms. Jackson raised concerns related to lack of effective communication between the school and home concerning a bullying issue with a male student who hit Sarah multiple times. Ms. Jackson told the story:

This was not a little girl, but a little boy actually beating her up and what made me mad about the situation is that the school is not calling me telling me what happened, I'm finding out when she gets off the bus and has a nurse's note where he had did something to her and she got hurt and had to go to the nurse, bitten, kicked in the stomach, punched in the face when she wears glasses. Why isn't the school calling me? Why do I have to get a note, carbon copy, from the nurse because she was hurt? This happened like five or six times in two weeks. I was like that is it...I had to call the liaison before they moved her. (interview, June 13, 2017)

Ms. Jackson's advocacy was evidenced by her continued communication with the school and her decision to seek out a district parent liaison, who assists parents with resolving school conflicts.

Reflecting on experiences from her adult children, Jackson proclaimed:

I just like to be there for her, something I didn't do a lot of with them. I might not have done volunteer things or went on field trips and stuff with them, but if there was a problem with one of my kids I was at the school. (interview, September 8, 2017)

Raising her children, Ms. Jackson worked and did not have as much time to volunteer, but readily addressed school issues or concern. Being involved with Sarah's education is more feasible as Jackson no longer is employed, but medical conditions detract from involvement as well as criminal record history.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

*Exo- and macro-systems.* Since Ms. Jackson is not employed, the exo-system, which represents the navigation of work responsibilities and the balance of family life, is not as prevalent while raising her granddaughter. The macro-system involves interaction with society and influences her participation with Sarah's education. Ms. Jackson had chosen not to submit a volunteer background check due to anticipated denial. Criminal record history consisting of an assault charge from a physical altercation with another family has negatively impacted Ms. Jackson. Ms. Jackson explained the incident and how a teenage altercation led to criminal charges.

...I had an assault case on my record, but we were protecting ourselves, you know, but people don't look at that. Some people came to my house trying to fight my kids and I made my kids stay in the yard to keep from fighting, but they came in my yard and hit one of my kids and that's how the fight started. Then they ran up and went and took a warrant out on us and we was in trouble. They say innocence until proven guilty, but that's a lie. We were guilty until we proved ourselves innocent. It got to the point when we were going to trial and we had a black judge, a female, and she flat out said, I'm not playing no games with nobody. I don't want to see you near their house and I don't want to see you (other group) near their house... and if I find out somebody is lying, you will be prosecuted for perjury. So, they didn't even come back to court anymore. So, it's on me and my daughter's record. (interview, September 8, 2017)

From this experience, Ms. Jackson began her journey navigating her criminal record history, which changed the trajectory of her life. Initially, Ms. Jackson viewed the assault charge as a blemish until she tried to gain employment as a caretaker and realized her criminal record made her ineligible for this and similar job opportunities.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parental role construction and efficacy continue to evolve as Jackson develops skills and adjusts actions based on her experience and interactions along the development continuum. From her initial experiences with a teenage mother, to raising four children and now a grandchild, Ms. Jackson has revised parenting expectations and strategies. Based on experiences with her four children, she has become an advocate for her granddaughter's education to ensure she has knowledge and skills that build independence and self-sufficiency.

**Ms. Taylor.** Ms. Taylor is a single mother of four. Her youngest son, Justin, attends Deacon Elementary School and the next oldest son attended Deacon previously. The two oldest daughters do not live in the home; one has graduated from high school and the other dropped out of school and has yet to earn her diploma. Having her first child at 13, Ms. Taylor has been a mother most of her life and completed her own General Education Diploma (GED) at 30 years old.

Over the years, Ms. Taylor has had to grow and change as a parent. Losing custody of her children for almost three years due to a Child Protective Service (CPS) complaint and finding forced her to attend parenting classes and evaluate how she was going to move forward. Since 2008 she has retained custody of her children. Additionally, Ms. Taylor's educational involvement has grown over the years, triggered by misbehavior and academic struggle of her son attending Deacon Elementary.

***Personal limiting factors.*** Beyond criminal record history, poverty, and neighborhood context, stigma has been a tremendous limiting factor for Ms. Taylor. At 36 years old, she is still working and trying to better herself economically. Aspirations of being a nurse, as well as other job opportunities, have been closed to Ms. Taylor due to her criminal record history. Her plan is to get her record expunged as the case was closed over seven years ago. Yet, the \$100 fee she

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

has been quoted to start the process is a barrier in itself, "...true enough, it's \$100, but when you have children, gas and electric bills, water, it's a lot of money, especially when you have to pull it out of the household" (interview, June 17, 2017). Ms. Taylor discusses her criminal record with regret, stating that she feels she must defend herself regarding the charge. Ms. Taylor explains:

I feel like I have to defend that because when you hear CPS, the first thing you hear is child abuse, awful person in my head and I used to have to defend that at times and I still do, explaining for people because I don't want anyone to think I'm a monster. I don't want you to put me in a category from what happened in my past because I overcame it and did what I had to do. (interview, June 17, 2017)

While Ms. Taylor waits until she has an additional \$100 to spare the household, she actively looks for programs that offer free expunction opportunities.

At the time of our second interview, Ms. Taylor had just been hired and fired from a job at a local healthcare company who accused her of falsifying an application. Prior to starting the position, she spent a day travelling to the courthouse and child support office by public bus to gain documentation of her closed cases at the request of the company. Even after providing the requested documentation, the company called back and rescinded the job offer that she was due to begin the following Monday. However, Ms. Taylor went to work that Monday; but at a different job at a local hotel, with less hours, no benefits, and much lower pay.

Frustrated by this cycle she has been through numerous times, she discussed her disappointment with practices of employers who offer jobs and then fire you once they complete the background check. Ms. Taylor comments, "...I went through going to take a drug screen, and don't get me wrong, all of it was worth it for the job, but I feel you should do the

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

background check first, before you hire people” (interview, September 13, 2017). If Ms. Taylor had begun work at the local healthcare company, it would have guaranteed 40 hours a week, fringe benefits, steady schedule, and a salary that would elevate her family from beneath the poverty threshold.

A decade ago, Ms. Taylor had a public bout with stigma following an investigation at a daycare where she was employed, prompting desire to have her record expunged. The director, fully aware of Ms. Taylor’s criminal record, hired her as an assistant. Following a news station investigation of the daycare, police raided the center after learning the cook was a registered sex offender. Ms. Taylor’s photo, along with other employees of the daycare center, was shown on the news as part of this sting operation. Ms. Taylor, who had no knowledge of the cook’s status, recalled her experience:

They ended up putting my picture up there and my name and everything and I was depressed for almost like a month, I wouldn’t even go outside because I didn’t want anyone to see me, that’s embarrassing. You know, that’s like dang even though I know that’s on there, it’s like being reminded of the humiliation again of what I went through and what I’m still going through, so yeah that did it for me and I was like, really?

(interview, June 17, 2017).

Determined to get close to her nurse aspirations, Ms. Taylor was excited to report that she had begun online classes for a medical records assistant certification. Talking with her son’s teacher at Deacon, Ms. Taylor learned the teacher is an advocate who also works for the Urban League. As such, the teacher offered to help Ms. Taylor find resources for expunging her criminal record. Creating this relationship with the teacher, Ms. Taylor is building upon her social capital in effort to gain resources to combat her criminal record history.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

*Neighborhood limiting factors.* A community of large, beautiful homes along a parkway that is home to two public parks and acres of green space are the façade to the interior neighborhood's boarded homes and independent struggles of residents who mostly live below the poverty threshold. Crime plagues the neighborhood and cause specific concern for this mother of an African American boy:

I just can't...I will not let my boys end up in jail, dead, or out here on the corner selling drugs somewhere or running around like some of these kids are now. I'm not going to do it. I'm not losing my kids to the streets. I will move from down here and I already told them we are moving from down here before he goes to high school. We are going to live somewhere else to let y'all see somewhere else besides the West End. We have been in the West End all our life... all my life and all their life. We have never lived anywhere but the West End. (interview, September 13, 2017)

Ms. Taylor's sense of urgency is grounded in incidents of young African American men and boys losing their lives to gun violence in the community. Her son's father is currently incarcerated and she intends to keep him from a similar fate. The national news is inundated with protests and commentary on police shootings of unarmed African American men in America. Ms. Taylor is determined to see her son grow into an adult and live a productive life; yet she is cognizant of the many factors working against young Black boys.

When visiting Ms. Taylor for her interview and observation, I noticed the neighborhood felt tense. Raising two young African American boys in the West End of the city, an area that has grappled with homicide steadily over the past years is at best, worrisome. A local school houses a 'shots fired' beacon on the roof that helps police officers identify the trajectory of bullets to narrow search areas. Trash and debris litter Ms. Taylor's street that also houses two

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

elementary schools within four blocks of one another. The neighborhood is predominantly African American as are the schools in this area. Deacon is almost five miles away from Ms. Taylor's street, but mirrors the schools in this community demographically and in terms of academic achievement. Houses on this block are well maintained, opposed to the blocks on each side that have houses both lived in and boarded. The varied state of homes are indicative of the change over time, moving from African American stability to subsidized housing and inherited dilapidation due to increased poverty in this area (observation, June 17, 2017).

Ms. Taylor continues to seek employment opportunities to improve the family living conditions and diminish outcomes she associates with living in this area of town, including drug use, jail, or worse.

*The developing parent and involvement.* Ms. Taylor continues to evolve, noting that her parenting style, role construction, and efficacy has changed over the years from rearing her two older daughters to now supporting her son as he moves through school. The greatest difference being the challenges of raising a boy without his father, "For one, I'm a mother, I don't know how to raise men" (interview, September 13, 2017). To support her son Ms. Taylor has leveraged mentor relationships provided through school with the support of volunteers that paired her sons with a male mentor from the community.

Moving through the four environments that comprise the micro to macro-systems, Ms. Taylor continues to develop her involvement as a parent. Having lost custody of her children for three years, Ms. Taylor was directed by the court to attend parenting classes. Stubborn for too long, she decided to get on track, complete the required classes and regained custody of her children.



## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

*Micro-system.* Rooted in observations of her mother and aunt, Ms. Taylor's parental role construction is based on her experiences growing up in a house of love, support, and a strong connection to faith. Raised by her mother and aunt, Ms. Taylor and her siblings attended church regularly and depended on their aunt as a second parent due to their mother's overnight work schedule as a nurse. While Ms. Taylor's mother did not regularly attend school events or volunteer, Taylor was supported at home with homework help, routines, and expectations for learning as part of parenting and learning at home.

Becoming a mother at 13, Ms. Taylor admittedly made mistakes and dropped out of school. Determined to be a model for her children, Ms. Taylor later returned to school and completed her GED at age 30. Ms. Taylor is now able to recognize her growth over the years because of her experiences as a mother, learning from parenting classes, and her time in counseling. This growth has fostered Ms. Taylor's role construction, adding experiences of motherhood, information derived from parenting classes, and her own development because of therapy.

Developing efficacious behaviors and practices as a parent has influenced how Ms. Taylor navigates both the home environment (micro-system) and the interactions between home and school (meso-system) to support her two boys.

*Meso-system.* Direct school involvement stemmed from behavior issues Ms. Taylor's son experienced in the classrooms at Deacon Elementary. Ms. Taylor explained:

I had to get involved with Justin. Before he started taking medicine, he was off the wall. I was getting calls everyday. That's another reason why they know me. I figured that if I stay on him and stay coming and knowing what's going on, they know they have that support from me... (interview, June 17, 2017)

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Justin now has an Individual Education Plan and has been assigned to a special class as part of special education services geared to support his learning and behavior. Ms. Taylor has implemented strict routines to manage her children's time, set expectations for learning, ensure daily communication through email, text messages, and calls to her son's teacher and provides rewards and consequences to support achievement. Ms. Taylor shared her philosophy:

They'll tell you, I don't play about education. If it's free, soak it up, and you're not going to get nowhere in life knowing nothing. You can correct ignorance; you can't correct stupid. And if you're ignorant, and you don't know, somebody can teach you. If you want to be plain stupid, then I don't know what to tell you. If it's out here and you don't want to engage, I can't make you. You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink. They will tell you, I don't play with education. And I'm the type of parent that if you call me and tell me my child did something, I'm not going to tell you, no they didn't, I'm going to investigate it, but I know my kids. (interview, June 17, 2017)

Over the past two year, Ms. Taylor has seen great progress with Justin's school achievement and behavior. Providing another example, Ms. Taylor discussed a series of text messages between she and Justin's teacher when she discovered his homework was still in his backpack a week after it was to be turned in. Ms. Taylor reached out to the teacher and through their conversation created a system in which the teacher asked for his homework daily to prompt him to recover it from his backpack. Justin not receiving a grade for homework Ms. Taylor made sure was complete was unacceptable. Communicating with the teacher on behalf of her son evidenced her involvement and advocacy for his achievement.

Other communication with school staff including the teacher and school nurse has led to adult relationships and social ties that benefit Ms. Taylor as well as her son. Justin's teacher is

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

also an advocate for the local Urban League and through conversation, Ms. Taylor has sought advice and information regarding clinics for criminal record expunction. Limited by the cost of filing legal documents, the relationship with the teacher may lead to information that mediates the cost for Ms. Taylor. Due to Justin taking daily medication at school, Ms. Taylor and the school nurse have developed a relationship through shared experiences with breast cancer. A survivor herself, Ms. Taylor commented on how she checks in with the school nurse, prays for her, and talks with the nurse about her progress.

*Exo- and macro- systems.* Moving through environments of work (exo-system) and society (macro-system), Ms. Taylor has proved resilient in her quest to maintain employment and improve her skillset by enrolling in online classes geared towards medical records assistance. Though she continues to be affected by her criminal record history, Ms. Taylor seeks out employment opportunities and continues to collaborate with Justin's teacher.

Over the years, criminal record history has plagued employment for Ms. Taylor, regulating her to low-wage positions that limit upward economic mobility. The stigma of this criminal history has impacted how she is able to participate as a parent due to a failed volunteer background check. In spite of this limitation, Ms. Taylor works to be actively involved with her students through parenting including setting high expectations for learning and achievement, monitoring homework and providing resources that facilitate learning at home, communicating with school staff to support achievement and appropriate behavior, and leveraging community collaboration through mentorship for her son that provided a male role model and gaining potential support through the Urban League to minimize the impact of her criminal record history.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

**Ms. Smith.** Ms. Smith is a single mother of two, her son attends Deacon and daughter attends a different elementary school. Our interview was over the telephone and within minutes of beginning our conversation, it was clear that Ms. Smith readily leveraged community collaboration to support learning with her family. Ms. Smith had recently completed a parent leadership academy at the local Urban League to support parent advocacy and was eager to share the learning and impact the academy had on her parenting skills.

Ms. Smith was reluctant to meet with the researcher and agreed to a phone interview and short meeting the following day to sign consent forms. The next day, Ms. Smith and her two children walked to Deacon to sign documents and provide a quick follow up to the previous conversation. While Ms. Smith agreed to be interviewed, she expressed concern regarding her identity and the audience for the study. Ms. Smith seemed uneasy and preoccupied by her inquisitive children who were enamored with the classroom materials staged in the hallway for summer cleaning. It was obvious that she was attentive to the needs of her children and demanded appropriate behavior.

**Limiting factors.** Discussing limiting factors that affect parental involvement with Ms. Smith, the neighborhood context interferes with the sense of safety she expects for her children. There may be other factors that detract from involvement, but due to limited data, this observable factor is recorded based on my time in the field with this parent.

Ms. Smith walked to and from the school with her two children in tow, battling the oppressive heat of summer, walking to a nearby apartment building. She does not own a car and relies on public transportation to move throughout the city. A single mother, Ms. Smith raises her two children in the high poverty neighborhood that directly surrounds Deacon Elementary. The community is disrupted by crime, overrun with liquor stores, and predominantly African

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

American. Dwellings surrounding Deacon are a mixture of houses and apartments in conditions ranging from livable to boarded with plywood and decorated with graffiti along the front and sides of houses (observation, June 13, 2017).

The working poor inhabit this neighborhood and the community park that sits behind Deacon is dilapidated, but still in use by some locals. The grass is thin and missing in areas detracting from the green expectation of a community park. Playground equipment is sparse and broken, with swings missing from chains thrown over the pole, crooked and unreachable by children not tall or agile enough to climb the pole and untangle it. Sketchy characters sit under a tree at the opposite end of the park, smoking and looking menacing enough to pass them by quickly and not make eye contact. One would expect a park that sits 30 feet from an elementary school sidewalk to be more inviting, but this is not the case. A newly implemented revitalization project for the community, located just west of the city center, will bring a new YMCA, renovations to the park, and new businesses to improve economic stability over the next few years. But for now, the park is unsafe for children. Next to Deacon is the Urban League that provided the parent leadership program Smith participated with, a symbol of future upward mobility.

***The developing parent and involvement.*** Ms. Smith continues to develop as a parent navigating the various environments from the micro- to macro-system as part of involvement type 1, parenting. Parental role construction derived from childhood models of the godparents who raised her. Ms. Smith's godfather had a third grade education and her godmother made it to the ninth grade, yet they spoke to her often about going to college. Due to their educational limitations, neighbors were sought out to provide homework help until Smith reached middle school (grades 6-8) and began seeking help from friends and classmates. Raising her own

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

children, Ms. Smith parents by setting expectations for learning and success. She tells her children to figure out what they want to do and then decide on going to college to avoid owing money for student loans. Smith explained her reasoning:

As far as education, I tell them you have to have a basic education even if you wash dishes or are a custodian. I am at the other end of the spectrum, I tell them to find something you are really interested in before you go to college, because I know a lot of people who have gone to college and some have gotten degrees and some have not and they have a lot of student debt. A lot of people don't talk about that as much as they talk about go to college. (interview, June 13, 2017)

She continued that she instills in her children that there are many different occupations to have and that learning a trade is a great option as well. Ms. Smith shared that she discusses her expectations and options with her kids, stating that if they do not go to college, they can still find a career by being a plumber, construction worker, a builder, or a hair stylist to avoid the assumed debt that will accumulate from a college education.

Increasing her parental efficacy Ms. Smith participated in a parent leadership academy sponsored by the Urban League, leveraging community collaboration. From the parent academy, Ms. Smith gained information and exposure to support advocacy. Speakers participating in the program brought information pertaining to student advocacy, school policy, and charter schools as its implementation was pending in the state. In addition Ms. Smith joined a community group and described her experience thus far:

It was originally geared towards fathers and their children, but it is really geared towards anybody, you can be a female, single parent, co-parent where parents aren't together, just some family time to curb or prevent violence in our community. We went one time and

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

made hats and the children made Mother's Day cards. We made a collage one time for setting goals and trying to take articles and things that will help you accomplish your goals in the next 12 months. It's just spending time with children and parents and keeping kids off the street. Those [activities] are the two most recent ones. I try to get involved in things that will keep us busy. (interview, June 13, 2017)

Joining parent groups and being involved with community happenings allowed Ms. Smith to increase her parenting skills and build upon her role as parent to her two children.

Navigating school and home in the meso-system, Ms. Smith facilitates learning at home through the routines and procedures she has put in place to support school success. Her children have a strict routine of playing for about 30 minutes following arrival after school, then dinner with homework following. The culminating event for school is nightly reading and recording the number of pages read for the class reading log and then off to bed by 8:30 PM.

