ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores engagement experiences of low income and minority parents in the work of schools since the implementation of No Child Left Behind in order to understand relationships between parental involvement, school improvement, and parental support for student academic achievement. This inquiry observes an urban, Midwestern school district that has implemented parent liaison programs designed to empower parents toward active participation in the academic lives of their children. Through this qualitative study, I explore district-wide parental engagement efforts to assess how low income and minority parents are included in parent involvement initiatives.

Specific methodology for this study includes observations, interviews, focus groups and document analysis. Case study data from two schools is examined in depth. Findings from the case studies are then used to compare to overall district patterns. Data from this research is analyzed using literature on parental engagement and school improvement, and theoretical frameworks of social capital, implementation theory, and democratic theory.
DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my husband, Jon Tracy Robinson, my children, Jacob and Jonathan Robinson, my parents, Shirley and Cyril Vanderpool, and my grandmother, Daisy Shirley Reddix who passed away during this doctoral journey.

I am eternally grateful for your unconditional love and support.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to those who were a source of ongoing support during my doctoral journey. I am fortunate to have had the encouragement of so many faculty members, family, and friends, and blessed to have had the guidance of God as I pressed toward completion of my doctoral degree.

I would like to acknowledge the members of my committee including Dr. Philip T.K. Daniel for his wisdom, for raising the bar on academic excellence and for pushing me to move beyond my comfort level. To Dr. Ann Allen, your warmth and encouragement helped me to persevere to the end and you challenged me to develop sound theoretical and conceptual foundations. Dr. Michael Glassman, you taught me to be true to the spirit of activism and pushed me to think out of the box. To Dr. James Moore III, thank you for your encouragement and insights, as well as your commitment to nurturing me as a scholar. Dr. Rafael-Fortney, I appreciate your time and your interest in my study; and to Dr. Peter Demerath, thank you investing the time early in this process to guide me toward sound methodological approaches for this study.

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Vanderpool and Dr. Cyril Vanderpool, who through their on-going guidance encouraged me to be a lifelong learner.

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In addition, I offer my gratitude to the district and school community where I conducted my research. I appreciate the opportunity to have had a glimpse into the educational world of the many school community members that I met during the course of this study. This dissertation has been shaped by what I learned from members of the case study schools and district. It is also the culmination of many ideas sparked by the work of scholars and discussions with faculty, educators, administrators, parents, family and friends over the years. I have learned much through the research for this dissertation and I am a better person because of the doctoral experience. I hope that this study will help to improve educational experiences for children and their families.
VITA

May, 1983.......................................... Bachelor of Arts in Government
Oberlin College
Oberlin, Ohio

June, 1985.......................................... Master of Arts in Public Policy
The University of Chicago
Chicago, Illinois

September, 2007 – Present
Graduate Research Associate
School of Educational Policy and Leadership
The Ohio State University

Graduate Research Associate
The Ohio Collaborative, Research and Policy for
Schools and Families.
The Ohio State University

PUBLICATIONS

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Schools: Studies in Leadership and Culture. Greenwich, CT: Information Age
Publishing, Inc.

Henningfield, D. (Ed.) At Issue: Charter Schools. Farmington Hills, MI:
Greenhaven Press, pp. 49-70.

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: College of Education and Human Ecology
Specializations: Educational Policy and Leadership; Educational Administration
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Schools are essential institutions in our American democracy. American schools are perceived by many as vehicles that extol the virtues of civic responsibility while equipping the populace with skills that we hope will enable them to participate in the societal discourses regarding everyday life (Dahl, 1998; Tyack, 2003). Education has often been considered as a way to help to level educational inequalities (Ravitch, 2000) and steer students toward social and economic wellbeing (Reese, 2008; Sizer 2004). Dewey (1897) viewed education as “the fundamental method of social progress and reform” (p. 9). Gutmann (1987) advances that our educational institutions cultivate “democratic ideals” and nurture the “conscious social reproduction or ways in which citizens are or should be empowered to influence the education that in turn shapes the political values, attitudes, and modes of behavior” (p. 14). Schools have been thought of as entities that help individuals accomplish the American dream (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003; Noguera, 2003; Ravitch, 2000). In order for all students to reach for this goal, the creation of equitable avenues and supports is necessary in the educational lives of children.

Parent involvement has been identified as one of the key supports that help to launch students toward successful school and life trajectories (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Comer, 1986, 1996; Comer & Hayes, 1991; Comer et al. 1996; Epstein, 1996, 2001;
Henderson & Mapp, 2002, 2007). Students with parents who are engaged in their education have been known to perform better academically (Epstein, 1991; Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Van Voorhis, 2003; Sheldon, 2003), have better attendance (Sanders, 2008) and experience greater success socially (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Researchers contend that student achievement and success is essential because it helps to define a student’s future social mobility and status in society (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1996; Coleman, 1988; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Jencks, 1972; Kozol, 1991, Lin, 2000). Parent involvement has also been known to increase parental social networks and social capital by providing parents with greater access to information on how to help their children succeed (Coleman, 1990; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Sheldon, 2002). School, family and community partnership advocates encourage parents to be partners with schools in support of student educational attainment and school improvement because it contributes to successful student outcomes (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Epstein, 1996, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002, 2007; Sheldon, 2002).

**Statement of the Problem**

Although parental involvement has been put forth as being a valuable support in student advancement, various barriers often confront efforts to involve parents in the work of schools to support student success (Comer, 1991, 1996; Epstein, 1996, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002, 2007; Van Voorhis, 2001). Researchers suggest that these hindrances are even greater for families from low income and minority parent populations who are often alienated from involvement with schools (Brantlinger, 2003; Lareau, 2003; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Sanders, 2008). Examples of obstacles to school
and home collaboration include challenges such as divergent goals and motivations between parents and educators (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003), differing paradigms of school and home partnerships (Epstein, 2001) and varying capacities of parents to understand schools and to interface with them (Horvat, Weininger & Lareau, 2003). In addition, some parents lack the time to be actively involved (Swap, 1990) and cultural and class barriers (Lareau & Horvat, 1999) are often cited as reasons that deter marginalized parent populations from participation.

Further, scholars such as Lareau (2000) and Brantlinger (2003) note that parental involvement approaches are often based on middle class paradigms of how parents should interface with schools, making it more comfortable for middle and upper class parents to interact with schools than low income and minority parents. These authors suggest that schools are structured around middle and upper class understandings and expectations. For example, middle and upper class parents understand how schools function, they are more at ease in interfacing with school personnel, and they have the ability to secure information that can help them support their children (Brantlinger, 2003). These impediments to inclusion of all parent voices hinder attempts to mobilize parents and thus deter the full engagement of parents from underrepresented groups (Lee & Bowen, 2006).

Recognizing the importance of student success and the connection between strong supports for students, such as parental involvement, Congress and the Federal government have endeavored to implement various initiatives requiring schools to develop strategies and provide services that would increase achievement for all students through No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the corresponding Title I provisions. Included
in NCLB and Title I, a program designed to meet the needs of disadvantaged students, are provisions that offer guidance regarding the engagement of parents, especially those in schools and districts receiving funds through the Federal Title I Program. The NCLB and Title I reforms require that schools educate all students to proficiency through increased performance on standardized tests. School staff must also meet the definition of highly qualified. In addition, schools have been asked to extend the provision of services such as tutoring and supplemental services to students and their families should all students not meet academic milestones within specified period or provide options for students to transfer to better performing schools. The expanded requirements of NCLB have also resulted in increased costs for districts and schools without the provision of supplemental resources from the federal government.

Many scholars and groups have called NCLB an “unfunded” or “under-funded” mandate because federal allocations are insufficient and states and localities have been expected to absorb the costs of implementing NCLB programming (Fusarelli, 2004, Mathis, 2005, National Council of State Legislators, 2004). With the advent of NCLB legislative guidelines and Title I provisions now placed on schools, educators have been grappling with meeting the directives of the law.

As a result of the added requirements of NCLB, the responsibilities of school communities have increased in complexity. These changes have extended the work of schools. School staffs are not only being expected to meet more rigorous educational standards imposed by the law, but they must also be concerned with meeting adequate yearly progress (based on state measures of how all students are progressing toward meeting state milestones of academic standards annually), insure that teachers meet the
definition of highly qualified, and respond to legislation urging them to involve parents in “meaningful” ways (NCLB, 20 U.S.C. 6301, Sec. 1001 (12)).

NCLB’s directives have been added to the already heavy workload of educators, which includes attending to the increased social needs of students and their families, and the mounting pressures of societal conditions. For example, in 2006, 13 million children were living in poverty (or living below the poverty threshold of $20,650 annually for a family of four) reflecting an increase of 1.2 million children in poverty from 2000 – 2006 (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2007). The conditions of poverty often result in increased social, emotional, behavioral, and health challenges for students, and affect student learning (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2008). Factors like these place added demands on school personnel. The conditions of poverty often prevent families from accessing resources from schools, districts, and other institutions that can help parents navigate society and advocate for their children (Noguera, 2001).

As educators turn their attention to NCLB, they must also effectively support the increase of students with various social, health, and emotional challenges that include behavioral disorders, issues brought on by pre-natal exposure to parental substance abuse and problems such as childhood obesity and diabetes. Additionally, school personnel are learning how to better understand and respond to the cultural nuances of growing immigrant populations as required by NCLB and guide them concurrently toward equal levels of proficiency as their English language classmates. While navigating NCLB, school leaders must also effectively assimilate children from families in transition and in temporary foster care situations into school environments without the benefit of connections with families of these students. In addition, many school administrators are
facing issues regarding increased hostilities in our communities, such as bullying and
school violence. As school administrators address educational, social, emotional, and
health needs of students and simultaneously respond to NCLB accountability measures,
they face the task of advocating on behalf of the many complex issues mentioned above.
These administrators increasingly find themselves burdened with greater responsibility
for the identification of critical services, supports, and resources to help sustain
disadvantaged families. In addition, “…Government policy, parent and community
demands, corporate interests, and ubiquitous technology have all stormed the walls of the
schools. The relentless pressures of today’s complex environments have intensified
overload” in public schools (Fullan, 2000, p. 157). Hence, as a result of the varied and
increasing demands, it is possible that many school leaders are left feeling weary and in
need of assistance.

Not only are issues of poverty and health of students confronting school staff but,
as Orfield (2007) notes, major demographic shifts in society are transforming schools and
creating complex and challenging changes that leave schools without any strategy or
help. He suggests that this [demand on educational institutions also] “threatens a
democratic society in which common schools have traditionally played a central role in
helping diverse groups of students and their broader communities get to know one
another and our common societal values” (p. 299).

As the administrative responsibilities and the demands on school staff continue,
this study explores whether administrators might be receptive to greater parental
involvement and welcome stronger parent and school partnerships to help ease the
demands on school staff, improve schools, and support student advancement. This study
makes inquiry as to whether NCLB and Title I’s increased emphasis on parental involvement presents windows of opportunity for school parent partnerships to be cultivated, particularly with parents from underrepresented groups.

The research has shown that parental involvement contributes to successful outcomes for children (Epstein 2001; Epstein et al. 2002; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Sheldon, 2002). Parents are major stakeholders in schools and have a great deal invested in schools because they have entrusted them with their most precious commodity, their children. Many parents believe that school administrators and teachers will teach and care for their children. Parents can often share knowledge about the preferences, personalities, and characteristics of their children that can complement the work of school personnel in support of student success (Comer & Hayes, 1991). Further, school staff can often offer insights about students with parents and provide information on student growth and development (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). Thus, it is possible that parents and educators will be interested in partnering to improve the school environment because it provides a bi-directional benefit to all parties.

NCLB and Title I guidance that schools involve parents presents an opportunity for schools to increase the civic capacities of parents, particularly those parents who have been traditionally underrepresented, by encouraging and developing parent school partnerships in reforming schools. As parent involvement increases, school administrators have an opening through increased engagement activities to facilitate shared leadership as modeled in the Chicago Local School Councils where educators, parents, and community members all come together to improve schools.
Although NCLB’s parent engagement initiatives are focused primarily on the inclusion of parents of children receiving Title I funding, the initiatives have major components that are inclusive of all parent groups. As evidenced from the research (Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al., 2002; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Sheldon, 2002), school-home partnerships are essential for improved student outcomes for all student groups. However, we have yet to understand whether these parental engagement initiatives have taken into consideration the best approaches to achieve full inclusion of parents from disadvantaged populations.

NCLB’s and Title I’s policies regarding increased involvement of parents in the work of schools present a window of opportunity for stronger collaborations between parents and schools. Further, these policies have the potential to lay the foundation for possible increased partnerships and shared leadership roles among administrators, teachers, and parents where Title I directs that “…programs, activities, and procedures shall be planned and implemented with meaningful consultation with parents of participating children (NCLB, 20 U.S.C. 6318 SEC. 1118 (a)).

Since NCLB requires that schools develop plans with parents for engaging other parents in the life of the school community, increased collaboration between school and home is expected to increase. Greater parental participation in the matters of schools should relieve school officials from a multitude of tasks that will free them to focus more on school instructional leadership, management, teaching, and learning. As school leaders engage parents in school decision-making, together they can strengthen the effectiveness of schools. Further, as administrators collaborate with parents as decision-making partners, they stand to not only garner support for educational change and
improvement efforts, but they also fulfill the historic vision of schools as institutions of “empowered participatory governance” and “participatory democracy” (Dewey, 1916; Gutmann, 1987; Fung, 2001). In nurturing parents as partners, school professionals have the potential to build leadership, civic capacity, and trust in parents, paving the way for highly committed and loyal allies. Finally, as this school-parent partnership grows, these parties may become agents of change for more democratic school communities and a more democratic society.

Provisions in NCLB and Title I give direction for schools to “build capacity” of parents (NCLB, 20 U.S.C.§ 6301, 6318 (a)(2)(C)); (NCLB, 20 U.S.C.§ 6301, 6318 (e)(9)), provide professional development for educators with information on partnerships ((NCLB, 20 U.S.C.§ 6301, 6318 (e)(3)), and to facilitate the collaborative development of goals and standards for partnership programs (NCLB, 20 U.S.C.§ 6301, 6318 (a)(2)(C); Epstein, 2005). This is especially important since the NCLB directives emphasize the value of parents in support of student achievement. It is also possible that parents can provide bridges between the school and parents in the larger community (Comer, 1996). This brings promise, especially as parents from underrepresented groups begin to facilitate involvement opportunities for those from socio-economic populations who have historically been absent from participation in the school life of their children. Through these channels, linkages may be formed to inspire others toward active participation in the lives of children. Essential to these relationships will be the facilitation of authentic partnerships and trust that will include all parents as partners (Comer, 1996; Epstein, 1996, 2001, Meier, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Extra efforts will be necessary to
foster an environment where parents from diverse backgrounds feel welcome and affirmed.

**Purpose of the Research**

This study examines parental engagement activities and parental experiences in the selected school district in light of NCLB and Title I requirements regarding parent involvement in schools. This study also looks at how the selected schools and district have implemented parental engagement initiatives under NCLB and Title I. Using the perspectives concerning parental involvement and school improvement, and theoretical frameworks of social capital, implementation theory, and democratic theory, this research explores parent engagement initiatives in an urban, Midwestern school district where parents are hired as part-time staff to assist schools in mobilizing other parents to support school improvement and ultimately student advancement. These parents serve to connect families to schools and they are empowered by the district and their principal to create activities and programs help facilitate partnerships between parents and educators.

**Research Question and Sub-Questions**

In considering the parent consultant program in the identified school district, I examine the following research question: How have low income and minority parents in the selected urban school district been engaged in parent involvement initiatives under NCLB and Title I and what impact has this involvement had on social capital and increased support for school improvement and student achievement?
Specific sub-questions of this inquiry look at parental engagement in the selected
district and schools to examine how NCLB and Title I parental involvement guidelines
have been implemented in light of implementation theory. Sub-questions in this research
also examine how these policies fit into the school and district contexts. This research
also highlights the experiences and perspectives of parents in school and district
engagement activities and, using theories of social capital, examines the access to social
capital as well as the social networks of underrepresented parents.

In addition, using parent engagement perspectives as guided by Epstein (1996,
2001) of successful school, family, and community partnerships, this study explores how
school and district level activities fit into parent involvement models. Further, this
research observes if the NCLB and Title I policy instruments can serve as catalysts for
parental engagement activities in districts and schools and if they encourage parental
engagement of underrepresented populations. Finally, in looking at parental engagement
strategies using democratic theory, this research examines if there are increased
opportunities for the full engagement of underrepresented parents in the studied district
and schools and if this involvement provides opportunities for shared leadership with
school administrators in improving schools. Associated questions or sub-questions for
this research and the related categories are presented in Table 1.
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**Examination of Public Policy**
- Does public policy as stipulated in NCLB promote or limit parental engagement?

**District and School Parental Involvement Policy Implementation**
- How have the underlying goals for parental involvement been implemented in the school and the district?
- What recognizable changes have occurred in the district and schools since NCLB’s parental engagement initiatives were implemented?

**District Organization and Leadership Practices**
- What district leadership practices and/or organizational systems promote parental involvement activities, localization, and buy-in in case study schools?
- What have been the roles of educational leaders in the implementation of parental involvement initiatives?

**Socio-Cultural Context**
- Do NCLB parent involvement policy documents at the federal, district, and the school levels reflect a socio-cultural approach to parent involvement strategies?
- Do the selected schools and district reflect a socio-cultural approach in the execution of NCLB parental engagement initiatives?

**School Parental Involvement Policy Activities and Implementation**
- How have the case study schools implemented the directives from the district on the parent involvement guidelines of NCLB?
- What do the specific parental involvement activities look like at the case study schools?
- What alternative approaches might provide opportunities to further involve parents from low income and minority groups beyond those approaches already in place in the selected district and schools?

**Parental Characteristics**
- What are the parental characteristics of those who participate in the parental involvement activities in the selected district and schools?
- Is there an absence of class and racial diversity within the spheres of parent participation in district and schools even with NCLB programs aimed at underrepresented groups?

**Parental Perceptions and Participation Experiences**
- What are the perceptions of parent and school relationships from school stakeholders in the selected educational communities?
- Whose paradigms of parent engagement are most prominent in district parental involvement strategies?
- Are the parent engagement dialogues in the district and schools inclusive or exclusive discourses privileging some students and parents and alienating others?

**Social and Cultural Capital**
- What role does social and cultural capital play in aiding or hindering the full integration of low income and minority parents into parent engagement initiatives in the work of schools?
- Do NCLB policy initiatives facilitate or hinder the development of social capital among stakeholders, including those underrepresented in schools?
Findings from this research have the potential to inform policy and practice related to the engagement of parents as partners with schools and districts in the areas of student advancement, school reform, and school improvement. Scholars suggest that school improvement and “reforming the public schools has long been a way of improving not just education but also society” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Theoretically, as parents become more engaged in the school life of their children, opportunities arise that enable parents and educators to come together to affect social change in the school and the greater community (Anyon, 1997). These kinds of collaborations have implications about the potential that exists to make our institutions in society more democratic, including schools and the environments where they are located (Anyon, 1997, 2006; Dewey, 1909; Gutmann, 1987, 1996). Democratic theorists (Dahl, 1998; Dewey, 1916; Gutmann, 1987; Putnam, 2000, 2003) would guide us to consider parent engagement that is participatory and inclusive of varied diverse, minority, and majority perspectives in our educational discourse. “[D]emocratic theory faces up to the fact of difference in our moral ideals of education by looking toward democratic deliberations not only as a means to reconciling those differences but also as an important part of democratic education” (Gutmann, 1987, p. 11).

**Contribution to Research**

This research contributes to theory and practice by examining the implementation of NCLB policy initiatives as they are employed at the district level, and highlights successes and hindrances in the engagement of underrepresented groups. This inquiry also expands the parent engagement dialogue to represent the perspectives of low income and minority parents. In addition, this study explores opportunities to extend the work of
parent involvement in schools to be more inclusive of the underrepresented. Finally, based on research findings from this study, this project offers recommendations for the future practice of educators and expanded ideas and strategies for researchers on engaging low income and minority parents to support student success.

**Research Summary**

This research explores how the NCLB and Title I policy directives promote or impede parental engagement of low income and minority parents, the role that engagement plays in student advancement, and potential strategies that can be used to extend parent-school partnerships for the advancement of all students. In this study, parental involvement and parental engagement will be used interchangeably to discuss ways that parents are involved in supporting the education of their children. This research contributes to discourse about the ability of schools to facilitate social capital and to serve as catalysts for participatory democracy (Fung, 2001, 2004; Gutmann, 1996) that is inclusive of all parents, including low income and minority parents.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The problem of parental engagement of minority and low-income parents is best informed through theories of social and cultural capital, social networks and concepts of parental involvement. This literature review presents the related scholarly work and theoretical perspectives that provide support for this study. This chapter also includes a discussion on the parental involvement policy guidance provided by NCLB and the related Title I provisions are examined through literature on policy implementation. Finally, literature on shared leadership and democratic school communities is considered with an overview on what research says about the importance of trust in building and sustaining strong collaborative partnerships and democratic educational institutions.

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is defined in NCLB and Title I as

…the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including by ensuring –

(A) that parents play an integral role in assisting their child’s learning;
(B) that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child’s education at school;
(C) that parents are full partners in their child’s education and are included, as appropriate, in decisionmaking and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child;
Epstein (2001) defines parental involvement within the context of a framework that delineates ways that parents can be engaged effectively. She uses a typology of school, family, and community partnerships to discuss how schools, parents and communities can partner to support students toward successful outcomes and mobilize other parents in support of school improvement and student advancement. Epstein’s framework outlines six types of parental involvement activities that can facilitate collaborative environments between parents, schools, and community in support of student learning. These elements include parenting, which involves assisting parents in understanding the developmental stages of children and guiding parents in providing supportive home environments for children; communicating, which involves the development of effective “two-way communication” about student advancement and school activities; volunteering which enables parents to assist and support school and student activities and programs, learning at home, which includes ways that parents can support student learning at home, decision making, which builds leadership capacity of parents and includes parents in decisions regarding school; and decision-making and community collaboration, which seek resources, support, and partnerships with and involvement from the greater community. She suggests that school collaboration can be facilitated when schools include parents as they “plan, implement, evaluate and improve school-level partnership programs” (p. 601).

Scholars advance that parental involvement is important to student learning because it provides a support system for students (Epstein, 1996, 2001; Coleman, 1988;
Comer, 1986; Henderson & Berla, 1994); helps to reinforce consistent concepts at school and at home (Downey, 2002) (i.e.: that attending school is important, doing homework is important, being on time is important); and shows students that the adults in their lives care about their success (Epstein, 1996, 2001; Sheldon, 2003; Comer, 1986).

Parental involvement includes engagement in the life of children at home and at school. Involvement at home takes the form of support for student learning through the provision of resources (i.e. dictionaries; school supplies; a quiet, organized space for learning), assistance with homework, or exposure to learning opportunities (i.e. learning measurements through cooking; learning how to be organized; understanding how to manage money for purchases; going to on outings). Parental involvement at school can take the form of interactions with school staff, participation in school activities, including parent conferences, supporting student performances, attending school events, and informational meetings; building social capital through getting to know other parents volunteering at school or assisting school staff through projects at home.

Further, Epstein (2001) advances that there are three areas of a student’s life that influence how students learn and grow – family, school, and community, and suggests that these three spheres represent what she calls “overlapping spheres of influence” that locates the student at the center and that includes the separate and overlapping areas that affect a student’s development. It is these areas of overlap that link family, school, and community contexts. (p. 8). Epstein further notes that these areas do not exist completely separate from each other but, rather, are impacted by what the student acquires from each context. In addition, she suggests that, as parents (home) and schools partner on
approaches that aid student advancement, all contexts can help to reinforce academic habits that contribute to student success.

**Social Stratification in Parent Involvement**

Research has shown that not all parents are involved in the school lives of their children and some parents are more involved than others in their child’s education (Brantlinger, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Lareau, 2000; Epstein, 2001). General consensus is that middle and upper class parents participate to a greater extent than many low income and minority parents because they understand how to interact with school personnel and how to navigate school environments (Brantlinger, 2003; Mc-Namara Horvat, Weininger & Lareau 2002; Lareau, 2000). Some argue that the structure of schools perpetuate stratification because their programming and approaches are based on middle class paradigms (Brantlinger, 2003; Lareau, 2000; Fine 1993). Fine (1993) and Reay (1998) suggest that “observed associations between parental participation and children’s educational performance are really artifacts of the class and racial advantages that involved parents bring to the table” (Thurston, 2005). These advantages often privilege students and parents from middle and upper class strata and leave out students and parents from underrepresented groups such as low income and minority populations.

**The Policy Environment**

**No Child Left Behind and Title I Provisions**

In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was passed by the U. S. Congress with strong bipartisan support and was signed into law by President George W.
Bush in 2002. NCLB extended the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and the Federal Title I Program (designed to meet the needs of disadvantaged student populations) to require schools to develop strategies and provide services that would increase achievement for all students. Included in NCLB are provisions regarding ways in which state and local educational agencies and schools are to engage parents especially those in schools and districts receiving Title I funds. The policy instructs

- schools and districts to develop a written plan for ways that parents are involved in schools, particularly those in Title I buildings. This plan is to be developed and approved in conjunction with parents and submitted by the state to the U. S. Secretary of Education.

- schools to organize annual meetings to communicate with parents about the stipulations of NCLB and ways they can participate in their children’s education.

- schools to share information with parents in Title I schools regarding the academic performance of schools and students. This accountability data is to be categorized to include the specific performance measures of all groups including sub groups such as English language learners, students with disabilities, students of varied races and ethnicities.

- schools to inform parents in Title I schools about the qualifications of teachers in the building as NCLB aims to ensure that all teachers meet the criteria of highly qualified teachers.

- schools to offer alternatives for parents in Title I schools if the students in their child’s school do not meet certain academic standards. Parents can request that
their child can be reassigned to another, higher performing school after two consecutive years of underperformance; parents also have the option of requesting supplemental educational services for their child if schools do not achieve certain proficiency goals for three consecutive years. The policy suggests that schools develop strategies for ensuring that students with limited English proficiency receive the support necessary to advance academically along with their peers.

Coupled with these strategies are specific Title I provisions focused on “affording parents substantial and meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children” (Sec. 1001 Part. 12). These references are found in Section 1118 of NCLB and provide instructions for how parents are to be involved.

Under the NCLB law, state agencies and school districts must oversee and monitor the activities of Title I schools in the implementation of parental engagement initiatives. In addition, opportunities for collaboration between educators, administrators, and parents are encouraged at all levels of development and review of programs directed at engaging parents. Further, school districts must perform annual assessment and evaluations of the parental involvement programs. These procedures are intended to evaluate program effectiveness and seek to correct any deficiencies in the programs. As a part of the monitoring and evaluation responsibilities, districts must integrate parent representatives into the administrative functions of the process. According to section 1118 of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002):

…A local educational agency may receive funds under this part only if such agency implements programs, activities, and procedures for the involvement of parents in programs assisted under this part consistent with this section. Such programs, activities, and procedures shall be
planned and implemented with meaningful consultation with parents of participating children….

....Each local educational agency that receives funds under this part shall develop jointly with, agree on with, and distribute to, parents of participating children a written parent involvement policy. The policy shall be incorporated into the local educational agency's plan developed under section 1112, establish the agency's expectations for parent involvement, and describe how the agency will —

(A) involve parents in the joint development of the plan … and the process of school review and improvement …;

(B) provide the coordination, technical assistance, and other support necessary to assist participating schools in planning and implementing effective parent involvement activities to improve student academic achievement and school performance;

(C) build the schools' and parents' capacity for strong parental involvement…;

(D) coordinate and integrate parental involvement strategies under this part with parental involvement strategies under other programs, such as the Head Start program…;

(E) conduct, with the involvement of parents, an annual evaluation of the content and effectiveness of the parental involvement policy in improving the academic quality of the schools served under this part, including identifying barriers to greater participation by parents in activities authorized by this section (with particular attention to parents who are economically disadvantaged, are disabled, have limited English proficiency, have limited literacy, or are of any racial or ethnic minority background), and use the findings of such evaluation to design strategies for more effective parental involvement, and to revise, if necessary, the parental involvement policies described in this section; and

(F) involve parents in the activities of the schools served under this part (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002).

NCLB emphasizes increased communication with parents in the form of a jointly developed and agreed upon parent involvement policy that is distributed to parents and evaluated annually for effectiveness (NCLB, Sec. 1118). In addition, should schools fail to reach Adequate Yearly Progress over a three year period, the law also provides avenues for increased parental choice such as the transfer of students out of schools that are underperforming into higher performing schools. In crafting NCLB, legislators
hoped that the parental involvement aspects of the Act would provide new opportunities to engage parents in a substantial way. However, as Fusarelli (2004) and others, including legislators skeptical about the adequacy of the bill note, the funding and resources provided by the federal government is limited and falls far short of meeting the needs of states and districts in carrying out the law. Consequently, the absence of adequate funding to carry out NCLB programming leaves local, actors such as school administrators, district administrators, and teachers, attempting to deliver services without the adequate tools and resources that are needed (Elmore, 1983).

