

## Why Do They Not Volunteer?



Investigating the Reasons Parents Choose to Not Volunteer:  
Examining The Factors at a High School Athletic Booster Club

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## **Executive Summary**

The purpose of this research is to explore why parents do not volunteer to support the Athletic Booster Club (ABC) at John Quincy Adams (JQA - pseudonym) high school and seek possible solutions to encourage greater involvement.

The mission of ABC is to promote, support, and assist the JQA high school's athletic activities and student athletes by providing encouragement, advice, volunteer support, and financial assistance to the Student Activity Office. The ABC cooperates with other recognized organizations of the school and community for the support and betterment of the JQA high school athletic program and student athletes. The ABC provides for 910 student athletes, representing 42 sports teams. The county provides minimal financial support to athletics. Each school principal must use discretion on how to budget for athletics and other intra and extracurricular activities. This makes the ABC just one of many school-sponsored organizations that rely on parent volunteers to support various teams with fundraising, concessions, uniforms, scholarships, and community outreach.

Research has surfaced many reasons why parents volunteer in their child's school, especially in support of academics. The literature also provides reasons parents do not volunteer in schools, with work conflicts and communication being the most common reasons; however, there is less research addressing the reasons parents do not support extracurricular activities. Still, some insights have been informative. Most of the literature confirms that parents are less engaged as their children move out of elementary school into high school. The primary focus of parents' engagement with their high school students shifts to college acceptance. The problem for many schools, including JQA, is to revive parent involvement that decreased since elementary school. This is the goal of the director of student activities (DSA) and the Athletic

Booster Board (ABB). To achieve this goal, they seek to explore why parents do not engage in volunteering in support the ABC and offer possible solutions to encourage greater involvement.

The examination of the literature along with pilot interviews and discussions with the DSA, ABB and other parents suggested that a framework that would allow analysis of a range of factors impacting choice to participate was needed. One of the powerful diagnostic tools for determining why people do or do not engage in some action is expectancy theory (Grant & Shin, 2011). Simply stated, it suggests that people will evaluate choices based on three factors: the extent to which they believe that the choice to expend effort will lead to an expected outcome, and the extent to which that outcome is associated rewards or positive outcomes the person values. Further, choices are always made in a context of other choices, and the expectancies associated with other choices are part of an individual's decision making. Using the framework in this context led to the following research questions:

1. What are parents of athletes' perceptions of and understanding of the John Quincy Adams Athletic Booster Club and its role in support of student athletes?
  - a. Do parents understand what is required of them?
  - b. What are the perceived impediments to engaging in the behaviors being asked of them?
  - c. Are there demographic factors that are associated with participation?
2. What do parents see as the outcomes (to the school, to athletics, and to their children's' experience) associated with volunteering?
3. How much do parents value volunteering (to the school, to athletics, and to their children's' experience)?

4. Are the evaluations of these factors similar or different in other extra-curricular areas requiring volunteer support at the school?
5. What tools and strategies could the Director of Student Activities (DSA) and Athletic Booster Board (ABB) employ to increase active engagement for parents in Athletic Booster Club (ABC)?

A mixed-methods approach was used to execute this research. Quantitative data on student athlete demographics at JQA was compared to the overall school population and the county to determine if the school and its student athletes are a fair representation of the overall student body in demographics, socioeconomic status, and race. All parents of student athletes were asked to complete a questionnaire concerning their involvement in the ABC with various opportunities and tasks. The qualitative data was collected through interviews with eight parents of student athletes, each parent representing different levels of effort of involvement. Additionally, one parent each who served as board members of the Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA), Drama Boosters, and Band Boosters was interviewed to explore potential commonalities and differences in parent involvement and motivation.

### **Key Findings**

1. All parents responding to the questionnaire affirmed their knowledge of the ABC, and all placed some value on what the Boosters provide to the student athlete. However, consistent with expectancy theory, their level of understanding of the role of Boosters varied greatly based on the information received and how that value translated to them personally. Responses from the interviews indicated less understanding and knowledge of the ABC than the initial questionnaire results would have indicated.

2. Every parent interviewed provided some level of volunteer support to Athletic Boosters, either directly to the organization or through their child's athletic team. The parent's commitment in terms of effort and time and their reasons for doing so varied greatly and their perceptions of volunteering did not align with how the board thought of the volunteering opportunities. Some findings in the initial questionnaire matched respondents' comments in the interviews, but there were also several mismatches in responses.
  - a. Obstacles, time, and commitment were most often cited factors limiting involvement. Work demands were the most common limiting factor for parents regarding these three factors. With multiple other priorities among their options and needs, volunteering was not a choice.
  - b. Communication flow and access to information were issues. Parents reported receiving mixed messages and often did not have clear information explaining the organization's need for volunteers. This would indicate that outcomes to the school, athletics and their children associated with volunteering, as well as their value, were not defined.
  - c. Feelings of intimidation by board members and other volunteers were expressed by several respondents, especially regarding the white female board members. Expectancy theory suggests that attitudes toward the choice itself can have a profound impact on behavior,
  - d. Several parents disclosed that their children did not want them to be involved.
3. There were differences in demographic data of John Quincy Adams's student athletes compared to the county, but no significant differences were noted relative to other

students in the school. Six of eight of the mothers completing the questionnaire and responding to the interviews are white women. This is consistent with reports of parental involvement in school education and extracurricular activities (Sheldon, 2002). Along with the second set of findings there appear to be gender and race factors that are affecting attitudes toward volunteering.

4. Parents representing other extracurricular activities at the school identified the same issues with volunteering as Athletic Booster parents. This would seem to indicate that it is not athletics as an activity that affects the choice to volunteer, but other factors.
5. The literature, in combination with results from the initial questionnaire and the interviews, provided tools and strategies that the Director of Student Activities and Athletic Boosters could employ to increase active engagement for parents and guardians in Athletic Boosters Parents.

### **Recommendations**

The recommendations emerged from the results of this research in combination with the extensive literature on improving the relative expectancies of opportunities. Recommendations are based upon increasing engagement of parents through education and information to inform the choices they make regarding their children's school.

**Recommendation 1** The board should aim to diversity its board members by recruiting individuals with diverse racial backgrounds. By increasing ABB diversity, Barge and Loges (2003), report it changes perceptions and communication between various parents. Boosters will create representation and send a message that the board is commitment to changing the “white mother” norms of the board involvement. Wegmann and Bowen (2010) discussed the value of cultural capital in engaging parents and families across all aspects of school including attitudes, identity, approaches, and creating a welcoming atmosphere. An important element of expectancy

theory is the perception expected behaviors. To the extent to which volunteering is seen as associated only with white women, attitudes toward the volunteering opportunities would be dismissed or even disliked by people who identify as men or people of color. The ABB should aim to recruit at least two new members in the year 2021-2022 and 2022-2023.

**Recommendation 2:** Rapp and Duncan (2012) make note of the strength of the principal's engagement to improve overall school community. Several parents mentioned the principal's perceived lack of support. The DSA needs to explain to her the potential value and role in recognizing volunteers. A supportive and engaging principal who acknowledges the successes of students, athletes, musicians, performers, and other accomplishments of the school community will foster positive parental partnerships, communication and involved parents (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). The ABB working with the DSA should aim to have the principal engage with student-athletes once a quarter through an awards luncheon or other recognition and acknowledge all volunteer efforts by holding a volunteer gathering at the end of each year.

**Recommendation 3:** Increase knowledge of Athletic Boosters through several channels. This overarching communication plan should include the principal (Lumpkin, 2010), coaches and the DSA. Using print and social media to communicate facts about Boosters to clearly articulate why Boosters is important in relation to the lack of school and county support. Although the ABB cannot influence all decisions parents make, providing accurate information on value, outcomes and success may increase parental participation.

Hold quarterly open house for recruitment of volunteers and board members. As mentioned by one mother who recalled a volunteer list with tasks of various time commitments, the board should communicate the tasks needed with clear requirements of time, effort, and skills required. Cole and Kelly (2011) noted that volunteers given choices in tasks may lead to an increase in their desire to engage. This could help parents find volunteer opportunities that fit within their motivational force equation.

Develop an alternative approach for parents who cannot volunteer but would like to continue to support through financial means. Managed appropriately it will avoid issues of equity, fairness, and legal concerns (Atkin & McCardle, 2016). Although there are risks to this idea, creating a patronage system could provide additional funding.

Although not directly related to parental volunteering at athletic boosters, several parents made mention of not understanding the role of the DSA. He is a key node in the coordination of all the stakeholders. Providing parents with a clearer understanding and awareness on the different aspects of DSA *may* increase understanding and purpose to raise levels of engagement.

## **Introduction**

### **John Quincy Adams**

John Quincy Adams (JQA) high school is in northern Virginia. It is one of 24 traditional high schools in the county. There are four additional alternative schools and one governor's high school. JQA is one of the smallest schools in the county with an enrollment of 2,100 students. The student population across the county's high schools range from 1,700 to 2,900 students. JQA has 42 athletic teams and 86 clubs and parent organizations for students and families to participate in and support. All of them require various levels of funding, support from faculty, and parent volunteers.

