Understanding the Challenges to Parent Engagement in Cumberland County Schools

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I.   Executive Summary

According to multiple studies, parent involvement in a child's school life is one of the greatest determinants of that child's academic achievement (Degraan, 2000; Domina, 2005; Jeynes, 2005; Powell-Smith, Shinn, Stoner, & Good III, 2000; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). To that end, this study sought to understand the challenges to parent engagement in Cumberland County Schools. Students in Cumberland County Schools have a history of lower performance across several metrics including literacy rates, test scores, and graduation rates. If prior studies are correct, improving parent engagement in Cumberland County Schools could have a profound impact on overall student performance.

For this study, I developed three research questions based on the Barton et al., (2004) Ecologies of Parent Engagement (EPE) framework to explore issues surrounding parent engagement. The questions were derived from the first two conjectures outlined in the EPE framework. "Parental engagement is the mediation between space and capital by parents in relation to others in school settings" and "engagement as mediation must be understood as both an action and an orientation to action" (Barton et al., 2004, pg. 6-8). Within this framework capital, space, authoring and positioning are significant aspects of engagement that require thorough analysis. According to Barton et al., (2004) engagement is a function of authoring and positioning as well as the activation of resources (capital) available to parents in a given space. Activating their capital allows parents to play a role by authoring a place of their own in schools and using that position to influence life in their child's school.

To begin this study, the first research question explored **the factors that prevent parent engagement in Cumberland County Schools.** In order to improve parent engagement, it is important to understand all of the issues that are currently hindering parents' ability to be fully

engaged. There were multiple findings for this question. **Finding 1:** There are a wide range of perceived physical (tangible) and psychological (intangible) barriers to parent engagement. While there is general agreement between parents and educators regarding many of the tangible (physical) barriers, there is less overlap regarding the psychological barriers to engagement. Often rooted in misunderstandings and a lack of clear communication, these barriers create friction between parents and the school which further inhibits effective parent engagement. **Finding 2:** Although many parents express a desire to be engaged in their child's education, they believe they lack the capacity due to their perception of physical and psychological barriers. This finding is related to finding one, but it also highlights that parents want to be involved which contrasts with many teachers' views of these parents. **Finding 3:** Barriers are exacerbated by a lack of understanding between parents and teachers. This finding is important because it highlights the impact of some barriers and how one barrier can create additional barriers.

The second question for this study looked at **what prevents parents from activating the resources available to them in a given space in order to author a place of their own in schools.** There were two significant findings for this research question. The first finding for this question, **Finding 4:** Parents and Teachers are unaware of non-traditional forms of capital which hinders parents' ability to author a place of their own within the school. This finding is significant as it highlights why some parents who lack traditional forms of capital might not believe that they can be engaged. Likewise, parents and teachers are unaware of alternate forms of capital that could be used in lieu of the parents' lack of traditional forms of capital. The second finding for this question, **Finding 5:** The various spaces where parents can be engaged are not universally recognized as active engagement (i.e. non-academic spaces vs academic spaces). This finding is significant because it limits the spaces where parents can be considered

"engaged" in their child's education. This disproportionately affects lower socio-economic groups and also overlooks parents' efforts that take place outside of the classroom.

The final question for this study looked at **what prevents parents from using or expressing that place to position themselves differently so that they can influence life in schools.** This question is focused on the authoring and positioning aspect of the EPE framework. This question is important because it looks at how parents are prevented from leveraging the given "spaces" to become actively engaged. For this question there was one significant finding that was derived from the individual interviews and through the summation of the findings from the first two research questions. **Finding 6:** The combination of multiple barriers and a narrow framing of capital and space prevents parents from authoring a place in the school which further inhibits their ability to position themselves differently to influence life in school. Similar to the previous findings, this finding has the most significant impact on lower socio-economic members of our community. Members from lower socio-economic groups who have many obstacles that inhibit parent engagement, also suffer from a lack of understanding regarding other assets that they might be able to contribute as well as a lack of recognition for actions they engage in that are outside of traditionally recognized educational spaces. This combination of factors prevents parents from full engagement that would otherwise allow them to author a position to influence life in their child's school.

Recommendation One: Create an inclusive sense-making environment with strategically invited administrators, teachers, and parents to gain insight from diverse opinions to identify and understand the various barriers that inhibit engagement and then develop tailored approaches to resolve these barriers. Overcoming barriers is the most important prerequisite for improving parent engagement and possibly the most complex. Resolving barriers is important because most

of the other issues that negatively impact parent engagement are derivatives of some form of barrier and in turn create additional barriers.

Recommendation Two: One of the barriers that was identified in this study was based on perceptions regarding roles and responsibilities. Because there is confusion regarding roles and responsibilities, unmet expectations lead to friction between parents and educators which often creates additional barriers to engagement. To resolve this, the recommendation is to develop co-created (parents and educators) common understandings of the roles and responsibilities for parents and educators. A clear understanding will identify responsibilities for specific tasks thereby reducing misunderstandings between teachers and parents, which should reduce the friction that creates additional barriers.

Recommendation Three: Using the same inclusive sense-making space identified in recommendation one, the schools should work with parents to expand the scope of what is considered parent engagement. In order for parents to have buy-in, schools should develop clearly defined, co-created "rules and norms" for engagement so that parents and teachers understand how and where parents can be and are engaged in their child's education.

Recommendation Four: One of the barriers to engagement is a lack of capital as defined by traditional understandings of capital, primarily material-based capital. To resolve this issue, the recommendation is to develop training to help educators identify additional sources of capital or funds of knowledge that parents have that can be leveraged to support their child's education and to support the parents' ability to provide greater contributions to the classroom.

Recommendation Five: As our country becomes more diverse, the traditional models, school policies, and engagement practices that were created using traditionally white middle-class views may be less relevant and feel more exclusionary for the current and future population. The

recommendation is to create a deliberate plan to welcome all parents, with a specific focus on non-dominant groups, into the parent engagement community of practice. This will ensure that their voices are heard and that their contributions are included in the development of future policies. This could also make the school environment more welcoming for those that often feel out of place and unwelcome in their child's school thus reducing barriers related to negative school environments.

II.   Introduction

Parent involvement or participation in their child's education is believed to be one of the most critical aspects for a child's successful outcomes. According to multiple studies, family involvement in their child's school life is perhaps the greatest determinant of that child's academic achievement (Degraan, 2000). Specifically, when parents or guardians are involved in positive ways, grades improve, test scores and graduation rates rise, absenteeism falls, and expectations for the students' attitude, behavior, and performance soar (Degraan, 2000; Desimone, 1999; Domina, 2005; Jeynes, 2005; Powell-Smith, Shinn, Stoner, & Good III, 2000; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). The Cumberland County School (CCS) system's board of education has also recognized the importance and value of parent participation in education. The board of education's position regarding parent participation is that a child's education and overall academic success should be an ongoing cooperative partnership between the home and the school. This is informed by the board's view that parents and other family members are their children's first teachers and as such they play a vital role. Therefore, continued involvement of parents and family members in the educational process is extremely important in fostering and improving educational achievement (Title I Part A: Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged**).**

III.   Organization Context

The Cumberland County School (CCS) system is the 5th largest of 115 North Carolina school districts and is located in Fayetteville, North Carolina (see Figure 1).
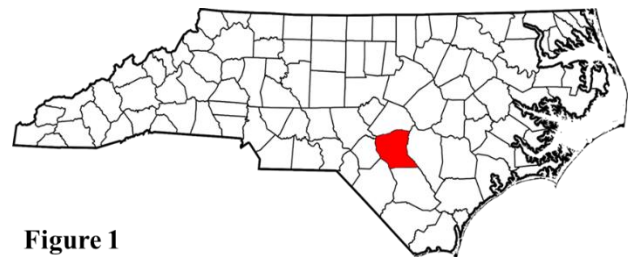

Figure 1

Fayetteville is also known as the All-American City because it has received the All-America City

Award which is given by the National Civic League to recognize the work of communities using inclusive civic engagement to address critical issues. It is also considered the All-American City because it hosts one of the largest military installations in the world, Fort Bragg, with residents from all 50 states. As a historic

Figure 2

Student Demographics

military town, Fayetteville has a diverse population represented with approximately 45.7% White, 41.9% Black or African American, 2.6% Asian American, 1.1% Native American, 0.4% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, 3.3% some other race, and 4.9% two or more races. Additionally, 10.1% of the population are Hispanic or Latino of any race (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). With an estimated population of 211,657 (United States Census Bureau, 2020), Fayetteville is the 6th-largest city in North Carolina.

The Cumberland County School system has a current enrollment of more than 50,000 students and approximately 6,360 full-time staff (3,421 teachers & 2,938 staff). The school district is represented by a diverse student population (see Figure 2). The school system consists of 52 elementary schools, 18 middle schools, and 17 high schools (District Profile: Cumberland County Schools, 2019).