Policy Implementation, No Child Left Behind and Title I Provisions

Resources are essential in order to facilitate the delivery of services and, as Elmore (1983) notes, the lack of resources add to the complexity of policy implementation and local entities often end up bearing the burden of costs. The call by many that NCLB is an “unfunded” or “underfunded” mandate is evidence of Elmore’s position (Fusarelli, 2004; Kim & Sunderman, 2004; Mathis, 2005; National Council of State Legislators, 2004). Unless schools and districts are creative, funding decisions are often made using trade-offs from one program to another. Even though NCLB provides kernels of opportunity for schools to promote the success of all students through opportunities for student support services, greater accountability, and an increased integration of parents in the school life of their children, inadequate resources pose barriers that create new problems for program implementation (Elmore, 1983; Spillane, 1999).

Parent educational advocacy organizations, such as the Public Education Network (PEN), have also expressed concerns regarding lack of funding to carry out NCLB’s
agenda. ACORN has been responsible for many grassroots initiatives urging increases in funding streams for NCLB (Campaign for Educational Equity, 2004).

According to Spillane (1999), lack of resource support can result in local government entities “remaking” policy to suit their own needs. Thus, NCLB runs the risk of being tailored to suit local agendas and co-opted to serve local political purposes. The burden of policy implementation, in spite of limited funding, lies at the state and local level where administrators must grapple with developing plans and enforcing provisions of the policy. Tyack & Cuban (1995) suggest that implementers, believing that policymakers are often out of touch with where schools need improvements, choose to “adapt innovations to local circumstance, or comply in minimal ways, or sabotage unwanted reforms” (p. 61). One might conclude that policy takes on a different character at the local level.

Spillane (1999) notes that successful policy implementation at the local level requires that district goals and capacities are aligned with the standards of the policy hierarchy (state and federal government), that policies are clearly defined, and that the state and federal government, for that matter, must be attentive regarding resources, such as funding, necessary for implementation. He suggests that lack of attention to resources can lead to alterations in the policy directions as local government entities prioritize other needs and make decisions on the allocation of local assets. Spillane also highlights that local manpower must possess the skills and the knowledge to carry out policies and have an interest in promoting the policy. In addition, he supports that the clarity of policy directives, the incentives or enticements to encourage compliance, and a system of
accountability are essential conditions in securing the local commitment to school reforms.

What is revealing about NCLB is the fact that, although education has historically been considered a state issue, the reach of the federal government has extended into state territory as NCLB mandates idealistic policies, provides limited resources, and places expectations on state and local government entities to meet milestones. Daniel (2006) notes that there has been criticism of federal action as it relates to NCLB and “critics have raised major questions about the usurpation of state hegemony over education and the authority to construct educational policy” (p.1). Others suggest that the federal government has been moved up in stature and is in full control in the educational policy-making hierarchy (Cross, Riley & Sanders, 2003). This intrusion by the federal government warrants further inquiry.

Scholars, such as McLaughlin (1987) and Elmore (1983), note that, although the policy makers at the federal and state levels of government can develop and mandate policy, successful policy implementation outcomes are “situational” (Elmore, p. 350) and are shaped by the varied local inputs that drive the policy. For example, implementation is often impacted by the political climate, competing problems, the ebbs and flows of local budget priorities, and the passion or commitment of those who implement policy such as teachers and administrators. McLaughlin notes that “the supports, incentives, and constraints that influence implementor capacity and implementor motivation reside in the broader system” (McLaughlin, p. 192). Essentially, one must recognize that local implementation of policy must be considered in the context of the larger environment, and is affected by “local capacity and will” (McLaughlin, p. 187). Given the changing
nature of policy, the ways that policy can be localized to fit local contexts and the impact of policy on the community, an examination of the benefits of a socio-cultural approach to policy might enhance our discussions about the involvement experiences of under-represented parents.

Socio-Cultural Considerations in the Policy Process

A socio-cultural approach to the study of policy lends itself to looking at policy as “a complex social practice” where policy is examined from varied vantage points and “different levels of social life” (Sutton & Levinson, 2001, p.1). A socio-cultural approach seeks to explore policy at the policy formulation and the appropriation/localization stages where policy is put into practice, searching for evidence of ways that policy is “negotiated…in daily life” (p. 2). This approach recognizes policy as an ever changing process that is “negotiated and reorganized in the ongoing flow of institutional life” (Ibid). It includes observations of how people superimpose and construct “frameworks of cultural meaning” that they “use to interpret their experiences (p.3). It, in turn, considers ways to integrate these cultural meanings into our societal practices.

Given that NCLB supports higher standards for academic performance, “mandates for improved achievement of all students”, and has a goal endeavoring “to close the achievement gap between high and low achieving students” particularly students in poverty, students of color, special education students, and students for whom English is a second language (Daniel, 2006, p.1), a socio-cultural approach that is sensitive to the many dynamics of advocating for these groups can be valuable. NCLB policy activities could serve to benefit from a socio-cultural practice of policy
implementation and localization given the protected populations - those underprivileged, those marginalized - that the policy was designed to support. Socio-cultural approaches offer opportunities for parents from varied populations to capitalize on NCLB’s suggested advancement opportunities for children through the creation of a place for parent voices to be heard.

Sutton (2001) advocates for a more democratic process in socio-cultural studies as she highlights policy formation in international assistance agencies and advocates for stronger partnerships and agency research in the policy process. Her discussion provides relevant parallels to the application of socio-cultural purposes to NCLB and how this approach might guide us to a more democratic policy process.

**Social Capital in Parent Involvement Circles**

Social capital encompasses the benefits which are gained from participation in social networks and groups (Bourdieu, 1986; Noguera, 2004; Sampson, 1998). Groups have varied capacities to leverage social capital since the placement of social groups in our stratified society finds people at different levels of advantage and disadvantage (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1996; Brantlinger, 2003; Lin, 2000). Norms, expectations, and obligations among the members of groups are considered common elements in social capital (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1996); Coleman, 1988). This study assesses the experiences of low income and minority parents as they navigate the school environment and interact with others in the school community. In addition, in relation to social capital, this research examines the social capital of parents as they interact with school stakeholders, particularly other parents. Further, this research focuses on low income
and minority populations because research suggests that there are similarities in the
dependent experiences of these groups as they interface with educational institutions and educators.

This study examines what happens in the trajectory of parental experiences when social
capital is superimposed on race and class in an environment where federal policy is
driving parental engagement initiatives.

Bourdieu (1977) advances that social capital is based on social relationships, “a
network of lasting social relations” (Bourdieu, in Grenfell and James, 1998, p. 20) and
encompasses the resources that members of groups can access through group
membership. Bourdieu (1977) supports that social capital is “the aggregate of the actual
or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less
institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition that provides each
of its members with the backing of the collectively –owned capital, a “credential” which
entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word” (p. 248-249). Bourdieu
suggests that individuals “invest” in social networks in order to be able to develop
relationships that can be leveraged for benefits or “profits” when needed (p. 249 – 250).

Bourdieu notes that social capital and cultural capital are interconnected. He
defines cultural capital as manifested in a person’s ethos or cultivated dispositions, their
exposure to cultural artifacts i.e., art, books, and their exposure to institutionalized culture
through knowledge and qualifications (p.243). Bourdieu and others support that the
linkages between social capital and cultural capital and suggest that differences among
classes and the stratification of cultural capital impacts one’s social capital (Bourdieu,
1986; Horvat, Weininger & Lareau, 2003). Since social capital is relationally based,
access to groups and to those relationships is often based on shared characteristics with
those who have similar dispositions or as discussed in sociological terms, “habitus” (Bourdieu), behaviors, or recognizable cultural capital. Bourdieu advances that culture in institutions is dominated by certain intellectual classes and is transmitted intergenerationally through a hierarchical social structure to foster stratified arrangements in society that privilege intellectual classes. Bourdieu (1986) contends that various institutions (such as schools) perpetuate and reinforce certain behaviors, “habitus”, or dispositions that are reflective of the majority class. He further notes that cultural practices which mirror these dispositions in institutions enable social inequalities. To elaborate on this idea as it relates to parental involvement in schools, for example, certain groups (intellectuals/middle class groups) have established ways for interacting with school staff, for gaining access to information, and for securing advantages for children (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003; Lareau, 2000). These behaviors, Bourdieu suggests, have become a natural way of conducting business in schools. Further, Bourdieu notes, these behaviors are learned from generation to generation and are transmitted through social networks and interactions with family or similarly situated individuals. Low income or minority families, not being a part of these networks and not having the social capital from these groups, often do not have the pre-established knowledge about how to interact and interface with schools (Brantlinger, 1993; Lareau, 2000, 2001; Brantlinger, 1993).

Lareau (1999) and Horvat et al. (2003) point out that the interactions that parents have with members of various institutions, including schools, seem to contribute to class divisions. She suggests that students can experience moments of inclusion, which are those times when parents are successful at intervening on matters of education for their
children, and moments of exclusion, those times when parents are unsuccessful.

Drawing from Bourdieu (1986), Lareau suggests that these moments are influenced by the extent of a parent’s experience and knowledge of how to operate in an educational setting (“dispositions”) and by their capacity to actually leverage social capital (Lareau, 2003; Horvat et al. 2003).

Putnam (1993) defines social capital as “connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (p.19) and offers a similar argument as Lareau (2003) and Horvat et al. (2003). He notes that race and class add a different dimension to how social capital functions and posits that “racial and class inequalities in access to social capital…may be as great as inequalities in financial and human capital” (p. 6). Putnam further suggests that one’s wellbeing is affected not only by a person’s parents’ social resources, but also by the resources of their parents’ ethnic group.

Putnam (2003) suggests that individuals are able to get more out of life through social connections and social networks. He advances that social capital can provide benefits valuable to individuals and collectively to groups of people and as such can be considered a public and a private good (p. 20). In addition, Putnam maintains that “social capital matters for children’s successful development in life” (p. 299) and is beneficial to successful educational outcomes for students. He bases his theory on research that he performed in a state by state analysis of social capital across the United States that found that high levels of social capital in a state have a positive relationship to positive well-being for children. From this research, he developed a “Social Capital Index or measures of social capital, that look at social connectedness of citizens for the studied states and
concluded that when looking at Kids Count indexes of child welfare, developed by the Annie Casey Foundation, poverty and social capital and demographics, in that order, had the most substantial impact on student lives (p. 297).

Putnam (2001) concludes that the more socially connected and civically involved a community is the more parental involvement there is and the better student performance is in school. He notes that student behavior problems and dropout rates decrease at these schools and student motivation is higher in these school settings. Further, Putnam suggests that “kids of parents who attend programs at their kids’ schools, help with homework, and monitor their kid’s behavior outside school are likely to have higher grade point averages, to be more engaged in the classroom and to shun drugs and delinquent activity” (p. 305).

Putnam’s perspective is consistent with Coleman’s (1988) findings in Coleman’s comparison of public and Catholic high school students. In his research, Coleman concludes that social capital in families and communities better positions students for success in school. He notes that social capital in families and communities is important because it contributes to the development of human capital, (i.e., educational skills and capacities) in students. Coleman found that high school dropout rates were lower in Catholic schools than in public schools and attributes this to the social capital enjoyed by students whose parents attend the same church and sustain relationships as parents of students who are school friends.

Coleman (1988) discusses three forms of social capital – “obligations and expectations, information channels and social norms” (S95). He suggests that social capital is “productive… [and helps] in the achievement of certain ends…is a resource for
persons” (S98) [and] “exists in relations among persons” (S100 - S101). The first form of social capital discussed by Coleman is the social capital generated from obligations and expectations. This form of social capital can facilitate action and these interactions can be furthered by trust. Trustworthiness is established in relationships that create action and as social capital is exchanged through actions, obligations will be accumulated with the expectation that as social capital is needed, it will eventually be reciprocated (S101 - 102). Coleman also notes that social capital can be manifested in the form of information sharing. Access to information can become useful by providing information that informs and facilitates action. The third kind of social capital discussed by Coleman is the existence of social norms in the social relations that form social capital. These norms help to guide social behavior. For example, in terms of parental involvement in schools, the social capital and norms of a social network or group could serve to promote certain parent school interactions (such as requesting a certain teacher for your child) that eventually could become common practices in the school community. However, parents without access to the social capital of this group of informed parents and without knowledge of this information would be at a disadvantage in terms of advocating for their children in this way. Anyon (1997), talks about the “social gulf” or the “social distance” between individuals from various socio-cultural classes and backgrounds and how these gaps “impair communication, trust and joint action (p. 21 - 23), characteristics known to facilitate strong school communities. Scholars suggest that the variability in a family’s ability to leverage social and cultural capital in schools further compounds societal inequalities and keeps low income families from negotiating the educational terrain to
support student achievement like middle class families can (Lareau, 2003; Lee & Bowen, 2006).

Researchers have established that many middle class families are comfortable with the school climate and can distinguish the cues and codes of the educational environment (Lareau, 2000, 2001; Brantlinger, 2003; Heymann & Earle, 2000). Because middle class families are familiar with the “habitus” and “dispositions” upon which the schools are based, they are comfortable functioning in schools and thus can capitalize on interactions with school staff and benefits for their children (Lareau, 2000, 2001). On the other hand, working class families often don’t possess the “habitus” and “dispositions” embraced by the school and the middle class; they have limited access and knowledge and are reluctant about facilitating relationships between educators and themselves, (Ibid).

As the social capital of a family is strengthened through social networks, parents have access to resources that can support and contribute to improved achievement for their children (Anyon, 2005). Thus, as NCLB’s parental engagement initiatives are implemented in school districts; one wonders if the resulting programming is facilitating access to social capital for low income and minority families. Anyon (2005) elaborates on the multi- faceted barriers that hinder the socio economic advancement of low income and minority families. She notes that the dynamics of and interactions between “jobs, housing, tax, transportation maintain poverty in neighborhoods all interrelated in perpetuating limitations on the working class and minority families in urban communities (Ibid, p. 66).
According to Lin (2000), many parents belong to “resource-poor networks”, lacking the ties to social capital that provide educational advantages for their children. Low income and minority parents often do not have the reservoirs or the “drawing fund of social capital available in a time of need” to rely on (Coleman, 1988, p.S117) when they are called upon to advocate for their children. Further, according to Lin, these groups have minimal access to “information and influence” (Lin, 2000). For example, members of low income and minority groups often have limited knowledge of how to maneuver through school systems (Brantlinger, 2003), they may have limited relationships with well-networked parents and educators with whom to form interdependent relationships, or they may live in neighborhoods where they have limited resources and proximity to neighbors with which to build relationships and, in turn, benefit from the networks of social capital (Lin, 2000; Brantlinger, 2003). One might conclude that, unless low income and minority groups have increased opportunities to access social capital and leverage social networks, schools, especially those lacking high levels of involvement, may not be able to fully realize the benefits of parental engagement programs.

**Parental Rights – Constitutional and Case Law**

Support for parental involvement and the social capital that can be gained from such engagement can be found in the constitutional rights of parents. The constitutional right of parents to be involved in matters related to their children has been supported consistently by the U.S. Supreme Court, especially when pointing to the liberty interest as articulated in the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution. The 14th
Amendment of the Constitution of the United States affords parents property rights and liberty interests. The amendment specifically states that “No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law;” U.S. CONST. amend. XIV, § 1. Further, the rights of parents to participate in decisions about the academic life of their children in schools has been supported in case law, including rulings from *Meyer v. Nebraska*, 262 U.S. 390 (1923) (Goldstein, Gee & Daniel, 1995; Sperry, Daniel, Huefner, & Gee, 1998). *Meyer v. Nebraska* was a case where the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that it was unconstitutional for the State of Nebraska to prohibit students to be taught modern foreign languages before high school. The court determined that a State of Nebraska law violated the right of Due Process and the Fourteenth Amendment when it prohibited a teacher from teaching a ten year old student German. In this case, the Supreme Court ruled that the court had imposed on the liberty interest of parents and a parent’s right to make decisions about the education of their children (*Meyer*, 262 U.S. 390 at 401).

In *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* 268 U.S. 510 (1925), the U.S. Supreme Court also ruled that a parent’s right to direct the education of their children had been infringed upon by the state when the voters of the State of Oregon approved a compulsory education law requiring students eight to sixteen years to attend public schools. The Supreme Court concluded that while the State had reason to require students to attend school it, was imposing on the Fourteenth Amendment liberty interest of parents to determine what kind of school their children should attend.
The law cases of *Meyer v. Nebraska* and *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* provide specific examples regarding parental rights, including parental rights in matters of curriculum and their rights regarding the decision to make educational choices for their children. Other case law provides examples of rulings highlighting a parent’s right to criticize educational personnel, and parental rights in accessing the educational documents of their children. Essential to the opportunities afforded to parents is the legal declaration that “the custody, care and nurture of the child resides first with the parents” (*Prince v. Massachusetts*, 321 U.S. 158, 166 (1944)). Based on the outcomes of *Meyer v. Nebraska* and *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, one might conclude that opportunities should exist for parents to participate regarding issues of a child’s education.

Not only is there legal support for a parent’s right to be involved in the lives of their children, but scholarly research has shown, as previously noted, that parental involvement and support facilitates student academic advancement (Comer, 1997; Epstein 2005; Henderson & Mapp, 2002, 2007; Lee & Bowen, 2006, Sheldon 2002). Further, one might conclude that the federal government and the U.S. Congress, through the NCLB and Title I provisions, have further provided an opportunity for parents to be actively involved in the lives of their children. However, while NCLB offers an opening for parents to advocate for greater levels of engagement in the school lives of their children, the Act does not provide the necessary backing for parents to have a legal cause for action if schools and districts fall short of carrying out NCLB’s direction. The parental rights cited in case law, however, are still subject to judicial rulings and more general restrictions on the broad brushing parental liberty interest contained in the Fourteenth Amendment.
For example, in trying to balance liberty interests of parents against the greater common good for young people, the Supreme Court ruled in *Jacobson v. Massachusetts*, (197 U.S. 11, 26 (1905) that the state had a right “to restrict generally the liberty guaranteed under the Fourteenth Amendment” (Sperry et al., 1998). In *Jacobson v. Massachusetts*, a case involving an individual’s rights regarding state imposed vaccination requirements, the court ruled that the wellbeing of the public often takes precedence over the rights of the individual and thus all citizens shall be subject to vaccination requirements. This measure provided an avenue for the state to intervene when necessary as “parens patriae”, a Latin term meaning “parent of his country…[or] sovereign of the public interest” (Gifis, 1991, p. 342), in order to ‘secure the general comfort, health, and prosperity of the State…’ (Sperry et al., 1998). This case illuminates the fact, that although parents have certain rights relative to their children, the greater good of the public can often supersede that which is in the best interest of the individual.

As evidenced from this section, judicial rulings and case law, coupled with scholarly research, provide support for parental involvement in the education of their children. The next segment highlights historical milestones in parental involvement.

**Historical Overview of Parental Involvement in Education**

The parent-school divide has long been a concern of parents and educators. (Cutler, 2000; Lawrence- Lightfoot, 2003; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Recommendations on bridging this gap and the identification of approaches that foster partnerships between these parties have varied. Collaboration amongst parents and educators has often been
brought about by tumultuous and adversarial interactions throughout the history of education (Cutler, 2000; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003).

Prior to the early 1800’s, education was perceived as a “private matter” (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2003). Parents assumed the major responsibility for teaching their children to read and write. During this time, the pursuit of educational opportunities was limited to the upper and elite classes who availed themselves of tutorial and preparatory schools. Generally, the home and church were viewed as major contributors in the overall education of the child in the early 19th Century (Cutler, 2000; Pulliam and Van Patten, 2003). By the mid 19th Century, school and home relationships evolved from the parent being the primary educator to the expansion of schooling when teachers began to assume greater control and responsibility for the education of children (Cutler, p.1-4).

Around 1820, school reform initiatives sought to extend primary school opportunities to establish and provide more organized instruction for all citizens (Church, 1976). During this time, middle class parents advocated for exclusive opportunities to set their children apart from everyone else (Church; Reese & Rury, 2008) and educators considered the education of children their domain (Church, 1976 p. 155; Cutler, 2000; Pulliam & Van Patten, 2003).

Parents, then and now, considered the parental role as one that identifies the parent as their child’s first teacher (DePlany, Coulter-Kern & Duchane, 2007; Epstein, 2002; Gutmann, 1987). From this parent as educator perspective, parents thus believed that they should have a say in the learning process. Hence, the continued opposing viewpoints and source of tension between parents and school personnel.
The period from 1812 to 1865 encompassed the Common School Revival. A closer examination of this era follows.

The Common School Era

The rise of the common school was largely facilitated by the efforts and desire of the American public, including parents, for equal educational experiences. The Common School was looked at as the institution that, in the words of Horace Mann (a self-educated visionary), would be the “great equalizer” in education in the 1800s (Meier & Wood, 2004; Ravitch, 1983). It was hoped that common schools would level the playing field in education between the learning experiences of the elite and the masses.

During the period from the early 1800’s to the Civil War, citizens were vocal about the establishment of common schools. Farmers and citizens in rural America were instrumental in advocating for their children to obtain access to the education that had been enjoyed by the elites for years. They pushed to have their children exposed to the “rudiments of education” while holding fast to their prerogative to maintain control over issues such as schedules and curriculum. (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2003, p. 132; Cutler, 2000). They were deliberate in their demands and became visible participants in elementary school life.

Numerous elementary schools appeared in the North and West to add to the public school programs in New England. Teachers in these institutions were responsible for building the “social, political and moral character” of students. (Pulliam & Van Patten 2003, p.133). The primary duty for teachers during this era was to promote civic education and to improve one’s status in society.
According to Pulliam and Van Patten (2003), although states gave the impression of support for common schools by developing laws and setting up frameworks for school systems, they were resistant in the implementation of them. Figurehead superintendents were put in place to appease the populace and give the perception of leadership. States often deferred to local education advocacy groups to establish corporations that tended to the affairs of schools. Middle class families lobbied for the best educational opportunities for their children. The provision of resources to stabilize the progress of education and to support educational advancement for students from all backgrounds was limited. As the industrial revolution expanded, bringing Black citizens and waves of immigrants to urban cities, working class parents, although not formally organized, began to exert their influence politically. Factory employees created working men’s societies and pooled resources to unite behind the concept of taxation for public schools (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2003). These workers desired equal educational experiences for their children. Cycles of protest followed the economic and political upheavals caused by the industrial revolution. Cities became overcrowded; many lived on the fringe of society in poverty and depressed conditions. Despite the situation, the working class continued to advocate for the provision of education for all. In the years leading up to the Civil War, the teaching and learning environment was limited in the classroom. The teaching profession was slow to gain the respect of the population. Salaries were low and they had to rely on educational reformists and, reform movements begun by women’s groups to lobby for better wages for teachers and improved resources in schools. Reformers, like Horace Mann, worked to gain support for taxes to allocate funding to new school buildings and improved wages for teachers (Pulliam & Van Patten 2003, p. 142).
School Change and the Era of Progressivism

The progressive period followed the common school era from the late 1800’s to the early 1900’s. During this time, John Dewey, the father of the progressive movement, expressed concern that schools were losing touch with society (Cutler, 2000). Dewey and other progressives felt that “their [schools’] devotion to traditional subjects and methods made schooling irrelevant by detaching it from the experience of the young” and called for education to be more experiential and child centered (Dewey, J., 1909 in Cutler, 2000, p. 26).

As part of the progressive position, the role of the parent in helping to improve schools was seen as essential to the successful growth and development of children. “Cooperation between school and home to meet the needs of child life” was adopted as one of the seven principles of the Progressive Education Association, an organization desiring to reform American schools (Cremin, 1964, p. 243).

During this period, parent organizations were formed and served both an educational advocacy function and a social function. As schools began to function more like bureaucracies, the role of these parent groups eventually evolved into monitoring schools. As school systems moved toward greater organization and developed layers of bureaucracy, the responsibilities of educators grew and teachers became “further removed from the life of common people” (Cutler, 2000, p. 26). As a result of these changes, school staff began to view the opinions of parents and outsiders as intrusive.

While immigrant students had an easier entrée into American public education in the late 1800’s and the early 1900’s, the African-American community had more of a struggle in their quest for educational access for African-American students (Tyack,
Many African American leaders and community groups lobbied for improved educational opportunities; however, some advocated for stronger “separate but equal schools” while others emphasized greater integration of African Americans into predominantly White schools (Tyack, 1974, p. 110-111).

The Rise of Home School Associations - Mothers Clubs and Parent Teacher Associations

Home school associations were first established during the progressive period, in the early 1900’s and was created largely due to the interest of mothers who sought to influence the education of their children (Cutler, 2000). Although involved in educational advocacy, many fathers were busy earning a living while mothers, whose activities were focused in the home, were more involved in influencing the education of their children (Cutler, 2000). During the late 1800’s to the early 1900’s home school associations were viewed as instrumental in uniting the interests of home and school. These parent groups developed agendas to facilitate upgrades in school facilities, educate and share information about education with the parents and the public, help establish home school associations in other schools, and advocate for the use of schools as community space in the evenings and on weekends (Cutler, 2000, p. 37-38). Home school associations were not only looked at as entities to affect educational change but were considered vehicles to “instruct… parents concerning the care of their children; and to promote the social interests of the neighborhood” (Cutler, 2000, p. 36).

These levels of parental activism also served to ignite similar national efforts in the formation of the Progressive Education Alliance and the National Congress of Mothers. Numerous parents, and in particular mothers, united in formal organizations, such as the National Congress of Mothers in 1897, to advocate for the education, health
and safety of children. This group of elite mothers campaigned to raise modest pensions for single widowed mothers and laid the foundation for what would eventually be known as Aid for Dependent Children (Britannica Online (2008) National Congress of Parents & Teachers). These efforts provided the impetus for social organization around issues of child welfare. However, organizations like these were still reliant on resources of the elite classes that provided no opportunity for involvement of parents from other classes or groups. The mother’s organizations were instrumental in moving varied educational reforms forward (Reese, 2002, p. 29).

Concerns that the mothers’ organization was becoming a gender exclusive socialist organization caused the Congress to change their focus to include parents and professionals (Britannica Online National Congress of Parents & Teachers). In 1908, the organization changed its name to the National Congress of Mothers and Parents – Teachers Association. They shifted their focus to include advocacy in the areas of service to children, families, and the greater school community. Participation of low income and minority parents was non-existent in these early organizations. Modeled after the National Congress, Black women established the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers in states that had mandated segregation (Britannica Online National Congress of Mothers). The National Congress invited representatives from the Colored Parents and Teachers association to attend their National Congress to indicate their recognition of common agendas in spite of governmental restrictions against desegregation. It was not until 1970 that the two organizations merged as a common entity.
In his account on parents and schools, Cutler (2000) notes the tensions that existed as PTA organizations and schools negotiated their relationships. “PTAs differed in their political tactics…some adopted a cautious approach avoiding open conflict with school authorities. Others were more direct, ignoring the expectation that parents and especially mothers should not be confrontational” (Cutler, 2000, p. 74). School administrators recognized the power of these growing parent networks and concluded that the home school dialogue gave educators a forum to further their agenda, (Cutler, 2000). As PTAs evolved, the association developed political agendas as well as monitoring the school organization. PTAs also served a role in parent education and pursued community service initiatives. Cutler also highlights that schools relied on the PTAs to mobilize parents and these parent organizations began to identify strategies to purchase equipment and supplies for schools. The social and political capital enjoyed by parent elites facilitated these efforts. Oftentimes the school’s goals for parents were co-opted as a result of the generosity of parent groups. As parents and schools began to interface more, struggles ensued as to the role of the PTA in supporting the viewpoints of the school. Educators sought to limit the parental role to reinforcing discipline and morals and encouraging completion of homework. Parents refused to relinquish their influence on the educational affairs of their children and continued to organize around issues of school reform.

Cutler (2000) notes that, eventually, PTA members began to recognize political opportunities that existed in the power of their organization. These groups gradually realized their ability to exert political pressure on school boards. Members began to question their roles, strategies, and tactics in the organization and wondered “Should
they restrict themselves to subtle pressure tactics such as discrete lobbying or be more partisan, endorsing reforms, and campaigning for candidates” (p. 74). Standardized practices and political tactics were difficult to establish across all PTAs. Some chose tactics that ignited conflict; others chose more subtle strategies for advocacy. The risk to the PTA would be the loss of trust among members of their organization should they perceive that the PTA was becoming a mouthpiece for the school system. It was clear that parent associations and the home school partnerships developed through these groups, although sometimes volatile, were valuable coalitions toward shaping school reforms (Cutler, 2000).

Parental Activism in Education and the Era of Desegregation in Schools

This section highlights the historical activism that occurred in education leading up to and during the periods of desegregation in America. The synopsis presented here provides an overview of events and cases that illuminate activities involving parents and students as they advocated for school reform and increased equity and access to education for all students.

Cutler notes that, although parental roles in education evolved into more secondary positions in the twentieth century, due to increased bureaucratization of schools, parental activism continued all through the twentieth century leading up to and throughout the period of desegregation in American public schools (Cutler, 2000). Following the American Civil War and the ratification of the 13th Amendment, which freed the slaves in 1865, the American education system experienced major problems regarding the level of access and services that Black Americans were to receive in the country (Pulliam & Van Patten). The attempts by the various branches of the federal
government to provide greater educational equality and to impact segregation in public schools during the late 1800’s were inhibited not only by the disruption of the Civil War, but also by Horace Mann’s vision and belief in the “absolute right of every human being that comes into the world to an education…. and the correlative duty of every government to see that the means of education are provided for all” was not embraced by many of the states. (Pulliam & Van Patten 2003, p.127).