### **Stakeholders**

The function of the Athletic Booster Club (ABC) is to promote, support, and assist the JQA athletic activities and student athletes by providing advice, volunteer support, and financial assistance to the Director of Student Activities (DSA) and his role as head of the Student Activity Office. The DSA is the school's administrative representative for athletics and other activities. The DSA serves as a non-voting member of the Athletic Booster Board (ABB). His duties include coordinating all athletic schedules including practices, games, team travel, hiring of coaches, and ensuring the safety and well-being of all student athletes. He spends approximately 65 hours per week at school (Dombrowski, 2019). Because the county's funding is limited to paying officials and renting out venues such as golf courses and pool time, the DSA, coaches, teams, and parents rely heavily on the funds raised from the ABC to reduce out-of-pocket parental costs and cover costs of equipment, travel, scholarships, and other needed materials. There are several mandatory funding requirements for ABC. The ABC uses several methods to raise money throughout the year, including membership drives, spiritwear sales,

hosting craft fairs, tag day solicitation, and concessions sales. All of these require support from the DSA, coaches, athletes, and parents. Memberships raise approximately \$16,000. Spiritwear funds primarily benefit students and families who showcase their school colors. The craft fairs, tag day, and concessions raise an average of \$55,000 each year. In addition, teams organize their own fundraising events. All these activities require a significant number of volunteers to successfully achieve results. Table 1 shows the DSA's budget presented to the ABB.

**Table 1**

*DSA Annual Budget With Booster Funding*

<b>Expense by Item</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Turf Field Maintenance	\$2,000.00
Baseball/Softball Field Maintenance	\$15,000.00
Gator/Mower Maintenance	\$2,000.00
Irrigation Repairs	\$1,500.00
Field Paint	\$1,000.00
Weight room maintenance/repair (split)	\$1,000.00
Coaches Shirts	\$1,500.00
HUDL - online video	\$5,000.00
Awards	\$4,000.00
Porta Johns- Toilets	\$3,000.00
Safety Equipment	\$8,000.00
General Equipment- Balls, etc.	\$10,000.00
Uniforms	\$14,000.00
Registration Fees- Tourn, invites	\$7,000.00
Official Fees - School responsibility	\$1,500.00
District Assessment	\$2,000.00
Region Assessment	\$2,000.00
State/Region Travel	\$2,000.00
VHSL Mandatory Meetings	\$750.00
Professional Development	\$750.00
Beautification	\$3,000.00
Coach/Team Requests	\$8,000.00
Subtotal	\$85,000.00
Reimbursed By FCPS for Field maintenance	\$13,000.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$72,000.00</b>
<b>Revenue</b>	
Booster Membership	\$16,000

Booster Turf Field Fund (\$5k/season)	\$15,000
Booster Fund Raiser \$ to DSA	\$29,000
Gate Revenue	\$10,000
Revenue Totals	\$70,000
<b>Remainder</b>	<b>(\$2,000.00)</b>

The ABB is composed of seven parents who volunteer to serve and are elected for a one term, with most returning for a second term. Each board member has child(ren) involved in athletics and have been supporting the teams prior to being elected to the board. Often, a parent is asked to run for the board because of their active involvement (Dombrowski, 2019). The board's gender and racial makeup over the last 8 years is shown in Table 2. In 2016, the ABC was in danger of dissolution due to board apathy and lack of parental support. In 2017, a new ABB board was elected and sought a new way forward with goals to fully support the DSA, coaches, and athletic teams. While successful in achieving many of its goals, the ABB struggled to increase parental volunteer support for many activities.

**Table 2**

*Racial and Gender Makeup of the ABB*

Year	President	VP	Membership	Operations	Communication	Treasurer	Secretary
20	WF	unfilled	WF	unfilled	WF	HF	WF
19	WF	WF	WF	unfilled	WF	HF	WF
18	WF	WF	WF	WF	WF	WM	WF
17	WF	HM	WF	WF	WF	WM	WF
16	WM	HM	WF	WF	WF	WM	WF
15	WM	HM	WF	WF	WF	WM	WF
14	WF	WM	WF	HM	WF	BF	WF
13	WF	WM	WF	HM	WF	BF	WF

*Note.* VP = vice president, WF = White female, WM = White male, HM = Hispanic male, HF = Hispanic female, BF = Black female.

Other parents engage and support the ABC by serving as committee members, volunteering as team parents, driving athletes to events, making dinners, and participating as

spectators and fans at various competitions (Rapp & Duncan, 2012). However, not all parents are present at these events. Others do not respond to requests for support from the ABC, coaches, or other parents.

Coaches engage with student athletes daily—on the field, in the classroom, and as mentors. There are no full-time coaches at JQA. Rather, all coaches are school faculty or employed outside the school and earn a stipend as a coach. They dedicate many hours to their teams. The coaches need the support of the ABC and parents to complete the tasks associated with managing a high school athletic team. Some coaches engage parents directly while others communicate to parents through the athletes or the ABC for the support they need. These tasks include serving as a liaison to other parents, organizing pregame dinners, coordinating parents for other volunteer roles, ordering team spiritwear, or serving as volunteers during competition.

The student athletes are the recipients of this direct support from the DSA, ABC, coaches, and parents. Studies have shown student-athletes perform better academically, have higher graduation rates, drop out less frequently and perform better on standardized assessment tests compared to non-athletes (Lumpkin & Favor, 2013). This is also true of JQA athletes. Students must maintain passing grades to remain eligible for athletics and most coaches require a weekly grade sheet from students. Keeping the athletic program running is beneficial for them and the school community as a whole. Besides participating in their sport, the student athletes are often asked to communicate information to their parents from the coaches, participate in fundraisers, and volunteer for other sports teams' large events, such as tournaments. They often support the local community through various activities such as food drives and park clean ups. Several athletes earn athletic and academic honors throughout the school year.(Dombrowski, 2019).

All of these groups are stakeholders in the process and receive some benefit from parent volunteers' support. By identifying the reasons for non-volunteering and providing recommendations, the DSA and ABB may be able to eliminate some of the obstacles to engagement, potentially increasing parent participation to ultimately benefit the teams and student athletes. The results of this study will help the DSA, coaches, and the ABB create a plan to educate parents, increase engagement, and encourage volunteerism on behalf of students participating in supported activities. The new board takes office in August of 2021 as JQA fully reopens to academics and interscholastic sports post COVID-19.

### **Covid-19 Complications for the ABB**

COVID-19 forced the school system to shut down (including all sports) in March of 2020. The ABB held their last meeting of the school year virtually on May 4th, 2020. Boosters began in September for the 2020-2021 school year with monthly virtual meetings. Their goal was to determine how to continue to support athletics without live sporting events or fundraisers. Sports returned on a limited basis in December 2020 without spectators, concessions, and volunteers. The ABB continued to meet virtually, disseminate information, court potential sponsors, and raise money for their annual scholarships. In March 2021, students returned to the classroom on a voluntary basis and sporting events were allowed with spectators in limited numbers. In June 2021, the new ABB members were elected. The board recognizes the need to reengage the school community and the ABC membership to refocus the ABC mission. There is now a group of parents who have no direct understanding of the role of ABC due to the shutdown of athletics during the pandemic. The new board will adjust to an unfamiliar system this school year as students have the option of in classroom learning or continued virtual learning. Parents will now be faced with a new set of choices. Previously, work demands were the most common factor

limiting parents' ability or desire to volunteer. Now, new priorities, attitudes regarding the value of athletics, and changes in circumstances may further alter parents' decisions to volunteer.

### **Problem of Practice and Purpose**

The purpose of Boosters includes promoting, supporting, encouraging, and advising the DSA through volunteer and financial support (Adams Athletic Boosters, n.d.). Currently, the ABC is falling short of their goals because key board positions remained unfilled, and events were cancelled due to lack of volunteers. Without parent volunteers, fundraisers cannot proceed, fewer scholarships will be offered, and purchasing needed equipment will be delayed. Over 46% of 559 families and 900 student athletes are registered as booster members, but 66% of these are students (i.e., 170 out of 258) members. Less than 5% of members (i.e., 12 out of 258) attend the monthly booster meetings (including the eight board members) and most parents do not volunteer for needed activities (Waterval, 2019). The reasons for lack of parental volunteering, factors influencing their decisions to volunteer or not, and the other choices they make remain unclear. For example, football games require the greatest number of parents to support the concession stand. There were 102 football players on three teams, but only 2% (i.e., 5 out of 32) of football game concession volunteers are parents from the football teams, even as some of these parents may be sitting in the stands watching their student athlete. A few potential explanations for the lack of volunteer participation could be that Friday nights are designated family nights or traffic poses an added challenge in arriving on time for the game. Alternatively, perhaps attending or volunteering would require the parent to arrange for and pay a babysitter.

The goal of this study is to identify the factors that inform parents choices to volunteer or not. Some reasons may include tangible obstacles such as work schedules, balancing of other family activities and transportation needs. Others may be attitudes or beliefs about volunteering

that are psychological in nature. They are based on the weighing of options, availability of other choices, efforts required, and values. Volunteering decisions are not only about the volunteering opportunity; they are always made in a context of other choices, and always as an individual decision process.

## **Literature Review**

Many researchers have explored parental involvement and volunteering. The research identifies who is volunteering, why they volunteer and with what organization. It also details reasons parents choose not to engage with their child's school. When deciding to volunteer, volunteers choose organizations for a myriad of reasons including social engagement, obligation, learning new skills, and contributing to the overall mission of the organization. Volunteers almost always have some personal reason, often empathy, or otherwise aligned beliefs and values with the organization (Stukas, Hoye, Nicholson, Brown, & Aisbett, 2016). While there are many reasons for parents to opt in or out of volunteering at school, several topics are often the focus of the literature: parental engagement (often mothers), involvement in parent led groups (PTA and Boosters), the role of white mothers in leadership, and the motivations to volunteering. Utilizing expectancy theory, and this prior research, the factors associated with the choice to volunteer can be unpacked.