Within the Cumberland County School system there are a variety of stakeholders that are concerned about successful student outcomes. These stakeholders can be categorized as those immediately affected, those affected over time, and those affected both immediately and over time. The stakeholders that are affected immediately include the administrators, teachers,
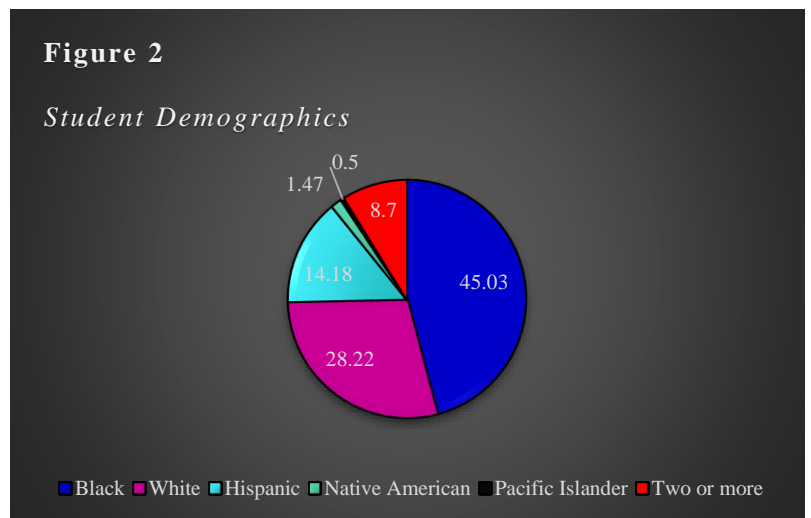
parents, and most significantly, the students. The administrators are important stake holders because they are responsible for developing the policies, procedures, and administering the school system. If the students are not successful, it could reflect poorly on their ability to administer the system. The teachers are stakeholders because they are the immediate implementers of the administrative policy. The teachers are also responsible for engaging with the students. If students fail, it could be a reflection on their ability to teach. Parents are important stakeholders because their child's success is a reflection of their parenting skills and their failure to prepare their children can have significant consequences for the child.

Some of the stakeholders are affected over time by student outcomes. One group of stakeholders that often gets overlooked when considering education policy and outcomes is taxpayers. While some taxpayers have children in school, all taxpayers contribute to funding the education system. For these taxpayers, funding education is supposed to be an investment in the future. As stakeholders, the taxpayers expect that students will be educated to a level that is adequate for them to become contributing members of society. Otherwise, taxpayers receive a poor return on investment. In general, taxpayers (and society at large) need students to succeed so that they can become independent contributing members of society and not dependent on their parents or society into adulthood.

Some stakeholders are affected immediately, but also suffer long-term consequences. The most important group of stakeholders are the children that education policy is meant to help. When these policies are ineffective, it harms the students immediately, but also has long-term consequences for their development and preparation for independence. This group also tends to have the least amount of input, but bears the greatest impact of

the decisions.

IV.   Problem of Practice

The main problem that the school district is trying to solve is improving student outcomes. Cumberland County Schools lag behind the national and North Carolina averages in several key

Figure 3

Academic Proficiency
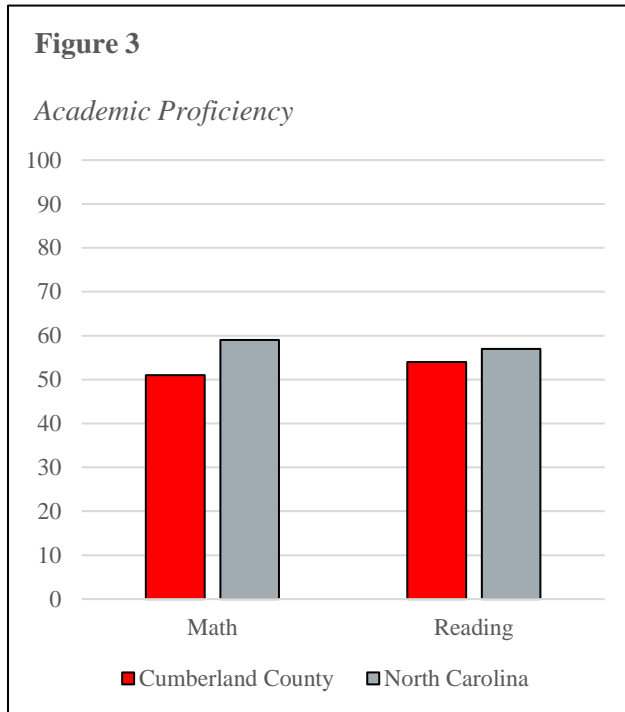
metrics for student success. For example, for the 2018-2019 school year, 23 of the 53 elementary schools were considered low-performing schools, representing a 43 percent increase from 16 schools in the 2017-2018 school year. Only 51 percent of students were proficient in math compared to the North Carolina average of 59 percent. Likewise, only 54 percent of students were proficient in reading compared to the North Carolina

average of 57 percent. In addition, the Average SAT scores were 62 points lower in Cumberland County compared to the North Carolina average (1,029 to 1,091) (North Carolina Schools Repor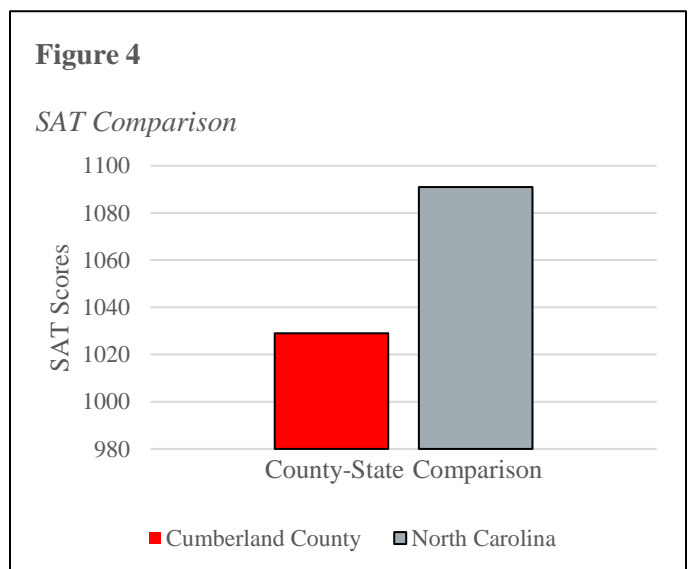t Card 2018-19 District Profile, 2019). According to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Cumberland County Schools' graduation rate for the 2018-2019 school year was only 83.7% which is the highest graduation rate in CCS' history

Figure 4

SAT Comparison

(Hogard, 2019). While the graduation rate has increased, a significant number of people are still being left behind.

In response to this performance, the district conducted an eight-month study to get feedback from thousands of key stakeholders including students, parents, community partners, educators and staff members (Whitley, 2019). The intent of this effort was to improve overall district performance and increase students' opportunities for success. On June 11, 2019, the Cumberland County School Board of Education approved a five-year strategic plan (2019-2024). Developing this strategic plan included researching state and national best practices, and conducting focus groups, online surveys, community presentations, community listening sessions and a Town Hall with more than 500 people in attendance (Whitley, 2019). The new strategic plan consists of four priorities to guide the district's efforts and resources. The four priorities are:

> 1. Successful Students: Graduate every student confident, competitive, and ready for a career, college, and life.
> 2. Premier Professionals: Recruit, support, and retain impactful teachers, leaders, and support staff.
> 3. Exceptional Environment: Integrate resources, facilities, and staff to maintain a safe, inviting learning environment for students to grow academically, socially, and emotionally.
> 4. Committed Community: Collectively engage schools, parents and community in building student success (Whitley, 2019).

When I partnered with the Cumberland County School district in the Spring of 2020, I was invited to help develop solutions for the fourth priority, "Committed Community," with a specific focus on parent engagement. For that reason, the problem of practice for this study focuses specifically on parent engagement in Cumberland County Schools with a special emphasis on barriers that are currently preventing more effective forms of parent engagement which could improve student outcomes (Degraan, 2000). Taken from the fourth priority listed above, "Committed Community," this study examines parent engagement as a factor in overall

improvement. Developing an understanding of parent engagement will help reduce the impact of barriers to parent engagement in Cumberland County while also complimenting the other priority areas of the strategic plan.

Developing successful improvement models, such as the one under study here, is important because successful student outcomes are a vital public policy concern with broad ranging societal implications. Education lays the foundation for societal growth and prosperity and an educated populous increases the possibilities within that society. An educated society will have more tools to improve the quality of life, a greater ability to lift people out of poverty and it will be better prepared to face the complex challenges of the future. On the other hand, an uneducated or an undereducated society will be less capable of taking on the same challenges and could quickly lead to a downward spiral of cascading problems.