Interaction in the exo-system and macro-system were not as clear with Ms. Smith as she was unable to complete a second interview due to having, "...too many things going on at the time..." according to a voicemail left for the researcher. Although excited to talk about her community engagement activities, Ms. Smith was guarded in her conversation and not as forthcoming discussing her personal path. During our interview and observation at the school, Ms. Smith asked questions regarding who would view the information and how her identity would be concealed. She discussed her belief in the subject matter and the power of bringing forth voices of parents who struggle with criminal record history. Then in the next sentence, she reminded the researcher that she did not want anyone to know of her participation, even glancing over her shoulder a few times as we talked. Although information from Ms. Smith was not as plentiful, her ongoing community collaboration demonstrated how she interacts with the macro-

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

system in addition to working around her criminal history as a potential barrier to employment and upward mobility.

### **Common Themes**

Across all three participants, three themes emerged from the data to answer question two, demonstrating how parents with criminal record history experience involvement with their child's education. The three themes are:

- Working around policy restrictions and limitations
- Development of parental role construction and efficacy
- Active negotiation of criminal record history and poverty contexts

For each theme, evidence from interviews, artifacts, and observations is provided to support findings, along with narratives to illuminate how the experiences of parents are relative to each theme. While themes are not ordinal, they do work interdependently in the daily lives of participants as they negotiate routines and obstacles, continuing towards parental involvement.

**Working around policy restrictions and limitations.** Motivated participants in this study worked around policy restrictions and limitations to participate in the education of their child. Parents leveraged communication, learning at home, and substituted school visits for volunteering to work around the restrictive policy to be a presence within the school actively involved in their child's education.

**Communication.** Parents used verbal and written communication to support school success for their students at Deacon Elementary. Maximizing time while dropping off or picking up their students at school, parents used the time to personally introduce themselves to staff members and the classroom teacher. As Ms. Taylor commented, "I try to get in and be so involved as to where they know me" (interview, June 17, 2017). For Ms. Taylor and Ms. Smith



## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

communication was key to support the learning of their students who had been identified as having significant behavior concerns. Ms. Taylor had daily interactions with her son's teacher, receiving written reports on his work completion and behavior and weekly newsletters concerning classwork topics and homework assignments. The Weekly Agenda, consisting of the learning plan from the last week of school, was still posted on the refrigerator for easy reference (observation, June 17, 2017). Ms. Smith also received daily written communication from her son's teacher as to his progress and work completion. During our phone interview, I asked her to walk in the kitchen and tell me what papers were posted on her refrigerator. After laughing at my odd request, she obliged and relayed what items were posted and how they related to the family (interview, June 13, 2017). Ms. Smith had the Weekly Agenda from her son's class, artwork created in school by her son and daughter, and two flyers from the Urban League – one advertising a parent academy that Ms. Smith participated with and another advertising an Open Mic Night. The Urban League flyers attested to her community engagement with the Urban League.

In addition to daily communication about learning and behavior, these two parents reported positive communication experiences with Deacon that supported their student and encouraged community collaboration. Collected artifacts from a meeting with the family resource center coordinator during Parent-Teacher Conference day (observation, February 27, 2017) provided evidence of school-wide communication artifacts from Deacon Elementary including 22 flyers for afterschool programming such as literacy camps, sports and clubs, a Parent Teacher Association meeting, mental health partner outreach, and information regarding community events. These artifacts evidenced ways in which the school invited participation of

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

students with after school programs and community events as well as parents through the Parent Teacher Association meeting notice and offerings of services through the mental health partner.

In her involvement, Ms. Jackson was forced to contend with the additional work around of poor communication from Sarah's teacher. She cited poor communication as the primary reason for transferring Sarah to a new school. Sarah's experience being bullied by another student and Ms. Jackson not receiving notice from the school other than a carbon copy from the nurse's office due to injury was the catalyst that prompted transfer. The teacher Sarah had did not provide weekly newsletters or daily communication to support learning and achievement. On report cards, Sarah received markings of "needs improvement" in reading that contradicted Ms. Jackson's experiences of Sarah's nightly reading and homework completion. Attempts to meet with the teacher were ignored until Sarah had an incident of misbehavior and then the teacher wanted to meet. Ms. Jackson was adamant that discussions of behavior would come only after they discussed academics as she had been trying to facilitate previously (interview, June 13, 2017). The meeting never took place. Thus, this example illustrates how communication is a key relationship component in school and parent partnerships. Ms. Jackson attempted repeatedly to partner with Sarah's teacher, but did not receive the cooperation needed to facilitate Sarah's success at Deacon Elementary School.

***Learning at home.*** Learning at home was supported across participants through routines and rituals to support homework completion and set expectations for achievement. Parents provide or facilitate homework help, check student backpacks and folders, and provide materials at home to support learning.

Described during each initial interview, homework routines were ritualistic in each participant household. Ms. Jackson's granddaughter ate dinner, Ms. Smith and Ms. Taylor's

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

sons had a snack and then all were seated at the kitchen table to begin their homework after arriving home from school each day. Both Ms. Jackson and Ms. Smith described providing help when needed, and Ms. Taylor solicited help from Justin's older brother while she made dinner. During the discussion of homework routines, each participant mentioned having their student put the completed work in their backpacks, demonstrating the parents' commitment to getting the completed homework back to school for grading.

Ms. Taylor shared an experience where she communicated with the teacher after finding Justin's homework still in his backpack Friday evening when all homework is due to be turned in each Friday. Following the conversation with the teacher, an agreement was made to ask Justin for his homework to counteract his forgetful tendencies associated with his Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder diagnosis. Checking the backpack is how Ms. Jackson discovered notes from the nurse regarding injury from the bully in Sarah's class. The parent survey used in this research study was sent home by student carry, so parents who checked their student's backpack or folder received the survey and instructions to complete and return it. In all cases, parents actively sought information from the school and participated in two-way communication.

The home environment with each participant was conducive to learning. During observations at Ms. Jackson's home, the kitchen table was clear and ready for use. Story books appropriate for her first grade granddaughter were stacked on the end table next to the couch, a certificate from the end of the school year was sitting on the coffee table, prompting Ms. Jackson to let me know she, "...needed to find a place to put it on the wall" (interview and observation, June 13, 2017). During an observation at Ms. Taylor's home (June 17, 2017), the house was extremely neat and quiet with backpacks hanging on hooks on bedroom doors and her daughter's diploma framed and displayed in the deep living room windowsill. There the kitchen table was

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

also clear and ready for use, with the computer desk pushed against the back wall of the kitchen without a chair, possibly one was pulled from the kitchen table when needed. Since I met with Ms. Smith at Deacon Elementary, I was unable to observe her home environment, but during our interview, she spoke extensively about the strict homework and evening routines in place for her son, specific to the time allotments for snack, homework, play, dinner, bath, and bedtime (interview, June 13, 2017).

*Substituting school visits for volunteering.* Parents substituted school visits for volunteering. Any time parents are in the school building, they make it a point to communicate with staff members and be visible. Ms. Taylor developed relationships with the teachers as well as the school nurse who was responsible for administering medication for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder to her student, “I might be going to get him to go to an appointment because he sees a counselor...[they say] Hi, Ms. Taylor – they know me and they see me” (interview, June 13, 2017). Additionally, Ms. Taylor had lunch with her student on several occasions as she worked to support him through behavior issues, until the \$4.50 cost became prohibitive. Ms. Jackson brought cupcakes to the classroom to celebrate her granddaughter’s birthday and attends open house events each year as students go back to school (interview, September 8, 2017). Ms. Smith walks her son to and from school daily, creating regular opportunities to speak with his teacher (interview, June 13, 2017). Additionally, Ms. Smith met the class at the zoo to attend a field trip. Her ability to chaperone was hindered by the failed background check; yet, she transported herself to the fieldtrip site and visited her student to be part of his learning experience. Ms. Smith explained:

They went to the zoo every day for a week. When he first told me about it I thought he was joking, saying you’re not going to the zoo for a week, what are you going to learn at

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

the zoo for a week? Then I talked to the teacher and she said yeah, they're going to the zoo all week. So I went on a Tuesday and it was really interesting. They talked about the different temperature levels of earth and the different parts of the hand and the tooth and put them under the microscope. Talked about the armadillo, dragon, and split up into groups and talked about kangaroos and wallabies and then they did case work and had to draw information about the animals. (interview, June 13, 2017)

Approved chaperones typically arrive to school and ride the bus along with students and teachers to the field trip location and provide supervision to a group of students. Ms. Smith, who does not have reliable transportation had the burden of traveling to the location on her own and it was permissible to only interact and supervise her son during the day per the district school volunteer policy (interview, Volunteer Center Coordinator, February 2017).

**Development of parental role construction and efficacy.** Parents within this case study built upon their parental role construction and efficacy to advocate for their students and support achievement. Role construction was based upon models each parent experienced as they grew up and attended school themselves. Their parent or guardian's routines and support shaped their practices and expectations for achievement they now relay to their children.

***Parental role construction.*** Parental role construction is rooted in previous experiences and expectations of what is involved in the parent role and how parents grow within their practices to become more efficacious in child rearing. At various points in life, each parent recognized they had to develop as a parent and constructed a pathway for themselves. Supporting their students, each parent grew in their role construction over time based on the needs of their children.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Ms. Jackson identified negative experiences from her childhood that labeled her mother's involvement as, "Horrible" (interview, June 13, 2017). She explained the pain of not having an involved parent or family that attended her sporting events or school activities. Determined to change the path for her children, she made effort to be involved. Work schedules and the burden of failed relationships and consequently raising her children as a single mother strained her availability. Ms. Jackson's involvement was relegated to dealing with problems or concerns from the school (interview, June 13, 2017). Following the graduation of three out of four children and the realization that two of her children greatly struggle with literacy as adults, Ms. Jackson has dedicated herself to being involved with the education of the granddaughter she is raising.

Through the years, Ms. Jackson has evolved in her role construction. As a grandmother, she has a second chance at school interaction and is determined to make it the best experience for Sarah, even monitoring the television shows Sarah can watch, strictly limiting them to educational and children's programming (interview, June 13, 2017). As such, Ms. Jackson transferred Sarah's school because she did not feel confident her granddaughter was getting the care and growth experiences needed to be successful in school.