### **Demographic and Cultural Characteristics Predicting Parental Volunteerism**

There is a significant amount of literature on parental engagement in schools. Epstein's (1990) often-cited theory on parent involvement focuses on relationships between parents and the school. These relationships can be arms-length or involve a great deal more engagement with the school. The following Table shows the range of involvement in which parents may engaged (Epstein,1990). Table 3 highlights the actions that take place in these relationships

**Table 3**

*Epstein's Typography of Parent – School Relationships (Yap & Enoki 1994, p.2)*

Parenting Communication	Includes positive home environments to support students Effective methods of two-way communication between school and home to understand student's progress and available programs
Volunteering	Recruit and organize parents for help and support in the classroom and with school activities
Learning at Home	Teachers providing information to help families at home with homework, activities, and other skills
Decision-Making	Including parents in decisions, encouraging leadership, advocacy groups and networks between parents
Community Collaboration	Identify community resources and services to improve school programs, families and students learning

In the United States, mothers are often the primary caregiver and coordinate most all activities related to school from transportation to schedules even when they work outside the home. They manage the educational carryover at home such as reading and helping with homework (Goodall & Montgomery 2013). However, differences in coordination vary by race. In Catsambis and Garland's (1997) longitudinal study of parental involvement of eighth and 12<sup>th</sup> graders, academic expectations, involvement, and supervision remained high for African American and Latino parents but dropped from the higher levels in elementary school for white and Asian parents. Seventy- eight percent of the respondents in this study identified as mothers. In other areas of parental engagement there was wide variation with respect to race. While Catsambis and Garland (1997) noted a drop in white parent engagement in academics, their inquiry and involvement in volunteering increased significantly from eighth grade to high school. The authors hypothesize some of these contradictions may be due to family decisions about sending children to private school and seeking greater independence (Asian) or preparing for colleges by bolstering applications (white).

While parents often attend kindergarten orientation and parent teacher conferences together, educational tasks such joining the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and serving as “room moms” are the domain of mothers. Men make up just ten percent of PTA membership. However, the national PTA created the MORE Alliance (Men Organized to Raise Engagement) to increase the focus of meeting and increase male involvement (Annual Report, 2020). Mothers often form friendships with other mothers who volunteer in the school because of their children’s age and academic grade (Posey-Maddox, 2013). As students move through elementary school, mothers continue to oversee many school related engagements (Simon 2001). A shift begins to occur in parental oversight and involvement as students move out of elementary school.

The purpose of the engagement changes as students move through middle and high school (Halsey, 2005). Both Barge and Loges (2003) and Halsey (2005) investigated various perceptions of parent engagement at school. Both found students, teachers, and parents at the middle school level looked at participation differently. Barge and Loges (2003) focused on students’ responses, with students indicating students still valued and needed help with homework, encouragement, and found it acceptable for their parents to volunteer and attend sporting and other extracurricular activities if the parent was not a source of embarrassment. Halsey (2005) found similarities in parent engagement in extracurricular activities but also found differences in teacher - parent perceptions. Teachers reported parents did not come into the classroom even when an invitation was extended, while parents reported they did not feel welcome. Divergences can be explained by a difference in communication expectations between the teachers, school, and parents. Teachers provided an open-ended invitation, while parents expected a specific invitation with purpose. Institutional contacts include general announcements, newsletters, or calendars informing families of events at school with an open

invitation. While these methods inform, parents do not view these requests as a method to developing strong relationships with the school community or teachers. These are not calls to participate (Halsey 2005).

### **Communication Barriers to Volunteering**

Communication issues add a level of complication with parent involvement as students move into high school. Parent – teacher conferences are no longer required as students move into the later grades, unless there is a significant academic concern. Many parents are not comfortable helping with homework because it may be beyond their understanding (Goodall & Montgomery, 2016). Simon (2001) and Catsambis and Garland (1997) used the same data, the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (Ingels,1990) in their respective studies. Their foci were similar, but Catsambis and Garland (1997) found striking differences in parent involvement by race. Simon found family engagement dropped significantly in high school as students' social networks expand, and while parents become more focused on grades and finances as it relates to attending college. Catsambis and Garland (1997), on the other hand, concluded that parents who were keenly engaged in middle school continued that behavior through high school. Forty-one percent of parents of seniors reported inquiring about volunteering, up from 22% in middle school. The assumption is inquiry into volunteering was focused on college admission preparation. However, the authors found differences in these requests based on race and ethnicity. Table 4 summarizes the findings of school and parent inquiries about volunteering by race from eighth and twelfth grade. The greatest increase by both school and parent is in the white community.

**Table 4**

*Summary of Parent Volunteer Inquiry by School/Parent (NELS:88)*

Race	School Inquiry		Parent Inquiry	
	8th Grade	12th Grade	8th Grade	12th Grade
Asian	31%	50%	18%	33%
Latino	24%	43%	16%	32%
African American	30%	51%	19%	35%
White	36%	59%	24%	43%
All	34%	56%	22%	41%

Epstein (1984), however, contradicted some of these findings in her research from 1984. Several federal policies and programs (Head Start and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act [ESEA]) were put in place to engage parents in school but their efficacy has been questioned. Epstein surveyed nearly 4000 teachers and principals at the elementary school level about involvement and attitudes of parents. The results paint a dismal picture of parental involvement, including providing examples of obstacles to participation. Table 5 is a summary of those findings.

**Table 5**

*Summary of Epstein's (1984) Parental Involvement Findings*

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40% of teachers had a parent in their classroom at some point during each month
70% of parents never helped in the classroom or on a field trip
70% of parents never assisted in school fundraising activities
88% of parents never assisted in the library or cafeteria (common locations help is needed)
40% of the mothers in the sample work full time and cannot participate
4.1 days was the average volunteer rate in a classroom

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A significant outcome of parental involvement from elementary school through high school are connections and friendships formed between parents as they spend time in classrooms, at fundraisers, and on the sidelines of sporting events or in the auditoriums for concerts and

performances with other parents. Some of these relationships and friendships change as children begin to explore their own interests in and out of school. However, the nexus of these relationships and parent engagement is still the school community, the teachers, and the principal. These relationships create a strong informal network of information and communication from parents that they do not receive from the school or the teachers. However, the network is not inclusive (Vincent 2010). The variations between school levels and volunteering and various demographic groups and volunteering make understanding these parent-school relationships difficult to understand. It is clear, however, that the school community and in particular the principal have a responsibility to provide open communication and information for all parents regardless of their level of involvement at school (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014).

### **Parent Led Organizations and Principal Relationships**

Study after study stresses the importance of parental involvement and good relationships between parents and the school to improve the success of students (Epstein, 1995; Rapp & Duncan, 2012). Definitions of appropriate engagement, involvement, and volunteering have been inconsistent across literature. Goodall and Montgomery (2016) defined involvement as simply taking part in or attending an event or activity. Involvement is passive, whereas engagement includes a sense of commitment, belonging, and actively participating in the event. Wegmann and Bowen (2010) further extended the understanding of commitment as demanding that schools value social and cultural capital of all families in relationship with the school, particularly on behalf of the principal. Finally, Barr and Saltmarsh (2014) reported on the key connections that principals must have with parents and parent led groups. The principal establishes the atmosphere of the school for teachers, students, and parents and is key to their engagement.

Principals need to engage parents by making them feel welcome, supported and creating a partnership in terms of benefits for all students. When parents form organizations within the school, both the organization and the principal must effectively engage in this relationship and the potential benefits. Principals need to actively acknowledge parents' efforts and recognize their attitudes toward parents can contribute to feelings of trust, inclusion and equity or intimidation and exclusion and power imbalance (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014).

### **Parental Volunteering to Benefit Children**

As school budgets shrink and additional academic requirements are added, many schools do not have a dedicated budget for extracurricular activities. Funding for these comes from relationships with outside organizations for activities such as drama, band, debate, or forensics. PTAs raise funds to support teachers' continuing education requirements and unmet resources for the classroom. Band, music, and athletics are required to raise funds to supplement the limited budgets of DSAs and these fundraisers take time and energy. Booster clubs are formed to assist with these efforts (Vincent, 2010). While many parents utilize these organizations to strengthen their collective involvement others use them to gain advantage for their own child (Lareau & Munoz, 2012). Several researchers (Vincent, 2010; Lareau & Munoz, 2011; Posey-Maddox, 2013) all acknowledged the engagement of parent led groups can be complicated and often political.

Vincent (2010) analyzed characteristics of two parent-led forums in secondary schools. She specifically examined the makeup and motivations of the attendees. Her findings showed the groups were homogenous, made up mostly of white mothers, many of whom had established friendships with fellow mothers outside of the organization. The majority admitted to using their position to obtain insider information and gain access to staff. However, they also expressed true

enjoyment of spending time with their children and participating in something important with a sense of satisfaction. Several parents expressed a belief that these are the expectations of a parent—“something you do.” Additionally, Posey-Maddox (2013) obtained similar results in a case study on parental engagement in a city school. Her findings, along with many others, highlighted most parents in leadership positions are middle- or upper middle-class parents who, along with their skills, resources, and motivations, also bring conflict in the form of entitlement, race, class, and professionalizing what was once a group of volunteer mothers running bake sales and book fairs. Their structure and influence have been shown to engender inequity (Posey-Maddox, 2013).