Prior to *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896), very few efforts were made to challenge the separation of facilities for Blacks and Whites. *Plessy v. Ferguson*, challenged the Separate Car Act, an Act that required Blacks and Whites to travel in separate railroad cars and that justified having separated, dual facilities for Black and White Americans as long as they were equal. The Plessy case concluded that it was constitutional to have separate facilities for Blacks and Whites providing they were “separate but equal” (*Plessy*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896). This case had implications for all institutions and ultimately proved to be expensive and cumbersome to maintain (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2003, p. 240). For example, Pulliam and Van Patten note that the economic support for separate facilities was limited and public schools for Blacks were substandard. Further, schools serving Black students lacked adequate textbooks and were in run-down facilities (Pulliam & Van Patten). Minority parents lacked the resources and the relationships with non-minority parents and other groups to lobby for substantive changes.

In the early 1900’s Black and immigrant families began to move to larger towns and cities (Cutler, 2000, Trotter, 1993). This growth led to overcrowding in many cities and towns coupled with poor health, housing, and economic conditions for working class,
immigrant and Black families (Cutler, 2000, Reese & Rury, 2008). The increase in population in the cities also added to increase in the demand for schools (Cutler, 2000). Reese and Rury (2008) note that during this period, however, African Americans, American Indians and Hispanics were “disproportionately poor, politically powerless, and usually lived in heavily rural areas without much public investment in their education” (p. 126). Middle class parents advocated for advantages such as secondary education for their children in order to strengthen the skills of middle class children and prepare them for white collar and professional positions (Church, 1976). Such educational opportunities were not easily afforded to lower class populations. Their intention was to set their children above poor and working class children. Educational reformers began to look at schools as opportunities to socialize and “Americanize” citizens (Reese & Rury, 2008). As educators became concerned about non-attendance, child neglect and the desperate home conditions of some students, schools were relied upon to provide increased social services and to educate parents about parenting (Cutler, 2000).

The 1920s and the 1930s were periods of changes in court rulings and views regarding integration. Many of the laws reflected courts shifting toward decisions supporting increased equality. A number of judicial and legislative actions had an impact on and helped to shape desegregation policies. By the 1940s there was evidence of greater activity towards civil rights and increased efforts toward desegregation. Not only did activism grow among parents but Frankenberg & Orfield (2007) note that there was increased activity related to desegregation in various branches of government, especially in the courts.
For example, legislation, such as the GI Bill of Rights (GI Bill) or The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, that provided educational opportunities for soldiers returning from World War II, including soldiers of color, opened the door for greater advocacy for equality in education (Ravitch, 1983; Roach, 1997; Wilson, 1994). Although the GI Bill laid the foundation for progress, it was met with resistance, particularly from Southern policy makers who were against affording Black veterans equal educational access as that of White veterans (Roach, 1997; Wilson, 1994). The GI Bill enabled some Black veterans to attend predominantly White colleges and universities in the North, helped to stabilize enrollment at Black colleges, many of which were experiencing trouble operating, and provided resources through a subsequent Act for construction and renovations at historically Black colleges and universities (Roach, 1997; Wilson, 1994). Further, the opportunities made possible by the Bill's increased access to education for Black Americans have been credited with helping to prepare a group of professionals who became part of the “black middle class” (Roach, 1997) or “black bourgeoisie” (Wilson, 1994). Scholars suggest that the increased educational activity was a contributor in helping to guide the mindset of policy makers toward being more receptive to the idea of educational equality for all (Roach; Ravitch, 1983; Wilson, 1994) through “the encouragement of the conviction that “everyone, regardless of ability, ought somehow to go to college” (Ravitch; Newsweek in Ravitch, 1983, p.15).

The federal, legislative, and judicial activity in America following passage of the GI Bill and related Acts provided momentum for desegregation and ultimately activities leading up to the civil rights movement. The GI Bill helped to facilitate access for veterans to attend American colleges and universities and set the stage for movements
endorsing increased access of African-Americans to institutions of higher learning. Parent groups were also active advocates during the time of the passage of the GI Bill of Rights regarding issues of equality in education and parent groups united with other organizations to serve as a stronger force in their quest for equal education for their children (Cutler, 2000).

Desegregation efforts in the U.S Military around WWII also reflected evidence of the efforts toward desegregation in various American institutions. Desegregation activities eventually began to permeate the educational arena and as noted by Church and Sedlack:

Middle and upper class parents [sought] college preparatory schooling for their children. In a latter instance, the pressure came first from the African-Americans and then from other ethnic and racial groups among the poor and their supporters throughout society, who demanded that schools teach them successfully the educational skills necessary to compete on equal terms with more privileged groups – in short, that the schools offer compensatory education so good that it would enable these people to achieve economic and social equality despite the handicaps of their initial social situation. (Church & Sedlack, 1997, p. 223)

Higher education cases such as Sweatt v. Painter, 339 U.S. 629 (1950) in 1950 reflected action by the Supreme Court which was sympathetic to desegregation and educational equality when the Court ruled in favor of the admission of a Black student to law school. Several years later, Brown I or Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka et al. 347 U.S. 483 (1954) which was considered “the landmark Supreme Court decision of this century” (Orfield & Eaton, 1996) ruled that… “in the field of public education, the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal” (Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka et al., 347 U.S. 483, 495 (1954). In the Brown I ruling, also known as “The Decision” (Johnson, p. 178), the courts ruled
that state approved segregated educational facilities were unconstitutional by law. In Brown II, *Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka et al.*, 349 U.S. 294, (1955) also known as “The Remedy” (Johnson, p. 178), the federal Courts were afforded the right to insure that States complied with the Brown Decision “with all deliberate speed” (*Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka et al.*, 349 U.S. 294, 301 (1955)). During these deliberations, states were ordered to make a “prompt and reasonable start toward full compliance” with the Brown Decision (Johnson, pp.177-178).

Even with the legislative actions under Brown I and II, Southern court officials often succumbed to pressures from politicians not to enforce the law and “Southern school districts sought to frustrate the law at every turn” (Church & Sedlak, 1976) as Southern lawmakers and government officials found ways to circumvent the law by resisting (Ogletree, 2004), stalling on desegregation rulings or requiring only minor desegregation changes (Orfield & Eaton, 1996). Southern officials capitalized on the lack of definitions and clarity in the Supreme Court ruling as an excuse not to follow through with the federal law (Orfield & Eaton, 1996). Further, Southern officials used school closures or the passage of local laws opposing desegregation as alternatives to the federal rulings (Ogletree, 2004; Orfield & Eaton, 1996).

The Brown cases had implications for public K-12 schooling in America. As with the earlier federal, legislative, and judicial activity, the Brown cases served to lay the groundwork for future change that, although it was slow, provided some leverage for parents and other activists to eventually advocate for equal facilities, resources, and access for children historically denied these privileges.
Following the Brown decision and years of resistance by state and local government officials, the Supreme Court began to intervene in court rulings regarding desegregation. Although there were some federal legislators that supported initiatives developed to address the inequalities that existed in the American educational system, others were lukewarm. However, Congress ultimately passed legislation to help support schools in their efforts to desegregate (Orfield, 1996). Ravitch (2000) notes that “American society was shaken by seismic social, cultural and political changes” (p. 366). This activity opened the window of political opportunities for increased levels of activism in the movement toward equal opportunities in K-12 and higher education.

The 1960’s gave way to the start of civil rights era, a period of immense protest, and the emergence of similar struggles within the context of an era of multiple quests for social and economic changes by groups that included African-Americans, women, students, Native Americans, migrant farm workers, laborers, and parents (McAdam, 1982). Additional cases reflected this period of great activism, and pressure increased by the public and various levels of government on educational institutions to be vigilant with their efforts to provide greater access to education and to desegregate.

Moves to block desegregation, however, continued throughout the 1960’s and 1970’s. Once the federal government decided to desegregate the nation’s schools, they moved forward with policies and resources to make sure that states fulfilled their responsibility. Some U.S. Presidents even brought in the National Guard and used the U.S. Military presence to enforce desegregation. Parents risked their children’s physical safety and emotional stability to send them to schools with the National Guard to protect them. For example, in 1962, Mississippi Governor Ross R. Barnett opposed the
registration of James H. Meredith at the University of Mississippi. James Meredith, a Black student, was supported by federal court orders to enroll at the University. Meredith was the first Black student to attend a Mississippi public school with White students. Local citizens and federal marshals clashed over Meredith attending the University of Mississippi. Federal troops had to occupy Oxford, Mississippi. In 1963, Gov. George C. Wallace of Alabama stood in a doorway at the University of Alabama in a symbolic attempt to block two Black students from enrolling. The federal government had to use military force to integrate Southern schools. In addition, during the 1960s, college students themselves became active advocates for equality in education, a departure, Ravitch (2000) notes, from the materialistic, silent students of the 1950s who had enjoyed post war prosperity. Some scholars suggest that radical student activism that emerged during the 1960s was considered to be rebellion by many students against the complacency of their families in the quest against inequality (Ravitch, 2000, p. 371).

Additional examples toward efforts of integration occurred surrounding the issue of tracking. Across America, students were subject to a process known as a “tracking system”, which grouped them by ability level and presented them with a set curriculum track. This approach was ruled unconstitutional in Hobson v. Hansen, 269 F. Supp. 401 (1967), a 1967 case which found that the tracking system fostered segregation by locking children into academic tracks or pathways in schools that held them down and ultimately made it difficult for them move out of their tracks.

involving the City of Boston School Board and its participation in fostering segregation in the public schools. The schools were ultimately placed in federal receivership for non-compliance with desegregation laws. This showed a move toward the increased commitment by the courts to desegregation and reflected the exertion of federal power to force integration.

Other cases also had implications for K-12 education in areas of parent advocacy. In the Milliken v. Bradley, 418 U.S. 717 (1974) Case of 1974, the Supreme Court and lower courts were involved in differences regarding desegregation across district lines. The Supreme Court ruled that the courts could not impose rulings across district lines and therefore could not control the segregation of the suburbs around Detroit. This case preserved the segregated suburban schools that were the result of “White flight” out of the nation’s cities as majority parents sought to hold on to segregated schools for their children.

These efforts, commitments, and on-going attempts by the various branches of government to provide equity in public education represents a commitment from the various branches of government toward the enforcement of desegregation policies in education. Similar efforts by the branches of government to provide greater equality and access in education for all people continue even today. Many of these efforts were strengthened by religious and multicultural coalitions of parent and community groups who demanded change at legislative and judicial levels and who were fearless in their advocacy for educational equality (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 53).
School Change through Standardization

Following the release of the government publication, *A Nation at Risk* (1983), which expressed concern about the “mediocre” educational system in America, there was a greater push for rigidity and standardization in education. These major concerns of anti-intellectualism in schools were brought on by the period when Sputnik, a space satellite, was launched by the Soviet Union. People became concerned that the U.S. might not remain competitive. Competition ensued between the United States and the Soviet Union and educators decided to place heavy emphasis on math and science to counteract these concerns (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 52). Parents counteracted these changes by pressing for a return to the traditional subjects that would equip their children with the fundamentals of basic subjects (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2003). Other educators, such as Theodore Sizer, a former dean of Harvard Graduate School of Education and former headmaster of a preparatory school, and E. D. Hirsch, an advocate for core knowledge, proposed alternate educational approaches such as “mastery of school work”… [versus] standardized testing and “cultural literacy - knowledge of the basic information to thrive in the modern world” (Ravitch, 2000, p.419).

School Change and School Choice

Parental activism has contributed to the contemporary calls for educational reform in the area of increased school choices for families in the education of their children (Lacey, Enger, Maldonado, & Thompson, 2006). Parents have historically had opportunities for choice; however, the choices of low income and minority parents in past historical eras, have been restricted (Betts & Loveless, 2005). Betts and Loveless discuss the issues of equity surrounding school choice and highlight the historical advantages that
middle and upper class families have enjoyed when making decisions regarding schools (Ibid., p. 2).

Much of the school choice movement is a direct response to the concerns regarding the decline of academic achievement in many of our nation’s public schools (Lacey et al., 2006). Further activism surrounding school choice represents a cry from parents for better opportunities for their children. Within the context of the school choice movement, parental tactics centered around threats of abandonment of the public school system in exchange for private or suburban school systems if alternative institutions were not made available. The pressures on government by families seeking better school choices has led policy makers and government representatives to endorse policies in support of the use of public funds to provide alternatives for the education of children. Specifically, charter schools, vouchers, and home schooling are now areas of great interest in educational discourses.

As Kozol (1991) notes, inner city parents, like other parents, want to direct their children toward better education. However, “the poorest parents, often the products of inferior education, lack the information access and the skills of navigation in an often hostile and intimidating situation to channel their children to the better schools…” (Ibid. p. 60). Further, low income parents may also struggle when trying to determine whether a program that seems good on the surface will actually provide the best educational environment for their children. Policy makers and educators must, therefore, continue to seek venues to provide public information on educational opportunities. In addition, information flow about charter schools by journalists and the information provided by
chart schools needs to be increased to better inform the public about charter school programs (Allen & Robinson, 2008).

**Leadership and Decision Making Partnerships between Parents and School Leaders**

Building leadership capacity in parents realizes an untapped resource for schools. “Parents at the decision making level move beyond being committed advocates for their children into sharing responsibility for providing quality school education for their own and other children” (Barbour & Barbour, 1997, p. 263-264). Informed and committed parent leaders are engaged in more extensive school leadership roles, including participation in staff interviews, membership on site-based management councils, and advocating for school funding initiatives. Opportunities for parental engagement in federal NCLB legislation, and Epstein’s (2001) and Epstein et al.’s (2002) model of successful school, parent, and community partnerships provide the foundation for these relationships through advocacy for parents to be included on committees in decision-making and in planning. The initiatives that support parents as decision makers are similar to those of the teacher council movement of “the 1910’s and 1920’s and the democratic administration movement of the1930’s and 1940’s…These movements established new school and district-level decision making opportunities” among multiple stakeholders (Cutler, 2000, p. 37). More recent examples of school and community collaboration can be found in school improvement and reform efforts such as those associated with the Comer Project or School Development Project approaches nationwide, and the Local School Council arrangements in Chicago. Similarly, these partnerships advocated participatory decision-making arrangements with the intention of
reforming and transforming schools. While these common efforts indicate the potential for varied stakeholders in school communities, including parents, to be active agents in improving schools, these collaborations have not been without problems. Sperry et al. (1998) note that although the Fourteenth Amendment and case law supports “the rights of parents to direct the upbringing and education of their children” (p. 761), the Supreme Court and case law has also declared limitations on these rights and has provided legal rulings that have favored school interests over the desires of parents.

Sperry et al. (1998) highlight some of the issues and legal actions that have resulted from efforts in school and community partnerships and site-based collaborations. These problems illuminate the larger issues of conflicts between school administrators and non-school district actors where, in the example of the Local School Councils in Chicago, conflicts and struggles of authority between school administrators and non-elected council members led to litigation (Sperry et al.). Specific evidence of this can be found in the case Stevens v. Tillman, 855 F.2nd 394 (7th Cir. 1988).

NCLB’s advocacy of parental involvement lays the groundwork for greater parent engagement in school decision-making and provides opportunities for parents to have influence over school personnel on matters affecting their children. Discussions in this research regarding social capital further suggest that NCLB’s recommendations regarding collaboration provide opportunities for parents, through social networks with other parents and educators, to influence the educational decisions that ultimately affect their children.

NCLB lays the policy framework under which participatory decision-making opportunities can be afforded to parents through efforts at the local level. Although
NCLB directives promote participatory decision-making between parents and school personnel, these partnerships do not happen naturally and are not without problems.

Epstein (2001) advances key conditions supporting successful decision-making partnerships between school leaders and parents. She contends that schools should engage numerous parent representatives on school committees and workgroups. In addition, Epstein suggests that parent leaders must reflect the diversity of the school so schools should reach out to the varied populations.

Central to this decision-making role, Epstein highlights the importance of school support for those on decision-making teams. School representatives initiate the exchange of information and ideas. In turn, parent committee members should share information with those they represent. Parent leaders must be encouraged and supported to serve as entities for continued communication between themselves, other parents, and the school. Finally, Epstein advises schools to continue nurturing and growing new leaders, insuring continuity as veteran parents transition to other communities (Epstein, 2001).

**Social Capital and Parent Engagement**

Community engagement and empowerment has been a key element in facilitating lasting educational change in American schools and educational success of children (Comer, 1996; Putnam, 2000; Shirley, 1997; Berry, Portney, & Thompson, 1993). Successful models can be found nationwide where members of low income, urban communities have mobilized and partnered with other educators, institutions, and organizations and have become engaged to significantly reform school communities (Comer, 1996; Fung, 2001; Meier, 2002; Roderick, 2001; Handler, 1996). Grounded in
the work of Coleman (1988, 1990) and Putnam (2000, 2003) as community members engage in social behavior and unite around common issues (such as better schools), they develop societal bonds and thus increase civic participation and social capital. Fung and Wright (2001) further note that increased participatory behavior “deepens democracy” moving us closer to greater inclusion of all groups in society.

Specific school reform initiatives in Chicago neighborhoods provide rich examples which contextualize the type of citizen engagement efforts that support Putnam’s (2003) and Narayan’s (2000) premise that bridges of social capital can be constructed between communities through an engendered sense of “mutual aid” (Glassman, 2000) and “strong norms of reciprocity” (Narayan, 2000).

The Chicago initiatives emanated in the early 1980s from a groundswell of grassroots activism coupled with the maverick, reformist style of Chicago Mayor Harold Washington. The Local School Councils (LSCs) were established through public law following calls to relinquish school control to neighborhood-level community decision-making bodies. The LSCs were composed of parents, educators, and community members such as business and civic representatives.

The Chicago model provides evidence of participatory and democratic deliberation through an examination of LSCs in city neighborhoods. It provides a case analysis of a public institution through which citizens were empowered to problem solve and make decisions to govern, improve, and strengthen school reform. Katz (1995) suggests that these partnerships between parents, schools, and communities are evidence that democratic decision-making is possible. Fung (2001) notes that citizen-governmental collaborations, such as the LSC’s, provide voice for citizens in areas that
affect their daily lives. These organizations, in turn, benefit from the authenticity and creativity of the public who provide alternative perspectives on problems confronted in their communities.

In Chicago, these initial mobilizations were successful primarily due to the existence and efforts of community based organizations (CBOs) that had engendered a sense of trust among communities where there were strong kinship ties (Narayan, 2000) through bonding social capital (Lin, 2000). However, the success of these CBO linked efforts could not be fully maximized without an infusion of support from governmental agencies that began to function like non-governmental entities (NGO’s) and that developed supportive, not directive, intervention for the LSCs. These agencies facilitated workshops and trainings for LSC members. They also assisted the LSC’s with local problem solving, monitored progress, and provided support and training for the LSC distributive, community decision-making bodies. This assistance was essential, especially for LSCs in marginalized neighborhoods that were ill-equipped with the knowledge of how to manage the work.

The LSC structure has not been without problems and some LSCs fared better than others (Ryan, Bryk et al. 1997; Designs for Change, 2002). For example, some Councils were subject to takeovers from dominant and outspoken individuals, leaving the less assertive participants without a voice. In addition some LSCs lacked strong leadership or needed more training. There were also LSCs that experienced fraud and warranted reprimands. In addition, researchers (Fung, 2000) report that tensions and conflict often threatened to derail the collaborations. To combat these issues, the district central office utilized liaisons to help guide LSCs. At times these liaisons placed LSC’s
on probation while they assessed the challenges and determined where resources could be effective. In a report by Designs for Change (2002) researchers suggest that political agendas of central office personnel often clouded the districts guidance of the LSC’s. These problems further hindered the progress of various Councils.

In spite of the varied issues with LSCs, overall, the outcomes of the Chicago project reflect that bridges of social capital can span communities if the various participants can collaborate compatibly with others. Scholars note that to be effective LSC’s require adequate training, support and resources to be successful.

**Parental Involvement and Partnerships for School Reform**

Beyond day-to-day decisions, the potential exists for well-informed educational professionals and parent leaders to take on more extensive leadership roles as advocates for school reform. If school administrators desire to gain substantial support for their school reform efforts, school administrators must find creative ways to engage parents in the dialogue of school reforms, especially those that directly relate to increased student success. Parents can become strong advocates for school reforms but parents must be empowered through access and information so that they will understand their place in the school advocacy movement (Freire, 1970). Here, Epstein’s model offers sound advice. In order to participate effectively in school decision-making, parents require information about the proposed changes or enhancements to their child’s education. Parents must also understand the process for change and what roles they will assume within it. As these parents connect with other parents and the greater community, it is important that they be prepared to accurately describe the contents of and the process for these
innovations. Through this communication, the message of school reform and social change can either be furthered or deterred. If designed thoughtfully, this interface between parent representatives and the school can be used to gain public support for reform, sparking interest and excitement in others.

Hargreaves (2000) likens the school reform movements to those of the women’s rights, environmental, and peace movements. Hargreaves underscores the importance of solidifying the bond between parents and teachers in order to further the social movement of educational reform. Parent teacher alliances or “activist partnerships” propel home/school relationships into the forefront of educational reform (p. 219). More specifically, Hargreaves sees parents as partners with administrators in the quest to elevate the professionalism and effectiveness of teaching.

This work requires the motivation of the entire school community and the community beyond. According to Hargreaves (2000), “It is now vital that the teaching profession work in partnership with the public to become a more vigorous social movement of acting subjects who work together to improve the quality and the professionalism of teaching, rather than a set of fragmented individuals who act as client only in their families private interest” (p.227). Such a partnership results in a profession that will be “open to, inclusive of and actively learning from others (especially parents) who have a stake in children’s education and children’s futures; and it takes an activist stance beyond the classroom as well as within it to defend and develop public education” (p. 227).

This level of parent-teacher cooperation requires nurturing by school administrators. Historically, the teacher-parent relationship has been clouded by “high
anxiety” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, p. xxii). Parents and teachers are often considered “natural enemies predestined for the discomfiture of the other” (Waller, p. 133). Given the dynamics of this affiliation, administrators are called upon to mediate or referee the parent-teacher exchange, while advocating for the inclusion of the viewpoints of both parties. School leaders must be willing to take risks as they expose this area of uneasiness in an attempt to forge coalitions and build support for educational change. As Epstein suggests, elevating parent voices results in increased support and loyalty from parents.

Dennis Shirley (1997) discusses school reform efforts from the perspective of coalition building between schools, religious institutions, and citizens groups that included parents. Shirley gives examples of schools in Texas that were motivated to engage parents to advocate for educational reforms as a result of their association with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), a nationwide grassroots political organization. He notes “the Texas IAF actualizes a distinct new kind of parental engagement, which encompasses and goes beyond other types of involvement by recovering and enlivening the concept of citizenship which has so agitated and enriched the western political tradition” (Shirley, p. 76). Epstein lauded the Texas IAF’s work as reflected in the following comment. “The Texas IAF’s work with parental engagement transcends accommodationist approaches to school and community relations by bringing the community into the heart of the school and using the school as a base for the political revitalization of the community” (Epstein, 1992). This kind of fervor surrounding the schools can only serve to excite parents to be involved. As entire communities and schools organize to effect school change, our educational institutions are challenged to
improve, creating more effective schools for our children. A discussion about the important elements of partnerships for social change and social advocacy follow in the next section.

**Parental Involvement and Partnerships for Social Change and Social Advocacy**

Schools don’t exist in isolation but, rather, they are reflections of the environment around them. Anyon (1997) notes that school reform without reform in the larger community cannot be effective. She articulates that “the lack of a will to cooperate (lack of social impact) is perhaps the biggest problem we face in revitalizing cities and city schools” (Anyon, p. 18). As changes in society occur, schools are impacted and must make adjustments to survive. Each member of the school brings with them values, beliefs, and behaviors from their place in society. Schools serve to develop a sense of fraternity and community while carrying out their educational and social functions. The school community becomes an extended family that helps to mold students to function as citizens.

Parents and families are also a part of this school community. Many suggest that parents are a child’s first teacher and therefore are “equal partners” in the education of children (Carrasquillo & London, 1993). School and home are inter-connected. As parents raise their children, they contribute to the socialization of their children and of others. Further, as schools influence children and work to build community within the school environment, these institutions impact the outside environment. Thus, schools and parents impact and affect change in society, and together become change agents. “A
creative change agent will seek out business and other partners who can benefit and support their student’s learning.” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998, p. 81)

The development of leadership partnerships between school leaders and parents to make a difference in the greater community seems like a natural quest for this team. As trusting relationships are developed between school leaders and parents and as these groups begin to collaborate on making improvements, these parties can effect the social outcomes of school families (Sheldon, 2002, Comer & Hayes, 1991). Active parent partners may serve to motivate and spur other parents toward school participation, and schools will have a captive audience to assist with managing the many demands of the school environment. Further, as parents collaborate with educational professionals and other parents, a foundation of social networks and bridges of social capital between parents may be forged that will serve to inform and provide support for parents as they maneuver through the many demands.

Professionals, such as social workers and school psychologists, as well as social service agencies, have long been in place to help schools provide needed services for families (Comer & Hayes, 1991, Dryfoos, 2002). These professionals have also served as partners in the education of children. Since social and emotional challenges can often be an impediment to student learning, the existence of these safety net services can make a difference in the stability of many students (Comer & Hayes, 1991). However, this system is far from highly functioning. Many complain about the fragmentation of the service delivery system. The growing demands on these services have created unrealistic waiting periods before students and their families can receive assistance.
At the same time, [there has been] the development of a much greater variety of forms and strategies for outreach – e.g. neighborhood-organization led programs, communities of faith efforts, and many more school-linked in place of school-based programs. Finally, much of the recent activity in the service movement has been directed toward efforts which bridge pedagogically between schools and families/communities...[such as] after school tutoring [and] youth development programs (Boyd & Crowson, 2001, p. 59).

With these kinds of initiatives emerging, it makes sense that parents can further serve as catalysts that can propel other families in the community toward much need services and supports. In this way, the parent-school-partnerships begin to fulfill the role of social advocate.

Opportunities exist for greater parent roles in advocating for other parents who may feel disenfranchised and disconnected from the schools and services. Parent partners may provide the pathway for greater communication between schools and parents. Parent partners may also serve to legitimize school leaders with other parents because of trusting working relationships that they will have developed. The hope is that new parents will begin to follow the direction of parent leaders and forge paths for stronger school parent relationships. However, parental skepticism and reluctance that often plague efforts to involve underrepresented parent populations must be addressed as parents are encouraged to increase participation. Hindrances, such as past negative experiences with schools from a parents own upbringing and lack of common ground and relationships between parents and school staff (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003) must be overcome in order to develop stronger, more inclusive school and home alliances.

Shields (2004) articulates that successful educational leaders can be the catalyst that unleashes this manpower and these relationships. In spite of the changing and challenging role of educators in today’s times, “A successful education leader must
attend to both social justice and academic excellence because one implies the other” (Shields, 2004 p. 38). Shields suggests that the development of meaningful relationships built on respect for the value and the contributions of others can help to set the stage for what she calls “communities of difference” where varied voices and perspectives are factored into school decisions-making.

Scholars suggest that a foundational element in building solid, authentic parent school relationships is the development of trust between parents and educators (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Meier, 2002a, 2002b; Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Trust is an often mentioned and common thread cited by scholars regarding ways to establish and sustain solid school and home partnerships and democratic school communities. The connection between trust and authenticity to successful school and home collaborations will be explored next.

**Trust as an Essential Element in Promoting Parental Involvement**

Trust and authenticity must be woven into the fabric of the school if school improvement efforts are to be successful (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Collaboration between parents and educators is facilitated when school stakeholders trust one another and when members of school communities believe they have “a sense of place” (Driscoll & Kercher, 1999, p. 365). Tschannen-Moran (2004) notes that there is evidence (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001) that trust in school environments help to foster advances in student achievement. As schools develop strong relationships with parents, they render their long-term goals transparent. Sharing their
strategies for accomplishing and monitoring student performance, they build trust (Meier, 2002).

Meier cites examples of schools she led, such as Central Park East in New York and Mission Hill School in Boston, where trust is high and where parents serve as active participants in the school community. These schools have earned national recognition for their successes. Meier’s schools provide examples of trustworthy environments where all members, including parents, support the philosophy of the school community. Here, trust and authenticity were essential components of the educational process.

The first model, Central Park East (CPE) schools, emerged from a concept at City College in New York. Together scholars, practitioners, and parent partners sought to create small but “open corridor” communities within large elementary and secondary school buildings (Meier, 2002, p. 27). Based on a notion of learning and schoolwork as visible and open to everyone, these schools were grounded in relationships of respect, exchange, and dialogue between the adults and children in the community. These basic elements of democratic school communities provided an environment that celebrated the contributions of everyone. The CPS schools were also created as incubators of innovative teaching approaches (Meier, 2002; Schneider et al., 1997). The school community was conceived of as a family where parents had to endorse the school philosophy by actively choosing to enroll their children and join in relationships with other members of the extended school community (Meier, 2002). Although students at CPE schools were considered “at risk”, the schools’ effectiveness was demonstrated, as 90 percent of their students were high school graduates and 90 percent went on to college (p.69).
The second model, Boston’s Mission Hill School, reflects an educational approach and mission consistent with the CPE schools. In addition, Mission Hill was designed to encourage the intersection of daily activities with cultures of adults and children (Meier, 2002). The school space was created to reflect the dynamics of the marketplace with open hallways and common space facilitating the exchange of information and ideas between students, teachers, administrators, and parents. Meier cites this open exchange as fundamental to building trust in school communities. As school leaders “created a structure in which people – students, students and teachers, and teachers and teachers, and their families could think aloud together and jointly make decisions” (Meier and Schwartz, 1995, p. 29). In this way, adults and children, educators, parents, and community members develop a sense of common ground.