During interviews, Ms. Taylor (June 17, 2017) and Ms. Smith (June 13, 2017) discussed how they increased structure due to misbehavior. During our interview, Ms. Smith described how she was able to share the path she travelled with her son to support another parent whom she met in the Parent Academy. The other parent told Ms. Smith that her child's teacher told her he was too hyper. Hearing this, Ms. Smith shared her experience and how the Parent Academy assisted with teaching parents to be better advocates.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

I told her how my child has ADD and he is not on medication and trying to help with that... and I hope I never have to get to that point, he has improved. After being diagnosed, he has improved tremendously. If you think your child is struggling, [they suggested] ways to try and get them tested through the schools and so the teacher is not teaching your child good – basically how to be a better advocate for your child and the steps and pathways that you take as far as talking to the teacher, getting the meeting set up, questions you should already have prepared and that you know your child and then being able to come and sit in the class...just everything, what if your child is failing a class or is eligible for some honors classes and how to go about getting your child in some higher level classes, so all that from the lowest level to the highest level.

(interview, June 13, 2017)

Learning to become a better advocate for her son, Ms. Smith was able to share her experience and encourage another parent in a similar situation, putting her newly acquired advocacy skills to immediate use.

Ms. Jackson and Ms. Taylor each have an adult child without a high school diploma and Ms. Jackson has two adult children with limited literacy skills. Both Ms. Jackson (June 13, 2017) and Ms. Taylor (June 17, 2017) reflected on their older children during our interviews and attributed their growth as parents to these self-proclaimed disappointments.

Ms. Taylor matured into her constructed role as a parent. Becoming a parent as a teen Ms. Taylor was limited in her experiences and made mistakes as she raised her young family as a single mother. A Child Protective Services complaint and finding concluded with Ms. Taylor losing custody of her children for over three years. Ms. Taylor explained the ordeal:

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

See, what happened was when my oldest daughter was little, I spanked her and left a bruise, teacher called CPS and went through all that and at the time I was just being real hard-headed, young, naive, didn't want to listen to them. I thought they were trying to take my kids. Instead of using the system I was against it at the time. Then I finally wised up and was like look they're not going to work with you this way. So, I finally took my head out of my butt and just did what I needed to do to get my children back.

And then I went to counseling... went to therapy. (interview, June 17, 2017)

Ms. Taylor's role construction has been positively affected by attending parenting classes, therapy, and the experience raising her two older daughters. With one diploma displayed in the windowsill of the living room from her second oldest daughter and the promise from the eldest to finish her GED, Ms. Taylor has adjusted her practices to provide a strict and strong foundation for her boys, especially the youngest who attends Deacon. Ms. Taylor operationalized her involvement as advocacy and intervened due to Justin's behavior issues in school. Daily phone calls from the teacher and administration demanded she take an active role and she has since enforced home routines and additional help through counseling for Justin that has improved his behavior and achievement.

Role construction for Ms. Smith was based on her upbringing. Her godparents and their examples of strong routines, expectations for achievement, and prioritizing schoolwork provided her models for how to support school achievement (interview, June 13, 2017). Ms. Smith advocates for her students through strict parenting routines that provide a schedule for play, homework, and nightly reading. Ms. Smith's son also experienced behavior difficulties in school, forcing the adaptation of these strict routines to limit opportunities for misbehavior. Utilizing community resources, Ms. Smith chose to participate in a Parent Academy sponsored



## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

by the Urban League, to increase her parenting knowledge around navigating the school system and gaining access to services and supports to improve student outcomes. Learning within the academy provided information on gaining access to special education, advanced placement and gifted services, preparing students for post-secondary education including how to navigate financial aid and the importance of preparing for college entrance exams, and understanding new legislation regarding schools in the state (interview, June 13, 2017). Ms. Smith also participates in a community group geared to support single parents and deter violence in the community through shared activities and interdependent support from members.

Construction of parent roles evolved for each participant due to their own experiences, outside agency help from school staff, counseling and community groups, and the continuing needs of their students.

*Parental efficacy.* As parent participants recognized the need to develop in their role construction and improved their practices, a sense of efficacy developed and empowered them to maintain involvement. Participants observed academic and behavioral improvement from their students as their involvement increased. Ms. Taylor (June 17, 2017) and Ms. Smith (June 13, 2017) both communicated to the researcher their actions helped to decrease behavior incidents over time because of communication with teachers through daily notes and weekly correspondence related to work quality and completion. These factors demonstrated to both parents their involvement had positive effect on student outcomes. Ms. Jackson displayed efficacious behaviors with her decision to move her granddaughter to a new school since communication had not improved by the end of the school year with Deacon Elementary. Ms. Jackson's efficacy was also apparent with her reflection on past experiences raising her children

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

and her differentiated approach to involvement for her granddaughter. Ms. Jackson stated in an interview:

I refuse to have her in a situation that two of my kids, I have four kids, but two of them graduated without really knowing how to read and two of them were really smart. My oldest does better, but has problems with reading comprehension and my son would help her and then my middle daughter can't read to the point where I have to help her fill out job applications to this day. (June 13, 2017)

Across participants, parents internalize their sense of efficacy and stated their participation brings a sense of purpose and satisfaction from the observed impact it has on their student's success.

**Active negotiation of criminal record history and poverty contexts.** Interwoven with criminal record history, poverty and challenging contexts were consistent conditions across all three participants inhibiting involvement. All participants have had to confront obstacles derived from their record history, living in concentrated poverty, and raising children as a single parent. To be involved with their child's education these participants had to manage these challenges and persevere to be present for school visits, seek out assistance to support themselves and their children, maintain routines to support learning, and find opportunities to provide enrichment for their students.

***Criminal record history.*** Criminal record history excludes parents from the official volunteer process for Deacon Elementary based on school district policy implementation. Participants in this study are not deterred but work around these restrictions to be actors in the educational process with their children. Criminal record history not only obstructs volunteer opportunities, but also creates additional barriers to economic mobility and is a confounding

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

variable to living in poverty circumstances. Prior to her medical retirement, Ms. Jackson sought work as a caretaker, but was denied access due to her criminal record. Because of an assault charged that originated from a physical altercation between her teenage daughters and other teens –initiated by the other family who came to their house to start the issue; her calling to “...care for those who can’t take care of themselves,” (interview, September 8, 2017) was muted. One day, one incident changed her employability. Ms. Jackson stated in the same interview:

It stopped me from doing some things I wanted to do. Like, my job, when I could work, was a CNA and home health aide, I drove for [special needs transportation company], I love taking care of people who can’t take care of themselves, that’s what I love to do. So they have this thing now where you can bring a person into your home and you care for them and I was going to do that and I got rejected from that job because of that assault, which has been dismissed. (September 8, 2017)

Similar to Ms. Jackson, Ms. Taylor has aspirations in the healthcare field of becoming a nurse, but her criminal record also excludes her from eligibility in this occupation. In an interview, she described her mother who was a nurse for many years and the life it afforded them.

My mother was a single parent, she worked graveyard shift, she worked to provide us with a good life. We were never on welfare or anything. She was an RN at [local hospital] for 39 years, she retired in 2010. The structure she had for us and the fact that she worked hard, she never gave up, and she overcame being an alcoholic – that let me know she is someone I admire. I admire her strength, I admire what she did to take care of us to make sure we had clothes, food in our mouth, we had a roof, we never went homeless. (interview, June 17, 2017)

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Her case has also been dismissed. Eight years prior to this study Ms. Taylor completed the court appointed parenting classes, counseling, and met all requirements to regain custody of her children and has had no incidents since.

The specifics of Ms. Smith's criminal history were not disclosed, but her forward progression with community advocacy groups to support the needs of her family demonstrate commitment to her family and upward mobility.

*Living in concentrated poverty.* Poverty is deeply ingrained in the lives of these women and continues to be an obstacle as they work around their criminal history to improve their family situations and support their students' achievement. Other factors, embedded in concentrated poverty, plague the lives of these participants that include having reliable transportation, community surroundings, and health issues that impact daily life.

In regard to economic mobility, Ms. Jackson is no longer working due to health issues, but worked previously in various low-wage capacities while raising her four children. Ms. Jackson has been both dependent on government assistance and without it while supporting her family independently. During her life, she has taken in family members, cared for friends, and now has custody of her granddaughter. Although she has struggled economically, she is still adamant about supporting and taking in family and friends in their time of need (interview, September 8, 2017).

At the time of the study, Ms. Taylor started work at a local hotel, most recently having a job offer rescinded due to her criminal record history. The rescinded position could have provided economic upward mobility for Taylor and her family due to the salary and benefits included with the position (interview, September 13, 2017).

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

The cost of having lunch with her student made Ms. Taylor greatly reduce the number of times she was able to visit and encourage her son during the school day. Lack of reliable transportation for Ms. Taylor and Ms. Smith caused them to rely on walking and public transportation to run errands, transport their kids to appointments, or attend school events. Ms. Smith walked to Deacon in 90-degree weather to meet with the researcher for an interview (observation, June 13, 2017). Ms. Jackson commented that for the first time in her life, she was able to buy a new car and have reliable transportation (interview, June 13, 2017). This reliability finally achieved after raising her four adult children and four years into raising her granddaughter.

Evidenced by observations (June 13, 2017; June 17, 2017) parent participants reside in three different neighborhoods within a ten-mile radius that all share similar characteristics of boarded homes mixed alongside inhabited homes. Trash and debris litter streets, high crime rates plague the neighborhoods and undermine a sense of safety for the predominantly African American residents. According to the district data book (2017), schools in these areas mirror the neighborhoods with high behavior incidents, high poverty rates, and consequent low achievement rates.

These conditions have resulted in participants keeping a close watch over their students in effort to reduce their chances of becoming victimized by their neighborhood conditions and submitting to crime themselves or being further harmed by effects of concentrated poverty. Ms. Smith walks with her children in the neighborhood. During our interview (June 13, 2017) she kept herself in full view of the children while discussing her involvement. Ms. Smith commits to a strict schedule where play is monitored to ensure safety. Ms. Jackson relies on her family's reputation and her direct supervision to provide a watchful eye as her granddaughter rides her

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

bike up and down the street, forbidden to turn the corner (interview, June 13, 2017). Ms. Taylor allows her son to go out with his older brother to the local park but is strict on their comings and goings. Ms. Taylor continues to work on her plan to move her family from the West End of town to provide them an experience different from the neighborhood that has shaped their childhood and been the only experience of Ms. Taylor (interview, September 13, 2017).