### **Racial and Gender Disparity**

Parent networks differ by gender and race. Fathers tend to engage with their child’s school as the child moves into high school if there is a mutual interest in an activity, but most of the parental involvement in the United States is still the domain of mothers (Posey-Maddox, 2013). As mentioned earlier, Catsambis and Garland (1997) along with Doucet (2011) explore cultural dimensions to the different ways parents engage with schools. Like Goodall and Montgomery (2016), and Wegmann and Bowen (2010), Doucet (2011) suggests that definitions of involvement are exclusionary and do not have as great an effect on student success and outcomes as they might because the definition of involvement is narrow and does not consider the ways marginalized families, single parents, fathers, and co-parents define and act in school engagement. Doucet (2011, p. 407) describes how some parents can be characterized through cultural discrimination:

*Parent involvement is even more problematic when examining mainstream rhetoric about the kinds of parents who are “not involved,” particularly around working-class and poor women, women of color, from characterizing them as apathetic and absent to pushy and overbearing.*

Several researchers have explored the phenomenon of white upper middle-class mothers as highly engaged in and controlling over their children's school life. They are argued to choose their children's classes, make their voices heard, have extensive socioeconomic resources, work schedule flexibility, and usually a greater level of education. They are much more visible in the school. This does not mean families of color do not engage and support their children's school; rather, they participate differently. Sheldon (2002) argued many mothers of color are single or work jobs that do not allow them the flexibility to attend their child's school. He also added many parents of color feel unwelcome in parent-led organizations. Many working class and single parents do not have the time and daycare resources to attend evening events. One of the biggest cultural differences McGrath and Kuriloff (1999) noted is how Latino parents focus on the home family time and activities such as reading and doing homework. African American parents place a greater emphasis on extended families, church, and their community. One African American mother talked about the need for White mothers to have a community at school (McGrath & Kuriloff, 1999, p. 615):

*We have a life and community and family outside of school and I don't depend on the school for community or for friendship for myself. I have a different community. A lot of people are here without relatives and a lot don't go to church, so the school is the place where they are connected with other adults. I have enough outside of school.*

White mothers may not intend to exclude other parents but are frequently described as intimidating. These parents use their social networks to access information and gather other like-minded mothers toward the same cause (Posey-Maddox, 2013; Rapp & Duncan, 2012), whereas parents without the advantage of social networks rely on information the school chooses to share or that they receive from their children (Sheldon, 2002). McGrath and Kuriloff's (1999)

observations and interviews of parents at a suburban school district noted extremely involved white mothers acted to exclude mothers of other racial groups by forming cliques. This creates friction when these parents are together. Sheldon (2002) noted white mothers seemed oblivious to how their comments were exclusionary. Ironically, white mothers also expressed frustration about not having enough volunteers and trying to get more parents involved, yet as one African American mother new to a meeting noted (McGrath & Kuriloff 1999, p. 614),

*You all carry on your meetings as if you all know what you're talking about, and I don't know.*

### **Volunteerism and Motivation**

Parents act in various capacities for the benefit of their children. The reasons to volunteer are subjective, individualistic, and diverse. Parents have a limited amount of free time to choose how to use it. Lack of visible engagement does not necessarily equate to lack of desire for volunteering (Goodall & Montgomery, 2016). Parents make choices based on family values, educational goals, and their core identities. Not all parents have this same capacity and many reasons to contribute to different levels of volunteering (Goodall & Montgomery, 2016; Sheldon, 2002; Vincent, 2010).

Smith's (1994) 27-year review of the literature attempts to categorize parents' reasons for volunteering. These included the setting of the organization, education level, attitude, and personality of the volunteer, and being asked. The overall findings are consistent across many studies, indicating married mothers from higher socioeconomic status backgrounds are the most engaged. Another factor Smith identified as predicting volunteerism is the efficiency and effectiveness of the volunteer organization as essential to retaining and recruiting new volunteers. Altruism is often a reason attributed to the decision to volunteer, but multiple studies

point to a wide range of motives and values for determining why a parent engages in volunteering. In interviews of hundreds of volunteers, a number of researchers found several similarities for why people volunteer (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008; Stukas et al., 2016; Stukas et al., 2009). Like Smith (1994) and others, Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) find motives are variable and change over time. Volunteers who stay with organizations for a long time undergo a transition in socialization, sense making, and commitment. Stukas et al. (2016) and Stukas et al. (2009) specifically referenced parents involved at the school level and identified sense making and mattering, social connections and social capital, and community and specific activities that allow them to fulfill their individual motivations as reasons they actively engaged in volunteering.

Related to their motivations for volunteering is the perception of how the organization leads and carries out its duties. Boezeman and Ellemers (2008) discussed attraction to the organization itself as a key factor predicting volunteerism. These volunteers see membership in organizations as part of their identity. They want the organization to be valued and have meaning to them and be seen as a source of pride. In their studies, Boezemann and Ellemers (2008), consistently found organizational leadership that developed pride, improved effectiveness, and increased communication would then recruit new volunteers through their current volunteers. The social network also is important in keeping and recruiting volunteers. Values consistently come up as a primary reason to volunteer but its definition is unique to each volunteer. Connection to the values of the organization increases loyalty, helps volunteers engage in a specific setting or context, and provides purpose to their volunteering (Alfes et al., 2017). Volunteer board leadership can improve all these factors with a strong communication plan, annual assessments of perceptions of the work of the organization from all stakeholders, having

clear agendas and objectives, providing training, being inclusive, and recognizing the efforts of the volunteers (De Clerck et al., 2021).

Together, these studies on parental engagement reveal interesting patterns of involvement that include parent perceptions of opportunity and need, norms and attitudes related to volunteering, who volunteers, and perceptions about the value of volunteering. These factors align with one of the foundational approaches to understanding motivation—expectancy theory.

### **Expectancy Theory**

Motivation is the desire, willingness, and reason to engage in a behavior. Understanding why and what motivates parents to volunteer in schools or in their child's activity is important to recruitment of volunteers (Mannino et al. 2001) In the numerous studies of motivation to volunteer choice is most often mentioned. Choosing between options is fluid and affected by beliefs and the relative benefits of the outcome of the individual decision. The reasons behind the choice are described as valence and can be explained by attitudes, desires, incentives, and preferences (Vroom 1995). Each of the previous studies related to volunteering and the factors to choose or decline are contingent upon individual beliefs and attitudes about the opportunities presented and the resources available. Each parent must also believe they have the ability or will to pursue a positive outcome. Parents must also believe that their actions will be effective and benefit the school and their children. Finally, to initiate the choice based on all alternatives present, the parent must believe what they do matters. To understand the process of why parents, choose to or not volunteer, an exploration of a conceptual framework involving expectancy theory is needed.

## Conceptual Framework

Expectancy theory was developed by Victor Vroom in 1964 based on research examining motivation involving work and leadership (Vroom, 1964). Various researchers have applied this theory of motivation to students' academic success, athletic performance, police officers writing tickets and even the use of library services. Unlike linear models, expectancy theory is based on the momentary choices made between alternatives. It is a process based on choices that are influenced by beliefs and attitudes regarding the outcome of the choice. While other researchers have adopted the theory in an additive equation involving the elements of the theory—expectancy, instrumentality and valence, Vroom's original theory was expressed as a multiplicative equation:

$$\textit{Motivational Force (MF) = Expectancy x Instrumentality x Valence}$$

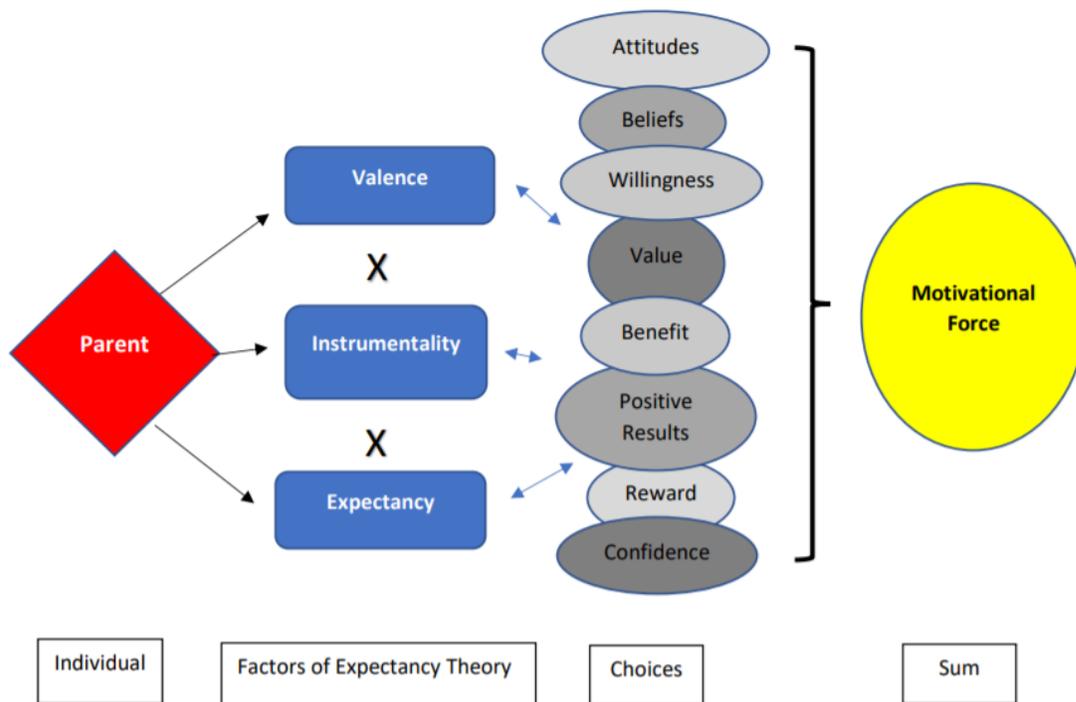
Expectancy is the first element of the theory and consists of choices between alternatives and the belief that that the chosen alternative will result in a positive outcome. It is defined by strength of belief that effort will lead to a result. The greater the expectancy, the greater the belief that effort or a particular choice will lead to an outcome. In the case of volunteering, the volunteer understands what is expected and sees no impediments to volunteering.