According to Meier (2002), the basis for high trust with a school community rests in a parent’s opportunity to select a choice school placement for their children. At CPE and Mission Hill Schools, school administrators require that parents visit the school prior to selection to facilitate parental buy-in and inclusion. Parents are encouraged to embrace the culture and philosophy and to feel comfortable with school personnel as they choose to share their children with the school community. In this way, parents and students develop a sense of commonality with other community members and may have opportunities to strengthen ties that can lead to increases in social capital (Mintorm & Roch, 1997). This school preview also helps parents develop confidence in the professional expertise of school members as partners in educating children. Further, school officials continue to earn this public trust and confidence, providing ongoing evidence of the “school’s competence” through a carefully documented track record.
(Meier, 2002, p. 54). At CPE, administrators maintain detailed records on student performance and track the progress of children through their K-12 journey. CPE personnel also follow the path of their students after graduation and use interviews and post-graduation data to support their theories of the continued success of their students.

Some researchers (Carnoy, 1993; Hening, 1994) would note that school choice environments, like CPE, have the potential to further contribute to “social stratification”, favoring parents who are most active in their child’s education over those who are not. They suggest that this “fundamentally reduces the ability of communities to address collective problems” (Schneider, 1997, p. 83). Meier (2002) would note that the efforts to forge strong relationships with members of the community and all parent groups build proclivities toward partnerships and collaboration between school personnel and parents. Under the CPE model, parents and students together collaborate with school staff to identify the most compatible school placements for students.

These school communities are models for shared leadership and decision-making between school leaders and parents. They demonstrate the value of trust between members of school communities as they collaborate to improve schools. All adults associated with the school are viewed as having valuable contributions to make towards the development of children. Further, all adults have made a commitment to support the school as they work together to facilitate the learning of children. In her research, Epstein highlights in her research that when schools engage parents in substantive volunteer experiences, trusting relationships are elevated (Epstein in Cutler III, 2000, p. 201). Further, educators can still maintain reasonable levels of autonomy and authority as they maneuver relationships between themselves, the parents, and the community.
Parental Involvement and Democratic School Communities

Common themes appear throughout the research regarding parental involvement that suggest that democratic school communities are ideal venues for shared partnerships and collaboration between school personnel and parents. Democratic school communities are often described as places where there is trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Meier, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003), participation, (Fung & Wright, 2001; Putnam, 2000) openness or an open flow of ideas (Apple & Beane, 1995, 2007), an interplay of ideas, Kahne (1996), dialogue (Gutmann, 1987; Freire), voice (Kincheloe, 2006), inclusiveness (Dahl, 1998) and mutual respect (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Miretzky, 2004). These characteristics are embedded in the perspectives about democratic school communities.

Furuman and Starrat (2001) posit that the foundational ideas for democratic school communities have been drawn from Dewey’s (1919; 1937) viewpoints on progressivism, and his concepts of collaboration and community. Fung and Wright’s (2001) concept of empowered deliberative democracy that focuses on deepening “the ways in which ordinary people can effectively participate in and influence policies that directly affect their lives” (p.7) extend these ideas. Putnam’s (2000) discussions regarding civic participation, where schools become settings for shared discourse and citizens build relationships and develop ties, provide promise for engaging parents and communities and extending school improvement. This coupled with Gutmann’s (1987)
ideas about the empowerment of citizens to influence educational outcomes hinges on
democratic deliberation as a key component of education.

The evidence from the perspectives of these scholars, provide consistent themes
and stress the importance of relational interaction and authentic discourse that lead to
opportunities for all citizens to have voice.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Research

This chapter elaborates on the methodology used in this research project. As introduced in Chapter 1, this study involves a qualitative inquiry into the experiences of low income and minority parents and how they have engaged in the work of schools since the passage of NCLB. Further, this research examines the activities and perspectives of parents, teachers, and administrators with regard to the implementation of NCLB and Title I parent involvement policies in schools. It explores how policy informs practice and how practice is contextualized, based on the situations and conditions in the schools and school district. Further, this research observes the role of social capital in facilitating the engagement experiences of parents.

One of the goals of this study is to explore possible windows of opportunity through NCLB and the related Title I provisions for parents from underrepresented populations to be involved in the selected school and district and to be engaged in the school life of their children. Another goal of this inquiry is to examine the engagement experiences and perspectives of parents from these underrepresented groups in the selected urban school and district settings to see how parents are being engaged. This research discerns how parent involvement policies are implemented and whether policy
implementation is sensitive to and inclusive of the needs and viewpoints of low income and minority parents. Finally, this inquiry examines the role of social capital in integrating low income and minority parents in parental involvement activities.

**Rationale for Qualitative Research**

This research studies the complexity of the parental engagement experiences of low income and minority parents in the work of schools and examines relationships and potential partnerships between parents and educators in support of school improvement and student advancement. This study involves “an in-depth inquiry of a program, activities [and/or] groups of individuals” (Creswell,). To accomplish this, to address the goals stated above and to respond to the research question and sub questions outlined in Chapter 1, a qualitative research methodology was selected for this study. The foundational elements of qualitative research allow for “an emphasis on …processes and meanings that are not experimentally measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) as in quantitative research. Rather, qualitative methodology is hard to measure and has complex meanings (Glesne, 1999). Qualitative research advances that knowledge and reality are “socially constructed” and qualitative inquiry endeavors to answer “how social experience is created and given meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln, p. 8). Further, qualitative research recognizes that there is an” intimate relationship” between the researcher and what is researched (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and acknowledges that the researcher is an instrument and must gain “entrée” into the world of the researched to study and understand and interpret the multifaceted meanings and the varied experiences in the
context of participants (Glesne, 1999). Additionally, qualitative research advances that “situational constraints shape inquiry”

Within the framework of a qualitative study, this research used collective case study strategies to capture the experiences of parents, teachers, administrators, and other adults affiliated with the selected schools and district. Specific data collection procedures included individual and group interviews, observations, and document analysis in order to gather information about the case study schools.

Since this study seeks to identify the “lived experiences” (Denzin, 1988) of parents in school and district settings and seeks to understand how the parents perceive their experiences in the context of their communities, a qualitative methodology seems to be the most appropriate method for this inquiry. Glesne (1999) suggests that “qualitative studies are best at contributing to a greater understanding of perceptions, attitudes, and processes (p. 24). A qualitative study provides the tools necessary to provide an in-depth exploration of the topic (Glesne, 1999), as this research examines the engagement of low income and minority parents in the work of schools. Further, essential to this research is the study of governmental NCLB policy and an analysis of the documents supporting parental engagement initiatives at the school and district levels. This study lends itself to selected document analysis techniques in order to search data and materials for evidence of themes and patterns that support (or hinder) parental involvement in the foundational NCLB and Title I federal and district programmatic documents.

A qualitative research study offers an opportunity for researchers to forge paths of in-depth study into a “situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This qualitative study occurs in the “natural setting” (Creswell, 2003)
where the researcher observes individuals, groups, and places in their own context and
within their own culture (Glesne, 1999).

Given that this qualitative study considers implementation of the parent
ingagement aspects of federal policy (NCLB) and attempts to situate parent voices in the
midst of those policies, this research pursues this inquiry from a socio-cultural stance.
Socio-cultural strategies see the policy process as “a complex social practice” where
policy is examined from a variety of vantage points and “different levels of social life”
(Sutton & Levinson, 2001, p.1). This strategy is grounded in relativist and interpretivist
perspectives, which respect differences and plurality. Relativist and interpretivist modes
of inquiry recognize that “there are multiple realities” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 21)
and that inquiry should support the production of “reconstructed understandings of the
social world” (p. 158). These relativist and interpretivist approaches draw from a
constructivist paradigm that acknowledges varied view points and multiple perspectives
(Lincoln & Guba, 2000). A socio-cultural approach to the study of policy and its
implementation is consistent with the relativist and interpretivist perspectives of the
constructivist paradigm that views reality and knowledge as a socially constructed, open,
and emergent process (Glesne, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Further relativist and interpretivist positions posit that “all inquiry reflects the
standpoint of the inquirer”, that the inquirer’s knowledge is “finite”, and that the
inquirer’s “observation is theory laden” (Smith & Deemer, 2000, p. 872). The relativist
interpretivist paradigm acknowledges that, from the perspective of the inquirer, what the
inquirer knows about theory is often used to evaluate situations through the inquirer’s
lens. “Relativism and interpretivism is about the way we are in the world, about living
contingent lives and about having to find new rationales for the judgments we make” (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000, p.1049). The relativist and interpretivist grounding of socio-cultural approaches to the examination of policy in this study urge us to continually press for new understandings, look at policy in the context where it is being applied and to be deliberate in seeking alternative ways of seeing the world. As prescribed by theorists, a goal of this study is to seek evidence of the multi-vocal perspectives of the parent engagement experience both in seeking varied venues from which to view parental involvement and in the identification of participants for interview experiences.

The “open and emergent nature” of a relativist and interpretive inquiry, as pursued in this study, guides the research, and provides opportunities to examine both the varied, complex meanings in the study (Glesne, 1999, p.6) and evidence of openness and flexibility in policy about what the outcomes of the policy action will be (Glesne, 1999, p.6). Through these discoveries in the research, the researcher identifies that policy flexibility enables school district actors to shape parental engagement policy to fit their local needs, however, the policy directives do not seem to provide flexibility when local contexts impacted the required achievement benchmarks. For example, district activities that will be elaborated on in Chapter Four, such as the school facilities program, proved to disrupt the flow of NCLB required parent involvement progress.

Further, relativist and interpretive views encourage us to probe for understandings, looking for patterns of diverse social behavior, and to seek to “understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them” (Glesne, 1999, p. 5). As activities and emerging patterns were
observed in the studied district and schools, the researcher often considered the reasons behind certain occurrences or behaviors.

The relativist and interpretive ontology also extends the perspectives of the socio-cultural approach to NCLB policy implementation. It provides reasoning and substance and illuminates how socio-cultural policy methods can be valuable in striving for more effective and successful policy formation and localization. This approach suggests that the NCLB policy environment regarding parent involvement should be relational, and should provide for multi-vocal discourses on how parents should be engaged in schools to support student success. The policy implementation process at the local levels should be recognizably collaborative and inclusive of numerous school stakeholders with a range of experience from varied cultures and backgrounds. This process should be governed by trust, mutual respect, collaboration, and commitment (Meier 2002a, 2002b; Tschannen-Moran, 2001) to the quest to understand others in our communities and advises us to “look thoughtfully and tolerantly at other cultures… to help resolve many of our tensions and some of our problems” (Cohen, 1998, p. 111). These modes of inquiry challenge us to determine why individuals behave in certain ways, to uncover our own subjectivity, and to seek to glean something new from others (Denzin & Lincoln, p. 191).

The methodological imperatives of a socio-cultural approach in the relativist and interpretive ontology urges that those making inquiry about society “gain access to the multiple perspectives of the participants” (Glesne, 1999, p. 5). Further, these methodological imperatives lend themselves to “in-depth long term interaction with relevant people” (p. 5) from varied environments.
Glesne (1999) notes that the researcher, in seeking data, serves as the primary mode for making inquiry or the “main research instrument as he/she observes, asks questions, and interacts with [the researched or other] participants” (p. 5). Stake (2000) further suggests that in making inquiry

“…enduring meanings come from encounter, and are modified and reinforced by repeated encounter [and that ]….in life itself, this occurs seldom to the individual alone but in the presence of others. In a social process, together they bend, spin, consolidate, and enrich their understandings. We come to know what has happened partly in terms of what others reveal as their experience” (p. 442).

**Study Design**

This research uses case study strategies that include in-depth observation and analysis (Stake, 2000) of two elementary schools in an urban, Midwestern school district. Schools were selected based on the overall performance of the school average yearly progress. School performance categories of the selected schools fall in the categories of either “at risk” or “in school improvement” status under NCLB. Schools in these categories were sought because it was thought that perhaps they would exhibit greater evidence of the various tensions that exist as a result of NCLB. A goal of this research was to observe how schools managed to navigate NCLB demands, how they integrated parental involvement as schools implemented policy, and the emphasis they placed on accountability and student advancement. Further, the research endeavored to assess how parental involvement factored into the process of school improvement.

The case study methods applied to this study involve grounded theory approaches with simultaneous data collection and analysis, and continuous comparisons and coding of interview, document, and observation data (Charmaz, 2000, 1983; Glazer, 1978,
1992). Specific methods of “collective case study” (Stake, 2000) or the “ multisite qualitative research” in this inquiry used research questions applied to multiple contexts or sites “seek[ing] to permit cross-site comparisons without necessarily sacrificing within-site understanding” (Herriott & Firestone, 1983, p. 14). As noted by Stake (2000) and Lincoln and Guba (2000), the multidimensional nature of each case was examined in this research while being true to qualitative inquiry and while recognizing that “social phenomena, human dilemmas, and the nature of cases are situational and influenced by happenings of many kinds” (Stake, 2000, p. 440).

A goal throughout the data collection process was to include a search for common themes that emerged from the research data using elements of grounded theory by conducting preliminary interpretations of data to inform and guide the remaining data collection (Chamaz, 2000). For example, in the early stages of data collection when examining federal policy (NCLB) it seemed that the policy directives have had far-reaching effects at both school case study sites. The implications of academic under-performance and the need for sustained academic improvement of students created conditions for these school communities that impacted how parent involvement was carried out. Discussions that follow in Chapter Four will show that, because of NCLB demands, school priorities were occasionally inclined toward increasing student achievement with limited time to nurture parent involvement. These discoveries helped to inform the research follow-up questions to increase understandings about what was occurring in the schools and the district.

In keeping with the various elements of case study analysis as suggested by Stake (2000) and Charmaz (2000), the research also examined the situational and contextual
characteristics of NCLB parental engagement policy implementation at the district and school level and to flesh out the varied voices for whom NCLB policy implementation impacts. As a process, the case study approach seemed appropriate for this research in order to achieve an in-depth examination of the experiences of low income and minority parents and their perspectives and relationships in select schools. Case study methodology enables the author to “scrutinize [the] contexts” (Stake, p. 437) of the schools while providing rich material that could be used to enlighten the research questions.

In-depth observation and analyses were carried out using data from the two schools, district-wide parent consultant meetings, and workshops. The researcher was occasionally invited to attend the parent consultant sessions at times assisting with registration and setting up meeting materials.

Semi-structured interviews of individuals from school stakeholders and group interviews of parents in the individual schools and the district were held to gather perspectives of parents, school personnel, and administrators. For example, group interviews were conducted with parents at selected schools and with parents fulfilling district roles as district-wide parent ambassadors of sorts. Additionally, individual interviews were held with parents, teachers, school and district staff, and administrators.

The semi-structured interview style allowed for open-ended questions that enabled the researcher to extract information from questions that were “moderately non-directive” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p.) providing adequate time for participant responses after the questions were asked. The semi-structured interview approach also allowed for follow up questions that emerged from participant responses.
In this particular research study, research data was collected and coded simultaneously. Throughout the data collection process, common themes and patterns were identified that emerged from the study data using “thick description” (Geertz, 1973, p.) or detailed contextual information of participants and the environments studied in the selected schools and district. Thick description implies that the study seeks the depth of rich data fleshing out and probing to understand any emerging differences as well as similarities. This detailed information or “thick description” (Ibid) “goes beyond the mere or bare reporting of an act but describes and probes the intentions, motives, meanings, contexts, situations and circumstances of action” in the research settings (Denzin, 1988, p. 39). Sutton’s (2001) discussion of “thickness” and how the quality of good research and good policy can be enhanced by a consciousness about multiple perspectives urges policy makers and researchers to consider thickness, to dig deep and make inquiry into the dynamics of “local institutions and practices” (p.95). This perspective on “thick description” is consistent with the viewpoint as advanced by Geertz (1973), which, when applied to this study, would encourage a search for detail and depth through observations of the parent populations that NCLB seeks to support. Geertz and Sutton would advocate for the researcher to engage with those in the studied communities and would urge broad, dense study of the parent engagement initiatives. This method suggests we make in-depth inquiry into reasons for and the “circumstances of action” of the diverse groups in our environments (Denzin, 1988, p.39), giving voice and energy to the advocacy of the “lived experiences” of all members of the community.
Selection of Cases

The site selected for this research is an urban, Midwestern school district. This location was identified as the site for the study because it is an urban school setting with widespread parent engagement programs that assert to be consistent with NCLB guidelines. To provide rich descriptions, this inquiry includes historical information on the schools and parent populations and their “relation to the contexts, other cases as well as informants who have provided information” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 372). In addition, this district was selected based on the contextual conditions surrounding implementation of NCLB parental engagement initiatives. Research in this district is appropriate because district leadership in this community identified and emphasized parental engagement and the policy guidance from NCLB as a major area of priority for their district. Further, school district leadership recognized the connections between parent involvement as a support for student advancement and school improvement.

Specific school sites have been deemed suitable for this study based on the demographic composition of select district schools. These sites provide the context for an examination of schools with students enrolled in the free and reduced lunch program and schools with a majority minority enrollment. Using a collective case study approach, this research examines two elementary schools in this district where the parent consultant program is functioning proficiently. This inquiry has been tailored to reflect select case study strategies in schools that are representative of the two low income parent populations to be studied, namely African-Americans and populations of Appalachian descent. A research focus on the elementary environment is based on an assumption that if parents are engaged in the work of schools at the elementary level, life-
long habits will develop that will continue to be evident at the middle and high school levels.

**Timeline**

The data collection phase of this study spanned the period of approximately four months. During this time, monthly observations were made at the collective district-wide parent consultant meetings. Additional observations took place at both case study schools at least 15 times during the course of the study. Busy periods, spring break, and school testing periods were avoided in the schools and district. Individual and group interviews occurred simultaneously both in the school district and at the case study schools. In order to increase the depth of understanding, multiple interviews were held to capture the different perspectives and experiences of school stakeholders in the district, including those affiliated with the case study schools, the parent consultant program, district administration, and those with policy development and implementation responsibility. One additional month was allocated for follow-up meetings, observations, and interviews to clarify or confirm findings that had emerged during the course of data collection.

**Sampling**

The sampling approach identified for this research included the selection of an urban school district with two urban case study schools that were identified because of the opportunity for in-depth inquiry with specific low income populations. Given the demographics in the school district, the researcher, with the assistance of district
personnel, selected a school with primarily African American families and a school with a majority of families of Appalachian descent from a list of schools that were consistent with the desired categories of low income and minority. These two groups were identified because the study endeavored to observe the engagement experiences of low income and minority parents in school and district parental involvement activities. Parents from these underrepresented parent groups, district and school administrators, educators, and other involved adults from the case study schools and district were observed and interviewed in group and individual sessions. The selected school district also provided a promising sample from which to observe parent involvement because the district had established a structured parent mentoring program district-wide as a result of urgings from NCLB to engage parents.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of this study has been accomplished through the use of several methods to verify the accuracy and credibility of study findings. To confirm the trustworthiness of study findings and in order to strengthen the accuracy of the study findings, several strategies advanced by scholars (Creswell, 2003; Geertz, 1973; Gergen & Gergen, 2000; Glesne, 1999; Peshkin, 1998) were used including an examination of researcher subjectivity (Peshkin, 1998), triangulation of data sources defined by Glesne, (1999) as the use of multiple data methods and sources, “thick description” (Geertz, 1973), attention to multiple voicing (Gergen & Gergen, 2000) and peer review and debriefing (Creswell, 2003).
Glesne (1999) suggests that trustworthiness is something that the researcher should be mindful of while designing research and during the data collection phase of research. Trustworthiness in research lends itself to examining:

“are these findings significantly authentic (isomorphic to some reality, trustworthy, related to the way others construct their social worlds) that I may trust myself in acting on their implications?” More to the point, would I feel sufficiently secure about these findings to construct social policy or legislation based on them” (Guba & Lincoln, 2000, p.178)?

To confirm and strengthen the trustworthiness and credibility of the study, it is recommended that the researcher use multiple research techniques. Glesne (1999) suggests that the use of varied approaches to data collection can lead to more authentic and comprehensive conclusions from data. Consequently, the varied approaches to data collection, such as group and individual interviews, observations, and document collection provide a combination of venues from which rich data and patterns can materialize.

Following recommendations provided by many researchers that to insure the credibility of the study, the subjectivity of the researcher must to be acknowledged (Glesne, 1998; Peshkin, 1988). During the study, the researcher remained constantly conscious of the subjective lens and perspectives that researchers often bring to the study.. This approach guards against the researcher imposing personal viewpoints onto the research. Field notes were used to log and document the researcher’s feelings and biases. Scholars also suggest that if the researcher is mindful of his or her subjectivity, the credibility of the research is increased because the researcher is aware of how one’s personal perspective can blur the study analysis (Glesne, 1998; Peshkin, 1988).
Steps to reduce study bias and increase trustworthiness can also be addressed through the use of “thick description”. In the analysis phase of the study, elements of “thick description” (Geertz, 1973; Denzin, 1988) were used as detailed information of observations of the selected schools serving low income and minority communities with established parental engagement programs was documented. Research data was gathered through in-depth inquiry into reasons for and the “circumstances of action” in these environments (Denzin, 1988). In these schools, the advancement of students and increases in school, family, and community partnerships was examined through extensive description of the observations and occurrences from the research. Given that this research inquires into two case study schools within their unique contexts, a vigorous analysis of data was used in order to contribute to the study trustworthiness through the “thick description” that result from well examined outcomes.

Research methods can often “support” (or “empower”) certain participants and populations (Gergen & Gergen, 2000, p. 1032). This outcome contributes to “situated knowledge of these groups but also tends to diminish or erase alternative realities” (Ibid). Trustworthiness is, therefore, compromised because the reader is not exposed to the different viewpoints to be able to effectively construct, reassess knowledge, or develop an understanding of the varied perspectives for themselves. Researchers can address mono-vocal study biases through “multiple voicing” (Gergen & Gergen, 2000) where research participants “speak on their own behalf [as in Lather and Smithies (1997) research,]…researchers seek out respondents with wide ranging perspectives on a given matter and include the varying views…[and] researchers also work collectively with their subjects [as in Ladson Billings’, (1994) work] so that their conclusions do not eradicate
minority views” (Gergen & Gergen, 2000, p. 1028). To address these strategies in the study, I conducted interviews with varied stakeholders and sought research participants with divergent perspectives in order to provide for the view of multiple voices.

Being mindful of trustworthiness of my research, the study has been triangulated using “multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation” in data gathering (Stake, 2000, p. 443).

Triangulation is another way that credibility of the research can be increased to counteract study bias. Triangulation for this study occurred using methodological and data triangulation. Data for this study was gathered using “multiple data collection methods and sources” (Denzin, 1988; Glesne, 1999; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), including observation and interview data (providing perspectives and ideas from school community members), existing data from district publications, school report cards (showing student performance and average yearly progress status), and school continuous improvement plans (showing areas for improvement and the goals that schools set for themselves, including goals in the area of parental involvement). Triangulation has also occurred through data collection from multiple sites that will provide various data sources from the two different case study schools. Patterns of connectivity and convergent themes were sought throughout the data.

Efforts were also taken to reduce study bias by engaging in peer debriefing with other graduate students, researchers and individuals from school district affiliated committees or organizations where the researcher was a participant. The researcher collaborated with other peers to cross check the interpretation of some of the data from
the study. The goal of these peer collaborations was to ensure that no findings had been overlooked, misinterpreted, misunderstood, or advanced without evidence.

Individuals identified for peer debriefing were selected by the researcher based on past relationships. The peers with whom study analysis and findings were discussed included one Caucasian, female, graduate student who was working on completion of her doctoral requirements. She had knowledge about the structure of schools and the federal, state and district policy process. The other two peers served as volunteers with the researcher on educational committees and in organizations. One was an African-American, female and the other was a Caucasian female. These three individuals would read and discuss the analysis of data one on one with the researcher after the names had been removed from the data. They would discuss the findings with the researcher and would ask questions. In addition, the peers would look for differences between the explanations of the researcher and the patterns that appeared in the data.

Member checking was also used as a technique to strengthen the credibility of the study. From time to time the researcher would ask participants to read their interview transcripts to confirm if the researcher captured and documented the perspectives and voices of the researched correctly. Member checks were conducted randomly with parent, administrator, faculty or staff interview participants.

Study credibility was also increased as a result of the support and willingness of the principal and the parent consultants to facilitate entrée and endorse the study. This support by the administrator and other parents lent credibility to this research among other school stakeholders. Parents, school staff, faculty, and administrators were
welcoming and supportive. The endorsement by the principals provided for a smooth transition into school sites.

Strengthening the credibility and the trustworthiness of this research helped to insure that information discovered through this study was authentic and conscious of potential biases as the research attempted to reliably capture the perspectives of research participants (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). By guiding the research through strategies, such as triangulation, member checking and peer debriefing the credibility of study findings increased. The researcher made an effort to identify whether low income and minority families have had avenues for input into how the policy has been carried out, or if they “had to adjust their actions and expectations to a fait accompli” (Sutton & Levinson, 2001). Select federal, state and district level policy documents, such as the NCLB statute, state and district NCLB policies, and documents detailing and evaluating school and district parental involvement program and activities, have been examined to determine if they support the other data collected.

**Data Collection**

Data was collected through in-depth observations, document analyses, and the collection and semi-structured group and individual interviews. Data from documents, interviews and observations were gathered from the two elementary schools in this urban, Midwestern school district. Observation data and documents were also collected at the district-wide parent consultant meetings. Interviews were conducted of smaller groups of pertinent parties including parents, administrators and educational staff in the schools and
district. Table 2 provides an overview of the interviews and observations held and the
documents collected in the district and at the studied schools.

The advancement of students and increases in school and community partnerships
will be considered as observations, interviews, and schools artifacts are examined
(Hodder, 2000) for ways that this district has aligned its parental engagement programs
with the goals of NCLB and Epstein’s (1997) model of school, family, and community
involvement. Further, this research will look for patterns in the implementation of parent
engagement initiatives and evidence of student advancement and school improvement at
these schools to see if there is transferability of findings to other schools in the district.
This study also takes a socio-cultural approach to examining federal, state and district
NCLB parental engagement policies. The diversity of American schools and society
necessitates that the study of policy expands and is responsive to the continual shifts and
changes in our constantly changing communities. A socio-cultural approach to the study
of NCLB parent engagement policies through this research has provided an outlet for
looking at policy as “a complex social practice” where policy is examined through varied
lenses and “different levels of social life” (Sutton & Levinson, 2001, p.1). A socio-
cultural approach in this study has enabled the study of NCLB policy at the policy
formulation and the appropriation/localization stages where policy is put into practice,
and evidence is identified for ways that policy is “negotiated…in daily life” (p. 2). This
approach recognizes policy as an ever changing process that is “negotiated and
reorganized in the ongoing flow of institutional life” (p. 2) It will include observations of
how research participants, namely parents, superimpose and construct “frameworks of
cultural meaning” that they “use to interpret their experiences” (p. 3). In turn, it has
enabled us to ultimately consider how these cultural meanings might be integrated into educational practices in the studied schools and district.

Observations of multiple sites in the collective case study approach helped to achieve a sense of the varied experiences. In reviewing these sources, this study has illuminated patterns, revealing connections and convergent themes throughout the data. Themes explored consist of the dynamics of social capital formation among various parental populations and the search for evidence of parental engagement discourses that may or may not have been co-opted by various groups (Brantlinger, 2003). In observing the “practice” and activities of NCLB’s parental engagement policy, the researcher was able to see how parents in this district were both “constrained and enabled by existing structures” in their involvement in schools (Sutton & Levinson, 2001). For example, the district has in place a dynamic cadre of parent consultants who serve in the schools where their children are enrolled, but once these children progress to the next level, oftentimes, these highly trained parents retire from the program with no formal outlets to continue their service. This is evidence of a constraining and enabling structure because the retirement of veteran consultants also makes room for the involvement of new parents, thus expanding the circle of collaboration.