Two of the three participants had to cope with health issues as well. Being a single head of household has implications on its on that make parenting challenging and health issues can have even more of a detrimental effect on the family. Ms. Jackson has nerve damage in her hands and feet that impact her mobility. She has relied on one of her daughters to assist with Sarah when she is sick or hospitalized. For this reason, moving Sarah to a new school, logistically it had to be a school close to home to make it easier for the aunt to help (interview, June 13, 2018). Ms. Taylor is a breast cancer survivor and her illness greatly affected the behavior of her son. She explained, “I was going through the chemo process, so he didn’t know how to control it or he didn’t know what was going on – all he knew was his mother was ill and there was nothing he could do about it, so he started acting out” (interview, September 13, 2017). As a single mother, Ms. Taylor had to rely on family members to help, but she still was the primary contact for school and as such was the one to deal with the acting out behaviors Justin exhibited during her illness.

While Ms. Smith has not been forced to cope with serious health concerns herself, both she and Ms. Taylor have sons diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorders. Each boy was diagnosed following an evaluation prompted by repeated behavior incidents. This led to special education designations and placement in a special class with smaller teacher to student ratios and smaller class sizes. Along with diagnoses, one student was prescribed medication, both attend

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

counseling sessions on a regular basis, and both have regular appointments to meet with a doctor. As both parents do not have reliable transportation, they must use public transportation to get students to required appointments and attend meetings at school, at least yearly, to monitor student progress towards their goals as part of the special education program (interview, June 13, 2017, June 17, 2017).

*Moving towards involvement.* Despite obstacles associated with criminal record history and poverty contexts, all participants continue to thrive in their efforts towards involvement. Becoming a mother as a young teen, Ms. Taylor dropped out of high school to raise her baby. She laughed and commented, “Yea...I still need my butt whooped after that... I’m serious...I was too young to be having somebody’s baby” (interview, September, 13, 2017). However, Ms. Taylor persevered and obtained her GED at 30. Ms. Taylor has been making plans to clear her record and is working with her son’s teacher, who is also an advocate for the Urban League, to seek out programs that offer assistance with the expunction process. In the meantime, she has enrolled in online classes to earn a medical records assistant certificate in preparation for her future expunged record.

Ms. Jackson remarried during the course of the study and now has more support to assist with raising her granddaughter. Now a two-income household, she is better able to support Sarah financially and potentially increase her economic mobility (interview, September 8, 2017).

Ms. Smith completed the Parent Academy through the Urban League and had plans to continue her participation with the Urban League and a second community group she joined (interview, June 13, 2017). The group provides family enrichment opportunities to support single parents and children, providing networking opportunities and positive community images.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Enriching the lives of their students, all participants leveraged community collaboration to provide additional opportunities for learning and fun. Ms. Taylor's son gained a mentor through a program pairing adult males with young men to encourage positive relationships and leadership. Ms. Smith leveraged community resources by participating in her advocacy and support programs. She seeks out resources to supplement her single parent efforts and keep her family busy with positive activities. Ms. Smith maintains focus on sharing reality with her children and how they should structure their studies on their interests and encourages them to explore new things and take advantage of all that is available (interview, June 13, 2017).

Furthermore, all participants utilized a community sponsored cultural pass that allows students to visit local attractions such as museums, the planetarium, zoo, and other cultural events to support learning and engagement through the summer months. The pass offers free admission for a student and one adult can get in free with a student who has a pass. The cultural pass provides free access to 42 venues around the city and surrounding areas. Parents and students can pick up passes at local public libraries at the start of the summer each year. As an additional incentive, students can win prizes for participating in activities and participate in the summer reading challenges sponsored by the public library. This initiative supported through the mayor's office and is facilitated in effort to increase summer learning and engage all families in community events and activities.

### **Convergent Findings**

Levels of involvement at Deacon Elementary School based on the Parent Survey of Family and Community Involvement in the Elementary and Middle Grades (Sheldon & Epstein, 2007), revealed a 42% response rate of parents who provided self-report ratings of their involvement by completing and returning the questionnaire. Based on frequency data from each



## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

subsection, parents demonstrated higher levels of engagement among involvement types of parenting and learning at home. In addition, parent survey responses suggested the school communicated well regarding student progress. The embedded case study (Yin, 2014) yielded three themes that answered the question of how three parent participants with criminal record history experienced involvement as they participated in their children's schooling. Convergent findings are presented, organized by theme, to compare the quantitative and qualitative data to support or show dissent of the evidence from involvement experiences of parents at Deacon Elementary School.

The principal of Deacon associated her views on student achievement, family engagement and barriers to success.

I think...my views are the more parents are involved and expectations that are set at home, you see that carry over into school. The less our parents are involved and our kids know when their parents are involved or not or want to be involved or not, we see that as a huge barrier for us. I won't say they don't want to be apart, but there's no effort to be apart and again that may go back to their experience with school. Not really able to see that, I do know that one of the barriers with the principal before me was that she did not have a strong relationship with the community or the parents and so they are apprehensive. I am still knocking down walls that were created and knocking down and trying to change mindsets about what happens at Deacon. That's a big struggle for us, changing a mindset because they don't come to meet the principal. We had a back to school bash for the whole school and probably about 50 families showed. (interview, March 8, 2018)

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Findings within this study support that motivated parents are open and encouraged by relationships reciprocated by the school and seek out opportunity to engage with school staff to support their students.

**Working around policy restrictions and limitations.** Across case study participants, each parent worked around volunteer policy restrictions by leveraging the involvement types of communication, learning at home, and substituted volunteering for visits to the school.

**Communication.** Survey questions within the communication component asked parents to rate school-to-home communication and response rates were echoed by participant experience findings. Ninety-three percent of respondents agreed that the school helps parents understand child developmental stages, 91% agreed the school appropriately reported student progress, and 93% were kept current regarding news about happenings at school. Ms. Taylor and Ms. Smith were kept abreast of student progress through written daily notes, class newsletters and weekly agendas that provided learning plans. Current learning topics and homework assignments were evidenced through interview responses and artifacts present during observations (interview, June 13, 2017; observation June 17, 2017). For their participation, parents returned and often initiated communication, checking student backpacks, sending notes to the teacher, and using text messages or emails to maintain contact. Survey responses regarding home-to-school communication consisting of talking with the teacher is not as strongly supported by cross participant parent experiences, as 48% of parents reported talking with their child's teacher on a frequent basis.

Ms. Jackson's experience with school-to-home communication was not consistent with survey evidence. Her granddaughter's teacher did not effectively communicate, causing strain in the relationship between home and school interactions (interview, September 8, 2017).

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

However, Ms. Jackson made effort to attend Open House and introduce herself to the teacher, checking her student's backpack daily, sent in notes, and left messages for the teacher to address concerns. Ms. Jackson's communication of concerns to the teacher and consequent transfer of Sarah to new school also evidenced advocacy as part of her parental role construction and efficacy.

District communication failed to provide information to case study participants as neither of the three were aware of permissive activities for parents who fail the background check (interview, June 13, 2017; June 17, 2017). In an interview with the district representative (May 1, 2017) who works for the office charged with managing volunteer background checks the representative was asked how parents are notified regarding acceptance or denial as volunteers. The district representative explained the process is to send a form letter to the school that informs the parent of acceptance or denial. The school then forwards the letter to the parent. Below, she did provide an explanation of what is permissible for parents if they are not approved as a volunteer due to criminal record history.

They can go on a field trip with their child, but transportation will not be provided by [district]. They can attend a class party or celebration, have lunch with their child, attend all public school functions, and help in the office, library, and computer lab under the supervision of a [district] employee. (May 1, 2017)

The information on permissive participation is not shared in the form letter, but is printed on the district policy (artifact, May 1, 2017). The district representative also revealed there is no appeals process and policy reviews are conducted "as needed," with the last update in 2014. Across participants, none were aware of the list of permissive activities. Ms. Smith was made aware that without an approved volunteer background check she had to meet the class at the zoo, but

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

not made aware of the exhaustive list of activities (June 13, 2017). Stating that she had just been hired in this new position, the district representative was unable to provide a response as to why the list was not included on the form letter or how this particular district compares to others nationally, “ I don’t know. This has been a whirlwind of adjustment this year. Unfortunately, I haven’t had time to research other districts or national trends” (interview, May 1, 2017).

***Learning at home.*** Learning at home is a large component of involvement for parent respondents from the survey and case study participants. From the survey, 95% of respondents reported frequently checking to ensure homework is completed, 94% of respondents reported regularly asking their student how they are doing in school, and 89% report frequent review and discussion regarding work completed in school and brought home by students. Case study participants within this involvement type all created a home environment conducive to learning. These three mothers ensured a regular space for homework completion, available supplies, access to books and technology, and maintained strict routines for out of school time that prioritized homework completion and regular communication with their student’s teacher (interview, July 13, 2017; observation, June 13, 2017, June 17, 2017). Additionally, Ms. Jackson insisted that Sarah only watch educational and children’s programming during television time (interview, June 13, 2017). Last, artifacts consisting of classroom communication were posted on the refrigerators of Ms. Taylor (observation, June 17, 2017) and Ms. Smith (interview, June 13, 2017), a diploma was displayed in the living room of Ms. Taylor (observation, June 17, 2017), and a certificate of achievement was in the living room of Ms. Jackson’s house waiting to be added to the wall display (observation, June 13, 2017). These artifacts in addition to a large, full manila envelope of report cards and certificates Ms. Taylor pulled from a drawer in her bedroom to show the researcher during an observation (June 17, 2017), evidenced how

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

participants displayed and collected student work and achievement memorabilia in support of student learning and achievement.