Educating future generations, providing them the tools necessary and preparing them for the uncertainty that lies ahead is an extremely important social responsibility and an imperative for long-term national viability. The failure to prepare the future workers, leaders and decision makers is a formula for disaster. As with most important public policy issues, there is an assumption that allocating enough money will ensure success. According to the FY 2018 budget, the nation spent $788.0 billion (including federal $57.0 billion, state $340.0 billion, and local $316.0 billion and other $75 billion) on education (U.S Department of Education, 2018). Unfortunately, the U.S. still lags behind many other advanced countries, currently ranking 13th in reading, 18th in science, 36th in math and has a graduation rate of 85% (Schleicher, 2019).

Over the years, the education system in the United States has been the target of widespread criticism regarding student success rates. For example, the Education Trust and the Heritage Foundation have suggested that the sole responsibility for poor outcomes lies with schools

(Carter, 2000; Jerald, 2001). These same views have shaped society's perception that schools are almost entirely to blame for educational outcomes and this view has become embedded in educational policy at both the state and federal levels (Welner, 2005). Many of the problems facing society have historically been blamed on the inadequacy of the schools without considering the myriad factors that affect student performance (McClellan, 1994). This was evident in 2002 with the adoption of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in which set out to hold local educational agencies, and States accountable for improving the academic achievement (Boehner, 2002). In response to the increased pressure to improve student outcomes, federal, state, and local officials, school board administrators, schools and teachers have adopted a range of public policy solutions and developed myriad strategies aimed at helping improve student success.

The importance of this topic cannot be overstated. In addition to the micro-level (i.e. the school, parent, child) importance of parent engagement and the link to successful student outcomes as well as the potential contributions to the academic body of knowledge, there are significant real-world macro-level implications regarding student success. As mentioned above, successful student outcomes are a vital public policy concern with broad ranging societal implications. At the individual level, the discussion of success or failure in school will inevitably alter the course of a child's life. At the macro level, the accumulated effects of all those individual children will alter the course of the nation and potentially human civilization. This may seem like an overstatement, but the statistics do not lie. If we fail to prepare them, the results will be our faults, and the results will be disastrous. If they are not properly prepared to take over our roles, their futures and ours will be bleak. The expectation or anticipation of a comfortable, safe, and secure future will not be possible if there are not enough well-trained people to fulfill the requisite roles and to assume the mantle of

leadership. If too many people fail, the burden to take care of those that fail along with the increasing aging population may outstrip our national capacity, resulting in increasing pressure on everyone that is capable. In short, academic success is an issue of vital importance for several reasons, among which is the future prosperity of the country.

As a society founded on principles of justice and equality, we have a moral imperative to take care of our children and ensure they succeed. Former U.S. Vice President Hubert Humphrey once said that "the moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and the handicapped" (Hansen, 2012. pg. 1). As such, our generation will be judged by the policies we develop that helps or harms these vulnerable members of our society.

Adequately preparing children for their future (and ours) is important for building and sustaining a thriving economy. Ensuring that more students graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed will have tremendous benefits for the national economy, while failing to do this will have devastating consequences. Studies from the Alliance for Education organization found that "increasing the national high school graduation rate to 90 percent for just one high school class would create as many as 65,700 new jobs and boost the national economy by as much as $10.9 billion. The nation would also see increases in home and automobile sales of as much as $16.8 billion and $877 million, respectively, and an annual increase in federal and state tax revenues of as much as $1.3 billion and $661 million, respectively (Delisle, 2018b). These statistics demonstrate the positive potential of increasing graduation rates, but our society cannot simply focus on high school students, we must ensure that students reach high school in the first place and that they are on the right trajectory.

While academic success has the potential to propel our nation into the future and achieve the goals and interests of the nation, academic failure has significant consequences that hinder the attainment of those strategic imperatives. Academic failure generally leads to poor life outcomes, while academic success tends to lead to much better outcomes. For example, the median earnings for full-time workers ages 25 through 34 who had not completed high school ($26,000) were lower than those of workers whose highest education level was high school completion ($32,000), an associate's degree ($39,000), or a bachelor's or higher degree ($55,000) (McFarland, et al., 2019).

Not only do individuals who less education make less money, there is also significantly less tax revenue to support local essential services, like education. Using North Carolina for tax calculation purposes, $26,000 in income equates to

Figure 5

Median earnings for full-time workers ages 25 through 34

approximately $4,291 in State and Federal taxes whereas $32,000 in income would result in $5,785 in taxes, $39,000 in income would result in $7,528 in taxes and $55,000 in income would result in $11,848 in taxes. This potential tax revenue is important given the growing size of the national debt. For example, in 2019 the U.S. national debt surpassed $17 trillion. In addition, major budget legislation signed by President Donald J. Trump, along with continued growth in entitlements and higher interest rates projected the debt to nearly double by 2029 and that was
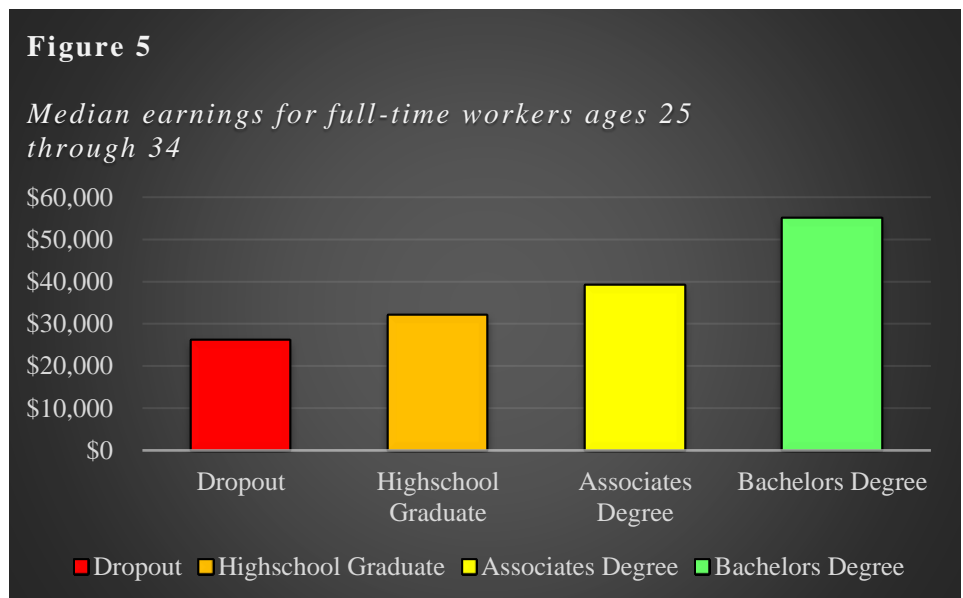
before the Coronavirus outbreak. As fewer people succeed, there will be an increased need for tax revenue from even fewer people.

Aside from the benefits associated with improving student outcomes, there are significant consequences of not addressing the issue of poor student outcomes. As our society becomes more advanced, many employers are looking for workers with some level of college degree or work experience. This means that not obtaining a high school diploma becomes not only a barrier to entry into post-secondary education, but ultimately to the job market. While education is supposed to build knowledge and provide greater opportunity, by default, not obtaining a high school diploma becomes a barrier to entry for the workforce. People who fail to graduate from high school are left with few options for employment, especially stable employment. This leads many high school dropouts to either require government assistance to subsist or to turn to the informal job sector which tends to include dangerous and/or illicit activities. In many cases, these high school dropouts inevitably become a burden on society.

In addition to losing out on the benefits that might be gained by having more successful student outcomes, there is also the increased potential for incarceration among those who are not academically successful. While there is no guarantee that a dropout will end up incarcerated, there is a much higher potential, and this will only add to the fiscal burden. For example, statistics show that nearly 83% of incarcerated persons are also high school dropouts (Hanson, 2020). Likewise, some studies report that one in ten male dropouts between the ages of 16 to 24 are either in prison or in juvenile detention (Eley, 2009) The result is that dropouts contribute to the number of people held in the American criminal justice system which currently holds almost 2.3 million people. With an average cost of $36,000 per year per person, the United States spends about $80 billion a year on incarceration (Wagner & Sawyer, 2020).

In addition to the cost of incarceration, the long-term impacts of incarceration also have significant individual and societal costs. In the United States there are currently more than 4.9 million formerly incarcerated people (Wagner & Sawyer, 2020). Of this formerly incarcerated population, only around 53% report making any money in the formal labor market three years following their release. This lack of employment is based on employers not wanting to hire people with criminal records. This leads to extraordinarily high rates of recidivism ranging from 41% to 71%. In one longitudinal study across 30 states from 2005 to 2014 found an 83% recidivism rate with at least one arrest during the 9 years following their release (Alper, Durose, & Markman, 2018). While it is not explicitly causal, there is strong evidence to suggest that academic failure can lead to a downward spiral from which it is difficult to recover. Not only does this cost the individual, it costs society as a whole.