During the data collection phase of the research, a search was made to identify how parents are informed about student advancement and school improvement and encouraged to be involved in the school life of children. In addition, connections between parental involvement policy opportunities and the development of avenues for underrepresented parents to participate in parental involvement activities are examined when looking at the data. An inquiry was also made to identify parental involvement
opportunities and experiences in the district and schools that help foster social capital in parent engagement activities. Further, parental involvement policy implementation was also examined to see how closely aligned federal NCLB policy recommendations are with implementation initiatives at the local level. Through the collection of rich data from varied sources and the resulting analysis that follows in Chapter 4, an effort is made in the research to discern whether the implementation of NCLB parental involvement policy has been controlled by middle class, hegemonic, cultural perspectives in society as informed by Bourdieu, (1977, 1986, 1996), Brantlinger (2003), Lareau (2001, 2003) Levinson and Sutton (2001), and others, and if the social capital garnered by low income and minority parents even positions them to be active participants in the policy process. The data collected in this study produced revealing findings that respond to these and other probing questions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERVIEWS</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>OBSERVATIONS</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>DOCUMENTS</th>
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<td>INTERVIEWS \ SCHOOL I</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>OBSERVATIONS \ SCHOOL I</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>School Honors Assembly</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Administrator Interviews</td>
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<td>Building Tour and Tutoring visit</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Individual Interviews*</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Event Planning Walk-Thru</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Group Interview*</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Spring Series Introduction Meeting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>College Workshop Series</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>OBSERVATIONS - \ SCHOOL II</td>
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<td>General Observations</td>
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<td>Parent Meeting School Lunches</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Egg Hunt</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Parent Appreciation Meeting</td>
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<td>School Carnival</td>
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<td>DISTRICT OBSERVATIONS</td>
<td>DISTRICT DOCUMENTS</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>TOTAL DISTRICTWIDE OBSERVATIONS</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PC Regional Meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>* Indicates some overlap with participants PC = Parent Consultant</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Interviews, Observations and Documents Collected
Interviews

Semi-structured interviews and open-ended questioning techniques were used to gain deeper interview responses from study participants. This approach was consistent with the quest for “thick description” in the research data. Interviews were used to identify “opinions, perceptions and attitudes” (Glesne, 1999, p. 69) and to gain greater understanding of the various experiences and perspectives of the stakeholders in schools, including parents, teachers, and administrators. The individuals and groups interviewed were connected in some way to the school district, case study schools, the parent consultant program, district administration, school and community activities, or were those in affiliated policy development and implementation roles.

A total of forty-one (41) interviews were conducted over a four month period. Of the forty participants, twenty-three (23) interviews were held with parents, grandparents or guardians of children in the district, ten (10) were teachers in the district, two (2) school administrators, and six (6) participants were a part of district administrative functions. These numbers were derived from an estimate of the anticipated number of participants from two school sites as well as participants from the school community, school district central offices, and the school district parent mentoring program.

Individual and/or group interviews of study participants were conducted to collect data. Individual interviews lasted, on average, about 40 minutes with an additional 40 minutes allocated for any subsequent follow up. Group interviews lasted an estimated time of one and a half hours with an additional hour for necessary follow-up. Both the individual and group interviews were employed to further expand on the
information observed in the various settings. Interviews were used to provide rich data and “to aid respondents’ recall of [information and] specific events and to stimulate embellished descriptions of events and [ideas]” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. )

An overview of the research was provided for all interview participants. Consent forms were secured from all interviewees and interview participants were given the option of having taped or non-taped interviews. The majority of interviews were taped and transcribed by the researcher and a professional transcriptionist except for two interviews where the participants opted out of taped interviews, indicating that they would be more comfortable with information shared without the tape recorder.

Interview questions were anchored in the theoretical frameworks of the research, including parental involvement models and social capital, policy implementation, and democratic theory. In interview settings with study informants, robust information was gathered that further informed the assumptions of this study. Further elaboration on the rich context of the interviews will be discussed in Chapter 4.

A goal in the interviews was to search for evidence of the desire of parents to prioritize education for their children but who may lack the resources and the knowledge to fully affect the educational outcomes for their children (Ogbu, 2003). Ethnographic style, open ended interview questions were also used to yield rich insights into what the perspectives and experiences of low income and minority parents are as they interface school faculties and staff and as they network with and build social capital with other parents.

Limitations cited about group interviews suggest that individual participants may be reluctant to express their opinions in front of a large group and certain individuals may
dominate the conversation (Fontana & Frey, 2000). However, group interviews have been found to “offer participants … a safe environment where they can share ideas, beliefs and attitudes in the company of [similarly situated people or] people from the same socioeconomic, ethnic, and gender backgrounds” (Madriz, 2000, p. 835). In some cases, individual follow-up interviews were held preceding the group interviews in an effort to triangulate information and in an attempt to compensate for some of the limitations. For example, if certain individuals seemed reserved during group interviews, efforts were made to hold a follow-up interview with them.

**Observations**

Varied observation strategies were integrated into the research methods of this study, including observation of participants in their “natural setting” (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000, p. 673). In this research study, participants were observed in their school, community, and district related functions in order to gain a more expansive picture of the experiences of the various school stakeholders. An effort was made to continually reflect on similarities and differences between observation and interview data to drive at greater insights and understandings of the data (Glesne, 1999).

Comprehensive field logs and detailed field notes were collected to capture the full context of the study. These research logs became a “place for ideas, reflections, hunches and notes about patterns that seem to be emerging” (Glesne, p. 49). Further, research logs were used as a place to record researcher biases and subjectivity that may infringe on the research (Peshkin, 1988).
The observations proved to be appropriate for this study because it facilitated the observation of parent consultant meetings, workshops and trainings, collaboration and interaction between parents and school personnel, interactions between and among parents, and the participation of parents in school activities and school related events. As the researcher observed parents and district staff in the various settings, the researchers’ involvement was as an observer.

Observation opportunities presented themselves when district personnel invited the researcher to shadow them during site visits at schools in their assigned regions to see the inner-workings of the parent consultant program as well as glimpses into various district schools. These site visits enabled the researcher to observe how district personnel followed-up with and interacted with parent consultants in school buildings. The school visits provided rich observations for the researcher about how different parent consultants have contextualized the parent involvement program to fit their unique school needs. For example, one school principal in a program that has an international focus selected their parent consultants that represented two of the main communities in the school. One was a Hispanic female and the other an African American male. The consultants focused on supporting the schools’ multicultural programming and worked to encourage families from these populations to be involved in school activities. Observations gleaned from the site visits were documented in the researchers’ field log.

Ideal opportunities also presented themselves during activities at school sites for the researcher to observe parents who participated in the various events. For example, observations took place at honors assemblies, school carnivals, Easter egg hunts, parent...
district meetings, school and university programs and workshops, volunteer meetings, and social gatherings of parents.

Observations at activities and events were arranged based on the parameters of the research schedule, school and district calendars, and researcher availability. During the course of the research the researcher attended two city-wide community meetings. Observations also took place at a total of four monthly, district-wide parent consultant general meetings and one regional meeting for parent consultants. At the school level eight observations were conducted at School I and seven at School II.

Documents

Relevant documents regarding district implementation of the parent consultant program, district and school improvement and continuous improvement data were collected. In addition, information on district initiatives surrounding the implementation of NCLB parent engagement programming was obtained from district and school administrators. This information was collected at introductory meetings with district administrators and at interviews with school and district personnel.

Documents, including district annual reports and handouts regarding school improvement, were collected at the district wide community meetings, provided from district administrators. Copies of parent consultant handbooks, meeting packets, and handouts were collected at the parent consultant meetings and workshops. School level documentation such as parent school contracts, school continuous plans, and school newsletters were collected from school administrators, parent consultants, and from information that was collected on-line by the researcher. District and school website
information, data from internet sources, and relevant Winton\(^1\) newspaper articles were also gathered about the district and the schools, to provide background information for the study.

The documents collected for the research were used to examine what information vehicles are used to inform parents about the parent consultant program and how the district communicates to parents to engage parents regarding NCLB’s and district parental involvement initiatives, district and school student advancement, and district and school activities.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis for this qualitative study involved continuous comparisons, analysis and coding of interview, document, and observation data (Charmaz, 2000; Glesne, 1999). The data analysis process included a search for and an awareness of common themes that emerged from the research data. The analysis phase occurred throughout the data collection process and included the development and examination of field notes, analytic files, and logs of activities, experiences, transcripts, quotations, and the data collected (Glesne, 1999). Preliminary coding categories and schemes were developed during the early data collection phase to document patterns that emerged in the study. This was followed by a more extensive, detailed coding system. A series of codes were used to tie back to the research question and sub-questions. Key components of the interview transcripts were initially reviewed and highlighted for significant comments. The highlighted portions were imported into the Excel software program and codes were attached to segments of the transcripts. The

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\(^1\) Pseudonym for school district studied.
coded sections were then sorted to search for patterns and families of perspectives common to the interviews. Unique viewpoints were also noted and included to insure validity of the research. Earlier intentions were to use techniques from the QSR N6 NUD*IST software used in qualitative research coursework. However, after discovering that the university did not support the software, an integrated coding scheme using the Excel database software to identify emerging codes and patterns was selected as the coding method. The coding scheme that was identified for the research and used to analyze research outcomes, trends, and patterns in the data can be found in the Appendix.

**Challenges and Limitations of the Research**

Challenges of this research involve differences in the anticipated and actual amount of time originally estimated for immersion in study sites. Given the constraints of the academic year, student testing periods, and breaks, the timeframe available to conduct the research posed some obstacles. For example, the limited frequency and length of days that school and district participants were available for interviews and observations impacted the data collection process. In addition, since a large portion of the interviews were scheduled during the winter months, inclement weather often hindered the planned schedule of interviews. Several times, participants had to cancel appointments because of school closures or an inability to get to school buildings. Due to these interruptions in the research cycle, it was often challenging to reschedule participants and, while most interviewees were rescheduled, there were a few that did not respond to the requests to reschedule.
Other obstacles involved gaining entrée to the school district in order to conduct research. Since the studied district is a large bureaucracy composed of numerous offices and departments with overlapping functions, it was often difficult to navigate and determine who to secure permission from to proceed with data collection. Some individuals were reluctant to provide access for the study because of concerns for the potential burden on administrators and interruption of student testing periods. Others met with the research team to identify mutually convenient approaches to the research so as to ascertain how the study could be accomplished. Once administrators were assured that the researcher would work with school staff to identify mutually convenient timeframes, and minimize the disruptions and effort required by school staff, it was much easier to obtain necessary authorizations.

Limitations of the research relate to the qualitative methodology in the study and the fact that research findings cannot be generalized to other schools. While findings from this study may strengthen the case for the transferability of research outcomes to other situations, this research has limitations and does not provide enough cases for broad generalizations. This study has wider relevance and potential transferability to other district schools and could be an example of similarly situated school environments.

Another limitation to note about this research involves the ability of the researcher to include individuals who never come to the school or participate in school activities. Failed attempts to identify and interview these parents made it difficult to garner the perspectives of those who might be disgruntled or negative about the schools and who may lack the capacity to understand the value or the importance of being an involved parent. This limitation will be discussed further in the findings in Chapter Four.
CHAPTER 4
ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

A Convergence of Perspectives on Policy, Parent Involvement and Social Capital

The diversity of American schools and society necessitates that the study of policy is responsive to the continual shifts and changes in our constantly changing communities. Drawing on the theory that guides this inquiry and the rich data collected through interviews, observations, and documents, this chapter presents findings from intensive inquiry into district and school contexts. A discussion of the influence and impact of NCLB parental involvement guidelines and how it has been implemented will include perspectives on resistance, buy-in, and localization of policy guidelines as informed by Elmore, (1980, 1983), McLaughlin (1987), Spillane (1999) and others as the local initiatives are highlighted in school and district findings. Research outcomes in light of Epstein’s (1996, 2001) model of effective school and home partnerships will be considered in this chapter as the research seeks evidence of district goals and the implementation of the various aspects of those goals in case study schools.

Policy perspectives and parent involvement experiences of school community members are analyzed from a socio-cultural angle recognizing that a socio-cultural approach to the study of policy lends itself to looking at policy as “a complex social practice” (Sutton & Levinson, 2001, p.1). Observations of ways that the integration of
NCLB parental involvement guidelines in this district show evidence of socio-cultural understandings where policy is examined from varied vantage points and “different levels of social life” (Sutton & Levinson, 2001) are considered. I will also elaborate on the development of social networks, the evidence of shared norms (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986), parental access to certain forms of capital (Lin, 2000), and parental development of bridging and bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000) that exists in case study schools. Finally, I highlight strands of democratic theory as they appear in the findings as informed by Gutmann (1987), Putnam (2000, 2003), Dahl (1998) and others as a lead in to chapter five.

**District Context**

This study takes place in an urban, Midwestern school district. The school district is located in a city with approximately 700,000 people, of which an estimated 50,000 people are school aged children (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). This district has approximately 55,000 students (Winton City School District Fact Sheet) and a total of 80% of the district student population are recipients of the free and reduced lunch meals (a federal designation for a federally funded free or reduced priced school meal program for low income students (Winton City School District Annual Report 2007-2008, 2008). Since the passage of NCLB in 2002, this school district has made progress in school improvement, moving up from the “academic emergency” status in 2001 to its status in 2007 of “continuous improvement” (Winton City School District Website, 2008). Further, during that same time period, the district graduation rate increased from 55% to approximately 73% (Ibid). While this constituency has been making progressive steps
through school improvement, school and district personnel admit that there is still work to be done.

An overview of the district’s student demographics, showing a racial and ethnic composition, is outlined in the chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>51.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>27.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.5%</td>
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<td>1.8%</td>
<td>Asian</td>
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<tr>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>Native American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>Multi-Cultural</td>
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</table>

**Table 3 - District Student Demographics**  
*Source: Winton City School District Website*

School district demographics in Table 3 show that just over 50% of the students enrolled in the Winton City School District are African-American with 27.6% Caucasian and 5.5% Hispanic. A total of 5.4% of the students are Asian (1.8%), Native American (.8%), and Multi-Cultural (2.8%) (Winton City School District website, 2008). The demographic statistics and the Title I federal free and reduced lunch percentages make this school district a reseachable fit for this study of parental involvement of low income and minority parent groups.

School district publications cite declines in student enrollment and attribute these decreases to the increased development of suburban communities and their schools, charter schools, and voucher programs (Winton City School District handout at community meeting, 2008). Demographic trends since the 1970’s have shown population growth in the school districts urban core being outpaced by increases in the surrounding suburban areas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000; Winton City School District
Because of declining school district enrollments, school board regulations have required a reassessment of district facilities. In addition, district administrators and the school board have had to make tough decisions regarding district budgets and district schools (Winton City School District Annual Report, Winton City School District Facilities Annual Report). The district has had to close and combine schools, decrease district staff, and streamline district services. Currently, the school district is in the midst of a facilities bond program, supported by city voters, intended to renovate and rebuild school facilities that have fallen into disrepair over the years. As a result of these projects, district students will soon have the benefit of upgraded facilities equipped with up to date resources, and that are safe and clean spaces supportive of student learning.

The changing school district patterns reflected in the loss of students, school closures, and school facility needs have impacted how the district is conducting education and have resulted in increased strain on district and school resources and personnel.

While federal policy makers hundreds of miles away cast bold visions and broad sweeping legislation to direct districts through No Child Left Behind, this district is faced with its own unique set of conditions that find district and school personnel almost consumed with keeping up. The perception is that the stated goals and guidelines of NCLB - to improve student achievement among all - are without adequate funding. Many also perceive that NCLB has led educators to place increased emphasis on testing drills that often leave less time for innovation in the classroom. These concerns are highlighted in the following comment from a school staff member:
“Because in [the district]… a lot of times, we’re really teaching to the test now. We’re trying to do the things required [by NCLB]. …3rd, 4th and 5th [grade] spends a lot of time, drilling and testing… Rather than teaching, there is now a lot of time spent on getting the test…, practicing for the test and preparing for the test and everything else” (teacher interview from a case study school)” (School staff member interview).

Further, in considering implementation of NCLB, there is evidence that the district has contextualized federal guidelines to meet their unique needs (Sutton & Levinson, 2001). As I will highlight later, the district worked creatively to provide parent consultants for every school in the district in order be more equitable and to increase parental involvement district-wide. This is further evidence of a more socio-cultural and democratic approach to federal policy implementation in the district.

The district has placed strong emphasis on parental involvement. It has a superintendent that is very supportive of parent involvement and advocates for strong connections between school and home. The superintendent stresses partnerships and collaboration between parents and educators at community meetings and in many presentations. During remarks at a community meeting, the superintendent stressed “the development of programs that insure teachers and parents are working together” (Winton Superintendent Comments Community Informational Meeting #2, 2008), and at another meeting the superintendent expressed a desire to produce “long-lasting relationships between students and families and schools” and to “promote connections between families and schools” (Superintendent Comments Winton Community Informational Meeting #3, 2008). Similarly, at another community meeting the superintendent stressed developing relationships where the district embraces “the valuable connection among students, teachers, and their families that promotes high achievement” (Handout
Community Meeting #2, 2008). This sustained emphasis on collaboration and partnership between families and schools to support student success sets the tone for a very pro-active approach to the engagement of parents in the researched school district.

There is also evidence of parental involvement priorities in Winton City School District publications. A commitment to and the increased parental involvement in the school district are regularly mentioned in school district annual reports, district and school continuous improvement plans, and school activity documents as being important and making an impact. Further, the school district website provides information for parents with a specific parent link that leads to resources and data for students’ families. Winton school board publications and policies also emphasize the importance of the role of parental involvement in district schools with an official board of education policy document that addresses parental and community involvement and which outlines school and district activities that should support this involvement.

The most substantiated example of the school district’s commitment to parental involvement is the elaborate network of parent consultants, who serve as liaisons for parents in schools and who have been hired as part-time, quasi staff to work with school staff to promote parental involvement. District staff report that the established program has been noted as a leading exemplar in the area of parental involvement by scholars. Additionally, the structure is in place to engage and empower parents toward being active participants in school improvement and student advancement. The foundational programming of the parental involvement initiatives in the district and district schools is highlighted below.
No Child Left Behind Policy Implementation - Development of a Parent Engagement Team

Following the advent of NCLB in 2002, the school district implemented parental involvement programming district-wide to respond to policy recommendations that districts and schools increase their efforts to involve parents in schools. Senior district leaders, led by the superintendent, placed a high priority on having a greater emphasis on parental involvement in district schools and in activities that would support student achievement. Further, the superintendent and school board developed understandings that emphasized the importance of school and home connections. There is evidence throughout the district structure that these leaders are committed to the facilitation of partnerships between parents and school. Administrators are required to incorporate parental involvement into the fabric of what they do on a day-to-day basis as was shared in this comment.

…one of our administrative evaluation pieces, (there are ten separate pieces to our administrative evaluation), and one of the pieces is parental engagement. So, lately we are just being evaluated on what’s our parent engagement and satisfaction level is. It is encouraged and you are literally being evaluated on it; that is part of your job, so it is pretty serious. (School Administrator)

As stated, district schools and staff are evaluated on parental involvement. Parent surveys are being used to gauge parental satisfaction levels and schools develop goals on the NCLB required All School Improvement Plan measures that include elements related to parental involvement and parental satisfaction. The superintendent has been empowered to carry out district goals as it relates to
parental involvement with the blessing of the school board and has taken the leadership for central office and the board in this area.

In numerous initiatives, the district has included parents on the planning teams and task forces, where visioning and program development and assessment occur. For example, parents have been involved in the district-wide efforts regarding the possible allocation of admissions spots at college preparatory district schools for gifted children, task forces regarding school facilities (including school level committees where parents participate in planning for building furnishings), and working groups to vet the idea of school uniforms for district students.

To support the new NCLB parental and family engagement initiatives and offices, district staff were hired or reassigned from district classrooms, other grant programs, or other district functions. As explained by district administrators and staff, the NCLB parent involvement activities integrated some of the family involvement programming that was already in place through previous federal grant programs. District personnel worked closely with the state department of education, the intermediary for federal NCLB and Title I funding, to structure a program to meet the recommendations of the law. This district office was responsible for designing, implementing, and overseeing the district parental involvement efforts. The office also seemed to evolve into serving the function of an ombudsman for district families.

Office space was also allocated to the district’s parental and family engagement initiatives and a resource room was developed to serve as an information bank or gathering space for district families. This resource room is continually stocked with reading material and information that is relevant to district parents and their families.
The resource room also has meeting space for group meetings and workspace and computers for parents. Its services were expanded and served multiple functions as noted by district staff member.

One of the things we did last year was to create a resource notebook for our resource center for the parents. …[It included] various information that one could pick up on the tables. We have two wonderful Parent Consultants At-Large who have a wealth of information. We get together and brainstorm when someone has a question and get back to whoever needs information. In the information that the parent consultants get at the monthly meetings, a lot of that is community information such as things dealing with health, drugs and alcohol, voting etc., or information on student achievement. [The material includes] things that they can copy and take back to their schools and have a resource table to share information with parents (district staff member).

Resource room services were ultimately increased when the district received a grant that enabled district personnel to expand the parent resource concept to other locations in the city. Two additional resource rooms were established to serve various regions of the school district. They were equipped with computers, small meeting spaces, and lending libraries with books and materials relevant to student development, parents, and parenting. The range of resource room services can be seen in the following comment.

We are a resource center on a small scale but we have such a wide range and connections. If there's something that a parent needs and we don't have it here, we know how to make the phone call to get them in contact with the agency’s program, whoever it may be. We're very much tied to all the mayor's initiatives, the county-wide initiatives, and then having the consortium …helps to keep us connected with the districts across…[the] county. And so you just kind of get that ripple effect of how we work. Parents know if they're hitting a stone wall or a road block. They come, they call and we help to navigate them to where they need to be. And it doesn't mean for us giving advice because we're not an advice type of program. We sit, we listen, we assess what their needs are and we can find out. We can attach them to whoever they need to get to. For example last night – at… [a program] – afterwards I had a couple of fathers saying
“you know what, I didn't know you guys existed. I need to come over and talk to somebody 'cause I got kids here, here, and here.

Future visions for these sites are to update the resources and materials available to parents and to engage parents through workshop experiences at these locations. One parent consultant in the district, through a partnership with a community partner, was able to secure a grant to host GED coursework for parents at one of the resource room locations. This shows how parents were empowered through district programming to implement and expand parental involvement activities.

As a result of the new NCLB efforts, the district created an action team that was made up of various stakeholders in the community. This advisory group was composed of parents, district personnel, and community members. Varied representatives participated in this body, including district staff and individuals from the parent teacher association council, gifted education and community advocacy groups, special education, and district program initiatives. District parental engagement personnel sought the perspectives of a wide variety of voices on the action team and were deliberate in their efforts to create the group to ensure that parents and community members were included.

The action team was instituted to develop ideas for implementing NCLB parental involvement recommendations while representing various constituencies and bringing varied perspectives to the table. These efforts are further evidence of the contextualization of policy (McLaughlin, 1987) that took place in the district and the socio-cultural treatment (Sutton & Levinson, 2001) of district NCLB parental involvement policy implementation efforts.
In addition, this team was involved with the facilitation of programming that was offered at the annual Principals Academy to help change paradigms on parent involvement and create consistency in schools throughout the district. During the academy sessions, district principals were introduced to Epstein’s (2002) model of school, family, and community partnerships. Principals were coached on the importance of parental involvement. They were exposed to the six steps to successful school, family, and community partnerships as advanced by Epstein that include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. Further, sessions were held to help participants develop ideas for implementing this model.

Given the enrollment diversity in schools and the district, district leadership decided to contextualize their implementation of NCLB to reflect their environment, the district, its schools, and the greater community. District personnel chose to localize the Epstein (2002) framework by adding “Diversity” as a seventh, distinct element to the parental involvement model. The diversity element was developed by district staff members as a result of a brainstorming session that was being held while strategizing with a foreign staff member about Epstein’s model. The team came up with what they call a “different dimension to parent involvement” (district staff member) by considering ways to incorporate other cultural and socio-economic considerations into parental involvement activities. District policies identify strategies and activities that will be used to provide a supportive educational environment and promote a multi-cultural atmosphere in the district and schools, such as offering publications in different languages, international celebrations, and opportunities for sharing information on varied cultures.
These efforts provide evidence that the school district has considered socio-cultural approaches as they implement policy and as they consider ways to shape local district policy that is reflective of a more inclusive and democratic program (Sutton & Levinson, 2001; Gutmann, 1987). The emphasis on socio-cultural approaches can be seen in the following comment from a district team member:

We were brainstorming about Epstein [‘s model] and …we wanted to pull diversity out so people would take notice of it. We wanted to be sure to include it in other parts of the [parental involvement] rationale. We said, this component should be infused into other steps to be sure it was paid attention to … we are so much more rich because of diversity [in our district]…questions about culture makes for enriching conversation.  (District staff member on the expansion of Epstein’s model)

The school district endeavored to become more deliberate and reinforce the notion that, as parental engagement was carried out, it should be more inclusive of families from varied cultures, races, and ethnicities. Consequently, district personnel stressed that an emphasis on diversity should be integrated into parent involvement activities. These actions further highlight the social cultural considerations that occurred as federal and district NCLB policy activities were rolled out. These considerations, in turn, gave voice and energy to the advocacy of the “lived experiences of all members of the community” (Denzin, 1998; Levinson & Sutton, 2001).

**Parent Involvement**

As a result of NCLB, the school district also implemented a program in various schools and selected parents to serve as parent consultants from each school building. These parents were to fulfill the role of connector between schools and families and to
encourage other parents to become involved. Parent consultants were assigned to assist school principals in engaging other parents. The consultant program was ultimately expanded to include all schools in the district, and funding through the federal Title I program was identified to provide a modest stipend for the consultants who were hired to work approximately 10 hours per week. All district schools in the program, even those that were not eligible for Title I funding were included in this initiative. The district creatively identified a funding stream through Title V funds (a line item for nurses, social workers, and counselors) to compensate consultants from non-Title I schools.

The district’s staff helps to steward the parental involvement program. The team from the district office is responsible for assisting parents and families and work closely with the consultants as they provide support and partner with school staff. For many of these team members, one interviewee noted that it is a “spiritual” journey as they work to nurture the human side of the program. The following quote summarizes the feelings of the team: “We want to be the front line of defense for them when they don’t know who to talk to”… “We are working with parents who have ups and downs and things that happen in their lives and we want to be sensitive to that” (Member of district administrative team).

Another district administrative team member added:

We want people to feel valued and a part of a team…Programs will reflect those who participate in them and each program will look different based on who you are and what your niche is…we want to be sure that we are utilizing [consultant] strengths…[It’s] not a cookie cutter and… individualism is the strength of the program (Another member of the district administrative team).
Parent consultants for each school participate in monthly workshops and presentations. My observations included attendance at several consultant sessions and volunteer experiences at the annual opening and closing ceremonies. The energy observed at parent consultant meetings resembles the excitement of school pep rallies. There is often excitement surrounding the announcement of successful activities and participants can often be found cheering as individuals are recognized and applauded for innovative ideas and accomplishments. During the meetings there are often informational and motivational presentations. Consultants often highlight projects that they are working on and, occasionally, district students perform for the meetings. This cadre of liaisons and district organizing team members share successes and challenges with one another. The gatherings often include interactive workshop sessions with creative programming designed to provide consultants with a broad overview of information to share with district parents and school personnel. Most meetings are held auditorium style; however, some meetings have been organized in round table formats to strengthen social capital between build relationships, and enable consultants to share ideas and best practices with one another.

District personnel work with consultants from all ends of the city to bring in relevant speakers to share information on topics such as new academic initiatives in the district (e.g., the science and math curriculum), maintaining good health (with speakers from the health department), and understanding your child’s testing results (showing charts and handouts on student proficiency measures). Several sessions turned into large field trips where district personnel hosted meetings at a park while park staff led expeditions of parents through nature trails.
The overall theme for the program during the 2007-2008 school year centered around the idea of having an “Extreme Makeover” of the parent consultant program using a takeoff on the television program where people’s homes are renovated. Concepts such as the provision of a good foundation and the importance of all building materials that make up a house were used to communicate how essential the program and the work of consultants were in strengthening the district domiciles (the schools) that support district children. At one meeting, district parent engagement team members showed up in hard hats and used drafting equipment as props to emphasize the links between homebuilding and the creation of strong educational foundations. A major objective of the program was to also insure that parent participants felt valued and important to the success of parental engagement efforts in the district and school community.

Professional development programming for the consultants includes the provision of reference material and parent resource handbooks that identify consultant responsibilities and provide information on the program, such as the NCLB initiating policy and ideas for programming at schools. They provide us with “tons of information” one parent consultant commented. The purpose of the information is for the parents to share it with other parents and to pass materials on to school staff. One administrative team member noted:

One of the things we encourage parent consultants do is to attend staff meetings once a month…. [We have] a log of the information that they get at their monthly meetings…. A lot of the resources they get … are good for the parents [and] good for the teachers to have…. [Additionally] we have a principal take back pack so that even if they don't get the opportunity to sit down and talk to that principal, at least they can go to the staff meeting once a month to share with that principal and the staff, this is what we learned …
The consultant meetings also include ideas for accessing support services and resources and specific approaches for implementing ideas to involve parents in district schools. Networks of consultants and bridging social capital (Lin, 2000) were formed as a result of these sessions, providing branches of social networks all across the city. These consultant relationships help to extend bridges of social capital between district schools, and help to facilitate collaboration, sharing, and supportive networks (Narayan, 2000) and aid in the development of “norms of reciprocity” (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986) between consultants and parents in the district and in schools. The alliances and bonds of support developed between consultants served as the medium for the creation of quarterly regional consultant meetings that were self-initiated and self-planned. In preparing for and participating in these sessions, consultants would partner and strategize about programming, successes, and challenges. These regional forums or “cross-community connections”, as one administrator described it, provide opportunities for consultants to follow-up on ideas, learn about new ways to engage parents, and problem solve together. One parent consultant commented about the collaboration among consultants adding “I also network with [four other schools]. I know every one of those parent consultants personally” (Parent consultant on collaboration opportunities).