*Substituting school visits for volunteering.* Case study participants worked around their criminal record history and restrictive school district policy by substituting school visits for volunteering. Seventy-three percent of survey respondents reported receiving volunteer invitations from the school and 85 % reported receiving invitations to school programs; yet, 10% of respondents reported volunteering frequently and 20% said they volunteer once in a while.

Case study participants maximized encounters or created opportunities to be visible in the school while dropping off or picking up their student. Either during arrival and dismissal or while collecting students for appointments, participants were purposeful with introducing themselves to staff members and taking the opportunity to check on student progress (interview, June 13, 2017, June 17, 2017). Ms. Taylor made specific effort to speak to office staff and developed a relationship with the school nurse. She stated she would see them while picking up her son for appointments and or discussing his medication schedule with the nurse (interview, June 17, 2017). During our second interview (September 13, 2017), Ms. Taylor commented that she needed to check on Ms. Gold (school nurse) because she was battling breast cancer, leading her to discuss her own bout with breast cancer a couple years prior and how it affected her children.

Ms. Smith walks her son to and from school daily, providing regular scheduled occurrences for the teacher to access her and for Ms. Smith to have opportunity to speak with the teacher (interview, June 13, 2017). Ms. Jackson's school visits consisted of attending Open House, eating lunch with Sara once at Deacon, and she brought cupcakes to the classroom in celebration for her granddaughter's birthday (interview, September 8, 2017).

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

**Development of parental role construction and efficacy.** Survey respondents reported strong agreement with ideals of role construction believed to be part of their responsibilities as parents. Tracking student progress and helping students understand their homework had agreement levels of 96% and 95%, respectively, of respondents who understand it is a parent's responsibility to teach their children the value of schoolwork. The lowest level of agreement was with the statement pertaining to contacting the teacher about student struggle at 89%.

With efficacy, survey respondents had strong agreement in their comfort with how to help their student do well in school at 95%. Ninety-three percent both recognize their ability to motivate their student to do well in school and feel satisfied with their efforts to help their student learn.

Case study participants' experiences with involvement mirror statements of role construction and efficacy present with survey results. Role construction across all participants developed over the years as a result of models originally present from the parent's childhood, experience parenting their own children, and growing within the role over time. Ms. Taylor had to humble herself and, "...get her head out of her butt, and just do what I needed to do to get my children back..." (interview, June 17, 2017). Ms. Jackson realized that she did not want Sarah to have a similar fate as her adult child who, "... can't read to the point where I have to help her fill out job applications to this day" (interview, June 13, 2017). Ms. Smith realized from experience with her godparents who raised her that if you do not understand something to find someone who can help you. They did this by, "...getting neighbors to help me..." (interview, June 13, 2017) shaping her practices of seeking information from others to better yourself, evidenced by her participation in the Parent Academy to improve upon her role construction and efficacy.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Efficacy for case study participants has manifested through recognized improvement of student behavior and achievement for both Ms. Taylor and Ms. Smith with their sons. Ms.

Taylor explains:

I think that it helps me, uh, makes me feel important...when I am engaging and it makes me feel like I have the support of [the] school. Uh, I love Deacon because three of my children went there... And that's how I grew, it's like a family over there, they know me...one dysfunctional family. (interview, September 13, 2017)

Ms. Jackson's efficacy is rooted in understanding that she is trying to be better for her granddaughter, "I just like to be there for her, something I didn't do a lot of with them" (interview, September 8, 2017).

**Active negotiation of criminal record history and poverty contexts.** Demographic data from Deacon Elementary School revealed a 98% poverty rate and 80% of the student population was African American. Based on survey reports, 60% of parents had never married and 9% were divorced, indicating that 69% of students represented by this survey hailed from single parent households. Employment statistics indicated 40% of respondents worked full time, 12% part time, and 38% were unemployed, a percentage ten times the national average of 4.4% (National Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). Case study participants mirrored this demographic as single, African American female heads of household that grapple with living in poverty circumstances in addition to navigating society with the stigma and limits of criminal record history.

Last, although parents worked around the volunteer background check to be involved in the education of their students, these parents do not have access to the decision-making involvement type. Survey results report that 66% of parent respondents agree the school invites

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

participation on committees and 74% report receiving invitations to join the Parent Teacher Association, yet for those with criminal history, this option is closed. Participating on the Parent Teacher Association board or with school governance is not permissive without passing the background check. In this way, parents with criminal record history continue to be marginalized as they are excluded from school advocacy or governance mirroring a stigmatized existence in society that does not readily restore full rights of citizenry to those with criminal record history.

### **Chapter 4 Summary**

Results from both the quantitative and qualitative findings support the notion that parents at Deacon Elementary School are involved with the education of their students. Specifically, case study participants with criminal record history experienced involvement through three themes that explored how they are involved in their students' education. Participants worked around restrictive policies, developed in their parental role construction and efficacy, and continually negotiated obstacles that result from criminal record history and poverty contexts to be part of the educational process for their children that attend Deacon Elementary School.

Each parent had to develop along various environments to improve upon their practices as a parent and create home environments conducive to learning and routines to support school achievement. At greatest influence, parents conveyed messages to students that education is important and set expectations for learning and achievement. Despite having criminal record history and living in poverty circumstances, parents in this study provided strong support and advocated for positive student outcomes. Their advocacy was strengthened as they became more efficacious in their parenting role and they persevered through difficult circumstances to work around barriers of school district volunteer policies to be active participants within the school setting as well as in the home.



## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Convergent findings supported parental involvement at the school level, evidenced by survey results as well as involvement from the case study participants. Parents in the sample worked around the volunteer background check necessary for school volunteers to be involved despite a barrier to participation resulting from criminal record history and school district policy.

### Chapter 5: Discussion

#### Overview

This dissertation study aimed to examine levels of parental involvement in a high poverty, urban elementary school and how a purposeful sample of parents with criminal record history experience parental involvement. In the study state, school district policy mandates the use of volunteer background checks, essentially criminal background checks, for all school volunteers. Since there is no language delineation between school volunteers and parents, current implementation of this policy becomes exclusionary and a barrier to school access for parents with this history. As such, parents who have criminal record history are unable to be school volunteers or participate with school governance committees, thus potentially marginalizing their voice and ability to wholly advocate for students within the school. Consequently this could also undermine their ability to provide the parental support that researchers (Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Jeynes, 2003; Jeynes, 2005; Wilder, 2013) attest promote student achievement.

A second complication to this practice is the impact this policy has on parents and students in poverty circumstances. Federal legislation through the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) appropriates Title funds to support impoverished students, referring to them as our most at-risk individuals. These funds are provided to districts for school allocation in support of parent involvement program activities and outreach; yet parents and students funds are meant to serve are faced with barriers to access. Within a particular urban school district, students in high poverty schools are disproportionately affected by the implemented policy as the number of volunteer background check rejections in this district is significantly correlated to poverty rates within schools (Vanderharr, 2012).

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

This study attempts to expand the research of Epstein (1995) and her framework for the six types of parental involvement in schools to include the demographic of parents with criminal record history. Students in high poverty neighborhoods and schools often grapple with crime, violence, poor health conditions, food insecurity and high rates of mobility (Davies, 2006; Sparks, 2016). The effects of poverty disrupt cognitive development (Walsh et al., 2014), language acquisition (Hart & Riseley, 2003), and stunt academic achievement in reading and math (Morrissey & Vinopal, 2018).

The need for parental support of students is especially prevalent with families already working from a deficit position. To counteract the deleterious effects of poverty, parental involvement is crucial to promote academic success. Of greatest impact with parental involvement is the practice of parents setting expectations for achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001) and instilling learning behaviors that translate to self-guided behaviors (Loughlin-Presnal & Bierman, 2017) in later years. Controlling for socio-economic status, Jeynes (2003) asserted that African American children, more so than Latino or Asian students, benefit from parent involvement. This assertion is especially prevalent for the 80% African American student population at Deacon Elementary School.

### **Discussion of Findings**

In this chapter theoretical foundations are revisited to situate study findings within the research literature on parental involvement. Discussion of findings will present information on the levels of involvement at Deacon Elementary School, a high poverty, urban elementary school that bounded the embedded case study. Three themes emerged from the embedded case study (Yin, 2014) that examined the experiences of parents with criminal record history that have children attending Deacon Elementary and want to be involved in their child's schooling.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Finally, implications will be presented for theory, practice and future research. The following research questions were addressed:

1. What is the level of parental involvement in an urban elementary school navigating conditions of high poverty, neighborhood crime, student mobility, high levels of behavior incidents, and low achievement scores on state assessment?
2. Within this context, for parents with criminal record history, what are parents' experiences of involvement with their child's schooling?

**Theoretical Implications.** The conceptual framework for this study was grounded in the research literature on overlapping spheres of influence and parent involvement (Epstein, 1987, 1995, 2002), embedded influence (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), Erikson's (1950) generative stage of development, and stigma (Goffman, 1963). Bronfenbrenner's embedded influence (1979) outlined how participants, motivated through generative tendencies (Erikson, 1950) to help shape their student's growth and achievement, developed their parental role construction and parental efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). This development happened as they gained experience and negotiated multiple environments of home (micro-system), school (meso-system), work (exo-system), and society (macro-system) and moved towards parental involvement. Moving through the various environments, parents had to contend with limiting factors that impacted their ability to be involved. Last, stigma was a lens to view how parents managed their identity as a person with criminal record history among society.

Overlapping spheres of influence provided context to discuss how the home, school, and community partnership paradigm overlaps to support student achievement over the course of a student's educational career. Epstein's (1995) framework for the six types of parental

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

involvement provided a deductive framework to categorize involvement in both the survey and the embedded case study.