North Carolina for example currently reports around an 86.5 percent graduation rate for 2019, that leaves approximately 14,239 non-graduates (Hogard, 2019). At an annual cost to educate of around $6,116 per student, that means North Carolina spent around $81 million dollars in 2019 not graduating students. Even more troubling is the correlation between high school dropouts and incarceration. If one in ten male dropouts between the ages of 16 to 24 end up in prison or in juvenile detention that becomes a significant burden for North Carolina. For example, if only one percent of 14,239 fall into this trap, that means that approximately 142 of those students could end up incarcerated. The average cost of incarceration in North Carolina is $36,219 (NC Department of Public Safety, 2019). This means that at one percent incarceration for 13.5 percent dropout rate, North Carolina would spend an additional $5 million per year to incarcerate those former students. If the number is closer to the ten percent suggested figure from the study noted above, the price tag would be closer to $51 million dollars per year (NC

Department of Public Safety, 2019). The cost of incarceration also compounds as more people dropout each year and add to the already incarcerated population. At some point, continuing to incarcerate at this rate will drain the state of resources. For this reason, it is vitally important to find a way to better allocate resources by understanding the best intervention points. The sad irony is that the cost to incarcerate a person is almost six times higher than the annual cost to educate a person.

In addition to high incarceration rates for high school dropouts there are other significant issues. Among 25- to 34-year-olds in the labor force, the unemployment rate for high school dropouts was significantly higher than the unemployment rate of those whose highest level of educational attainment was a high school credential. Additionally, reports indicate that regardless of income, dropouts age 25 and older are in worse health than their peers who graduated (Pleis, Ward, & Lucas 2010). High school dropouts also represent the highest percentage of the nation's institutionalized population. Relative to individuals who obtain a high school diploma or equivalent, the average dropout costs the economy approximately $272,000 over his or her lifetime in terms of lower tax contributions, higher reliance on government assistance (Medicaid, Medicare, welfare, etc.), and higher rates of criminal activity (Levin & Belfield, 2007). According to an Alliance for Excellent Education report, if the high school male graduation rate

increased by 5 percentage points, the U.S. could save an estimated $18.5 billion in annual crime costs (Delisle, 2018a).

In addition to the costs associated with poor student outcomes and the already stressed national debt, there are other issues that should be considered. For example, people in the United States are living longer than ever

Figure 6

Population Over 65 Historical Projections

before and this trend is expected to continue for the foreseeable future. The current average life expectancy in the U.S. is around 79, with males at 76 years and females at 81 years. This increased life expectancy is attributed to significant advances in science and medicine. While

living longer is generally positive and a sign of an advanced nation, it comes with added costs that emerge for an older population. For example, in 2018 Medicare spending grew 6.4% to $750.2 billion. From 2020 to 2028 Medicare spending growth is projected to accelerate at an annual rate of between 7.2 and 7.8 percent
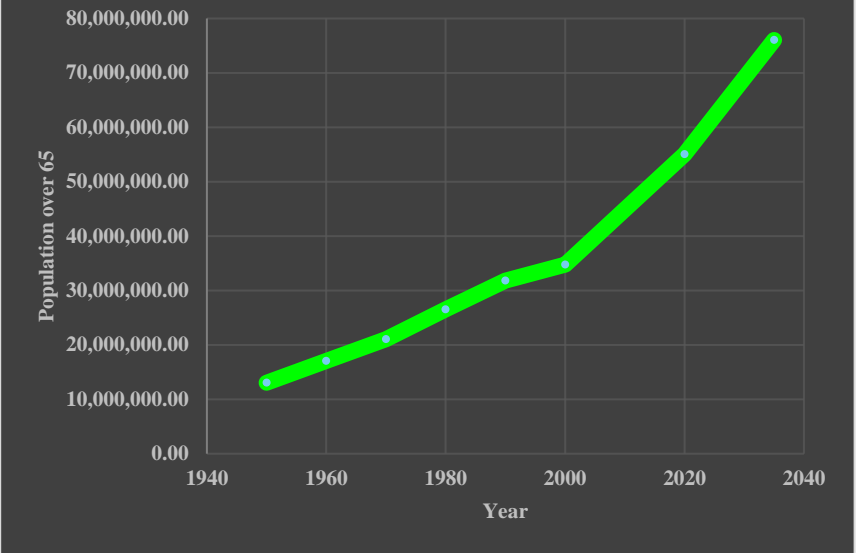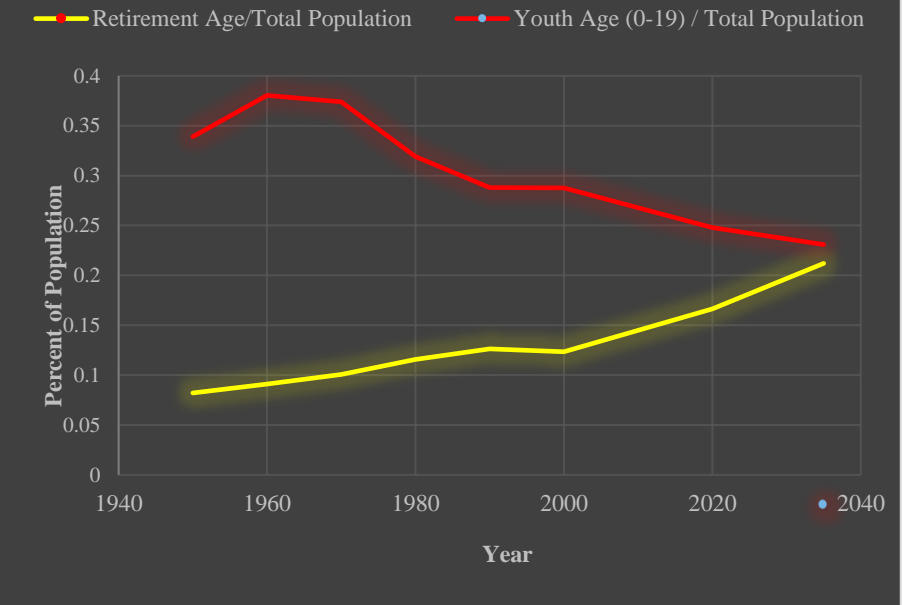
Figure 7

Population Comparison Over Time

(Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2019). This trend is expected to continue as the number of Americans living over the age of 65 is projected to steadily increase overtime reaching approximately 98 million by 2060 (Mather et al., 2015). The number of people living over 65 is not the issue; the issue is the percentage of the population living over 65 compared to the working population and the future working population (i.e. the current students). Current reports project that the 65-and-older age group will increase from 16 percent to 23 percent of the total population while the worker replacement rate declines (Mather et al., 2015). With many Americans lacking a savings or retirement, most of these people will be almost completely dependent on Social Security, Medicare and their families. This data suggests that the cost of poor student outcomes is extremely high; this overwhelming evidence should demonstrate the importance of ensuring every person succeeds.

There are various conditions that affect student outcomes, but parent engagement has been found to be one of the most significant factors in determining students' success (Degraan, 2000; Powell-Smith, Shinn, Stoner, & Good III, 2000; Sheldon and Epstein, 2005). Hornby (2011) found that the most effective schools are ones that encourage and support the involvement of parents in the education of their children. Likewise, there are many factors that affect a parent's decision to be actively engaged in their child's education. As briefly described above, the broad reaching societal implications of this problem cannot be overstated. Successful student outcomes must be a priority for all students, not just a select group. Failure to fully understand the entirety of the problem will continue to produce results that increase the strain across the whole of society.

V.   Literature Review

The literature reviewed for this study employed a deliberate approach to understanding the

various factors affecting parent engagement. The literature review is broken into three sections. The first part of the literature review provides some contextual understanding of parent engagement, the importance, and its development over time. The review begins by outlining **the importance of parent engagement,** looking specifically at the linkage between parent engagement and successful student outcomes. There is a robust collection of research from academic and government organizations that suggests a strong correlation between high levels of parent engagement and successful student outcomes. The second set of literature reviewed focuses on the **evolution of parent engagement** research including how parent engagement has been classified. This set of literature is informative because it highlights some of the underlying challenges that inform the discussion around engagement and how the concept of engagement has been constructed over time. The next set of literature focuses on the various **types of participation.** Understanding the research on the types of recognized participation or engagement is important because it highlights the many ways in which engagement has been defined and some of the challenges associated with those definitions. This literature also highlights additional ways to reimagine ways that parents are currently engaged and ways that they can become engaged.