Instrumentality is the confidence of a reward or benefit that will follow from effort. The outcome does not have to be tangible, and may include social approval, friendships, and a range of consequences to performance. When weighing expectancy beliefs, the volunteer will consider instrumentality as part of the decision process as well.

Valence is the final element of the theory and is the value or importance an individual assigns to the range of outcomes that result from the behavior or choice.. These values are often affective and will vary considerable between individuals.

Although represented in an equation, the three elements all intersect in a complex fashion. Still, they provide sensitizing constructs when investigating motivation to volunteer. Figure 1 below illustrates the individual nature of the process of expectancy theory, suggesting some of the possible alternatives influencing a parent’s decision to volunteer.

Figure 1: Parental Volunteering Decision Conceptualization



## **Research Questions**

The research questions were created based on the literature review with focus on parental involvement with schools using expectancy theory as a foundation to understand parents' motivations for volunteering. Volunteers' decisions to act or engage is based on actions are based on choices between alternatives and that alternatives will result in a positive outcome. The stronger the belief in the outcome, the more likely the parent will engage in volunteering. Along with the belief in the strength of the outcome is the belief in a benefit or reward. For parents deciding to volunteer or not they weigh the effort of the action or behavior and its value. The following research questions guide this capstone and focus on parents' perceptions and level of involvement with JQA's ABC

**Research Question 1:** What are parents of athletes' perceptions and understanding of the JQA's ABC and its role in supporting student athletes?

- **Research Question 1a:** Do parents understand what is required of them?
- **Research Question 1b:** What impediments do they perceive as preventing them from engaging in volunteer work?

**Research Question 1c:** What demographic factors are associated with participation?

**Research Question 2:** What do parents see as the outcomes (to the school, to athletics, and to their children's' experience) associated with volunteering?

**Research Question 3:** How much do parents value volunteering (to the school, to athletics, and to their children's' experience)?

**Research Question 4:** Are the evaluations of these factors similar or different in other extra-curricular areas requiring volunteer support at the school?

**Research Question 5:** What tools and strategies could the Director of Student Activities

(DSA) and Athletic Booster Board (ABB) employ to increase active engagement for parents and guardians in Athletic Booster Club (ABC)?

### **Project Design**

A mixed methods study using quantitative and qualitative methods in data collection addressed the various research questions. The project was completed in four phases. Each phase informed the next phase and served as the basis for answering the research questions. The 2018-2019 school year data was used because the 2019-2020 athletic season was cut short due to COVID-19. A limitation of this approach was that parents were not actively engaged in the ABC and their memories of their experiences may have degraded.

#### **Phase 1: Sample and Recruitment**

In August 2020, the DSA provided me with an anonymized roster of demographic data of all athletes, including race, gender, and sport for the school year 2018-2019. This was compared with data from Fairfax County and then with data from those who completed the questionnaire and interviews to examine for any significant differences in the groups who responded.

#### **Phase 2: Questionnaire**

For Phase 2, the ABB was asked for a list of every possible volunteer or engagement opportunity the Boosters offered the parents during the school year. These were collected from SignUpGenius™ rosters and Excel spreadsheets. The highest score a participant could obtain if they volunteered for multiple opportunities was 203.5 (see Appendix A). The questionnaire was available in English, Arabic, and Spanish to accommodate the languages parents at the school most commonly spoke. The questionnaire was sent by the DSA with a cover letter from me to

559 parents of the 909 student athletes in September of 2020. Every student athlete–parent couple was given a unique identifier code as part of the questionnaire to maintain anonymity. The DSA sent out the questionnaire five times over the course of three months. Those who responded did not receive another request. A notice was also posted in the weekly booster newsletter to remind participants. An incentive (i.e., \$5 coupon code) to use in the booster store was offered to each parent who completed the questionnaire. Out of 559 parents, 89 questionnaires were returned. Six were discarded because they were incomplete or lacked the code identifier, resulting in 83 completed questionnaires and a usable return rate of 15%. For the 83 parents who completed the questionnaire, results ranged from 1-103 ( $M = 16.37$ ) of the possible 203.5 points. Other results from the data show 56% (47/83) of families purchased a booster pass, 41% (34/83) supported the largest fund raiser of the year Tag Day), and 63% (52/83) worked at least one shift in concessions.

### **Phase 3: Interviews With Parents of Athletes**

Phase 3 of data collection was qualitative in nature, using semi structured interviews with those parents who completed the initial questionnaire (see Appendix B). The DSA sent invitations for interviews to the 83 respondents beginning in December 2020 with a cover letter of explanation from me. At this time, parents responded directly to the me, unmasking their identity. However, the DSA was unaware of who was interviewed to address parents' concerns about potential ramifications for their student athletes from coaches or the DSA based on their responses. Each participant was read an explanation of the study and a consent form. Verbal agreement was confirmed on ZOOM and in the transcript. The first few questions were introductory in nature to allow us a chance to become comfortable. Next were questions relating to the personal value of the ABC. This was followed by questions pertaining to understanding

and purpose of Boosters. Then questions on engagement, relationships of race and leadership for ABB and the school administration. Finally, subjects were given the opportunity to provide recommendations for improvement and change. Interview times ranged from 36–68 min.

Interviews took place in February 2021. Interviews consisted of eight parents of student athletes.

All parents were mothers and three were ABB members. Six mothers, including the three board members, were white. One mother answered her interview questions based on having two student athletes, a son, and a daughter, simultaneously involved in sports. Two mothers were Asian. Their questionnaire scores ranged from 7 to 103 ( $M = 40.25$ ,  $SD = 28.28$ ). Table 6 outlines demographic and sports-related data of the eight parents interviewed. Table 6 is a summary of these parents' demographic information

**Table 6**

*Demographics of Student Athlete Parent Interviewees*

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>AA*</b>	<b>BB</b>	<b>CC</b>	<b>DD</b>	<b>EE*</b>	<b>FF**</b>	<b>FF</b>	<b>HH*</b>	<b>II</b>
Race	White	White	White	White	White	Asian	Asian	White	Asian
Athlete's Gender	F	F	M	M	M	F	M	M	M
Sport 1	Field Hockey	Softball	Baseball	Football	Baseball	Volleyball	Tennis	Football	Track
Sport 2	Softball	Swim	Football	Lacrosse	Swim		Track	Lacrosse	Indoor Track
Sport 3				Wrestling					
Questionnaire Score	103	14	40.5	7	43.5	15	15	46.5	37.5

\*ABB parent \*\*FF is one parent with 2 students in sports simultaneously

**Phase 4: Interviews With Band, Drama, and PTSA Board Members**

For the final phase of data collection addressing Research Question 4, which sought to determine if the expectancies in other parent-involvement organizations were different from ABC, I reached out to the boards of Band, Drama and PTSA and requested an interview with a board member from each club. Similar questions were asked and expanded on regarding parent engagement and volunteering. (See Appendix C). They were interviewed via ZOOM, and each

lasted approximately one hour. All were conducted in March of 2021. Table 7 summarizes demographic data of the interviewed board members.

**Table 7**

*Interviewed Board Members Demographic Data*

Interviewee	ZZ	YY	XX
Race	Hispanic	White	Black
Student's Gender	Male	Female	Male
Parent's Gender	Male	Female	Female
Organization	Band	Drama	PTSA

### Data Analysis

#### Quantitative Results

For the demographic data and questionnaire results, descriptive data were collated and reviewed. The racial composition of JQA's athletic population and student body were similar. However, JQA's student body was much more racially diverse than the county. It is unclear why female athletes were significantly underrepresented in the questionnaire results. Table 8 and Figure 2 show demographic comparisons. White students composed the largest response rate for the questionnaire. White students are over 64% of all students enrolled in Fairfax County schools, however they only make up 25% of the school enrollment at JQA and represented 33% of all respondents to the questionnaire. Hispanic and Black students are represented in greater numbers at JQA than the county. Their response rate was almost equal but Hispanic students compose greater than one third of the student body at JQA. Asian students were underrepresented in the questionnaire as well as the student body relative to the county and the response rate of student athletes of two or more races was significantly greater than their representation at JQA.