During an observation of district schools, I had the opportunity to attend a regional meeting where consultants and members of the parent and family administrative team were gathering to celebrate the retirement of a parent who had been active in her school for almost a decade and who had been a consultant since the inception of the parent consultant program. This consultant had implemented major programs at her school site and had initiated programming that reached far into the surrounding
community near her school. There was food and celebration, hugs and tears as this consultant shared her successes and best practices with the group. “This program has been a large part of my life”, she noted, as her eyes welled up with tears, “You all are like family”.

Other retiring consultants shared similar feelings:

To this day, [the principal] will tell you that I am irreplaceable, and this is my last year. This is my hard year because there are a lot of emotions going on. I don’t want to leave [my] school. I have friends here. I’ve made these kids, parents, teachers, they are my life, and without them I’m scared.

This is evidence of the value of parent consultants and the role that they fulfill in schools in extending the feelings of family. As observed from comments and observations of parent consultant activities, there seems to be a relational and human side of the program based on how passionate program participants are. Many comment that the school community actually evolves into being a part of their extended family.

Another support that the district has established for the parent consultant program is the identification of two parent consultants who function as Parent Consultants at Large. These individuals, a male and a female, serve as district-wide parent representatives who help to provide the overall parent perspective on the parent and family engagement team. They also help to respond to questions and concerns that are received in the parent resource room and help with the coordination of parent consultant activities and workshops.
School Contexts

Case study schools were selected because of their demographic composition, the percentages of free and reduced lunch, and their at risk or school improvement status under NCLB. Findings on school contexts are discussed in this chapter considering the school standing in relation to these conditions as well as through the lens of policy implementation, parental involvement, social capital, and democratic theory. There are various similarities as well as differences in the contexts of these case study schools (See Table below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Characteristics</th>
<th>School I</th>
<th>School II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total student enrollment</td>
<td>~200</td>
<td>~500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total students on free and reduced lunch.</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Performance</td>
<td>6th year delay Total reconstitution</td>
<td>5th year school improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Facilities</td>
<td>In facilities plan for new building School being built; waiting to occupy.</td>
<td>In facilities plan for new building. Building complete; school moved into new building.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Surroundings</td>
<td>South of Downtown Residential/Business</td>
<td>South of Downtown Residential/Industrial</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Characteristics of Studied Schools

Geographically, both schools are located in the same general region or quadrant of the city and both share high levels of students from families in poverty. For example, school faculties who were interviewed shared that many parents in these schools are “overwhelmed by their jobs, home life or financial situations… some don’t have time to participate in schools …some have had bad experiences … a few are neglectful …”((TY) School staff member).
Another school staff member noted:

I think the majority of them are very caring loving parents and care about their children and the education they are getting, I would say not all. We have some students that come from rough situations. You don’t want to go back to the judging thing, you do judge them by the way they are groomed and you don’t want to judge people but it’s hard not to when they come in dirty clothing or have an odor to them, you don’t want to judge that parent. But you’re just not sure what kind of environment they are coming from at home. The yelling, the way they treat their children here and in front of other kids, we see some interesting situations, but I would say that’s less than normal. The normal situation is parents that really care about the education their children are getting. They want to know their child is safe at this school (TP).

In addition, a member of the school staff added:

I think that there are just so many other issues going on in their life that takes precedent over anything going on here at school. We are talking to a lot of parents who aren’t parents; they are grandparents or aunties, or somebody else. It isn’t usually a biological parent. It is very rare here that you have a child with the biological mother and biological father in the house. It is very rare. I don’t know if I can name you five children that have that in their home. I think that the family has just broken down. I don’t think the kids realize that that is not the way it is supposed to be. It is so hard for these people to get active and stay active with these kids just because there so many other issues like teenage issues or baby issues. There are babies coming into the family and these parents are stuck tending to these babies. They have to send the little ones off to school and they keep the babies. I think there are a lot more things taking precedent over that child’s education in that house (TL). In terms of district hierarchy, the principals of these schools receive their overall direction and administrative guidance from the same administrative leader (a position that one district administrator indicates has provided a
supportive team involved in shepherding them and an organized approach to aid the schools in progressing toward student advancement). This district leader appears to be a good steward for schools in this particular region and based on comments from school administrators, leadership functions as a team.

In addition, both schools are working very hard to maintain school discipline. The principals of these two school communities spend sizable portions of time mediating disputes and handling disruptions to enable the educators to focus on pedagogy. It is not unusual to find several students situated in the principal’s office explaining why they are having a tough day. I was constantly amazed at the ability of these school leaders to triage as they would guide staff, and talk with parents while simultaneously problem solving with students. These kinds of demands on school leaders make the case for the need for committed parent partners (Leithwood & Prestine, 2001).

Other similar conditions find both schools have been included as a part of the district plan for new school facilities; one has recently moved in to a newly constructed building and the other is expected to move in 2009. They were two of 35 schools that were candidates for new school buildings equipped with more efficient space and resources to support student learning (District Facilities Annual Report, 2007). The school facility program has been noted as a tremendous morale booster by numerous school stakeholders. In addition, both school communities have gone through some sort of turbulence in the structure of the school over the last several years. For example, one school community has experienced total reconstitution under the requirements of NCLB and community members from the other school are learning to become a cohesive community following the merging of two school communities into one building.
Other findings from the research show that parents at both schools want to participate at a higher level but school personnel are not always proactive in identifying avenues for parents to elevate their involvement. Many school staff members still tend toward holding parents at arms length and some identify the classroom as their domain or their turf (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). One parent noted: “They welcome people in, but they keep them at a distance because it’s a big variation between the staff members and the parents that come here. So, therefore, they are looking at it from a different perspective” (PA Parent interview).

While these similarities offer perspective on the selected schools, similarity does not imply sameness. As discussed in chapter three, the expectation for this research is not that findings will be generalizable or even transferable (Yin, 1994) from one site to another or from one site to other schools but rather that there will be patterns that emerge from the data that illustrate what certain contexts can yield.

School I

School I is nestled in the midst of an historical community on the edge of the city’s central urban core in the shadows of downtown. School staffs approach each day with a sense of mission – a mission to defy the odds and continue the upward trend toward student success after years of underperformance.

Stepping outside school doors to deliver daily news to parents' homes isn't in the job description. But the staff here thinks it's the only way to do the job -- to remake one of ...[the districts neediest] schools. They walk these streets and knock on doors and sit on parents' porches and couches. They make it a point to hug students and their moms, grandmas and aunts. They're trying to remake the school by calling home whenever any of the ... students this year is acting up. They're hell-bent on pulling parents into the fold and understanding when kids are hungry, or Dad's in jail, or
Mom's on drugs -- all without expecting less in the classroom” (Columbus Dispatch, Dec. 2005).

This school is an example of an environment that has weathered the storm of total reconstitution per the guidelines of NCLB: a new principal and team of personnel were brought in to overhaul the school and steward the students toward improved academic performance after six years of underperformance in math and reading. The school's elementary student population has approximately 200 spirited, energetic young people of whom about 90% are African American (See Table 5). Approximately 95% of those enrolled qualify for free and reduced lunch and many are from single parent households (School I, All School Improvement Plan (ASIP)).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School I Student Demographics</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>86.9% African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.6% White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5% Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: School I Student Demographics

Not only has the school been subject to reconstitution, but the school is also a part of a larger district scheme to renovate and rebuild school facilities that have fallen into disrepair. A year and a half ago, the school community was relocated to temporary swing space in an empty school while the old neighborhood school was demolished and rebuilt. Common consensus from most school stakeholders is that school outreach and family engagement activities have suffered during this transition. These feelings are summarized in the following comment from a school staff member:

One thing that worked against us...[was the move here]. Our kids all live, not all of them, most of our children live on the other side of ...[the main thoroughfare which is a number of blocks away] .... Many of our parents
don’t have regular transportation. It is really difficult for our families, unless they walk, and some of them have lots of little ones at home too, to come over here for activities taking place. When we were at the old site, and where we will end up next year, or the year after…we will be able to do the things that we had done in the past. Parents will have easier access to us, because they can walk. …. Secondly, we’ll have easier access and we will reestablish the things that we did like walking kids home. We started a walk-home Wednesday program. It became walk-home many days of the week. We walked our kids home and during testing week, if we had kids who weren’t there, we walked home to get them, you know? ….We made ourselves very available. We went to see people. We’ve done home visits during our parental conferences. We welcomed people to come to us. We had more parental involvement when we were in the neighborhood…(TM, School I).

School II

School II is tucked away in the midst of a neighborhood where school and family boundaries blend together naturally. This elementary school is found in a community in this urban district where there is a small town feel, where people come and go regularly, and where parent chatter of the latest happenings at school and in the neighborhood today can be heard in the school parking lot or front hallway. The school’s student population boasts of approximately 500 children, most of whom are White and who hail primarily from families of Appalachian descent. The student body also includes about 70% of those enrolled who are eligible for free and reduced lunch. Specific racial and ethnic breakdowns on student demographics follow in Table 6:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89.9%</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: School II Student Demographics

School staff report that school breaks and holidays are often spent heading for the “hills” of surrounding Appalachian cities.
I’d probably have to say 80-85 percent of [the families are of Appalachian descent]... I mentioned before that my kids go to the hills for summer and spring break, they talk about the holler up in the hills, [and] you are allowed to do this and this, different culturally things that you are not always aware of. I know that is where they vacation per se, so that is where I am making my judgment on, also where relatives are (Administrator interview).

Members of this community seem to have strong bonds within their small circles of friends and acquaintances, as observed in these remarks from a parent.

…there are six or eight streets and that is where we all come from with the exception of a few over here on…[the main] street. The majority of us come from that middle neighborhood over there, we’ve all been here all of our lives, our parents all knew each other, we all grew up together, and our kids are now growing up together, so it’s like a family in its third generation from where I am standing (LPD).

However, through analysis of the more nuanced findings, conditions of poverty have given way to various community challenges.

The women are the ones who try really hard, if there has to be an income from public work, the women usually work. Many of our dads are absent and a lot of our dads who are home they are disabled and they have lots of social problems, they drink a lot and there is drug abuse. Overall, there is a lot of physical abuse on the children and on the women (NTB).

In spite of issues of unemployment, substance abuse, and social problems, school community members have a sense of optimism that seems to sustain them, as evidenced in a parent comments. Characteristics of this perceived tight knit community is apparent in parent comments. The idea that “everybody watches out for everybody” can be seen in this unique district as an example of social capital.

**Social Capital in Studied Schools**

...the basic idea of “social capital” is that one’s family, friends and associates constitute an important asset, one that can be called upon in a
crisis, enjoyed for its own sake and/or leveraged for material gain (Woolcock, 2000, p.).

Scholars (Coleman, 1990; Mintrom & Roch, 1997; Sheldon, 2002) support that when social networks are formed, social capital is fostered among parents and staff in schools. They also suggest that these activities are known to benefit the greater school community. This argument is advanced because, as individuals participate in networks and access social capital, they can leverage and provide resources through the group, and can access information that will serve to inform the greater community. Sheldon (2002) notes that social networks produce social capital to the extent that social relationships encourage the exchange of information, shape beliefs, and enforce norms of behavior”. He refers to studies that have shown that “parents who maintain ties with other parents use them as a source of information and advice”… Affirmation of these views can be seen in the interview comments from school stakeholders.

School I

As noted earlier in this chapter, the demographic make-up of School I is primarily African American, with 95% of their students qualifying for free and reduced lunch. The school has been through total reconstitution under NCLB. Thus, historical relationships with school staff may not be intact since most of the school personnel were replaced under reconstitution. In addition, this school is located in temporary space (known as swing space) used to locate school operations until construction on the new school building is complete. This new facility is a part of the district’s school facilities bond measure. School staff and parents note that the temporary school location is a substantial distance from the old school neighborhood where the students reside; consequently, it has
been difficult for most parents, many who don’t have transportation, to make it to the school on a regular basis. School stakeholders shared past experiences and mentioned that bonds of social capital were stronger but the current location of the school has hindered the maintenance of networks of social capital.

Current social capital at School I can be found in pockets with two or three parents forming bonds with one another to support each other’s daily needs and develop bonding social capital. Bonding social capital contributes to the survival of these families. They support each other and their day to day needs. Parents can be found sharing rides and babysitting one another’s children. The contact is often intermittent and on-going discussions occur when parents come together for mutual events.

“We talk because I see her at the bus stop” (parent 1)… “Her daughter is in my child’s class so we came together because they play together” (parent 2)…. “I've met their parents through the mist of that or through the mist of this 5th grader… going to tutoring with my 4th grader and I'd see her mom at tutoring 3 nights a week and she's been there 15 – 20 minutes earlier and we're sitting down chatting and talking that's how relationships are formed. Some of the other relationships which are the hi how are you today [are] from parents that are dropping their kids off or picking up…(P3 Parent interview)”.

There seems to be a great desire to develop social networks and build social capital. Parents comment on the value of connecting with other parents for support and resources, as seen in the following comment:

I really believe that starting there with having some parent days at the school bring different classes some motivational speakers coming in but also lining it up with dinner., (because to me that seems to be the safest – people come if there is dinner involved than to just come to sit at a meeting) making it more of a family gathering get together not overwhelming them with a lot of info, but keeping it positive and energy going through the room. I think that's where it's going to begin and then maybe just like with me and [my friend] through that branch out with parents beginning friendships with other parents. I think in that we can get
more parents once you get relationships going on to encourage one another and to support one another not just well enough to support for one another's children but where the child sees a loving and a caring environment, not just my mom and the teacher my Mom the teacher and [moms friend] and everybody rooting for me and encouraging me. We have to start there first and I think other things will blossom from that. (Parent interview comments expressing desire for greater social capital).

Because the school’s current location is away from the geographic location of the former neighborhood school, it has been difficult to sustain deep roots of bonding social capital or even to facilitate school and community relations. As mentioned, at the time of this study, the school has been housed in temporary space in an old school building pending the completion of the new school facility. Since many parents rely on public transportation or walk and because the school is blocks away from the neighborhood it serves, the physical location does not make it easy to use the school as a base for parent gatherings. The impact of the disruption of the school facility construction program can be gleaned from the following comment.

Of course we’re in the swing space right now and we will be flooded and it will be great and we will have full population when we get back, I don’t know if you heard what happened to us last year when we actually came to this swing space. Our children live about a mile and a half to the east of here and there was no bussing provided. So that just a distance, I don’t know what the percentage would be but there are some of our parents that don’t have a way to get here and that’s not safe crossing major intersections to get here so we lost about 150 of our kids to enrollment at other places so we have a very dynamic principal, she is an outside of the box person and she got it. She got the bus and I don’t know what would’ve happened to us, our whole existence when we lose children like that. The parents wanted them to come here but it was a matter [another school] is across here and much closer for them but [our principal] was very proactive and she has done that for years, we have an after school tutoring program 3 days a week and she made the bus route up and took it to transportation and they were saying it can’t be done for 60 kids and she said I think it can, let me see! So that helps the parents because the
children wouldn’t have been able to come if she didn’t step up and say yeah I think there is a way to do it. She’s not adversarial but she will get what our kids need and we have the bus (TB).

In spite of the various hindrances, the school embarked on a collaborative program with a local university to educate and get families excited about sending their children to college. For six weeks, selected students and their families from several district schools gathered to participate in workshops and sessions on things to consider on the path to college. Transportation was provided for families from school to home and food was provided since the program was during the dinner hour. Week after week, families gathered for two and a half hours to share a dinner meal, sponsored by the university, and to participate in the sessions. The interest from School I far exceeded capacity and, thus, some families were unable to participate in the experience. The response to the program is evidence that if programming is offered and is facilitated through the provision of supports (i.e.: transportation), families will commit to the initiative.

School II

As highlighted earlier, the demographic characteristics at School II reflect an elementary aged student population that is primarily White and of Appalachian descent. Approximately 70% of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch. The school population is made up of students and faculty from two separate schools that were combined into one school. The school is now housed in a new school building constructed under the district’s school facilities bond measure. Most of the students live in the neighborhood surrounding the school. Physically the school is in a better position
to facilitate the development of bonds and networks of parents because student families live nearby and can easily access the school. Parents speak of generations of families that have lived in the surrounding community for many years.

In this school community, there is evidence of both bridging and bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000), the existence of social capital assets (Lin, 1999) and similar norms of reciprocity (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986). Bridging social capital is evidenced through the interactions that occur with parents from School II with parents from other schools and bonding social capital is evidenced in the support and ties that exist between members of the immediate school community. Select parents in the school have formed a social club that meets daily on school days during the last hour of the school day. The principal shared that social group members were gathering in her office every afternoon to address issues of concern and to socialize, so she and the parent consultant decided that they needed meeting space. As a consequence, the principal allocated a small meeting room in the building and suggested that the parents meet and gather there to avoid interruptions of school business in the main office. In this way, rather than using tactics of diversion or dissipation (Bardach, 1977; Elmore, 1979-80) often seen in administrative behavior, the principal provided resources for parents to convene and empowered parents to partner together, own their issues, and problem solve.

Evidence of the inner workings of this group occurred several weeks following my first observation of the social group. Parents were concerned about the quality and nutrition of the school lunches. The principal empowered them to prepare for and organize a meeting with the relevant district personnel to begin discussions on the school lunches and what the alternatives could be. Weeks later I found myself observing a
meeting of about 20 parents and a staff-member from the district school lunch program. The parents had pulled together flyers, pictures of bad food, information about the existing lunch vendor and suggestions for alternative vendors and suppliers. In addition, parents had distributed surveys to students and parents to get their opinions regarding the school lunches. During the meeting, a number of irate parents grilled the district official for almost two hours with the resulting outcome being the possibility of the school becoming a pilot lunch program for healthier choices. In the meantime, the official committed to working with parents to review the list of food options and determine if certain choices would be more appropriate for this particular school community. Both groups left to do more homework.

As I inquired with various members of the school community about the social group, they all saw the benefits of a group like this convening and, as one school stakeholder noted:

“It gets some of the drama out of the parking lot and helps us have a place where we can talk about issues”. This sentiment was expressed by various parties and the overall perception of the social group was seen as productive. For example, when parents wanted to move an idea forward, the social club was often at the forefront of the activity. During my observations at the school, several parents were concerned about the quality of the school lunches. The principal empowered them to organize a meeting and invite the appropriate personnel from the district central office.

The social club is seen by parent participants as an important part of the school culture. This group came together as a result of the parent consultant and another parent who prepared and sent letters home with students telling parents about the social group and distributed flyers. Many of the letters never made it home and so the consultant thinks she should distribute the flyers in the parking lot at pick up time to invite other
parents. The social group comes together to talk about school issues and activities, share home baked goodies or snacks, and discuss their life patterns. The group varies from about 6 to 12 people who attend regularly and have built strong bonds of “trust and reciprocity”.

“We talk about who’s buying a house, what kid’s sick, what teacher does this person like, what classroom that person’s doing, or school lunches or so and so said so and so” Anything and everything. Usually it’s a lot about school but someone will say I’m looking to buy a house and the next couple of days “did you find one,” just everything about everything” (Parent social group member).

When asked if the social group serves as a support system for participants, the parent responded “Yes. Because they feel like they have other people to go talk to or get an idea or who should I talk to. Yeah” (Parent social group member). Group members compare notes about concerns of moving on to middle school. Those with older children talk about their experiences. Some parents worry that their children won’t be nurtured as much as they were in elementary. Others talk about positive transitions from elementary to middle and even cite how proud they are with the maturity and independence their child gained at the middle school juncture. Comments from parents in the social group sound like this:

“What have you decided about the field trip on Friday, I thought we could …[ride] together”…. “Oh we are going to the lake this weekend so I won’t be here tomorrow”…. “We live across the street from one another – our kids run back and forth and get together all the time”… “we share rides and care for each other’s kids” (Voices from parent social group members).

Parking lot is a big one. A lot of them sit out in the parking lot. They could be talking about anything: their kids, homes, the drama going on in their life, anything. We have our social group that discusses sometimes if
there is a problem, like a teacher missing, that has been absent for a few days, they’ll come to me and say is there a problem (Parent in a group interview).

I usually talk to my cousin, who is a parent consultant at [another school]. I always collaborate with her and ask her hey did you know, or if it is something like, because my son’s tutor is also a teacher, she gives me information and I will pass the information along, like did you hear about the trip down to Cincinnati, she told me, so then I told … [the principal], did you hear about it, so I told her over there, is your fourth grader going here? So, I have these many outlets of I can go to get all this information that they can tell me more about it, and then once I tell them about it, then they are closer to the information, and see if it is true, and see if they can give me some feedback on it (PP-Parent in a group interview).

**No Child Left Behind: District and School Stakeholder Perceptions of Policy’s Impact on Schools**

In examining study findings and the applicability of NCLB policy guidelines to those impacted in the schools and district, select interview questions were designed to determine whether individuals at the local level were aware of the policy directives related to parental involvement. The questions were crafted to discern whether those who implement NCLB related policy activities or those who are affected by NCLB policy activities had knowledge of the policy or understood the connection between policy and practice. Research findings indicate that district personnel involved at the policy development level and those directly responsible for carrying out the parent involvement program understood the various aspects of NCLB’s parent involvement recommendations and how it was instituted in the district. However, once you drill down to district faculty and parents, parent involvement initiatives are implemented without the imprint of NCLB.
School I

School I is the reconstituted school with mostly African American students. Most of the school staff does not have a lengthy relationship with students and their families. A large majority (90%) of the students enrolled qualify for free and reduced meals. A large part of the focus at this school is admittedly directed toward school improvement and increasing student achievement from an underperforming status.

When staff members at School I were asked what they knew about NCLB’s parental involvement guidelines for districts and schools, some of the responses were:

I know that it is tied in with the testing but it is to ensure that children, that we meet the needs of the children, that’s what I see in NCLB, so … on the path our standards have not been high enough, we have a late preconceived notion that this is where the children are so this is what we need to teach from middle to below. What I see with NCLB is it has increased our standards as teachers and …the expectations. I can’t say I agree with everything totally and of course there’s the funding issue that goes with it but to me it was just as it says, you don’t want to leave any child behind. Every program I’ve worked with that has federal funding or state funding there’s been a parent component, always… (TB Teacher interview).

During a later interview another staff member added:

I know that there are parental involvement components…. I have seen the parent consultants. I know there is a, I don’t know if you call it a mandate, component that says schools need to increase parental involvement by a certain percentage. I don’t know what that percentage is. I know there has been a real drive in our district to increase parental involvement in many different ways (TM1 Teacher interview).

Yet another commented “I really hate to say this but I’m not that up on what those guidelines are, and I know I should be” (TM Teacher interview). Some parents expressed uncertainty about the NCLB
initiatives as well commenting that “Actually I was not aware of that. Now I feel stupid (PS)”. 

Another parent noted:

When I think about it, my basic idea was that it was set up to try to equalize the standard of education across all the school systems that you shouldn’t have this good school and this bad school, but to bring them all up to a standard, a set of standards where they are all teaching at a certain level, teaching the children at a certain level (PM) (Parents interviewed at case study schools).

Overall one can conclude from comments by parents and staff members at School I that they did not make the connection between NCLB and parental involvement and while some school stakeholders have some knowledge of NCLB and parental involvement, it is only in bits and pieces.

School II

As stated, School II’s student population is about 70% free and reduced meals and is composed primarily of White students of Appalachian descent. The school population is made up of students from two separate schools and the school community was relocated to a new school building about two years ago.

As with School I, staff members at School II also seemed vague about the specifics of NCLB, as evidenced in the following comments. When asked what knowledge this teacher has about NCLB and the parent involvement guidelines of NCLB, one teacher noted: “Nothing. I know we have parent consultants. If that was mandated by NCLB, I don’t know (TY). Another teacher stated: “I know
that it is tied in with the testing and it is to ensure that we meet the needs of the children”.

Parents, when asked, responded:

I don’t know much about the parental involvement guidelines, but I do know that the “theory” behind it is that just because a kid is economically disadvantaged or academically disadvantaged they want to give them more avenues so that they can be up to par with schools that are performing like the state standard. I do know that it has something to do with that but I don’t know the logistics of it (PE).

And another:

What I do know about NCLB is that they are doing everything they can to meet each child's needs and trying to find different ways were they can learn in their unique way and making sure they are given the opportunities to learn (PB).

As seen in the examples from School I and School II, both parents and teachers were aware of the NCLB equity aspects and the goals to increase student achievement for all students but very few individuals made the connection between increased emphasis on parental involvement and the federal policy. When asking about the knowledge of individuals regarding the parental involvement emphasis of NCLB, many of the faculty and parent interviewees recognize that there has been increased parental involvement activity since NCLB but do not attribute much of the programming to the 2002 law.

Further, many interviewees were quite negative about NCLB in general, citing concerns that it was not producing results or placing too much work on school staff. One staff member at School II commented:

Because in [the district]… a lot of times, we’re really teaching to the test now. We’re trying to do the things required [by NCLB]. …3rd, 4th and 5th [grade] spends a lot of time, drilling and testing… Rather than teaching, there is now a lot of time spent on getting the test, … practicing for the test and preparing for the test and everything else (Teacher interview).
Others commented on how NCLB was taking a lot of extra energy out of school programming and decreasing time previously allocated for school events, the arts and community building events. For example, a school staff member from School I noted:

We have done, combine a lot of things together because it is hard to get parents, they have busy schedules, but in the evening we’ll have, we usually try to triple team it. There will be a performance, the parents come, they want to see their children perform, musically based. Then we have book donations through rotary, so those will be out. I will have something set up about reading, so we make sure we hit all those areas. We do those, not as often as I’d like, but because of NCLB, you know what our school has gone through, reorganization, then now we’re into continuous improvement. I think so much is built on that, so much is built on AYP, you only have so much energy and I think back to when I was in school, it was a big thing, parents came in, we did it a lot. When I was doing small group, I would have a parent night, K-1, we would use title funds to buy white boards and alphabet letters, and math cards and then the teacher would demonstrate, here’s some things you can do at home to support the parent. It just seems like the energy level, you’re putting so much into your daily instruction and sometimes these programs at night tend to become major productions, there’s no time in the day. I remember when I first started teaching, if we had a play we were doing for the holidays, just about every afternoon, we were doing our run-throughs, which I think was all valuable, but at least here and in our situation, we are fighting for survival and trying to increase student achievement. We do choral reading, we do poetry, different things like that, but not in a performance setting (TB Staff interview).

Yet another staff member at School I cited the need to meet NCLB benchmarks at the expense of parent involvement:

…I think when you’re in the setting we’re in, we’re in crisis mode and what we are focused on is passing tests and there is only so much of that you can, I think we do what we do, I think the district is trying and I think some schools do more and I think this building, we’re passing tests and keeping kids out of fights. I hope I’m not sounding like this is a bad thing, I like being here and it’s hard. I think the district is trying and I think in the buildings where once you’re out of crisis mode then you do other things and you do fairs and festivals and concerts and all that other stuff that brings parents in (TM Staff interview).
These perspectives show how policy can be perceived as disruptive to the general flow of schools, particularly if policy recommendations are not coupled with exemplars or systematic approaches to help school staff meet policy guidelines. As is often common with policy directives, at the level of implementation there seems to be some resistance to those who deliver services (Elmore, 1983; McLaughlin, 987) in the studied schools as school stakeholders in this research express the need to trade off between NCLB accountability requirements and test preparation and parental involvement.

**Epstein’s Framework on Successful Parental Involvement Strategies - District and School Evidence**

Other interview questions addressed Epstein’s (2002) framework for successful parental involvement with specific interview questions speaking to the six main types of parental involvement strategies that include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community.

Parent, administrator, and faculty perspectives on the six areas of parental involvement varied amongst school stakeholders. As mentioned previously, shortly following the approval of NCLB, the district superintendent partnered with district outreach personnel to discuss the development of a coordinated district initiative to involve parents in the work of schools. During this time, district personnel shared Epstein’s philosophy regarding successful parental involvement strategies, but also outlined district strategies for instituting a parental engagement program. Currently, the district continues to refine their parental involvement program to include best practices.
and make practical adjustments to their program. Epstein’s (2002) model still provides key foundational components of the district program and it is apparent in the varied interview conversations that I conducted. District personnel, such as central district office team-members, principals, and other administrators are all quite clear on Epstein’s areas. Some faculty are not emphasizing the six areas of Epstein’s framework but, rather, focus on getting the parent to assist at home. Based on the interviews, faculty members encourage reading and spelling at home as a shared parent and child activity.

All parents interviewed concurred that parental involvement was vital to student success. Many responded that it was a natural part of their responsibility to be involved and active in the school life of children. Further, although conventional wisdom talks about parental reluctance about interfacing with institutions and schools, most parents mentioned that the principal or the teacher would be their first contact when they have issues, questions, or concerns about the education of their child. It seemed in these two case study schools that the trust between parents and principals, particularly as the authority regarding issues of schools, was quite strong.