The second section of the literature review highlights many of the challenges that exist regarding parent engagement. This section begins by looking at the various **barriers to engagement**. Barriers to engagement make up the bulk of the literature review due to the number, complexity and implications of barriers. The second section also includes Critical Race Theory as a lens to understand some of the structural challenges to parent engagement.

The third section of the literature review focuses on literature that provides some possible solutions to the existing parent engagement challenges. This begins with a look at the

Communities of Practice concept and how being more inclusive can encourage greater parent engagement. The final piece of literature focuses on the **Funds of Knowledge** as a way to reimagine the ways parents are able to contribute**.**

A. Importance of Parent Engagement

There have been many efforts attempted to improve student outcomes that have resulted in varying degrees of success. The following literature is included in the study to examine the importance of parent engagement as a precursor to successful student outcomes and to justify a focus of resources in this area. The importance of parent engagement in children's learning has been well documented in numerous studies (Degraan, 2000; Powell et al. 2010; Wilder 2014). As mentioned above, research shows that family involvement in the school life of a child is perhaps the greatest determinant of that child's academic achievement (Degraan, 2000). Studies also show that when parents are involved, the child experiences academic improvements across the board: grades improve, test scores (Domina, 2005; Jeynes, 2005) and graduation rates rise (Rumberger, 1995), absenteeism falls (Simon, 2001), and expectations for the students' attitude, behavior (Domina, 2005), and performance also improve substantially (Domina, 2005; Powell-Smith, Shinn, Stoner, & Good III, 2000; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). Similar studies have shown that when parents are actively engaged in their child's education, students are more likely to show more motivation, maintain better self-esteem, demonstrate fewer behavior problems, resist substance abuse, and earn a college degree ("The Parent Factor", 2005). Other studies have found improvements in areas such as self-regulation (Fan & Chen, 2001) and more positive attitudes towards school and higher educational aspirations (Domina, 2005).

Numerous other studies have pointed out the positive impacts that parent engagement has on the child's early education (Fantuzzo et al., 2013; Froiland, Peterson, & Davison, 2013; Miedel

& Reynolds, 2000; Van Voorhis et al., 2013; Wilder 2014). The research conducted by LaForett and Mendez (2010) found that early parental participation was able to increase school readiness skills, which greatly influence the children's academic careers. Froiland, Peterson, and Davison (2013) found that parental involvement in early years were key predictors of academic achievement in later school years. Similarly, in a thirteen-year long longitudinal study, Miedel and Reynolds (2000) found a positive association between parent participation in early childhood and reading achievement in kindergarten and eighth grade. Of particular note, Domina (2005) found that parent participation was beneficial despite the student's ability or the family's social or economic status.

B. Evolution of parent engagement

While there has been a significant amount of literature that argues that parent engagement is beneficial, there is a perception that parent participation is lacking, especially in minority and lower socio-economic groups (Hornby, 2011). Understanding the history and development of parents' roles in children's formal education is instructive because it highlights some of the structural challenges that persist today and why some groups' participation does not align with expectations (Gonzalez-DeHass, 2005).

According to Mc Laughlin (2005), early forms of parent participation in schools began in the late 1940s which consisted of parent-teacher conferences, PTA meetings, fundraisers, as well as expectations for parents to monitor homework, sending report cards home for parents to sign and review ("McLaughlin Comments", 2005). In the 1960's educators and policymakers began looking at parent participation as a method to improve educational outcomes specifically for poor and underachieving students. In the 1990s there were significant budget cuts which left some schools heavily dependent on parents to help pick up the slack, either by raising funds or

providing classroom enrichment, such as music or art (Leo et al., 2019). The parents that were present in the classroom took on roles that provided them with a level of authority within the school and provided them with greater insight into their children's education. These parents also became the informal model representation for involved parents which led to the exclusion of parents who were unable to be present.

In 2002 the adoption of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was adopted to promote student success by holding schools, local educational agencies, and States accountable for improving the academic achievement (Boehner, 2002). One aspect of the law required Title I schools to have written parent-involvement policies and school-parent compacts to outline how parents should be involved in schools and how they could take part in improving student achievement. The purpose of this was to establish relationships between school employees (e.g., principals, teachers, and support staff) and family members to help improve student academic outcomes (Epstein et al., 2018; Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). The result however has been that family members have often been treated as clients rather than as collaborative participants in the education of their children; this is especially the case in more economically disadvantaged and culturally and linguistically diverse contexts (Ishimaru, 2014).

As a result of some of the negative feedback from the implementation of the NCLB, in 2015 the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015, §1010) was adopted to place a greater emphasis on establishing a more egalitarian approach to family–school relations. ESSA calls for the sharing of power between families and those who educate their children with the term parent "engagement" (ESSA, 2015, §1010) preferred over parent "involvement" (NCLB, 2001, §1116). The adoption of the term "engagement" indicates a desire to shift from a one-way, client-based

relationship to one that is focused on a co-created, collaborative form of education and engagement (Leo, et al., 2019).

C. Types of Participation

While the research is clear that parent participation has positive impacts on student outcomes, there have been disagreements on what constitutes parent participation (De Gaetano, 2007; Epstein, 1995, 2007; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Harris & Robinson, 2016; Johnson, 2015; Kim et al., 2012; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Nihat, 2012; Olmstead, 2013). Throughout the history of parent participation in schooling, researchers developed a variety of ways to imagine how parents can invest in their child's education. Parent participation has historically been labeled "parent involvement" which included deliberate actions taken by the parent to position themselves within the academic setting. Historically this academic setting has been limited to the school, classroom, or associated school activities (Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013; Barton et al, 2004; Doucet, 2011; Jackson & Remillard, 2005; Larocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011; Lim, 2012).

The literature indicates that the definition of what is considered parent participation has been strongly shaped by school administrators, schools and teachers (Barton et al., 2004; Howard, & Reynolds, 2008; Warren et al., 2009, Lawson, & Alameda-Lawson, 2012; Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013). This has been described as a school-centric approach and generally focuses on activity at school that is visible to school officials and teachers (Jackson & Remillard, 2005; Doucet, 2011; Larocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011; Lim, 2012; Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013). Many of these parental participation models focus on one-directional flow of support from parents to schools based on the school's determination of needs (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

As a result, what becomes codified as active parent participation is understood by the actions parents engage in and how that fits the expectations of the school (Doucet, 2011; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Because most programs that count as parental participation are based on activities at the school (e.g. volunteering in the classroom, attending Parent-Teacher Association events, chaperoning field trips, etc.), parent participation evolved into a deficit-based analysis where parents were viewed critically for their lack of participation in school-sanctioned activities (Gutman & McLoyd, 2000; Howard, & Reynolds, 2008). Framing parental participation using a school-centric or a deficit-based view is limiting because it overlooks critical activities that parents engage in with their children outside of school (e.g. helping with homework, school projects, time-management, etc.; Jackson & Remillard, 2005; Doucet, 2011). Additionally, using a school-centric view is exclusive in that it restricts what is considered acceptable roles for parents and can make the parents appear to be the problem (Howard, & Reynolds, 2008; Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013).

In recent years, research has expanded the definition of parent participation to include school-based parent participation, home-based parent participation (Barton et al., 2004; Chung, Lee, Lee, & Lee, 2015; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Lawson, 2012; Magwa & Mugari, 2017; Wilder, 2014) and community-based parent participation (Barton et al., 2004). Epstein's (1985, 2018) concept for parent participation consists of a combination of school and home-based activities including: parenting, communicating, volunteering, decision making, supporting learning at home, and collaborating with the school and community. Similarly, Hoover-Dempsey et al., (2001) defined a parent's active participation as establishing physical and psychological structures for performance (e.g. setting rules, providing guidelines, reinforcing parent and school expectations), supporting learning at home (not simply monitoring, but helping with tasks such

as homework), and participating in school decisions. In addition to broadening the scope beyond the school and classroom, some researchers have acknowledged that parents' participation can also include both informal and formal forms of participation (Barton et al., 2004; De Gaetano, 2007; LeFevre and Shaw, 2012; Tovar, 2016).

D. Barriers

The existing literature also identifies several issues that could explain some of the challenges that Cumberland County School parents face concerning parent engagement. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) note that while there is extensive literature addressing the importance of parental involvement, the reality of parental involvement on the ground is quite different. Research has shown that there are a wide range of barriers that prevent parents from being fully engaged in their child's education. These can be categorized as physical (tangible) barriers, psychological (perceptual/intangible) barriers, and barriers to parental engagement that contain a combination of the two. Whether the barriers are real, perceived, physical or psychological they are intricately linked and affect parent engagement. While physical or tangible barriers can affect parent's beliefs about their ability to engage, parents' beliefs about various issues (including intangible issues) can also act as barriers to effective parental involvement (Hornby, 2011).