Table 8: *Demographic Comparisons of Responses Between Survey Athletes, JQA and Fairfax**County Student Body*

Race	Responses	% Responses	% JQA	% County	M	SD
White	<b>27</b>	<b>32.9</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>64.7</b>	<b>40.87</b>	<b>21.01</b>
Hispanic/Latino	<b>19</b>	<b>23.3</b>	<b>35.4</b>	<b>16.5</b>	<b>25.07</b>	<b>9.57</b>
Black	<b>18</b>	<b>22.3</b>	<b>19.8</b>	<b>10.6</b>	<b>17.57</b>	<b>6.16</b>
American Indian /Alaska Native	<b>1</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>0.37</b>	<b>0.15</b>
Asian	<b>8</b>	<b>10.7</b>	<b>13.9</b>	<b>20.1</b>	<b>14.90</b>	<b>4.78</b>
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	<b>2</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>0.27</b>	<b>0.15</b>
Two or More Races	<b>8</b>	<b>10.1</b>	<b>5.2</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>6.40</b>	<b>3.27</b>

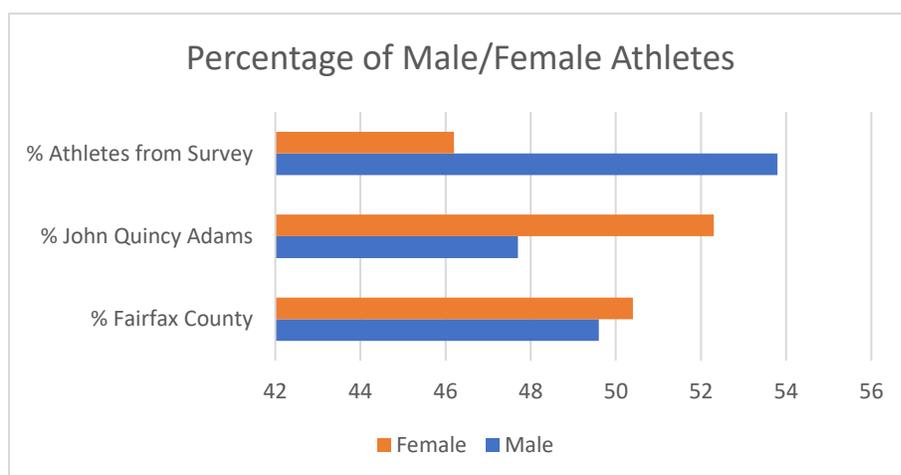
**Figure 2***Gender Comparisons Between JQA, Survey Athletes, and Fairfax County Study Body*

Table 9 displays the differences in Booster Activity by Race. The information is shown with all respondents and then the four ABB members were removed to determine if race was still a factor in level of involvement. Parents of white athletes are overwhelming more involved than any other racial group especially when the four ABB are included in the scores. When the ABB members scores were removed variance was much lower. Parents of Black athletes are the least involved, which correlates with literature about Black parents not feeling welcome.

*Table 9: Racial Comparisons of Booster Club Involvement Scores*

Race	<i>All Respondents to Questionnaire</i>			<i>Without 3 White ABB Members</i>		
	Number	Mean	STDEV	Number	Mean	STDEV
White	27	23.95	20.18	24	17.65	9.45
Hispanic	19	15.84	12.62			
Black	18	10.58	7.53			
Two or More	8	11.63	9.13			
Asian	8	15.5	8.75			
Native /Hawaiian	2	6.5	*			
Am Indian /Alaska	1	20	*			

## **Qualitative Results**

Most of the research question results were found in the interview data with parents. In preparation for coding and analyzing data I considered several key points related to my topic. I consciously attempted to be aware of bracketing my own biases and positions and to be reflexive since I have been immersed in the ABB for eight years. Using the expectancy theory elements of expectancy, instrumentality, and valence as a sensitizing concept, I was able to delve into the

psychological process of each respondent through their expressed attitudes and responses to understand their choices regarding volunteering for the ABC.

### **Coding and Themes**

Coding of the interview data began with the sensitizing concepts of expectancy theory: expectancy, instrumentality, and valence. Each transcription was analyzed for statements regarding behaviors and attitudes, outcomes, and values expressed in relation to outcomes. One of the board members (HH) described both her attitude and behavior when she was asked to become a Booster Board member:

Let me go back to when I was first asked and let me tell you the hook of my heavy involvement, I was working side by side in a concession stand with a good friend, Frankie. And he's acknowledged all of my years and knew that I was stepping away, from my involvement in all night grad party. He said, "I'm going to ask anyways." And I turned to him and said yes. And he was floored because he knew I had my volunteer hours in a different place. And I was ready. I was ready to just take on a different role. - HH

One of the challenges in categorizing the statements was separating instrumentality and valence. Often a statement contained both comments about outcomes and the value associated with the outcome:

C built this coalition of people who I knew and made it fun and made it inclusive. The guy before, he was not inclusive at all, he really didn't have a voice whereas Christina made it fun and even the coaches got into the act and said, "Become part of our booster team. It's really important to the high school and the teams and it's really important to raise money." I was all in. I'm a mission person. I'm a social worker. So, I'm a mission-oriented person and the whole mission of doing something for the school. And that appealed to me. - CC

Her comments focus on the positive outcomes of coalitions, fun and inclusion while sharing her values of being a mission-oriented person and being able to do something for the school

I asked all the interviewees about the literature of white mother dominance in parent led groups.

I was particularly interested in the response of the one Black parent in my sample group. She was the president of PTSA.

I can't say I'm real surprised. I mean, I guess when you look at this country, when you look at TV... it is disheartening. And I don't know if it's because it was perceived that maybe they have the time, they're homemakers or they're not working so they have the time. So. When I think about the PTA meetings or who's involved, majority of the time, they are women. Maybe for Blacks or maybe looking at single family, there's only the mom that's there. So, is she going to have time to work and then go do everything? Is it a cultural thing? I just don't know. - XX

I repeated this process with each interview transcript looking for examples and demonstrations of expectancy, instrumentality, and valence. As I reviewed each factor related to expectancy theory I found specific themes about volunteering. Some referred to the positive nature, others communicated the frustrations and challenges with volunteering and embedded in these statements were concerns about communication, volunteering, equity, white mothers,

I then developed codes that fit these respective concepts based on the excerpts of interviews. Table 10 below lists the sensitizing concepts of expectancy theory and the codes generated from the data and the number of interviews who mentioned them. Ultimately I generated six key themes about volunteering: communication, purpose and understanding, social acceptance, parent led groups, obstacles, and recommendations.

Table 10: Sensitizing Concepts/Codes

SENSITIZING CONCEPTS/CODES	PARTICIPANTS REFERENCING
<b>Expectancy (Behaviors &amp; Attitudes)</b>	
Being Asked	6
Information Sharing	8
Inclusion	4
Concession Stand	7
Volunteering	8
Principal Relationship	5
Communication	11
Racial Overtones	5
White Mothers	7
Choices/Options	8
<b>Instrumentality (Outcomes)</b>	
Raising Money	8
Benefit for School	6
Benefit for Student Athlete	8
Skills	3
Mission	
Friendships	4
Time	7
Work	6
<b>Valance (Values about Outcomes)</b>	
Present for Athlete	4
Coaches Appreciation	5
Stakeholders	4
Meaningfulness	5
Community	2
ABB	8
Drama, Band, PTSA	4
Individualized	5
<b>Understanding</b>	<b>6</b>

### Project Limitations

Three significant limitations were identified in this study: non-response bias, small sample size and researcher limitations. Due to COVID-19, the parent response group for the questionnaire was from the previous school year. Their interest may have waned, and many parents were overwhelmed with other issues during the quarantine. Some no longer had students at JQA high school. The only responses received were from parents who had a level of engagement and knowledge of ABC. No responses were received from noninvolved parents, so

drawing conclusions on why parents do not volunteer quite limiting. Additionally, the sample size was small. Of all parents of athletes, 15% responded to the initial questionnaire and only 1% of that 15% agreed to an interview. Three of those interviewed were ABB members with high questionnaire scores and a confirmed interest in the organization. This voluntary response and low numbers threaten external validity and is not representative of all parents of high school athletes at JQA high school. Although consciously aware of confirmation bias I was one of the most involved white mothers on the ABB for eight years. Despite efforts to the contrary this may have influenced the interviews, findings, and recommendations as I was the only researcher reviewing transcripts. Bias may have occurred, especially in the coding of the interviews.

### **Key Considerations within the Conceptual Framework Findings**

After reviewing all the data, questionnaire results and interviews, the following key findings are addressed using the conceptual framework. Although Vroom (1964) represents expectancy theory as a multiplicative model, it is a within-person process involving the psychology of choices and alternatives. The variables of expectancy, instrumentality and valence can fluctuate but if any one of them is low then the motivational force is low, and the outcome may not be believed by an individual to worth the effort or even possible.

### **Research Question Findings**

After reviewing the demographic data, questionnaire results, and interviews, I found the following key results that I will interpret through the lens of my conceptual framework.

**Research Question 1a:** What are parents of athletes' perceptions of and understanding of the John Quincy Adams Athletic Booster Club and its role in support of student athletes?

There are differences in understanding the purpose of the ABC between board members and all other ABC members and within club members. The board members scored significantly

higher on the involvement questionnaire and are more informed about the requirements and needs. For the other club members their scores ranged from seven- 40.5. Their understanding varies. Some have engaged minimally for various reasons; they do not see Boosters as a requirement, some simply cannot perform tasks such as working in concessions and others do not have the time due to work or choose to spend their time in other ways. Here are excerpts of parents with various levels of understanding and their choices about engaging:

*...most I know about Boosters is the raising of money and the giving of money to the team, and the kids buying the little passes so that they can get to the games. -BB*

*Things have just slipped. It's odd. Life is surprising. I was the primary caretaker when they were younger and now it shifted where he's managing them more than I am. But yeah, we are so busy. I doubt that we could sustain volunteering in person. Like honestly, the best thing from this pandemic is that I'm able to watch the kids from my computer while I'm multitasking doing other things. Right? My daughter is on volleyball. My son is at track at the same time, I've got two screens up. I'm watching them and I'm washing dishes. I mean this is like an unexpected perk. I hope we continue this after everyone gets vaccinated. - FF*

*the communication I think is key. I always wonder how we can get to maybe the non-English speaking community. I think we're starting to make some progress. To make sure, again, there is not an accessibility, access barrier. Making sure that everybody knows that they are welcome. They have something to contribute. HH*

*I know that they supported me. And the other thing, if I was in a play or if I did play sports, so they were at every game. So, they always supported me in what I was involved in. So, I think part of it is how you grow up, maybe your personality, having, I guess, some knowledge of it. XX*

**Research Question 1b:** What are the perceived impediments to engaging in the behaviors being asked of them?

Expectancy is the strength of choice to attempt or engage in the behavior. If the volunteer is ambivalent about the task, their strength is neutral, and they will choose to not engage in that particular behavior. Understanding the benefits of volunteering are not clear to parents.