School I

As highlighted the student population at School I is mostly African American, and qualifies for free and reduced school meals. It is the school that was recently reconstituted with almost all new school staff members. These school community members are waiting with anticipation for the completion of their new school building which will be located back in the neighborhood where the students reside. Parents and staff at School I cite the location as a barrier to full parental involvement. Evidence of parental views regarding parental responsibility can be observed in comments made by
parents who were interviewed for this study. One parent commented on the parental responsibility in supporting the student so that the student would not be left behind by noting:

> Not to make a play on words, but No Child Left Behind is all well and good, but if you have a parent that is not willing to not allow their child to be left behind it’s a detriment to that child. If you do not take a proactive role in your children and find out what they are doing, now they are like a little bud, and you have to kind of nip whatever little problem they have now in the bud at this age, because it is only going to grow as they get older (PE).

Another parent in this school shared similar sentiments:

> I would believe that parental involvement is important, because without it, your child can’t succeed without you being involved in it. And, I think that is the biggest problem many schools have, because parents want to get involved (PM).

Overall, parents interviewed expressed opinions about good working relationships and levels of trust with the principal. One parent noted “…I love [my principal] with all my heart”. A further comment from a parent at School I notes:

> As a district, the improvement, the slide[ing] scale on the improvement, may appear to be minimal if anything, because a whole district is working on [it], as opposed to a situation going on here at school, it is under a microscope with my principal, because she is going to address it right then and there, make it happen or not happen, whatever the situation may be (PE).

During the parent interviews, all of the participants at School I spoke fondly about the principal.

> Comments consistent with the scholarly suggestions about low parental contributor levels (Hoover et al., 1997) and parental desires to participate but low
avenues for participation (DePlanty et al., 2007) can be seen in interview responses from parents at School I.

One interview participant suggested the following:

Parents will come if they have information provided for them, I do believe. There’s just nothing there, what options do you have, “hey do you need any help today? Stand at the front door? I don’t know how else to do that if there’s no standing invitation, does that make sense? I would feel more than happy to help in any way that I can… (PS) (Parent interview on parental involvement).

It will take time for parents and schools to navigate the school home terrain and federal policy guidelines can’t authorize partnerships that are built on relationships and trust.

**School II**

Parents at School II also cited the importance of parental responsibility in supporting students. Parental perceptions regarding availability and feelings about the principal as a source of support were mostly positive at School II as School I.

In assessing a problem or issue at school, one parent at School II noted:

If something is amiss, the first thing I ask myself is “what is it I could’ve done either this not happen or make it better?” I ask myself first, what should I have done, could have done, this, that and the other? But you have got to be honest, it’s 3 things that have got to be prevalent, you’ve got to be honest, respectful of people, and you have to be willing to talk. I ask myself first was did I do everything I should do? If I can say honestly and truthfully I have, then I go to …the classroom teacher, that’s who I go to. If it’s anything really severe,… you can speak to…[the principal] any time (PA).

Despite the district and administrative emphasis, there is still resistance at School I and School II on the part of some district personnel. Parents want to participate at a higher level but school personnel are not always proactive in identifying avenues for parents to elevate their involvement. Hoover, Dempsey, and Sandler (1997) suggest that
a contributor to low levels of parent involvement often stems from parents feeling unwelcome and the absence of invitations from school staff to participate. Further, DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, and Duchane (2007) advance that, oftentimes, parents desire to be active but “open communication” is limited and involvement is not promoted.

**Parents as Advocates**

In the outcomes of this research, parents overall have been shown to care deeply for their children and exhibit a desire to advocate for their children. These findings are consistent with scholarly research (Epstein, 2002; Sheldon, 2002). A parent at School I shared a very moving story in an interview on why parent involvement is an essential activity. The anecdote was reported like this:

As a child, I went through...school [and]...school was very easy for me. I was always at every assembly that you could think of for good behavior, or for honor roll, or perfect attendance, and I never had a soul come and watch me get these awards, from kindergarten to high school, and when I got in high school I was in the choir or giving concerts, and doing all this wonderful stuff, and getting these wonderful awards in high school, and nobody would come and see me, yet I still did it. Then [finally when] I graduated, my mom, dad, and grandma were the only ones that came to my graduation, and it hurt. It hurt. So, I swore that when my children started school, there would not be a day that I wasn’t involved fully in their school life (PL Parent interview).

In the same vein as the parent viewpoint from the aforementioned parent at School I, a staff member at School II noted:

Parents in this community do anything in the world for their child but a lot of our parents have limited abilities to do those things and meet those goals that they need to meet. They sometimes come off as being street and aggressive, but all they’re doing is making sure they get the best deal for their child (TN Staff interview).
Although some parents are strong advocates for their children, as the comment above shows, not all parents are always present. Limitations of this research suggest that although there were parents who felt inadequate, or alienated the researcher was unable to gain access to them because they were not around in the school environment or interacting with the parent consultants. Findings from the study show that it is easy for parents to become disenfranchised from the school environment even with one negative experience. For example, one parent at School II, developed an idea for an enrichment activity for students and brainstormed with members of the school community to develop plans. The parent, however, subsequently became frustrated when it was announced that his or her child would not be able to participate because only certain grade would be allowed to attend. As a result, this parent withdrew from participation in the social group and refused to participate in the individual interview process. Prior to this situation, this parent had been a vocal and active participant at the school, in the social club and the group interview. Following this experience, although the parent continued to support their child at home, the parent was observed by the researcher and other parents to be distant, detached and withdrawn from school activities. As of the end of the school year, school personnel had not followed up with this parent to discuss the situation or recommend an alternative course of action.

It is important that school personnel and parents develop relationships where they can be open and honest with one another and be able to discern when there is a problem. As Putnam, (1993) and Tschannen-Moran (2000) concur “collaboration can generate the social capital necessary for excellent schools as both parents and teachers participate in
problem-solving processes where they have the opportunity for greater contact and understanding”.

In instances where parents are absent or reluctant to participate, perhaps active parents and parent consultants are the best way to help scaffold these students because they can serve as surrogates and become advocates for those children whose family members don’t participate and are never present. As they work to develop relationships with other parents they can show interest in and tend to students with absent parents.

**Parent Skepticism and Reluctance**

Findings regarding parental skepticism and parental reluctance among low income populations and their concerns about interfacing with school educators and administrators are consistent with perspectives advanced by scholars. Researchers suggest that often parents feel inadequate (DePlanty et al., 2007; Sheldon, 2002) and their “self confidence” about being capable of dialoging on issues of school is low (Henderson & Mapp, 2007). In addition, research and study findings have shown that parents often have had their own negative experiences (Hill & Taylor, 2004) in schools that color their views about their children’s school tenure.

Many school faculties shared that parents have varied reasons for their reluctance in interacting with schools and school personnel. Parents too offered their viewpoints about parental skepticism. Research has shown many parents from underrepresented groups often feel inhibited due to feelings that they don’t measure up to school personnel, they don’t understand the system, or they had negative experiences in schools. The general consensus with teachers and school personnel is that parents often feel inadequate
or are concerned that they don’t measure up to the level of school staff members and, while some teachers and staff tried to address these issues, overall it seemed that the district and schools did not have systematic approaches for addressing these issues or linking parental involvement efforts with district social work efforts.

School I

Viewpoints of faculty at School I echoed the findings of scholarly research and the overall patterns in the interview data with district personnel. One teacher noted:

It’s well documented that it could be negative experiences. It could be just the stress of the whole system, how schools are set up. It could be that lack of not knowing what to do, so it’s better to avoid something than to come and say what can I do because they may feel they can’t help their child either. I think sometimes racial, there’s racial reasons that block people from coming in, I don’t have that for a fact, but I have a feeling that’s part of it (TB).

Another teacher at School I added:

My own perception would be I think where we are in our neighborhood and our kids, I think these parents probably have bad experiences in school and that’s probably a hindrance. I think they respect what we do here, they are very supportive and (I don’t know what he said here), for discipline, they’re here. But I think they have that bad memory themselves a lot of them (TM).

The perspectives of teachers at School II from the interview responses show similar outlooks on parental reluctance to participate in the work of schools. School II

Faculty members at School II spoke freely about their perspectives on parental skepticism. They recognized the hindrances and barriers to parental involvement. Some tried to meet parents where they were. The views of school personnel on parent reluctance are apparent in the comments below.
Sometimes parent feel inadequate. People with mountain backgrounds feel they don’t have anything to contribute (TN). The only thing that might come to mind ...is they might feel intimidated because their education level is lower education so they might be intimidated by some of us because we are educated and we live our lives the way we do. The way they live their lifestyle, they might be intimidated by some of us. I think that might be a slight issue with some of the parents that they don’t come around more. They are afraid they might be judged by some of us. I’m not saying we would but I think that would be intimidating (TP, Faculty Member on Parental Reluctance).

Another staff member noted that parental reluctance to participate in schools is a result of:

Their jobs, the economy. Sometimes parents feel inadequate to come. They feel like we’re all smarter than [they are]. We’re talking about people with mountain backgrounds feel they don’t have anything to contribute. Years ago, this will help you, I had this ...[student] and [this student] was a needy child. [The student’s] mother had children with the [members of a] gang.... She’d bring her [child] and drop her off and I’d say we need you and she’d say I can’t do anything. One day I lost my composure and I said we’re having an ice cream social at the school, do you know how to scoop ice cream and put the chocolate syrup on it to make a sundae? I can do that [she said]! [I told her] I expect you in my room, I even have the scoop and she says but you don’t want me....[my boyfriend] is a [gang] member. [I said] we’re not talking about him, you have a child in my room ... [She responded] but I have piercings. [I responded] I don’t care. I said put your clothes on and get in here. I said you can get yourself cleaned up and come in. She had more fun than the kids did. I couldn’t get her out of my room after that. If it was something as simple as sharpening pencils, she could do that. She had a[nother child in another class] and I said now you go down and ask the ... teacher if there is anything you can do and you might just go in and sharpen pencils for her or sort crayons, there’s things you can do. She became a very important person in our school community because I had to give her this help [and help] her build enough self-esteem. And that’s one reason they don’t come, because they don’t have self-esteem and personal worth (NT Teacher interview).

As with this teacher, a number of school stakeholders talked about the importance of relationships schools. It seemed that even the most inhibited and reluctant parents, when welcomed and approached in the right way with authentic concern, would often come
around and become a part of the school community. Several staff and parents noted the importance of trust in helping to build relationships. School staffs are optimistic that, if you make parents feel welcome and show that you care you will begin to develop relationships and trust will build up. These sentiments are summarized in this faculty comment below:

I get to talk to a lot of parents when they come to activities. It’s not a scheduled duty, it’s not something I have to do, but I stand outside every morning and greet the children and parents when they come in. It makes their day, saying good morning, welcome to school today. It makes them feel wanted and appreciated that they are here. I always try to compliment them on something if I see a new haircut or a new pair of shoes (TP Staff comment).

An overview of viewpoints of the school and district stakeholders on the importance of trust in school home relationships follows in the next section.

Toward Building Relational, Authentic and Trusting School Communities

Meier advocates for school environments that are open and supportive of all school stakeholders and suggests that trust is a key contributor toward building a solid school community (Meier, 2002). Tschannen-Moran (2001) echoed similar sentiments regarding collaboration and trust among school stakeholders. Patterns in the interview findings contained herein show that not only does parent trust of administrators appear to be high, but there is a desire for transparency. District administrators indicate that “the district is now trying to achieve openness with open schools and open classrooms and that NCLB is helping to break barriers down and kick doors open” (District administrator during an informational session). One staff member noted that in the classroom they
strive for “openness and parents can come to the classroom at any time” (TS Staff interview).

Generally, parents feel welcome at their respective schools. Henderson and Mapp (2007) suggest that when parents feel welcome, the result is “a sense of belonging”.

Note the following responses to questions about schools as welcoming environments:

Yes. I definitely feel comfortable here. It's bright; it's open and I think that the people, the staff definitely are friendly. When you come in you're always greeted by somebody; somebody says “hi” to you they're not judgmental; I always feel comfortable here.

I love it here. I could not ask for a better elementary school to send either one of my children to.

I feel very comfortable; I feel welcomed…because of the leadership in this building, which starts with [the principal]… because she's just a welcoming person.

Further, evidence of team work and sense of family and partnership came across in some of the responses:

Last year …when my …[kid] would make a bad choice during the day, it was never a phone call where you need to come, we can't tolerate this or that; it was “how was your day” here's something we're going to work on together; it was never a thing of when my… [kid] was good he's our kid; when my [kid]… was bad he's your kid. It's always “these are our children” and we're just looking for a strategy where the child will succeed to the best of his ability ((PB) parent on comfort with staff).

Staff comments on parents who were involved (although generally limited) were often positive and one staff member added, “It is always good to have parents and be able to walk though the building and see parents. It just rounds everything out and completes the family, is what it does” ((TS) School staff member on parent partnership).
The perspectives and findings illustrated earlier add to the evidence that trusting relationships have been developed as parents have built bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000) with parent’s district-wide and bonding social capital (Ibid) among their more immediate friends and school community members. The vast scheme of parental involvement in the select school district and schools would not have survived without it.

**Study Findings and Research Questions**

This section considers study findings in light of the research questions for this inquiry. Interview questions were designed to link to the content areas of the research questions. Research questions were separated into categories with corresponding interview questions that were included on the interview protocols found in the Appendix. Specific findings related to each category are discussed below.

**Examination of Public Policy**

- Does public policy as stipulated in NCLB promote or limit parental engagement?

   Research findings have revealed that federal NCLB policy both promotes and limits parental engagement. Inquiry into the selected district and schools has shown that NCLB serves as a catalyst and provides a window of opportunity for local educational entities to develop parental involvement activities. Although there is an opening for districts and schools to develop “meaningful” avenues and programs for involving families in the work of schools and for offering alternative academic supports or school placements for students in underperforming schools, the policy is limited in its’ provision of penalties for local educational agencies that fail to comply with these aspects of the policy. This void leaves
parents without any recourse in instances where schools or districts fail to engage parents, provide information to parents or collaborate with parents on parental involvement activities.

Additional challenges of the NCLB policy revealed through this study confirm the concerns of scholars (Mathis; Fusarelli) in regards to the inadequacy of funding for policy initiatives. District personnel note that “the limited funding causes district and school staff to make tradeoffs from one program activity to another” (District personnel HS). Other district staff indicate that “certain things just don’t get done” (District personnel BP) suggesting that parent involvement programming could be much more robust than implemented.

**Federal Public Policy**

**District and School Parental Involvement Policy Implementation**

- How have the underlying goals for parental involvement been implemented in the school and the district?

The primary goal for the parent engagement initiatives in Winton City School District and the selected school sites is to facilitate greater involvement of parents in the school district. Overall the parental engagement program appears to meet the stated program goals, however, as suspected, there are still specific segments of the parent population that are absent from participation in school activities or from being engaged in the school life of their children. Based on interview responses, there are not any deliberate efforts being made to determine who these parents are and how they might be encouraged to be in relationship with other parents and school personnel.

- What recognizable changes have there been in the district and schools since NCLB’s parent engagement initiatives were implemented?
Most parents and school staff report that while they have a very general sense about NCLB and what it seeks to accomplish they were not aware of specific NCLB parent involvement initiatives and did not even know that NCLB had a parental involvement component. Further, many school and district stakeholders report that most recognizable change in the district and the schools since NCLB includes the presence of parent consultants in school buildings to assist in engaging other parents in the education of their children.

District Organization and Leadership Practices

- What district leadership practices and/or organizational systems promote parental involvement activities, localization and buy-in case study schools?

District leadership practices appear to be receptive to parental involvement. As noted, the school district superintendent and administrative leaders over the select schools are strongly supportive of the principals of case study schools and the principals in turn are supportive of the programming in their schools. The parent consultant program is organized and visionary. Organizational systems however are observed as somewhat bureaucratic and cumbersome and based on researcher observations and interview responses these aspects of the organization hinder creativity and often the morale of district staff.

- What have been these roles of educational leaders in the implementation of parental involvement initiatives?

An examination of documents and interview responses from study outcomes suggest that the Winton city school district superintendent has been proactive in advocating for parents to be integrally involvement in parental engagement activities in the district and the schools. As such, parents can be found sharing in deliberations in district wide working groups and committees at the school sites. In addition, the administrators with whom the researcher
interfaced, including those interviewed appeared supportive of parent participation. The administrator at School I responded on several occasions that her intention was to do more to facilitate school and parent partnerships with parents. However, the current school context (i.e. temporary school facility not in neighborhood) has limited the programming that can be implemented and disrupted the growth of previous programming.

Socio-Cultural Context

- Do NCLB parent involvement policy documents at the federal, district and the school level reflect a socio-cultural approach to parent involvement strategies?

- Do the selected schools and district reflect a socio-cultural approach in the execution of NCLB parental engagement initiatives?

Given that the district is approximately 80% free and reduced lunch and predominantly minority, and because parents from disadvantaged groups have been included in the visioning and planning for the parent consultant program and parental involvement in the schools, one might conclude that district and school policy would be inclusive of socio-cultural considerations. A review of federal policy documents reveals that the related federal legislation is quite generic and could be much more explicit. However, some socio-cultural aspects have been included in NCLB’s related Title I provisions including specific strategies that address the needs of low income, English language learners etc.

An examination of policy documents at the school level reveals that the Winton City School District has attempted to integrate socio-cultural features into policy documents. For example, the emphasis placed by district personnel regarding the inclusion a “diversity” component in the adopted parental involvement framework envisioned by Epstein (2001) has shown that district personnel had socio-cultural considerations in mind in developing
parental involvement plans. While it is possible that individuals at the district and school levels have the opportunity to be creative about NCLB parental involvement programming at the local levels, funding constraints and the demands of other aspects of parental involvement often hinder the time and resources that can be added to the creation of engaging activities.

Although local policy implementation has been considerate of socio-cultural approaches, study findings suggest that the burden of NCLB and the time involved in policy implementation has left school personnel with few positive feels about the law. For example, staff comments in both schools reported in Chapter 4 reveal that school personnel view NCLB as burdensome and some personnel share that they are consumed with meeting academic milestones of NCLB with limited time for parental involvement.

The studied schools have populations that are predominantly African American or White and observations suggest that both schools could give greater attention to reaching out to the minority populations in their respective schools. As school I eventually settles into their future school building in the student’s neighborhood it is probable that socio-cultural programming will resume as was previously implemented. Study participants, both parents and staff, shared that the program of educators walking students home to interface with the parents and members of the community and the parent conferences in the home were effective activities. Working groups with the involvement of additional parents beyond the consultants could provide greater insights into parental needs. School II currently provides opportunities for parents to be creative and to have avenues for voice through the social club and access to the principal. However, greater attention could be given to promoting the involvement opportunities for parents and to notifying the parent population about the social
club and opportunities for participation in school discussions. As the research has shown, strategies for overcoming parental reluctance will be necessary.

**School Parental Involvement Policy Activities and Implementation**

- How have the case study schools implemented the directives from the district on the parent involvement guidelines of NCLB?

  From the research it seems that case study schools have worked very closely with district administrators and the parent and family engagement team to implement NCLB and district parent involvement initiatives. They have identified parent consultants to help engage other parents and the building administrators have provided support for these individuals as they help to implement activities and involve parents. One area that could be improved is the education of school staff about the parental involvement expectations of NCLB and district goals. Findings examined in Chapter 4 show that many teachers and school staff are not aware of many of the efforts to involve parents in the schools beyond what they do in their classroom. Further, even fewer staff members understand the connections between NCLB and parental involvement initiatives.

- What do the specific parental involvement activities look like at the case study schools?

  Parental involvement activities at School I are developed through collaboration between the parent consultants and the principal. The principal at School I has empowered the consultants to be innovative in their programs and activities designed to involve parents.
• What alternative approaches might provide opportunities to further involve parents from low income and minority groups beyond those approaches already in place in the selected district and schools?

The studied district and schools could benefit from the development of specific strategies to focus on parents who are still absent from or who might feel skeptical about or alienated from participation in the school life of their children. As evidenced from parental comments and as shown by scholars (Bryk and Schneider (2002); Epstein, 2001; Meier, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2004), the development of trusting relationships where people feel listened to and respected is the first step toward the development of two-way authentic communication.

Parental Characteristics

• What are the parental characteristics of those who participate in the parental involvement activities in the selected district and schools?

The characteristics of those who participate in the parental involvement activities in the selected district and schools are those who appear to have developed relationships with either their school principal or the teachers in their child’s school. In addition, the parents who participate all seem to be socially connected with other parents in the school either through Putnam’s bonding or bridging social capital. Further, parent participants all appear to interested in what their children are doing at school and vocalize their responsibility in helping their students advance.

Specifically, at School I the parents are primarily African American and the parents at School II are of Appalachian descent. Both populations are considered low income based on
the percentages of students that are listed as participants in the federal free and reduced lunch program. The involved parents at both school sites are also primarily female; however, there are some males that were participants in the study.

- Is there an absence of class and racial diversity within the spheres of parent participation in the district and schools even with NCLB programs aimed at underrepresented groups?

As noted above there is not an absence of class and racial diversity within the spheres of parent participation in the district and schools because the district is primarily minority and low income given the 80% eligibility for free and reduced lunches. Parental consultant participants, workshops and programming includes representatives reflective of the demographics of the district and as noted in Chapter Four, the selection of consultants has been made with the respective school demographics as a consideration.

**Parental Perceptions and Participation Experiences**

- What are the perceptions of parent and school relationships from school stakeholders in the selected educational communities?

School staff members who were interviewed seem to recognize the constraints facing parents. Many perceive that parents in these schools are “overwhelmed by their jobs, home life or financial situations” and have had negative experiences.

Parents interviewed perceive that school staff and particularly principals are available for discussion. Overwhelmingly parents view principals as supportive of parental involvement but a good portion question the receptiveness of teachers to parental involvement citing lack of involvement outlets for participation in schools.
• Whose paradigms of parent engagement are most prominent in district parental involvement strategies?

Parent involvement paradigms of engaging parents are still based on the middle class approaches and strategies of parental involvement. However, as noted, the school district has attempted to contextualize and integrate socio-cultural considerations into the involvement plans and activities. More extensive and purposeful sessions with attention to specific racial, ethnic and class groups in the school district could provide greater insights and sensitivity to parental needs.

• Are the parent engagement dialogues in the district and schools inclusive or exclusive discourses privileging some students and parents and alienating others.

The research has shown that there are parents who are still alienated from participation in the studied schools. Few resources in the district are being applied to working with these groups.

Social Capital

• What role does social capital play in aiding or hindering the full integration of low income and minority parents into parent engagement initiatives in the work of schools?

There is evidence of social capital operating in the studied schools. Although it is not a deliberate aspect that has been considered, in the districts consideration of socio-cultural strategies in the implementation of NCLB parental involvement activities, the development of avenues for parents to gain social capital appear to exist. For example, the development of social networks and efforts to facilitate a sharing of social capital are planned into parent consultant workshops and conferences. This is done by randomly seating parents at tables
where they participate in exercises that promote interaction and develop relationships with one another. These connections serve as district-wide supports for parent consultants. Further, best practices that support the development of social networks and capital are shared at meetings for consultants to consider for their school sites. Programmatic recommendations stress the identification of activities that will fit the context and the characteristics of the parents in each school. As noted in Chapter 4, case study schools have developed social capital in different ways. The social capital at School I is seen through small more intimate networks of parents that support one another both in and out of schools. The social capital at School II has developed into a more active group like social network that parents use as a springboard for other initiatives such as efforts to improve school lunches.

- Do NCLB policy initiatives facilitate or hinder the development of social capital among stakeholders, including those underrepresented in schools?

As discussed previously overall NCLB policy initiatives both facilitate and hinder the development of social capital among stakeholders. While the policy offers opportunity or potentially serves as a catalyst for parental involvement initiatives, it is burdensome and comes with limited resources that pose barriers to progress.

**Limitations as Gleaned from Research Findings**

Difficulty in identifying and securing study participants who were completely dissatisfied or disgruntled with the schools and district was mentioned in Chapter Three, Methodology section. However, some interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with certain aspects of the parental involvement opportunities or the various components of the implementation of the parental involvement program.
In addition, while the program has been successful in increasing the levels of parental involvement, extra efforts to seek out and identify parents who are still absent from participation appear to be limited. Perhaps these kinds of initiatives will be developed at a later date, when the program is more fully established.

**Summary**

The voices illuminated in this chapter represent highlights of the parental involvement perspectives and experiences of parents, teachers, and administrators. The collaborative relationships and partnerships forged on behalf of strengthening school home relations have been integrated as a key ingredient in the district framework for supporting student success. These networks and branches of shared work and joint initiatives are grounded in the concepts of civic and democratic participation. The next chapter elaborates on these extended ideas of democracy and its role in empowering parental stakeholders for joint leadership to affect school improvement, student advancement and social change in the greater community.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

Conclusions to this study lead us to question the role of federal policy in the successes and challenges of local parental involvement policy implementation to support student success. Further, this study has implications regarding whether this process has become more inclusive, open, and democratic so as to celebrate and value the involvement of all school stakeholders as collectively they steward students toward academic success and advancement.

Based on the findings of this research, I am led to conclude that NCLB serves as a catalyst for increased parent involvement activities by providing opportunities for parents, schools, and districts to leverage policy guidelines to pursue stronger school and home collaborations. While policy falls short of providing adequate direction or funding, the district and schools have managed to construct an effective program to engage parents. Further, policy has provided some flexibility for local actors to have room for visioning and to creatively develop initiatives to engage and motivate parents. Where policy falls short, however, is in the sensitivity of policy guidelines to the local contexts that impact policy milestones.

The diversity of American schools and society necessitates that the study of policy expands and is responsive to the continual shifts and changes in our constantly changing communities. Policy cannot be treated as stagnant but rather must be viewed as
a continually changing process that not only helps to guide institutions and organizations toward practices that affect the “common good” (Furman & Starratt, 2001, p.115) but that are influenced and shaped by those it impacts (Elmore, 1983, McLaughlin, 1987). The need for transformational, effective schools that steer students toward successful outcomes, where trust is high and stakeholders collaborate in the best interest of our children, push us to identify ways that we can be more sensitive, relational, and inclusive as we consider education policy and attempt to impact policy outcomes. A socio-cultural approach to policy (Sutton & Levinson, 2001) viewed through a more democratic lens (Gutmann, 1987) seems appropriate as we draw conclusions about the study at hand.

A socio-cultural approach is sympathetic to society’s multiple voices and is receptive to the input of many as the policy process is shaped to direct how members of society conduct themselves. This approach provides channels for numerous stakeholders and agents to question and probe into policies, and to make inquiries about their meanings and their implications (Sutton & Levinson, 2001). This approach presents a refreshing vantage point from which to advance understandings about the policy process. The overarching purpose of the socio-cultural research strategy is to press researchers, policy makers, and individuals engaged in the discourses that lead to decision-making to be more aware of the social and cultural dynamics of our more global society. In this study, a socio-cultural treatment was considered in the collection of information and the analysis of data. A socio-cultural perspective has guided this researcher to consider “democratic process” with an end result that is inclusive of diverse voices collaborating to develop guidelines for governance and shared norms for human behavior (Gutmann, 1987; Putnam, 2000, 2003). These socio-cultural understandings lead researchers to
draw distinct parallels with the concept of “deep democracy” and participatory
democratic practices (Gutmann, 1987; Putnam 2000; Starratt, 2001; Strike, 1999).

Murphy (2001) reinforces this notion, suggesting that conceptions of thickness and depth
of understandings and democracy are necessary in education because of the diverse
discourses that are needed to enrich our experiences in the shared spaces of our schools.
This thought presses educators, administrators, parents, and others toward a higher
calling as we “develop lifestyles where we are acting for others as well as with others in
the interest of the common good” (Furman & Starratt, 2001, p.115).

Scholarly contributions can be made through a collaborative examination of
policy implementation, and can enable social actors to glean best practices from
implementation strategies. A collaborative examination of policy can also give respect to
and illuminate the truth of how an implementer’s world looks and provide implementers
insight into how their actions affect others (Schwant, 2000, p.191). A shared exploration
of policy and its implementation can help all stakeholders recognize the functions of
those implementers in the trenches who either bring policy to life, embrace policies, co-
opt or resist policy directives. By studying implementation activity that occurs on the
local levels of the policy process and examining the action that occurs between and
amongst the implementers, scholars can glean best practices for successful policy
implementation Further, scholars stand to learn and, in turn, can illuminate where
systematic policy breakdowns might occur as policy is carried out and where policy
approaches may need to be reconsidered.

Given that the NCLB parental engagement policies involve multiple stakeholders
in educational environments (district personnel, administrators, teachers, parents), the
implications of policy implementation has the potential to inform not only how the implementers respond and localize policy but also how the customers and clients (parents and those receiving the schools services) respond to the policy as well. An exploration of how parental engagement policy has been implemented in the past, how it is being implemented now under NCLB, and what the varied outcomes have been have been telling regarding what parents and low income and minority parents think and how engagement approaches have been embraced.

Social cultural approaches have illuminated district level differences in policy implementation strategies by providing contextual examples and parental engagement outcomes (Sutton & Levinson, 2001). These implementation examples or models and the resulting outcomes have provided rich illustrations on the varied conditions and climates in different schools and what methods of policy implementation have been employed. As is evidenced from the district implementation of policy, when a socio-cultural approach is considered in the policy development process and in the policy implementation process, the cultural contexts, meanings, and interpretations of the individuals involved, namely parents, teachers, and administrators, are considered and integrated into the policy process. Based on the findings, it is clear that the districts’ treatment of the parental engagement process has been developed with the varied meanings and views of the policy actors and policy implementation and has been considerate of school stakeholder needs.