Tangible barriers to engagement include things like a lack of resources, transportation, time, childcare, technology, etc. Many of the tangible barriers to parent engagement are rooted in family circumstances, primarily lower socio-economic status which can be one of the greatest of barriers. Smith (2006) found a strong correlation between low-income communities and parent involvement. For example, the structure in low socio-economic families can have an impact on parent engagement due to a number of factors including high numbers of single mothers, extended families raising children, and having two parents both working long hours (Griffith,

1998; McMahon, 2010; Norton & Nufeld, 2002). Parents of low socio-economic status also have limited access to technologies such as the internet, email, school websites, cell phones and other means of communication (McMahon, 2010). Parents in lower socio-economic groups also tend to have lower levels of education attainment. McMahon (2010) found that parents' personal fears regarding their own education levels often hinders their involvement. Another tangible barrier associated with socio-economic status families is language familiarity (Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; McMahon, 2010; Norton & Nufeld, 2002). Parents whose native language is other than English sometimes struggle to communicate with teachers and therefore feel less comfortable engaging (McMahon, 2010).

Intangible barriers are primarily focused on perceptions of parents and teachers that affect engagement. These include incongruent beliefs about parent and teacher roles and responsibilities, cultural differences, levels of respect, importance of education, comfort levels, power dynamics, etc. Whether barriers are real or perceived, the effects on engagement are real. These barriers, both physical and psychological, are also the byproduct of environmental factors and social construction.

One barrier that has been identified in the literature is the parents' perception of the importance of education. There are a lot of parents that have bad memories from their own education experience. Their experience can affect the way they view the school, the way they view education, how they interact with the school and how they decide to engage in their child's education. (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; McMahon, 2010). If their parents did not place a high value on education or had frequent conflicts with the school, or if they had a negative school experience in general, they may be less likely to value education which could lead to lower levels of engagement. Likewise, for those who struggled in school, it may be difficult to ignore

those negative memories which may reemerge and have a detrimental effect when dealing with their own child's school (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). The value parents place on a formal education can also be a factor of the parents' own success. McMahon (2010) explains that some parents have been able to be productive citizens through trade jobs or to succeed in certain careers despite attaining a limited education which may lead some parents to place less value on education as a means to an end.

Another significant psychological barrier to parental engagement is based on parent and educators' perception of the parents' role in their child's education (DeHass, 2005). Mahon (2010) explained that perceptions of parenting roles are based on modeling of the previous generation and their decisions are affected by how the parents themselves were raised. Similarly, parents construct their roles by considering their own expectations and those of people around them (e.g., teachers, friends; Yamamoto, Holloway, & Suzuki, 2016). Researchers have also found that what is perceived as appropriate family roles varies across stakeholder groups and includes everything from extremely involved to completely uninvolved (Mahon 2010; Gross et al., 2019).

Another barrier that affects parent engagement is related to the rules or norms for engagement. Gonzalez-DeHass (2005) found that diverse cultural backgrounds account for different ways parent participation manifest. This is strongly related to roles, expectations, and upbringing. Parents who were raised in families that had higher participation levels have a better understanding of the norms associated with engagement. Parents who were raised in homes with lower levels of active engagement may not have a strong understanding of the various ways to be engaged. Sylvestre (2018) highlights that among ethnic minority families, it is not necessarily a lack of interest in being involved, but often times they do not know how to become involved.

Perceived self-efficacy can also be a significant barrier to parental engagement. The construct of self-efficacy refers to one's beliefs in their capabilities to engage in tasks to produce desired outcomes (Bandura, 1977). When parents have higher self-efficacy and believe that their involvement in school positively influences their children's success in school, they have a higher sense of perceived self-efficacy which influences their decisions to become involved (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Eccles & Harold, 1996). On the other hand, this can be a significant barrier for many parents, especially those with lower levels of education. Lareau (2003) suggests that parents with lower educational backgrounds have more doubt in supporting their children (Sylvestre, 2018). Martin (2015) found that parents with low self- esteem or self-efficacy who believe that they cannot help their children, tend to avoid contact with the school.

Parents' lack of contact with the school and the low self-efficacy has a compounding effect when the teachers develop perceptions about the parents' abilities and intentions. This is particularly acute when it comes to minority parents. Research shows that teachers' low expectations of minority parents create additional barriers to parent involvement (Kim, 2009). Parent invitations by the school are less frequent when parents have few resources and more stress (DeMoss & Vaughn, 2000; Grolnick et al., 1997; Kim, 2009) and speak English as a second language (Garcia & Donato, 1991; Huss-Keeler, 1997). When these minority parents are not involved, teachers' misconceptions about those parents are reinforced which leads to a self-fulfilling prophecy due to confirmation bias (Kim, 2009).

Another significant barrier to parent engagement is the presence of structural racism that exists within society in general and schools in particular. Vincet et al. (2012) found that one of the biggest challenges that black parents report in schools is the conscious awareness and experience of the inequality of the education system. This awareness creates conditions where

some parents do not feel comfortable engaging with the school or the teachers. Griffith (1998) suggests that race may shape parental involvement among minorities due to the marginalization (whether perceived or real) that African American parents experience.

E. Critical Race Theory

Parent participation in poor and minority schools has historically been reported as relatively lower and different than what is reported in White middle class schools (Auerbach, 2007; Lareau, 1989; Lareau, 2003). Scholars have found a persistent and widespread perception among some teachers that low-income African-American and Latino parents do not place a high value on education and do not want to be involved in their children's education (Chavkin, 1993; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; De Gaetano, 2007; García & Guerra, 2004; Peña 2000; Valdés, 1996). Research suggests that predominately white teachers could be part of the problem because they overlay certain expectations of parent involvement that are rooted in their own life experiences (Graue, 2005). By excluding ethnic diversity in the structures of schooling and relying on a white middle class standard from which all other groups are compared, some educators perpetuate a tacit structural classism and racism (Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013; Calmore, 1992; Padilla & Lindholm, 1995).

Bell (1996) argued that racism continues to be a problem of social, political, and economic import in American society. In 1991 social activist and education critic Jonathan Kozol highlighted the great inequities that existed between the schooling experiences of white middle-class students and those of poor African American and Latino students describing them as "savage inequalities" (Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995). Guinier (1991) found that there are certain factors that guarantee winners and losers in life and that race is too often an important factor in various aspects of society including the control of education systems.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) highlights many of the racialized constructions of today's society and provides a critical examination of the ways that universally-applied normalized social constructs have detrimental impacts to anyone that falls outside of the prescribed norm. Padilla and Lindholm (1995) assert that the white middle-class American (often male) serves as the standard against which other groups are compared and the instruments used to measure differences are universally applied across all groups (Tate, 1997) Given the history and development in the United States as well as the general power structures that have been created, the normative values that have led to the creation of the current understandings of parental participation have been based on white and middle-class values and expectations (Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013). CRT specifically challenges the universality of white experience/judgement as the authoritative standard that binds people of color and normatively measures, directs, controls, and regulates the terms of proper thought, expression, presentation, and behavior (Calmore, 1992).

Failing to consider cultural variations, individual circumstances, and alternate views often leads to the adoption of policies and practices that only consider the dominant group. (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). This is one way that power as DiAngelo (2006) explains, becomes normalized outside of our conscious awareness. In the case of parental involvement, power determines what is acceptable and then acts to categorize everyone based on the dominant group's perspective. Ideas and practices that differ from the practices prescribed by the dominant groups are considered to be less adequate (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). The highly ritualized nature of parental involvement practices (e.g. chaperoning field trips, preparing brownies for bake sales, belonging to parent–teacher associations, attending parent–teacher conferences, etc.) not only creates group identities based on levels of involvement, it also marginalizes linguistically,

culturally, and socioeconomically diverse families who may not be able to engage in full participation based on a variety of factors (Doucet, 2011).

Framing educational policy in general and parental engagement with a narrow scope can be detrimental to disadvantaged groups. Overlooking the actions and value of parents from non-dominant backgrounds because they do not have the same resources or their actions do not fit the prescribed mold, can lead to faulty assumptions about their contributions and potential contributions which can further lead to alienation thereby causing even greater harm to the students (Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013; Doucet, F. 2011; Howard, & Reynolds, 2008; Lim, 2012; Ishimaru, et al., 2016). Larocque, Kleiman, & Darling, (2011) argue that we must not assume that all parents and children are the same (i.e. have similar backgrounds, have access to the same resources, have the same opinions about education, have the same level of empowerment, etc.). Such assumptions overlook the role that a person's background plays in the education process as well as the barriers that may exist for certain families (Kim, 2009; Larocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011).