Communication was cited by every interviewed parent as an impediment to engaging either due to lack of communication or miscommunication coming from various sources. Several parents reported they were never asked to volunteer, even though coaches are told that is one of their expectations as a coach to engage parents (Dombrowski, 2019).

Work was noted as the number one obstacle to volunteering by all interviewed parents regardless of their level of involvement. The ABC has not tried to offer other volunteer opportunities at times that are outside of work. Rapp and Duncan (2012) remind us to be specific in invitations to parents, know their strengths and skills to best utilize them and to ensure parental organization understand the differences in minority and nontraditional families.

I know it's hard, but maybe have them on the weekend, like on a Saturday or something, when maybe we have a little more free time and it's not the end of the workday when we're already tired and ready to just like, I don't need to go anywhere else. - BB

**Research Question 1c:** Are there demographic factors that are associated with participation?

Although the sample size was small there are some noted demographic differences associated with ABC participation and volunteering. SES and gender were not factors in participation in this sample group. However, Parents of white athletes are overwhelming more involved than any other racial group especially when the three ABB mothers are included in the scores. When their scores were removed variance dropped but parents of Black athletes are the least involved, which correlates with literature about Black parents not feeling welcome. (See Table 9). McGrath and Kuriloff (1999) note the actions of white mothers often exclude African American mothers through cliques, although, not always intentional. Interviewees expressed empathy about how a Black mother might feel about joining a group that is made up of all white

women. The PTSA president, a Black woman admitted to understanding how other parents could feel intimidated by the ABB board.

But I do feel like the diversity and ethnic cultures have something to do with that feeling of intimidation, of seeing all these white people at the tops of these... I mean, it's interesting. I would go to the Fire Marshal meetings where all the high schools would send their All-Night Grad Party parents, and they were all Caucasian, all of them. So, I think that is intimidating for people, but how do you make it not intimidating? – CC

And then I guess for me, because I had black boys, it's different. I feel like I don't want people to jump to conclusions about them, so I felt I had to be involved. They need to know that yes, they do have parents at home that care, that are involved. And then when you look at any other races, do they even understand what it is, what they should be doing, what they could do? It is intimidating. - XX

**Research Question 2:** What do parents see as the outcomes (to the school, to athletics, and to their children's' experience) associated with volunteering?

Instrumentality is the parents' perception that based on their decision to volunteer, those behaviors will result in good things. In the case of JQA parents these may be for their own benefit such as friendships or benefits to the school such as raising funds for the scholarships or needed equipment that will benefit their children. (Grant and Shin 2011). These comments exemplify the value these parents feel about the outcomes as well.

*I enjoyed that because I enjoy having the camaraderie. When we're doing an event, I like to be involved with people who are reliable, and fun, and get things done. That's not to say, "Oh, I wouldn't join, or I wouldn't participate if I didn't have any friends doing it." It just was a bonus that my friends were involved. I think that was a bonus. -BB*

*It was important for me to know because the budgets and things were so small from the county, it was critical that we raise the money to help support all the teams. One reason why I wanted to get involved in basically make sure that everybody was represented, not just specific teams. You hear things like, "Oh, everything is going towards football." You hear this stuff when you're not necessarily involved. -CC*

**Research Question 3:** How much do parents value volunteering (to the school, to athletics, and to their children's' experience)?

Valence is defined as the preferences and desires of the individual volunteer based on the possible outcomes (Grant and Shin 2011). Parents used terms such as meaningfulness, improving the community, being there for their athlete, improving the sports teams and creating equity with other schools and programs in the county. The responses to this question were again variable and ranged from indifference to a strong desire to pursue volunteering for the benefit of the school, athletics, and their student-athlete. This from a mother with a strong desire to pursue volunteering:

*Having daughters that played sports at the high school level, I was committed as a parent, as a support in terms of watching and attending their events. You start to get to know other parents who are involved with Boosters, and through their activities and through what the teams participated in that were booster-sponsored events, and friends that I've gotten to know drew me in and got me more involved initially. Then the love of it just kept me going. - AA*

Other parents do not see the value in volunteering because there is no clear benefit to them or the school.

*I get an email sent to 50 people gets asking for help with concessions on Friday, what does that do for me? Cooking hotdogs and serving pizza? No thanks- EE*

Still others see an easier alternative in donating money:

*So, whenever we can, we support through donations. That's probably the easiest way for us to volunteer at this point. to me, it's better than nothing. And I'm happy to support in that way since I can't volunteer and be there and be engaged and meet the other parents and all that social aspect.. But if I can't do that, then I'm more than happy to support financially if I can. So yeah, that's pretty much my take. -FF*

**Research Question 4:** Are the evaluations of these factors similar or different in other extra-curricular areas requiring volunteer support at the school?

Although only a single board member from Band, Drama and PTSA was interviewed the responses were quite like those of the ABC parents. When comparing Athletics to Band, Drama and PTSA, no differences were discovered in interviews. Work was again recorded as the number one issue in being able to volunteer. All three spoke of the lack of budget support from the county or school. There is no direct funding from the school for these activities. Band has a large fund raiser in the fall with door-to-door solicitations. Drama sold concessions at their performances, requested volunteers from the parents to build sets, make costumes and feed performers before and after events. Drama's ticket sale money goes back to the school not the drama club and the PTSA raises scholarship funds by partnering in events such as basket bingo with athletic boosters.

Ultimately you want to raise money to give scholarships. To make things better for the school where the teachers and the students and the parents, I think it's getting the word out or people knowing, just being knowledgeable, or the communication about what's happening at the school or what opportunities there are for the kids or maybe what the teachers need. So, I think it's because the PTA gives you an overview of what's happening in the school or with Fairfax County or in the community. And this gives them information about what's out there for your child. But fundraising is out there because you do want to give scholarships. - XX

The Drama president in saying yes to taking over did not realize how little money and support existed for the club:

I ran the Drama Boosters for three years. I had said yes to run the Boosters, thinking I was going to be with the existing Drama teacher. She wound up leaving and I inherited an organization that had very, very little volunteer support, very, very little financial support. There were very few volunteers. There were never any meetings. There was never any information coming from the Boosters. – YY

The Band Boosters lead reaffirmed what ABC parents said about students not wanting their parents around to watch:

And a lot of it is the kids. Quite frankly, I don't know about Spencer, but I know mine wasn't really all that happy that I was showing up all the time. Especially for field trips when I might chaperone. The band every year had a big trip and it always wound up being overnight and kids are different when they're around their friends and around their parents. And a lot of them don't want their parents around and I think that's a lot of reason why they don't know what's going on. they don't know that there is a need for help because somebody else's parent is going to have to do it because mine's not showing up at school. - ZZ

**Research Question 5:** What tools and strategies could the Director of Student Activities (DSA) and Athletic Booster Board (ABB) employ to increase active engagement for parents in Athletic Booster Club (ABC)?

One of the challenges of utilizing expectancy theory to changing organizational practices is that it is an intra-individual theory of motivation. A "one size" solution will not work for everyone because of the subjective nature of assessments of each part of the theory. But because attitudes can be used to assess the volunteer's decisions on behaviors and expectancy, developing tools and information to educate parents to possibly change their attitudes towards volunteering could increase their active engagement. Boezeman and Ellemers (2008) recommend several actions to increase volunteerism in organizations. Recognizing them for their actions and motivation can draw others to the organization. Research shows that many volunteers enter organization as volunteers through their social network. The data in this study often revealed the social aspect of volunteering and the friendship brought forward from earlier years as parents of school children.

Motivation force is the sum of expectancy theory variables, however, because each decision is unique to each person their ability to choose what they do as a volunteer may increase their desire to engage (Cole and Kelly, 2011). This was mentioned by one mother who

remembered a task list from elementary school with clear requirements of the time, effort and skills needed to complete the task:

*Francis Elementary School was really good about doing these fundraisers on pizza nights. And they were really on top of it, we're going to be building something for the gym, the wall thing for them to climb. I know that's what they did on the sign-up.. Even if you can just put postage stamps on an envelope, we'll take it. And I think if you can know it's just a specific amount of time. That helped too, they broke it up. Six to eight or six to seven so you can kind of fly in from work, do that thing, feel good and then rush out the door, so that was more manageable time. So, you can kind of give up your one hour it was more manageable for everybody.*

### **Other Significant Findings**

Several other findings emerged and may be pertinent to the ABB and ABC when reported out. These are pertinent to the overall goal of student success with a positive relationship between the school administration and the parents. The literature champions a good working relationship between parents and the principal and parental support for the benefit of students (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014; Goodall & Montgomery, 2016; Rapp & Duncan, 2012). Parents expressed disappointment in the principal's behavior and actions. Every participant described her as aloof, but more concerning was her perceived lack of support or acknowledgement of the students in academic or extracurricular activities and parental effort to support these endeavors. Many of these students win awards, earn honors, and receive recognition tied to their ability to balance academics and other activities. This was especially frustrating for the board members of various organizations who noted they had little communication with the principal, but portions of the money they earn through gate sales, competitions, or fundraisers were required to be returned to the school and county.