Findings from this study converge with Epstein's (1995) framework and support four of the six involvement types as accessible to parents with criminal record history. Two types, decision-making and volunteering, were not supported by findings from participant experiences. The presence of criminal record history did act as a barrier to participation for parents within this study demographic. Participants were precluded from the decision-making and volunteering involvement types due to criminal record history and school district policy restrictions. Impenetrable exclusion from decision-making was universal across participants, other than the decision to transfer students to a new school. Motivated participants transitioned volunteering to school visits as they worked around policy to be a presence within the school building. For decision-making bodies, there was no path around, as district policies require finger print background checks for participation on these committees.

The generative tendencies of participants to share knowledge and skills with their students were supported by this study. Their perseverance working around restrictive policy to be involved attested to their desire to improve outcomes for their children. Participants within this study did not serve time in jail, thus information to support generativity, as a mediating factor for recidivism was not available. Over time, parents have built upon their parental role construction and gained efficacy in their practices. This growth impacts generativity and the parent's ability to be knowledgeable and share this with their children.

The impact of being involved did supportive generativity for participants. Their involvement created a greater sense of self-satisfaction (Ackerman, Zuroff, & Moskowitz, 2000) because efforts of participants improved student outcomes. Increased structure for students

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

equated to classroom success and homework completion, parent advocacy for their students supported learning and safety.

Stigma was evidenced with one of the three participants. Across participants, stigma did not permeate the data. It is hypothesized this is due to the relative nature of stigma. In this instance, all parents lived within high poverty contexts that may normalize criminal record history.

Data analysis yielded a 42% return rate of questionnaires, representing the percentage of parents who provided self-reports of their levels of involvement at Deacon Elementary School. This information provided the researcher normative data with which to compare data gathered from the case study. Convergent findings produced three themes; working around policy restrictions and limitations, development of parental role construction and efficacy, and active negotiation of criminal record history and poverty contexts, indicative of how participants with criminal record history participate in their child's schooling.

***Working around policy restrictions and limitations.*** This theme was explicated by examples of how parents worked around restrictions to be active participants in the involvement types of communication, learning at home, and the substitution of school visits for volunteering. Epstein (2010) suggested it is the responsibility of the school, family, and community to support the education of students. The implication of a needed partnership (Alkin, 1992) is crucial to student achievement and is supported by researchers (Epstein, 1995; Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Jeynes 2003; Wilder, 2014) with its relation to student achievement.

Funds from federal legislation are allocated to support students in poverty, considered our most at-risk youth. Due to our student demographic of parents with criminal record history, students of these parents are perhaps at exceptional risk for adverse outcomes with stigmatized

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

parents (Goffman, 1963) and as part of high poverty, urban neighborhoods (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014).

Communication was the conduit to involvement as participants leveraged this type to monitor student progress and maintain relationships with school staff operationalized through written and verbal exchanges as well as visits to the school. Fan and Chen (2001) contend the greatest impact from parental involvement is the student's understanding of expectations for achievement set by the parent. Support from Jeynes (2003) attests to the positive impact, specifically, that African American students experience from having involved parents.

Participants created a home environment advantageous to learning to support the involvement type learning at home. In these scenarios, parents provided routines, space, resources, and expectations for homework completion to students, reinforcing the importance of success in school and instilling positive learning behaviors (Loughlin-Presnel & Bierman, 2017).

Study findings within this theme confirmed the use of communication and learning at home as indicated in the Epstein (1995) framework. Volunteering was transitioned by parents to school visits as they further leveraged communication by maximizing drop off and pick up times to talk with school staff, had lunch with their children at school, visited a field trip site and visited the classroom to deliver cupcakes for a birthday.

*Development of parental role construction and efficacy.* Within this theme, parents demonstrated their participation with the involvement types of parenting and collaborating with the community. Participants demonstrated the involvement type of parenting as they developed their role construction and efficacy through growth and experience with child rearing.

Collaboration with the community was evidenced through participating with counseling and enrolling in a parenting course provided through a community organization to increase efficacy.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Ensuring attention to basic needs (Brandt, 1989) and socialization (Alkin, 2012), participants matured into the role of parent and increased their efficacy as they developed over time. Role construction (Bandura, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995) is an amalgamation of previous models, experiences, and beliefs about what encompasses the parent role. Parental efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995) is an estimate as to how proficient parents perceive themselves to be in reaching goals based on their purposeful actions towards a specified goal. Findings support Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence (1987) and parenting (1995) involvement types. Parents developed in their role construction as they negotiated conditions within the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and through these experiences increased their efficacy in providing support that enhanced student learning.

*Active negotiation of criminal record history and poverty contexts.* Study participants consistently had to negotiate the contexts of their criminal record history and poverty circumstances. The adverse record history acted as a recurrent barrier to employment opportunities for two of the three participants and reflect school community demographics with an unemployment rate for parent respondents ten times the national average at 4.4% (National Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). Poverty contexts within the neighborhoods, demanded parents remain vigilant with supervising outside play and undertake additional worry within their neighborhoods due to crime rates and violence (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017).

Collaborating with the community was also demonstrated within this theme and supported the research as an additional influence to support student success. Parents utilized a mentor and community action group to support student and family engagement. Participants used a cultural pass to attend community events and activities sponsored by the office of the mayor. The cultural pass allowed free admission for each student who has the pass as well as the



## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

supervising adult that accompanied the student to the event. Participants took advantage of the opportunity to gain access to learning and enrichment events during the summer months and used this resource to offset the cost of attending local cultural attractions and events.

Involvement type five, decision making, was inaccessible to participants within this embedded case study. Fundamental to school advocacy within the home, school, and community partnership paradigm, findings supported its exclusion from participant experiences and possibly more detrimental, its absence was not recognized. Across participants, none had participated with school committees or advocacy groups and no one mentioned it as part of their definitions or characteristics of parental involvement. This result could be indicative of low levels of social networking recorded from survey responses where less than 33% of respondents reported talking with other parents regarding their student or topics related to school. Decreased access to social networks can impede social capital and upward mobility (Coleman, 1988) thus becoming another obstacle for an already stigmatized demographic to navigate.

It was also hypothesized that active involvement in the education of their student would increase psychological adjustment and possibly mediate recidivism for parents with criminal history. Parents within the case study discussed the impact involvement has had on their children and the satisfaction it brings them to see their success. Mediating recidivism could not be explored, as parents had not served jail or prison time for their offenses. However, parents have not had further incidents of criminal activity since the initial offense that earned them a criminal record.

**Practical implications.** Implications from this study could support changes or adaptations to Epstein's framework for types of parental involvement to be more inclusive of school visits in conjunction with volunteering or in place of as was the case with current study

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

participants. Implications for policy change with the implementation and use of volunteer background checks to support parental involvement in high poverty schools are also discussed as well as suggestions for future research.

*Implications for the parental involvement framework.* The importance of parental involvement in schools, especially to serve students at-risk for school failure due to poverty circumstances, is well documented in parent involvement literature (Cooley & Baker, 2013; Jeynes 2003, 2011, Morrissey & Vinopal, 2018). For families who experience incarceration or events resulting in criminal record history, denied access to parental involvement in schools becomes another collateral consequence (Mauer & Chesney-Lind, 2002) inflicted upon children. Nationally, one in 57 Caucasian children have an incarcerated parent (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2010). The numbers grow to one in 28 Hispanic and one in 9 African American children. In the study state, one in 14 African American children have a parent who has experienced incarceration or has criminal history (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017). Sixteen percent of children in the study state live in poverty circumstances, representing a significant portion of students that may be affected by this obstacle.

Epstein's framework for involvement could benefit from either a seventh category for involvement to encompass school visits or including a caveat to volunteering that includes school visits within that component. Implications for this change in theory could increase inclusion for parents as part of the involvement process and broaden the practice of how involvement is viewed or categorized. In my role as principal, I am purposeful to inform my staff that involvement manifests in various ways. If they answer the phone, they are involved. If they sign the paper, they are involved. If they ask a question, send a treat, or call to complain, they are involved and we should be careful to remember that and act accordingly.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

*Implications for policy change.* This research has implications to inform school district policy change to be more inclusive of all parents. According to state department of education websites, one state does not require a background check for school volunteers and seven do require checks, but with varying degrees of implementation and dependent on the degree of supervision. Additionally, there are also states that leave the degrees of implementation to the local board of education to decide. With this variance, the urban school district in which this study takes place could review the school volunteer policy and provide greater access for parents to be involved in their child's education.

Beginning with policy language, terminology could be differentiated to discuss qualifications for "school volunteers" and those for "parent volunteers." In this way the school district could create different criteria for parents with a child in the school as opposed to individuals from the community who want to volunteer, possibly creating a space to be more inclusive of parents. Second, families could benefit from an appeals process to provide explanation or documentation to support their ability to volunteer. Additionally, the notification process for approval or denial of volunteer background checks could be improved to be inclusive of permissive activities for parents. Current practice within this urban school district is to send a form letter to the school and the school is charged with sending the letter to the parent. The letter is a two-sentence notification stating the volunteer background check was approved or denied. Including ways in which parents with denied volunteer background checks are allowed to participate better supports parental involvement.

Decision-making as an involvement type is closed to parents within the study state that have criminal record history. This consequence of restrictive policy further dissipates the ability of collective parent voice to affect school change and parent advocacy. Within the study

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

demographic, families contending with criminal record history and effects of living in poverty cannot afford the exclusion from educational practices. Parent voices and participation are needed to support students already at-risk for school failure. Education is a mechanism to promote upward mobility and opportunity to transcend the grip of concentrated poverty. The stigma of criminal record history has exerted negative effects on parents who grapple with this social handicap that deters from economic opportunity. To continue to marginalize the voice and input of parents as they strive to support their students defies the purpose and foundation of why we educate children. Greater inclusion of parent voice, especially in high poverty, urban elementary schools, is an investment to better serve communities as researchers (Epstein 1987, 1995; Loughlin-Presnal & Bierman, 2017) attest the time of greatest involvement by parents is found in the elementary school years.