If researchers and policy makers at all levels of the process endeavor to guide scholarship and policy along a more democratic and authentic path, then policy implementation strategies using a socio-cultural approaches promise to be more relevant
to the specific local context and climate of the community. Since district level administrators and leaders function as intermediaries “responsible for translating the broad purposes of national and state goals into tangible practices in schools in ways that were consistent with the particular conditions of local districts” (Fuhrman & Starratt, 2001), research and policy can aid these local actors by integrating more socio-cultural and democratic considerations.

The inclusion of socio-cultural considerations into research and policy-making has the potential to illuminate local factors that support and hinder parental involvement because of its focus on a more democratic and localized approach to the policy process. Democratic viewpoints advocate for greater inclusion of multiple stakeholders and thus, urge policy makers and researchers to create channels for input from diverse groups (parents, teachers, administrators, community, and students) into the policy process. Further, because this approach seeks to create opportunities for expanded policy discourses from multiple voices, I suggest that the resulting parent involvement initiatives would have greater depth. This kind of “openness” enables the various actors (i.e., parents, teachers) to “think aloud together, make joint decisions”, and problem solve in varied venues, the formal and the informal (Meier & Schwartz 1995). Group-think of this kind lends itself to the accommodation of as many ideas and perspectives through a variety of channels. Hence, should parents from absent or underrepresented communities be reluctant or reserved about convening in traditional formal settings, perhaps neutral territory (i.e., community center, church, local library) can be used for activities in the extended community, where parents are more comfortable.
Since democratic and socio-cultural approaches to education urge school staffs to stretch themselves toward greater understandings of the communities they serve, educators will need to step out of their comfort zone (schools) and make inroads into the extended school community. These methods may call for the extension of school initiatives by engaging parents regarding school improvement and support for student success on community turf. Findings from this study show inclinations in School I toward a more grassroots strategy in parent involvement efforts. Given the diversity of today’s school populations and the fact that students hail from varied environments and cultures, educators can no longer remain within the confines of the school building or the immediate school neighborhood if they are to truly apply socio-cultural methods toward meeting student needs and understanding their families.

New tensions may emerge, given the demand of these models on school staff, and finding the time to interface with families at this level may seem daunting to already overburdened personnel. However, authentic commitments to student achievement and the elimination of achievement gaps in our schools may require greater levels of sacrifice from passionate educators. Microsteps of progress have the potential to yield new trusting relationships with parents as reciprocal efforts between school and home merge together and provide supporting frameworks toward increased student success.

Democratic and socio-cultural understandings may serve to illuminate parental perceptions of school discourses, policies, and information flows by providing fertile ground and opportunities for parents to voice thoughts, opinions, and concerns. This approach lends itself to “openness” and shared information that provides avenues for communication and shared discourses that seek to be inclusive in the localization of
policy. Further, as trusting relationships are formed, individuals become more comfortable sharing their perceptions, ideas, and concerns (Meier, 2002). It makes sense that other parent actors join forces with school staff to help bridge the gap and possibly reduce the skepticism that may exist among parents who have been absent from engagement in schools.

While NCLB is far from realistic and “falls short” (Winton school administrator comments), parent engagement policies seem to serve as a catalyst for activism, empowering low income and minority parent populations. It appears to promote partnerships between school and home and presents channels for relationship building with other parents and individuals with common agendas. With united efforts toward supporting student achievement, many stakeholders seem to have developed “a sense of place” (Driscoll & Kercher, 1999, p. 365) in the policy process both as advocates and participants in the discourses, and in the school community. These collaborations facilitate the development of relationships through shared goals that can extend the social capital of individuals and parents from marginalized groups (Bourdieu, 1986; Brantlinger, 2003; Noguera, 2001).

Based on findings from this study, it is evident that a more grassroots, localized effort to develop relationships and engage parents, may provide untapped opportunities for schools and districts, as seen at School I, and as noted by Shirley (1997) in the Texas neighborhoods, and Fung (2001) and Designs for Change (2002) in the Chicago LSC initiatives. It is also evident from these findings that if school administrators can facilitate the provision of support and resources and can empower parents to help collaborate on ways to involve other parents, families can become engaged, as seen at
School II. As suggested by scholars, trust, respect and on-going dialogue and communication provide the foundation for strong relational partnerships (Meier, 2002a; Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Bryk & Schneider, 2003).

Freire (1998), in his writings about education and disenfranchised populations, notes that communication and shared discourse or “authentic dialogue” can enhance relationships. He advocates for individuals to develop a “permanent attitude on the part of the subject who is listening, of being open to the word of the other, to the gesture of the other, to the differences of the other (Freire, 1998, p. 107). Both Freire (1998) and Darder (1991) suggest that schools are ideal places for all multiple stakeholders particularly the underprivileged to formulate knowledge about their standings in society and to determine how to pro-actively improve their social reality and affect change in society. Noguera (2001), in applying Freire’s (1998) perspective to schools, notes that school leaders should examine the “limiting” nature of the existing school structure and consider, with those who are marginalized, ways to transform educational institutions to be more receptive to all groups. Using perspectives from Freire, Noguera notes that school personnel cannot impose their views on the underprivileged but rather must support the disenfranchised to help create knowledge and problem-solve on their own. He posits that for school community partnerships to be effective, school leaders must be cautious and that through these collaborations members of disenfranchised groups must be empowered to take control of their futures not be told what is best for them. Further, he suggests that these partnerships must be informed by shared inquiry between school leaders and the communities served. As articulated by Freire, for these collaborative discourses to be effective, the inquiry, learning and dialogue must ultimately lead the
underrepresented to fully participate in the creation of common understandings about life, oppression and societal inequities. As this shared inquiry takes place, the process must include opportunities for oppressed groups to look at their situation, determine how they can shape their own futures and see these ideas placed into action.

In the context of these school and home partnerships, parents must be cautious regarding their parent consultant positions as quasi-district staff because they may compromise their ability to be full advocates for parental rights and the complete parental voice. As issues of concern arise, that district personnel cannot advance due to their position as part of the establishment, parents may need to band together outside the confines of the district process to insist on the change and reform necessary for the best interest of their children. At times, in order to further various causes, parents and community members may have to take an activist position as the era of desegregation highlighted in chapter two reminds us. It was during the time of desegregation that parent activists joined with supportive community members to press for desegregation in schools. Significant changes in education may require parent and community advocates to take similar radical measures.

NCLB parental engagement policies mesh with democratic and socio-cultural approaches to policy in their advocacy for inclusive processes that engage all parents with varied viewpoints and backgrounds. In relation to NCLB, a democratic and a socio-cultural approach suggests that an effort to understand the culture of different populations of parents is appropriate as initiatives are created to engage families to support student success. The democratic underpinnings of the incorporation of dialogue and exchange of

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information and ideas (Dewey1897, Dahl, 1998, Gutmann, 1987) communicate to parents that their viewpoints and perspectives are valued and respected.

Democratic and socio-cultural considerations in this study have provided robust exemplars that are applicable to the successful education policy formulation and localization process and provide optimism for the NCLB processes of engaging parents from low income and minority groups in the work of schools to support student success. While there are still areas where, as one administrator noted, a greater sense of openness is needed and where the district needs to “break barriers down and kick doors open,” the move toward more relational, open, and authentic approaches suggests promising modes of functioning for this and other increasingly diverse school environments with multiple actors. Further, its focus on the development of mutual understandings and collaboration among school stakeholders promises to provide fertile opportunities to create policy models that can yield success for students. If purposefully applied to the NCLB policy process this approach has promise and presents an opportunity to do what policies before have fallen short of accomplishing.
APPENDIX A

OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
The Ohio State University Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: THE ENGAGEMENT OF LOW INCOME AND MINORITY PARENTS IN SCHOOLS SINCE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND: INTERSECTIONS OF POLICY, PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Researcher: Philip T.K. Daniel

Sponsor: The Ohio State University

This is a consent form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate.

Your participation is voluntary.

Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form.

Purpose:

This research project is being accomplished by the College of Education and Human Ecology at the Ohio State University. The study is called “The Engagement of Low Income and Minority Parents and Families in Schools since No Child Left Behind: Intersections of Policy, Parent Involvement and Social Capital. The purpose of this study is to understand how a school district has involved low income and minority parents in school parent involvement activities under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and what impact parent involvement has had on school improvement and student achievement. As a part of this research parents, teachers, school administrators, district administrators, school staff and other adults are being asked interview by a member of the research team for the study. The information collected from interviews will be used for this research project.

Procedures/Tasks:

This study will take place in an urban school district and will include research in two schools and the district central offices. This research will include interviews and observations of parents, teachers, administrators and school staff in a school district. Interviews will be conducted with the consent of the participants and will be tape
recorded if participants agree to the tape recording. In this study researchers will attend
and observe district-wide parent consultant meetings and activities at schools.
Researchers will also interview individuals and groups of parents, teachers, school
administrators, district administrators, school staff and other adults in the district and
individual schools. The interview sessions will be audio taped with consent from the
participants. Tapes will be transcribed and participant names will not be used. Transcript
data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the research team’s office. Tapes will be
erased once the data from them has been transcribed.

Researchers will use information from individual and group interviews,
documents and observations to identify common themes that will emerge from the data.
In these schools, the advancement of students and increases in school and community
partnerships will be observed particularly partnerships with parents, schools and district
staff. Documents and parent involvement related policy information will be examined to
see how school district parent engagement programs compare with the goals of NCLB.
Further, the researchers will-examine the implementation of parent engagement activities
and the evidence of student advancement and school improvement at these schools to see
if there is transferability to other schools in the district. Information collected will
include existing data from school report cards, surveys, interviews and school continuous
improvement plans.

**Duration:**

The estimated time required from each participant including long-term follow-up is
expected to be as follows:

An estimated time of 30 – 40 minutes is the expected time required for participants
involved in individual interviews for this research. An additional 40 minutes may be
required for additional follow up. An estimated time of two and one half hours is the
estimated anticipated time required for participants involved in group interviews. This
will include the actual group interviews that are expected to take about one to one and
one half hours and the time necessary for subsequent follow-up.

You may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study,
there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are
otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The Ohio State University.

**Risks and Benefits:**

Participants will be reminded that the discussions in the interviews should remain confidential. However, as individuals participate in group interviews there is the possibility that information may be revealed or opinions expressed that have the potential to influence the perspectives of others regarding an individual. Further, while confidentiality for individual interviews will be maintained to the greatest extent possible, given that some individuals occupy unique or sole positions in the organization, there is the possibility that they may be identified, even if they are not named.

This research contributes to theory and practice by examining the implementation of No Child Left Behind policy initiatives as they are implemented at the district level and highlights successes and hindrances in the involvement of low income and minority parents. This research also expands the parent engagement discussions in schools to represent the perspectives of low income and minority parents. In addition, this study explores opportunities to expand the work of parent involvement in schools to be more inclusive the underrepresented. Finally based on research findings from this study, this project presents recommendations for the future practice of educators and additional ideas and strategies for researchers on engaging low income and minority parents to support student success.

**Confidentiality:**

Efforts will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your participation in this study may be disclosed if required by state law. Also, your records may be reviewed by the following groups (as applicable to the research):

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices;
- The sponsor, if any, or agency (including the Food and Drug Administration for FDA-regulated research) supporting the study.

**Incentives**

The participants in the study may receive refreshments that will be provided during the group interview process.
Participant Rights:

You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you are a student or employee at Ohio State, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

If you choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights you may have as a participant in this study.

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The Ohio State University reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

Contacts and Questions:

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact the Office of Responsible Research Practices at (614) 688-4792.

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.

If you are injured as a result of participating in this study or for questions about a study-related injury, please contact the principal investigator, Dr. Philip T.K. Daniel, Educational Policy and Leadership, Educational Policy and Leadership, 301C Ramseyer Hall, 29 W. Woodruff Ave., Columbus, OH 43210, 614.292.7991 or via email at: daniel.7@osu.edu. Should you have any concerns regarding your rights as a participant, you may contact the Office of Responsible Research Practices at (614) 688-4792.
Signing the consent form

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

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Investigator/Research Staff

I have explained the research to the participant or his/her representative before requesting the signature(s) above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.

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APPENDIX B

RESEARCH PROTOCOLS
Parent’s Parent Involvement Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Parent Interviews

(The individual parent interviews are expected to take approximately 30 minutes; the same interview questions will be asked of all parent participants in the study)

Knowledge or Perceptions about NCLB and Parent Involvement

- What do you know about No Child Left Behind and do you know that No Child Left Behind has parent involvement guidelines for school districts and schools? (is: recommendations for parents to help develop and plan activities to involve parents in schools).

- Do you think your involvement in the school life of your children makes a difference in your child’s success? How or how not?

Involvement Levels

- Are you involved in the school activities where your child or children attend? If so, how much time do you spend there each month and what activities do you participate in? Probes: Do you go to your child’s school? How often per month and for what purposes?

- What encourages you to participate in the activities at your child’s school? Probes: What things have gotten you interested in participating in the school life of your children? Are there reasons why you choose to participate in school activities? (i.e.: school events, parent conferences, school activities).

- What discourages you from participating in activities at your child’s school? Probes: What things hinder you from participating in the school life of your children? Are there reasons why you do not participate in school activities or reasons for you not participating as much in the school life of your children? (i.e.: school events, parent conferences, school activities).

Current and Past Levels of Parent Involvement Activity

- Have you noticed a difference over the last five years in the encouragement by the school and the school district to involve more parents in school activities? If so what are these differences?
• Do you participate more in activities offered by your child’s school now than you did five years ago? If so in what ways?

• What opportunities are there for you to partner or collaborate with school staff? What issues do you partner on? Probes: How are parent and school partnerships set up?

School Climate and Perceptions of Schools

• Is the school building welcoming to you? How is it welcoming or how is it not? Probes: How comfortable do you feel at your child’s or children’s schools? What makes you feel comfortable or what makes you feel uncomfortable?

• Do you feel that the school personnel are welcoming when you visit the school? Why or why not?

• How do you view school staff? Probes: The teachers? The principal? Other school personnel?

• How would you describe the relationships between school staff and parents? Probe: What do you think school staff thinks about parents?

Social Networks, Communication and Support

• Are you in touch with other parents at your child’s school? Why or why not? If so, how many parents are you involved with at your child’s school?

• What kinds of things do you talk about or do with other parents from your child’s school?

• What ways can you get to know other parents at your child’s school? Probes: What opportunities are there for you to get to know other parents at your child’s school?

• Do you think other parents at your child’s school would be willing to interact with you? Why or why not?

• When you need assistance or have questions about something regarding your child’s school or education who do you consult? Probes: Parents? School Personnel? Other individuals outside the school? Why do you consult these individuals?

• From whom and how do you get your information about the school, district and school events or the performance of your child and the children in your school?
Probes from school personnel; from other parents: from those outside your school community?

**Evidence of Epstein’s Model of Six Types of Parent Involvement**

- How does the school or district assist parents in the area of parenting skills including understanding developmental stages of students and suggestions on how to support student learning (Epstein, 1997)? How do school staff learn about the families in your school?

- How does school or district staff communicate with you about student advancement, school activities and events? What communication vehicles do they use (Epstein, 1997)?

- What opportunities does the school and district provide for parents to volunteer both in school and out of school? How are you prepared and encouraged to participate? How do they assist parents from varied backgrounds and in varied situations with being involved (i.e. low income, minority, varied ethnicities, working parents, single parents, etc.) (Epstein, 1997)?

- In what ways does the school and district include parent ideas in the curriculum; encourage parents to support student advancement by informing you about school and classroom activities; and involve you in student work at school and at home? Probes i.e.: through homework experiences, class sharing’s school events, etc.) (Epstein, 1997)?

- How are parents involved in collaborating on school “decision-making, governance and advocacy” (Epstein, 1997)? Probes: Are parents involved on committees or organizations that help in school planning and decision-making (Epstein, 1997)?

- How does the school and district facilitate support for you and school families and serve as a resource for parents in connecting them with community services and entities that can support their students and families (Epstein, 1997)?

**Recommendations for Improvement**

- How might parent involvement be encouraged at your child’s or children’s school? Probes: What things could increase parent involvement at your child’s school?
School Administrator Parent Involvement Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

School Administrator Interviews

(The individual administrator interviews are expected to take approximately 30-40 minutes; the same interview questions will be asked of all school administrator participants in the study)

School and District Priorities

- Is parent involvement a priority in the school district? If so, how has the district committed to the priority of parent involvement?

- How does the district communicate the importance of parent involvement to school personnel, parents and the community?

- Has the school district placed an increased emphasis on more parent involvement in schools since NCLB directives were implemented? If so, in what ways?

- Has parent involvement in the schools increased since the implementation of NCLB? If so, how can you tell?

Level of Parent Involvement Activities

- What specific programs and activities have been developed and implemented to meet the NCLB parent involvement guidelines? Probes: What has been done in the school district? What have the schools done?

- What specific programs and activities have been developed and implemented to specifically increase the involvement of low income and minority parents or those parents who traditionally are underrepresented in involvement in the schools? Probes: What has been done in the school district? What have the schools done?

- Do you measure parent involvement in your district or school? If so, how do you measure the levels of parent involvement? If not, why not?

- Do you believe that parent involvement initiatives since NCLB have had an impact on school improvement and student advancement? How?
Resources and Support for Parent Involvement

- Have NCLB directives and related activities been helpful in the identification of ways to increase parent involvement? If not, what could be changed to help your local initiatives?

- Has the NCLB parent involvement stipulations from the State and federal government come with adequate resources and support? If so, what resources and support have been provided? What support have you received from the federal or state government? (For School Administrators) What about from the school district?

- What other NCLB guidelines have been implemented at your school to support school improvement and student advancement? Do you believe these other NCLB guidelines have had an impact on school improvement and student advancement?

Administrator Perceptions of Parents and Parent Involvement

- How do you view the parents in your district or in your school? Do you think they want to partner with schools to support student advancement and student achievement?

- Do you sense that low income and minority parents are reluctant to participate in school activities? Why might that be?

- What efforts have been made at your school and in the district to help alleviate this skepticism amongst low income and minority parent populations? What specific efforts are made to increase the involvement and inclusion of low income and minority parent populations in parent engagement activities?

Opportunities to Facilitate Social Networks

- Are there opportunities for parents to interface and share information? If so, do you facilitate these opportunities?

- Are there opportunities for schools with active parent groups to interface and share with schools where parents are not as active? If so, how is this done?

Evidence of Epstein’s Model of Six Types of Parent Involvement

- How do you assist parents in the area of parenting skills including understanding developmental stages of students and suggestions on how to support student learning (Epstein, 1997)? How do you learn about the families in your school?
• How do you communicate with parents about student advancement, school activities and events? What communication vehicles do you use (Epstein, 1997)?

• What opportunities does your school provide for parents to volunteer both in school and out of school? How are parents prepared and encouraged to participate? How do you accommodate parents from varied backgrounds and in varied situations (i.e. low income, minority, varied ethnicities, working parents, single parents, etc.) (Epstein, 1997)?

• In what ways does school staff integrate parent ideas into the curriculum; encourage parents to support student advancement by informing them about school and classroom activities; and involve parents in student work at school and at home? Probes i.e.: through homework experiences, class sharing’s school events, etc.) (Epstein, 1997)?

• How are parents involved in collaborating in school “decision-making, governance and advocacy” (Epstein, 1997)? Probes: Are parents involved on committees or organizations that help in school planning and decision-making (Epstein, 1997)?

• How do you and your staff facilitate support for school families and serve as a resource for parents in connecting with community services and entities that can support their students and families (Epstein, 1997)?

Recommendations for Improvement

• What other strategies might be used to further engage parents from all populations? How might parent involvement be encouraged in your school? Probes: What things could increase parent involvement in your school?
Teacher Parent Involvement Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Teacher Interviews

(The individual teacher interviews are expected to take approximately 30-40 minutes; the same interview questions will be asked of all parent participants in the study)

Knowledge or Perceptions about NCLB and Parent Involvement

- What do you know about No Child Left Behind and do you know that No Child Left Behind has parent involvement guidelines for school districts and schools? (ie: recommendations for parents to help develop and plan activities to involve parents in schools).

- Do you think parent involvement in the school life of children makes a difference in a child’s success? How or how not?

Involvement Levels

- Are parents of children in your school involved in school activities or activities related to your class? If so, what activities do parents participate in?

- How would you rate the levels of parent involvement in the school life of their children in your class? Probes: Are they very involved; somewhat involved; involved; somewhat uninvolved, not involved at all?

- What percentage of parents would you say were involved and how much time do they spend being involved in school activities or activities related to your class each month?

- What do you do to encourage parents to participate in the activities at your school or in your class? Probes: What do you do to get parents interested in participating in the school life of their children? (i.e.: school events, parent conferences, school activities).

- Have you been able to increase parent involvement in your classroom? If so, how have you done this?

- What things might hinder parents from participating in the school life of their children? Probes: Are there reasons why parents might not participate in school
activities and if so, what are they? (i.e.: school events, parent conferences, school activities).

**Current and Past Levels of Parent Involvement Activity**

- Have you noticed a difference over the last five years in the encouragement by the school and the school district to involve more parents in school activities? If so what are these differences?

- Do parents participate more in activities offered by your school now than they did five years ago? If so, in what ways?

- What opportunities are there for parents to partner or collaborate with school staff? What issues do you partner with parents about? What other things can parents partner with school staff about? Probes: How are parent and school partnerships set up?

**School Climate and Perceptions of Schools**

- What things does school staff do to make parents feel welcome in the school?

- How do you view parents in your school? Probes: How would you describe your parent population? What do you think school staff thinks about parents?

- How would you describe the relationships between school staff and parents? Probe: Do parents and educators collaborate often.

**Social Networks and Support**

- Do teachers collaborate very often with parents on student achievement and school improvement? If so, in what ways do they collaborate?

- Do teachers view themselves as connectors helping parents locate support services and resources? If so how do you do this?

- How do you get to know families in your school? Probes: What activities do you engage in to develop relationships with families?
Evidence of Epstein’s Model of Six Types of Parent Involvement

- How do you assist parents in the area of parenting skills including understanding developmental stages of students and suggestions on how to support student learning (Epstein, 1997)? How do you learn about the families in your school?

- How do you communicate with parents about student advancement, school activities and events? What communication vehicles do you use (Epstein, 1997)?

- What opportunities do you provide for parents to volunteer both in school and out of school? How do you prepare and encourage parents to participate? How do you accommodate parents from varied backgrounds and in varied situations (i.e. low income, minority, varied ethnicities, working parents, single parents, etc.) (Epstein, 1997)?

- In what ways do you integrate parent ideas into the curriculum; encourage parents to support student advancement by informing them about school and classroom activities; and involve parents in student work at school and at home? Probes i.e.: through homework experiences, class sharing’s school events, etc.) (Epstein, 1997)?

- How are parents involved in collaborating on school “decision-making, governance and advocacy” (Epstein, 1997)? Probes: Are parents involved on committees or organizations that help in school planning and decision-making (Epstein, 1997)?

- How do you facilitate support for school families and serve as a resource for parents in connecting with community services and entities that can support their students and families (Epstein, 1997)?

Recommendations for Improvement

- What other strategies might be used to further engage parents from all populations? How might parent involvement be encouraged in your school? Probes: What things could increase parent involvement in your school?
District Administrative Team Parent Involvement Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

District Administrator Interviews

(The individual administrator interviews are expected to take approximately 30-40 minutes; the same interview questions will be asked of all district administrator participants in the study)

School and District Priorities

- Is parent involvement a priority in the school district? If so, how has the district committed to the priority of parent involvement?

- How does the district communicate the importance of parent involvement to school personnel, parents and the community?

- Has the school district placed an increased emphasis on more parent involvement in schools since NCLB directives were implemented? If so, in what ways?

- Has parent involvement in the schools increased since the implementation of NCLB? If so, how can you tell?

Level of Parent Involvement Activities

- What specific programs and activities have been developed and implemented to meet the NCLB parent involvement guidelines? Probes: What has been done in the school district? What have the schools done?

- What specific programs and activities have been developed and implemented to specifically increase the involvement of low income and minority parents or those parents who traditionally are underrepresented in involvement in the schools? Probes: What has been done in the school district? What have the schools done?

- Do you measure parent involvement in your district or school? If so, how do you measure the levels of parent involvement? If not, why not?

- Do you believe that parent involvement initiatives since NCLB have had an impact on school improvement and student advancement? How?
Resources and Support for Parent Involvement

- Have NCLB directives and related activities been helpful in the identification of ways to increase parent involvement? If not, what could be changed to help your local initiatives?

- Has the NCLB parent involvement stipulations from the State and federal government come with adequate resources and support? If so, what resources and support have been provided? What support have you received from the federal or state government?

- What other NCLB guidelines have been implemented in the district to support school improvement and student advancement? Do you believe these other NCLB guidelines have had an impact on school improvement and student advancement?

Administrator Perceptions of Parents and Parent Involvement

- How do you view the parents in your district? Do you think they want to partner with schools to support student advancement and student achievement?

- Do you sense that low income and minority parents are reluctant to participate in school activities? Why might that be?

- What efforts has the district made in alleviating skepticism amongst low income and minority parent populations? What specific efforts are made to increase the involvement and inclusion of low income and minority parent populations in parent engagement activities?

Opportunities to Facilitate Social Networks

- Are there opportunities for parents to interface and share information? If so, do you facilitate these opportunities?

- Are there opportunities for schools with active parent groups to interface and share with schools where parents are not as active? If so, how is this done?

Evidence of Epstein’s Model of Six Types of Parent Involvement

- How does your district assist parents in the area of parenting skills including understanding developmental stages of students and suggestions on how to support student learning (Epstein, 1997)? How do you learn about the families in your district?
• How does your district communicate with parents about student advancement, school activities and events? What communication vehicles do you use (Epstein, 1997)?

• What opportunities does your district provide and recommend for parents to volunteer in school related activities? How are parents prepared and encouraged to participate? How do you accommodate parents from varied backgrounds and in varied situations (i.e. low income, minority, varied ethnicities, working parents, single parents, etc.) (Epstein, 1997)?

• In what ways does your district encourage educators to integrate parent ideas into the curriculum; encourage parents to support student advancement by informing them about school and classroom activities; and involve parents in student work at school and at home? Probes i.e.: through homework experiences, class sharing’s school events, etc.) (Epstein, 1997)?

• How are parents involved in collaborating on district “decision-making, governance and advocacy” (Epstein, 1997)? Probes: Are parents involved on committees or organizations that help in school and district planning and decision-making (Epstein, 1997)?

• How do district staff and administration facilitate support for school families and serve as a resource for parents in connecting them to community services and entities that can support their students and families (Epstein, 1997)?

Recommends for Improvement

• What other strategies might be used to further engage parents from all populations? How might parent involvement be encouraged in your district? Probes: What things could increase parent involvement in your district?
APPENDIX C

EMERGING CODES AND SUB-CODES FOR RESEARCH QUESTIONS
Emerging Codes and Sub-Codes for Data

**Examination of Public Policy (EPP)**
- Does public policy as stipulated in NCLB promote (EPP-P) or limit EPP-L) parental engagement?

**District and School Parental Involvement Policy Implementation (DPPII) (SPII)**
- How have the underlying goals for parental involvement been implemented in the school and the district?
- What recognizable changes have there been in the district and schools since NCLB’s parent engagement initiatives were implemented?

**District Organization and Leadership Practices (DOLP)**
- What district leadership practices (DLP) and/or organizational systems (DOS) promote parental involvement activities, localization and buy-in in case study schools?
- What have been the roles of educational leaders in the implementation of parental involvement initiatives? (DOLP-R)

**Socio-Cultural Context (SCC)**
- Do NCLB parent involvement policy documents at the federal (SCC-PDF), district (SCC-PDD) and the school (SCC-PDS) level reflect a socio-cultural approach to parent involvement strategies?
- Do the selected schools (SCC-SPII) and district (SCC-DPII) reflect a socio-cultural approach in the execution of NCLB parental engagement initiatives?

**School Parental Involvement Policy Activities and Implementation (SPAI)**
- How have the case study schools implemented the directives from the district on the parent involvement guidelines of NCLB?
- What do the specific parental involvement activities look like at the case study schools? (SPIA)
- What alternative approaches might provide opportunities to further involve parents from low income and minority groups beyond those approaches already in place in the selected district and schools? (OPII)

**Parental Characteristics (PC)**
- What are the parental characteristics of those who participate in the parental involvement activities in the selected district (DPIPC) and schools (SPIPC)?
- Is there an absence of class and racial diversity within the spheres of parent participation in district (ADPIPC) and schools (ASPIPC) even with NCLB programs aimed at underrepresented groups?
Parental Perceptions and Participation Experiences (PPPE)

• What are the perceptions of parent and school relationships from school stakeholders in the selected educational communities?
• Whose paradigms of parent engagement are most prominent in district parental involvement strategies?
• Are the parent engagement dialogues in the district and schools inclusive (IPPPE) or exclusive (EPPPE) discourses privileging some students and parents and alienating others.

Social and Cultural Capital (SC)

• What role does social capital play in aiding (SCA) or hindering (SCH) the full integration of low income and minority parents into parent engagement initiatives in the work of schools?
• Do NCLB policy initiatives facilitate (SCPF) or hinder (SCPH) the development of social capital amongst stakeholders, including those underrepresented in schools?
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