During the interviews, several parents voiced confusion about the role and relationship of the DSA. Most still believed this position was an athletic director without realizing the scope of

his responsibilities. Some were unclear about his relationship with the ABB, parents, and coaches. Several parents admitted not knowing his name. Others wanted to know if they could reach out to the DSA if there was an issue with a coach. Others wanted information from the DSA, such as how to learn about athletes playing at the next level. Several parents believed he could do a better job of introducing himself. Clearly, there was a lack of information about school administration and communication between school administrators and parent volunteers.

### **Recommendations**

Because attitudes can be used to assess a volunteer's decisions and choices, developing tools and information to educate parents COULD possibly change their attitudes towards volunteering and could increase their active engagement. Boezeman and Ellemers (2011) recommend several actions to increase volunteerism in organizations and many of these were echoed by JQA parents. Wigfield (1994) and Baumann and Bonner (2017) address the fit and utility of the volunteer tasks. The recommendations emerged from the results of this research in combination with the extensive literature on improving the relative expectancies of opportunities. Recommendations are based upon increasing engagement of parents through education and information to inform the choices they make regarding their children's school. Recommendations on capitalizing on volunteer time include combining efforts, dividing labor, utilizing individual expertise for difficult tasks, allowing overlap, training in tasks, and recognizing volunteers for their efforts. These recommendations need to be prioritized, perhaps through a strategic plan crafted with the needs and priorities of the DSA and ABB in mind.

**Recommendation 1** The board should aim to diversity its board members by recruiting individuals with diverse racial backgrounds. By increasing ABB diversity, Barge and Loges (2003), report it changes perceptions and communication between various parents. Boosters will

create representation and send a message that the board is commitment to changing the “white mother” norms of the board involvement. Wegmann and Bowen (2010) discussed the value of cultural capital in engaging parents and families across all aspects of school including attitudes, identity, approaches, and creating a welcoming atmosphere. An important element of expectancy theory is the perception expected behaviors. To the extent to which volunteering is seen as associated only with white women, attitudes toward the volunteering opportunities would be dismissed or even disliked by people who identify as men or people of color. The ABB should aim to recruit at least two new members in the year 2021-2022 and 2022-2023.

**Recommendation 2:** Rapp and Duncan (2012) make note of the strength of principal engagement to improve overall school community. Several parents mentioned the principals lack of engagement and support. The DSA needs to explain to her the potential value and role in recognizing volunteers. A supportive and engaging principal who acknowledges the successes of student-athletes, musicians, performers, and other accomplishments of the school community will foster positive parental partnerships, communication and involved parents (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). The ABB working with the DSA should aim to have the principal engage with student-athletes once a quarter through an awards luncheon or other recognition and acknowledge all volunteer efforts by holding a volunteer gathering at the end of each year.

**Recommendation 3:** Increase Knowledge on Athletic Boosters through several channels. This overarching communication plan should include the principal (Lumpkin ,2010), coaches and the DSA. In print media to create a flyer or brochure to communicate facts about Boosters to clearly articulate why Boosters are important in relation to the lack of school and county support. Although the ABB cannot influence all decisions parents make, providing accurate information on value, outcomes and success may increase parental participation. Finley (2006) encourages outreach and education, transparency in the distribution of money and resources to sports

Hold quarterly open house for recruitment of volunteers and board members. As mentioned by one mother who recalled a volunteer list with tasks of various time commitments, email communications on the tasks required for volunteers to fill with clear requirements of time, effort, and skills required. Cole and Kelly (2011) noted that volunteers given choices in tasks may lead to an increase in their desire to engage. This could help parents find volunteer opportunities that fit within their motivational force equation.

Develop an alternative approach for parents who cannot volunteer but would like to continue to support through financial means. Managed appropriately it will avoid issues of equity, fairness, and legal concerns as seen with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (Atkin & McCardle, 2016). Although there are risks to this idea, creating a patronage system like what drama did could provide additional funding.

Although not directly related to parental volunteering at athletic boosters, several parents made mention of not understanding the role of the DSA. He is a key node in the coordination of all the stakeholders. Providing parents with a clearer understanding and awareness on the different aspects of DSA MAY increase understanding and purpose to raise levels of engagement.

### **Conclusions**

The goal of this research was to identify why parents do not volunteer for athletic Boosters at a high school in northern Virginia. The intent was to develop a list of factors and address them within the framework of expectancy theory to change perspectives, invite choice, and increase motivation to volunteer. Parents are busy with work, their families, and especially their children. They make choices about how to devote their time, their level of involvement and their overall balance of work and family life. Schools ask for parents' time both in and out of the classroom, but parents and schools may have different understandings of that commitment. They need to work together to create an array of opportunities and choices at various levels of engagement that are viewed as valuable by all the stakeholders. No single solution will address all the issues that emerged in this research, but just as organizations have responded to differences in motivations driven by expectancy at work by providing both information and cafeteria-style benefit options, schools must recognize the diverse motivations and utilities of parents.

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## Appendix A

### Questionnaire Responses

Question #	Question	Max Value	Response	M	SD	Total Responses
3	Are you aware of the Thomas A. Edison High School Athletic Booster Club?	1	Yes or no	0.99	0.11	74
4	Did you purchase an Athletic Booster Pass for yourself or family members? (the pass offers discounted entrance feeds to all sporting events)	0	No pass	0.04	0.20	27
		1	Student	1	0	11
		1	Adult	1	0	4
		2	Family	1.97	0.18	32
5	Did you ever attend an Athletic Booster meeting?	1	Yes or no	0.30	0.46	73
6	If yes, how many times?	10	1 pt per meeting	1.57	3.75	72
7	Did you receive information from your student athlete(s) regarding Athletic Boosters?	1	Yes or no	0.70	0.46	73
8	Did you attend the coaches meeting for your student athlete(s)?	1	Yes or no	0.89	0.31	73
9	Did you receive information from your student athlete(s)' coach or team regarding Athletic Boosters?	1	Yes or no	0.93	1.15	73
10	Did you serve as a team parent for your student athlete(s) team at Edison?	1	Yes or no	0.32	0.47	72
11	If yes, what sports did you serve as team parent? (check all that apply)	43	1 per sport	0.69	1.12	71
12	Please list any duties or activities you performed in support as a team parent	1	Spirit wear	0.06	0.25	32
		2	Dinners	1.21	0.43	14
		3	Official	1.80	0.84	5
			Communications	1.14	0.38	7
			Other	1.31	0.48	16
13	Did you ever receive the weekly Athletic Booster Blast information email?	1	Yes or no	0.71	0.46	73
14	Did you subscribe to any social media related to Edison Athletics? If yes, click all that apply.	3	1 pt for each	1.01	1.11	71
15	Did you subscribe to any electronic forms of communication with your student athlete's team?	7	1 pt for each	1.25	0.78	72
16	Did you volunteer to support any Athletic Booster Fundraisers?	1	Yes or no	0.67	0.47	72
17	If yes, check all that apply	1	SOAR	0.80	0.45	5
		1	Spirit wear	1.27	0.59	15
		1	Toy soldier	1		1
		2	Craft fair	1.75	0.46	8
		0.5	Tag day	0.51	0.15	34
		1	Basket bingo	1.04	0.21	23
		1	Morning hot cocoa	1	0	2
		2	Board member	2		1
		1	Other	1.20	0.45	5
18	Did you volunteer as staff for any of the concessions stands throughout the year for Athletic Boosters?	1	Yes or no	0.73	0.45	73
19	If yes, how many times did you volunteer at concessions?	111	1 pt each shift	4.56	7.16	73
		203.5		16.71	15.04	83

**Appendix B: Interview Questions for Parents of Student Athletes**

Would you tell me a bit about yourself and your time at JQA a parent of your student – athlete(s)?

What organizations /activities are you involved in at JQA? (other than Boosters)

Would you tell me how you got engaged in Boosters? Why is it important to you?

On the survey you listed involvement in several areas, what areas do you see as most important to you as a parent (reference those activities)

To the school? To the athletes?

Boosters raises a significant amount of money for student athletes and their teams, is there more to Boosters than that?

Like many parental engagements it seems to be a small minority of people who do the work why do you think that is?

What do you think could be the causes? How can these be overcome?

Do you think the principal should be more engaged?

Research shows that white middle-class moms are most engaged

Is that your experience? Why do you think it is?

Are there specific things the Director Student Activities (DSA) could do to increase parental involvement?

What about the coaches?

What could you as a parent do?

What ideas do you have? Your voice in this process really does matter

What could the DSA/Boosters could do to welcome or engage new parents to athletics and Boosters?

### **Appendix C: Interview Question for Parents Involved in Band, Drama, PTSA**

Would you tell me a bit about yourself and your time at JQA as parent of your student?

What organizations /activities are you involved in at JQA?

Tell me what you know and understand about the role of your organization

How did you set your priorities given we all have a limited amount of time to share with many worthy causes?

Do you think there is a hierarchical ranking of extracurricular organizations at JQA?  
Ask further questions as indicated

So many of the organizations at JQA focus on fund raising do think that effects membership?

One of the big needs is volunteering at various levels

How involved were you?

Are there obstacles to getting involved for you individually?

Do you think the principal should be more engaged?

The research says most parental support for Boosters comes from white moms—has that been your experience?

Why do you think that is?

Does that make you feel unwelcome?

Are there specific things you as a parent would like to see the school (appropriate leader) could do to increase parental involvement?

What could be done to welcome or engage new parents to your organization?