**Future research.** Future research is needed with a larger sample size of parents with criminal record history to examine experiences with parental involvement. Additionally the use of the Parent Survey of Family and Community Involvement in the Elementary and Middle Grades could be used as a one-to-one measure of parents surveyed to those participating in the case study to analyze findings more specific to the criminal record history demographic and directly compare survey answers to experiences of case study participants. Additionally, research is needed using Epstein's framework for the six types of parental involvement in an expanded form to be inclusive of school visits to identify if an expanded framework provides evidence of greater parent participation.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

### Appendix A: Interview Protocols

#### **Individual Parents**

1. How many children do you currently have in elementary school? How many go to this particular school?
2. How do you define active parental participation in schools?
3. What is or has been your experience participating with your child's schooling?
4. After submitting a Volunteer Background Check, were you approved or denied?
5. How were you notified of acceptance or denial? Were you offered any next steps towards participation?
6. What was/is your experience trying to volunteer or participate with your child's school/education within the school building or on school-sponsored trips?
7. Has your criminal history affected your ability to actively participate with your child's schooling?
8. In what ways do you participate with your child's education?
9. Are you aware of any ways to clear your criminal record?
10. What was your personal school experience growing up? How did your family participate?
11. Do you feel you and your family enjoy a productive school and family partnership? Why or why not?

#### **Principal Deacon Elementary**

1. What is the vision and mission of Deacon Elementary School?
2. How are parents involved in your school?
3. As the school leader, what is your philosophy with parent involvement/engagement at Deacon?
4. How do you communicate your philosophy to staff, students, and families?
5. Do you have any goals regarding parental engagement? Based on what data sources? Do you have any specific to [district measure] results?

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

6. In your time as principal, how what are your views on student achievement, family engagement, and barriers to success?
7. Does or how does the community support/interact with your school?
8. Do you see any challenges to parental involvement?
9. How does your school utilize Title I parent involvement funds?
10. How does Deacon Elementary communicate with families?

### **District Representative**

1. How long have you been over [volunteer office]?
2. What is the mission of the [volunteer office]?
3. What is the total process for volunteer background checks?
4. What is the average timeline from completing a volunteer background check online to acceptance or denial? What is the average timeline for paper submissions?
5. What is the district procedure for notifying potential volunteers of acceptance or denial?
6. Do those who are denied have opportunity for an appeals process?
7. Are rejected applicants told what is permissive regarding their participation with their student's school?
8. Is the [volunteer office] open to a revision of the form letter sent to rejected volunteer applicants?
9. Is there discussion of creating an appeals process?
10. Is there discussion of the criminal background check and impacts on schools?

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

### Appendix B: Consent Forms

#### **Investigation of the Effects of School Policy that Limits Parental Access to Schools Introduction and Background Information (interview)**

You are invited to participate in a research study. Dr. Grant Smith and Stephanie White are conducting the study. The study is sponsored by the Annsley Frazier Thornton School of Education at Bellarmine University. The study will take place at Roosevelt Perry Elementary School in Louisville, Kentucky. Approximately 5-10 subjects will be invited to participate. Your participation in this study will last for six hours over three months.

Participant Qualifications include:

- You are a parent or guardian of a student at Roosevelt Perry Elementary School
- You want to be involved in your child's education
- You have submitted a volunteer background check and it was denied
- You have chosen not to submit a volunteer background check because you think it will be denied
- You are willing to complete the parental involvement survey
- You are willing to participate in this study.

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the effects of school policy that limit parental access to schools. The researcher aims to examine the experiences of parents with criminal history who want to participate with their child's schooling and how parents work around a rejected volunteer background check. The researcher seeks to discover if parents who work around a rejected volunteer background or choose not to submit a volunteer background check due to an expected negative outcome are able to provide their child support that may lead to increased achievement and school success.

#### **Procedures**

In this study, you will be interviewed by the co-researcher, Stephanie White, up to three times to collect individual accounts of involvement in your child's education. You may decline to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. Each interview session will last up to thirty minutes and will be recorded audibly to assist the co-researcher, Stephanie White, with transcribing the interviews. Additionally, observations may be conducted at school-based events without interference from the researchers. Upon completion of the research project, audiotapes will be destroyed. No identifiable information will be shared outside of this research and names, ages, and school demographics will be changed to protect your identity.

#### **Potential Risks**

There are risks associated with completing surveys and being interviewed which are the potential pain of discussing past mistakes (criminal history) that may limit ability to parent. There is also risk to the parent and child relationship as parent criminal history could expose past to an unknowing child. Every effort will be made to minimize this risk and refrain from criminal history discussion in the presence of the student.

#### **Benefits**

The possible benefits of this study include providing parental voice from a marginalized group (those with criminal history) to discuss the barriers to school and family partnerships that result from the current use of volunteer background checks. This research could lead to policy

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

change and or adjustment to the current use of background checks to minimize the unintended consequences of its use; such as limiting involvement in schools, thus denying students in high poverty urban elementary schools the potential benefits of active parent involvement and collaborative family and school partnerships. The data collected in this study may not benefit you directly. However, the information learned from this research may be helpful to others in the future.

### **Confidentiality**

Although absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, confidentiality will be protected to the extent permitted by law. The study sponsor or the Institutional Review Board may inspect your research records. Should the data collected in this research study be published, your identity will not be revealed. You will remain anonymous and be identified only by a pseudonym assigned at the beginning of the study. The co-researcher will keep records, transcriptions, and audio files under lock and key. Following completion of the study, audio files will be destroyed.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw your consent at any time without penalty or losing benefit to which you are otherwise entitled.

### **Your Rights as a Research Subject and Contact Persons**

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the Institutional Review Board Office at 502.272.8032. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions, in confidence, with a member of the Board. This is an independent committee composed of members of the University community and lay members of the community not connected with this institution. The Board has reviewed this study.

You acknowledge that all your present questions have been answered in language you can understand. If you have any questions about the study, please contact Dr. Grant Smith 502.272.8191 or Stephanie White 502.303.0768.

### **Consent**

You have discussed the above information and hereby consent to voluntarily participate in this study. You have been given a signed copy of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Subject or Legal Representative

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Signed

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Signed

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person



## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

### **Investigation of the Effects of School Policy that Limits Parental Access to Schools Introduction and Background Information (observation)**

You are invited to participate in a research study. Dr. Grant Smith and Stephanie White are conducting the study. The study is sponsored by the Annsley Frazier Thornton School of Education at Bellarmine University. The study will take place at Roosevelt Perry Elementary School in Louisville, Kentucky. Approximately 5-10 subjects will be invited to participate. Your participation in this study will last for six hours over three months.

Participant Qualifications include:

- You are a parent or guardian of a student at Roosevelt Perry Elementary School
- You want to be involved in your child's education
- You have submitted a volunteer background check and it was denied
- You have chosen not to submit a volunteer background check because you think it will be denied
- You are willing to complete the parental involvement survey
- You are willing to participate in this study.

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the effects of school policy that limit parental access to schools. The researcher aims to examine the experiences of parents with criminal history who want to participate with their child's schooling and how parents work around a rejected volunteer background check. The researcher seeks to discover if parents who work around a rejected volunteer background or choose not to submit a volunteer background check due to an expected negative outcome are able to provide their child support that may lead to increased achievement and school success.

#### **Procedures**

In this study, you and your student(s) will be observed in your home or other setting where parent-child learning activities take place (church group, afterschool program, community organization) by Stephanie White. The purpose of in-home observation is to observe parent-child interactions around school based learning at home. During the observation, the researcher will not interact with participants. Each observation will last up to sixty minutes and the co-researcher, Stephanie White, will take notes. Additionally, observations may be conducted at school-based events without interference from the researchers. During and upon completion of the research, notes will be kept confidential. No identifiable information will be shared outside of this research and names, ages, and school demographics will be changed to protect your identity.

#### **Potential Risks**

There are risks associated with in-home and related settings observations. As an educator, the researcher has a duty to report child abuse, child sexual abuse, and child neglect or dependency to child protective agencies, posing a potential legal risk. The state of Kentucky defines abuse and neglect as "...physical or emotional injury by other than accidental means, commits or allows to be committed an act of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation or prostitution upon the child; abandons or exploits such child; does not provide adequate care, supervision, food, clothing, shelter and education or medical care for the child's well-being" (JCPS Board Policy 09.2211). There is risk to the student of having the researcher in the home, observing interactions as the student may question why the researcher is there. The researcher will not interfere with activities, but take notes. Every effort will be made to minimize this risk and refrain from criminal history discussion in the presence of the student.

## PARENT INVOLVEMENT

### **Benefits**

The possible benefits of this study include providing parental voice from a marginalized group (those with criminal history) to discuss the barriers to school and family partnerships that result from the current use of volunteer background checks. This research could lead to policy change and or adjustment to the current use of background checks to minimize the unintended consequences of its use; such as limiting involvement in schools, thus denying students in high poverty urban elementary schools the potential benefits of active parent involvement and collaborative family and school partnerships. The data collected in this study may not benefit you directly. However, the information learned from this research may be helpful to others in the future.

### **Confidentiality**

Although absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, confidentiality will be protected to the extent permitted by law. The study sponsor or the Institutional Review Board may inspect your research records. Should the data collected in this research study be published, your identity will not be revealed. You will remain anonymous and be identified only by a pseudonym assigned at the beginning of the study. The co-researcher will keep records, transcriptions, and audio files under lock and key. Following completion of the study, audio files will be destroyed.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw your consent at any time without penalty or losing benefit to which you are otherwise entitled.

### **Your Rights as a Research Subject and Contact Persons**

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the Institutional Review Board Office at 502.272.8032. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions, in confidence, with a member of the Board. This is an independent committee composed of members of the University community and lay members of the community not connected with this institution. The Board has reviewed this study.

You acknowledge that all your present questions have been answered in language you can understand. If you have any questions about the study, please contact Dr. Grant Smith 502.272.8191 or Stephanie White 502.303.0768.

### **Consent**

You have discussed the above information and hereby consent to voluntarily participate in this study. You have been given a signed copy of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Subject or Legal Representative

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Signed

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Signed

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Explaining Consent if other than Investigator

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