It is well understood in cultural studies that normative values, including things like views of parenting and parent involvement, are constructed and evolve over time which means that different cultural communities may have different ideas of what constitutes good parenting or good parental involvement (Lim, 2012). Therefore, the idea that there is only one "right" way to be an involved parent, is an assumption that not only denies access to people who hold perspectives that do not fit the adopted model, it also risks overlooking ideas that could improve upon existing models. Likewise, Howard and Reynolds (2008) argue that we need to use a more inclusive approach that looks at the relationships between parents, school personnel, space, and capital in order to understand how each of these affect the other to resolve disparities.

F. Communities of Practice

The previous section focused on many of the challenges to parent engagement and the need for greater understanding. The research surrounding critical race theory specifically highlights the need for inclusion to address deficiencies in the current practices. The "communities of practice" concept provides a way to be more inclusive by welcoming broader participation. Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern, interest, profession, set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and through continuous engagement deepen their understanding and knowledge of this area (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002 as cited in Price-Mitchell, 2009). Lave and Wanger's (1991) concept of communities of practice and their supporting process of legitimate peripheral participation provides insight into understanding the relations between what they refer to as the "old-timers" (in this case the educators and dominant group parents) and the "newcomers" (minority, low SES, etc. parents). Legitimate peripheral participation concerns the process by which newcomers can become part of a community of practice (Lave & Wanger, 1991). The way participation is viewed is also important because a person's intentions to learn (or participate) is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a practice (Lave & Wanger, 1991). As with other normative and sociocultural practices, legitimate peripherality as explained by Lave and Wanger (1991) can be a source of power or powerlessness, in affording or preventing articulation and interchange among communities of practice.

In the education community of practice, teachers, principals, counselors, parents, and others in the community share a common interest of educating the child. Because of the various structural issues mentioned above, the concept of communities of practice provides a way to conceptualize bringing historically marginalized groups into the engagement community of

practice through deliberate actions to recruit people into full participation. Failing to invite people into the community of practice can have detrimental impacts. For example, if minority parents' opinions do not align with the dominant ways of thinking, their opinions may be falsely perceived as illegitimate participation. When parents or their opinions are not welcomed, they may become less willing to engage with the school which could lead to a misunderstanding of the parents' views of education. As parents appear to disengage, their perceived lack of participation may confirm false views of parents' intentions, creating a self-reinforcing cycle. On the other hand, inviting these newcomers into the community of practice can facilitate their participation.

These new participants can strengthen the community of practice with the knowledge they bring and, in the case of parent engagement, the support they bring to the engagement process both inside and outside of the classroom. Wells (2004) emphasized the importance of the "co-construction of knowledge by more mature and less mature participants engaging in activity together" (p. xii). This type of collaborative learning plays an important role in communities of practice. The relationship between parents and schools can transcend participation and involvement and move toward the possibility of integration into the learning and knowledge creation process (Price-Mitchell, 2009). In addition to strengthening the engagement process, efforts to engage low-income, minority and otherwise marginalized parents by bringing them into the communities of practice, can help reduce psychological barriers to engagement and minimize the impacts of the physical barriers to engagement. This is especially true when leaders leverage their resources and capital in ways that support parents' efforts, insights, and aspirations.

G. Funds of Knowledge

Through the exchange and co-construction of knowledge between "old-timers" and "newcomers," we are able to gain new insights from previously overlooked resources (Wells, 2004). These resources can be referred to as "funds of knowledge." Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (1992) describe the historical accumulation of abilities, bodies of knowledge, assets, and cultural ways of interacting. The education field is just one of the many disciplines where the funds of knowledge concept can be applied.

Moll et al., (1992) found that there have been efforts to recognize parents, families, and communities as having knowledge that can offset the traditional school–home relationship by focusing specifically on funds of knowledge that identifies and engages knowledge sustained by community networks. Moll et al. (1992) define the term "funds of knowledge" as knowledge and related activities essential in households' functioning, development, and well-being. Because of the vast difference within each household and the myriad aspects associated with these "essential" activities, there is an incalculable amount of potential knowledge that can be generated from a single school environment. This knowledge includes ways of understanding social, economic, and productive activities of people in a given area that can be incorporated into classrooms (Moll et al., 1992).

Leveraging the funds of knowledge concept can help break down barriers between the classroom and the home and between the educator and the parent. Building relationships based on this concept can engender greater understanding about family circumstances, reduce the uncertainty and lack of familiarity of the school, contribute to the co-creation of academic content, lessons, and curriculum, and lead to the co-creation of school policy, all of which is a function of parent engagement. Gonzalez et al., (1995) asserts that as teachers begin to understand the rich resources or funds of knowledge that can be extracted from each household,

that in turn validates the family's experience as valued. This can lead parents to see the value in themselves and view their skills as worthy of pedagogical notice. In addition, parents report feeling more comfortable in the school and having greater access to the school (Gonzalez et al., 1995).

The existing literature lays out several issues that might affect parent engagement in Cumberland County Schools. The research has identified several physical and psychological barriers that might play a role. These barriers limit the ways in which parents can be and believe that they can be involved in their child's education. While many of the barriers are psychological, they can have the same impact as the tangible barriers when the parents choose not to become more involved. Understanding these barriers and how to reduce the impact of the barriers is necessary to understand how to improve parent engagement. Without reducing the impact of these barriers, it will be difficult to improve the level and quality of parent engagement regardless of the investment in parent engagement improvement strategies.

The literature also highlights some structural issues regarding minority populations which might play a significant role due to the demographics in Cumberland County. Understanding the structural issues and how to overcome those issues is important in the process for improving parent engagement.

The literature also highlights some important ways that can help overcome many of the psychological barriers and structural issues. The literature on communities of practice is instructive as it provides a way to understand the importance and process for bringing traditionally marginalized groups into the greater community of practice. This is also instructive for the current study due to the high percentage of minority and lower socio-economic group representation.

While the communities of practice literature explains the importance of welcoming

newcomers, the literature on funds of knowledge shows how that community of practice can be

strengthened through the inclusion of those additional voices. When viewed through the funds of

knowledge concept, the diversity in Cumberland County provides a rich source of potential

resources to assist in developing new ways to imagine parent engagement and education. The

intersection of this literature provides a way to understand many of the challenges and

opportunities that exist for resolving parent engagement in Cumberland County.

VI.   Conceptual Framework

Several explanations have been
developed to help analyze why some
parents are more involved in school
than others. For this study, I used the
Ecologies of Parental Engagement
(EPE) framework. The EPE
framework suggests "(a) that parental
engagement is the mediation between
space and capital by parents in
relation to others in school settings;

Figure 8

Ecologies of Parent Engagement Framework

Ecologies of Parent Engagement Framework (Barton et al., 2004)

(b) that mediation must be understood as both an action and an orientation to action; and (c) that

the differences in parental engagement across different kinds of spaces in urban schools (i.e.,

academic spaces versus nonacademic spaces) are both a micro and macro phenomenon" (Barton

et al. 2004, pg. 5).
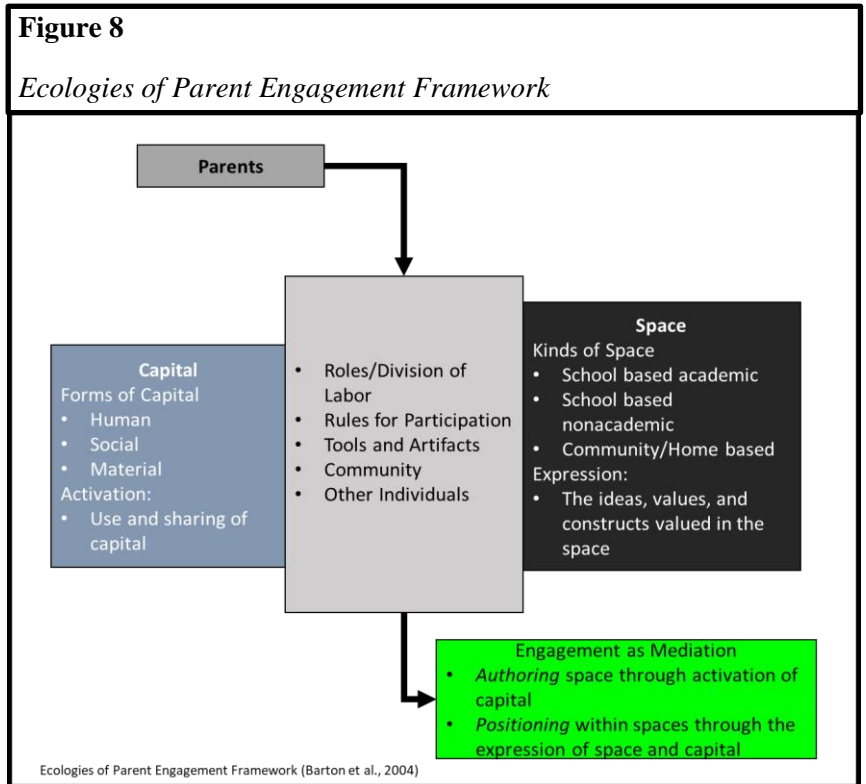
The EPE framework is a more holistic way of examining parental engagement which moves away from the traditional school-centric approach to one that is more inclusive, where parents are viewed as both authors and agents in schools. Similar to the way a scientist understands the interaction among organisms within a biophysical environment (e.g. people affect the environment and the environment also affects people), the EPE framework looks at the complexity of the converging interactions and circumstances within the educational environment. Understanding that culture, language, and social class are factors that can enhance or hinder parent engagement, the EPE framework attempts to understand relationships and actions between individuals within the school setting (Means, LaPlante, & Dyce, 2015).

Barton et al., (2004) explain that "engagement is a set of relationships and actions that cut across individuals, circumstances, and events that are produced and bounded by the context in which that engagement takes place" (p. 6). Therefore, parents' actions cannot be understood adequately without considering the entirety of the environment including the parents' interaction with other parents, parents' interaction with teachers, and parents' interaction with the school (Barton et al., 2004). In the same way that critical race theory highlights the structural challenges of marginalized people, the EPE framework also recognizes that parents' circumstances can have a significant impact on the ways they can participate vis-à-vis their middle-class Caucasian counterparts. Because of these structural issues and limitations, the EPE framework expands the understanding of parent participation beyond the traditional notions of involvement. Barton et al., (2004) use the word engagement to expand the understanding of parent participation to also include parents' orientations to the world and how those orientations frame the things they do.

Weaver-Hightower (2008) explains that an ecological approach is useful because it allows for a more complete understanding of the complexities of a given problem by engaging in a

deeper analysis of the entire context within which a problem exist. Using the term ecology for such a complex problem is appropriate because the term ecology within natural science describes how organisms are bound to their immediate and larger environments (Laferrière & Stoett, 2003). Therefore, an ecological approach provides a more comprehensive or inclusive view which allows researchers, teachers, schools and policy makers to better understand the how organisms might be bound in a given situation in order to assess the impact of all of the actors, the complexity of relations between those actors, the processes that have impacts on the actors, and the environments where everything occurs (Weaver-Hightower, 2008).

In addition to acknowledging both the complexities and constraints of a person's environment, the EPE framework is instructive because it explains how to use those factors as leverage to be engaged. Similar to the funds of knowledge concept, parent experiences and their actions, both past and present, are valued and taken into consideration within the EPE framework (Barton et al., 2004). As such, the EPE framework views engagement through the parents' use of various **spaces** and multiple forms of **capital**, rather than only analyzing their participation as dictated by the school. Cooper, Riehl, and Hasan (2010) explain that the EPE framework looks at how parents construct their roles using the capital or resources they possess rather than relying on the school system, administrators, teachers or staff to dictate their roles.

Space is an important aspect within the EPE framework. Drawing on their understanding of Critical Race Theory, Barton et al., (2004) acknowledge the connection between what a space is, and what ideas, values, and constructs have been created and are valued in that space. As such, they expand the understanding of space to include school-based academic spaces (classroom, science lab, etc.), school-based nonacademic spaces (cafeteria, athletic field, bus stop, etc.), and the home/community space. This third space is important when considering non-traditional

forms of engagement and those parents that may lack resources to participate in the school-based spaces. These spaces are also categorized along a continuum from formal, school-structured space to personal, individually authored and enacted space. The concept of an individually authored space is powerful because it provides a way for parents to construct their own ways of engaging that do not require them to be physically present in the school, while still being fully engaged.

In terms of parent engagement, the importance of space and the acknowledgement of the various manifestations of space cannot be overstated. Likewise, a deeper understanding of capital is also extremely important for understanding and improving parent engagement. Barton et al., (2004) borrowed from Bourdieu's (1977) definition of capital, where capital can be thought of as the human or cultural capital (educational advancement, expertise), social capital (social connections, social network, and memberships to organizations), and material or economic capital (wealth, assets) one has access to and can activate for their own desired purposes. In terms of the EPE Framework, capital is also understood as being framed by the space and the social, political, and cultural boundaries that frame that space. Additionally, capital can also be framed by the individuals who occupy that space at any given moment, such as the knowledge and experiences people bring to a space (Barton et al., 2004). As such, the concept of capital within the scope of this framework extends beyond the bounds of traditionally defined capital (e.g. material or financial means) to encompass all forms of capital. Drawing on the understandings of the "funds of knowledge" concept (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg,1992; Moll et al., 1992; Gonzalez et al., 1995) parents and teachers can leverage other types of capital (e.g., social capital, human capital, etc.) that allow parents to place themselves within spaces to engage and be involved in their child's education.

Using the EPE framework's explanation of space and capital allows parents, especially those with cultural, social, or economic barriers, to reimagine ways that they are currently engaged and ways that they can be more engaged. This framework can also extend the teachers' understanding of engagement so that they can recognize parents' current efforts and also provide parents with ideas to support non-traditional forms of engagement. Barton et al., (2004) explain that when parents activate their resources within a given space, they can situate themselves to influence the school and their child's education. Recognizing the scope of spaces means that parents can activate resources available to them in the home and still play a role in influencing the school.

I used the EPE framework for my study because it is more comprehensive than any of the other frameworks that seek to explain parent engagement and because I was interested in discovering ways to improve engagement, especially in an area with lower socio-economic status parents. The EPE framework helps conceptualize many of the barriers that exist while also providing insights into the preconditions necessary for improving parent engagement. Along with the literature review on barriers, critical race theory, communities of practice, and funds of knowledge, the EPE framework helped frame the questions necessary to explore parent engagement for my area.

VII.   Research Questions

The focus of this project centered on elementary schools because that is what my partner organization was most interested in examining. Understanding parent engagement in elementary schools is important because elementary education lays the foundation for a child's academic path. I developed three questions to help the Cumberland County School System understand and improve parent engagement. The research questions were guided by the literature review and the

EPE framework. To begin this study, the first research question explored the factors that prevent parent engagement in Cumberland County Schools. In order to improve parent engagement, it is important to understand all of the issues that are currently hindering parents' ability to be fully engaged.

Research Question 1: What are the factors that prevent parent engagement in Cumberland County Schools?

The second research question was derived from the EPE framework. Barton et al., (2004) frame their question as, "How do parents activate the resources available to them in a given space in order to *author* a place of their own in schools?" I adapted this question to fit the circumstances within my organization and focused on the lack of engagement.

Research Question 2: What prevents parents from activating the resources available to them in a given space in order to *author* a place of their own in schools?

The third research question was also derived from the EPE framework. Barton et al., (2004) frame their original question as, "How do they use or express that place to *position* themselves differently so that they can influence life in schools?" Once again, I adapted this question to fit the circumstances within my organization and focused on the lack of engagement and therefore a lack of influence.

Research Question 3: What prevents parents from using or expressing that place to *position* themselves differently so that they can influence life in schools?

VIII.   Project Design

A. Data Collection

To answer these research questions, I collected data leveraging the strengths of a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews that focused on the lived experience and individual

perceptions of the interviewees. Much of the literature emphasizes the importance of the individual lived experience and interactions within the environment as determinant of action. Understanding this, it was important to get a feel for experiences and perspectives from various stakeholders to explore consistencies and incongruences that might point to root causes. My goal was to interview administrators, teachers, and parents. Through my interviews with the administrators, I hoped to gain an understanding of their views on engagement, how they approach engagement, the resources they have available for engagement, and their views of the role played by parents, teachers, and the school with regard to engagement and student success. Through my interviews with the teachers, I also wanted to gain a better understanding of their views of the parents, teachers, and school's role regarding engagement and student success as well as the resources they have available and training they have received regarding parental engagement. Through my interviews with the parents, I wanted to see how they understand their role in their child's education, what engagement means to them, how important they consider engagement, any barriers to engagement that might exist, and the resources they have that support engagement.

I intended to uncover some of the root causes behind the current challenges to parental engagement in these schools, as well as the administrator, teachers, and parents' understanding of engagement. With this information, I was able to identify the gaps in both resources and expectations between the multiple stakeholders. Based on the collective feedback, I uncovered several common trends and themes amongst the responses that illuminate the challenges to parent engagement. These themes also hint at ways that parent engagement can be drastically improved as each barrier is reduced or eliminated altogether.

To answer these questions, the first set of data collection included interviews from Cumberland County Elementary School administrators. A stratified random sample was used to select the administrator interviewees. Using the school websites, all administrators' names and contact information were downloaded, placed in a database and categorized by school. One administrator from each school was selected for a total of 51 administrators for the final sample.

Figure 9

Teacher Participants (Grade Level)
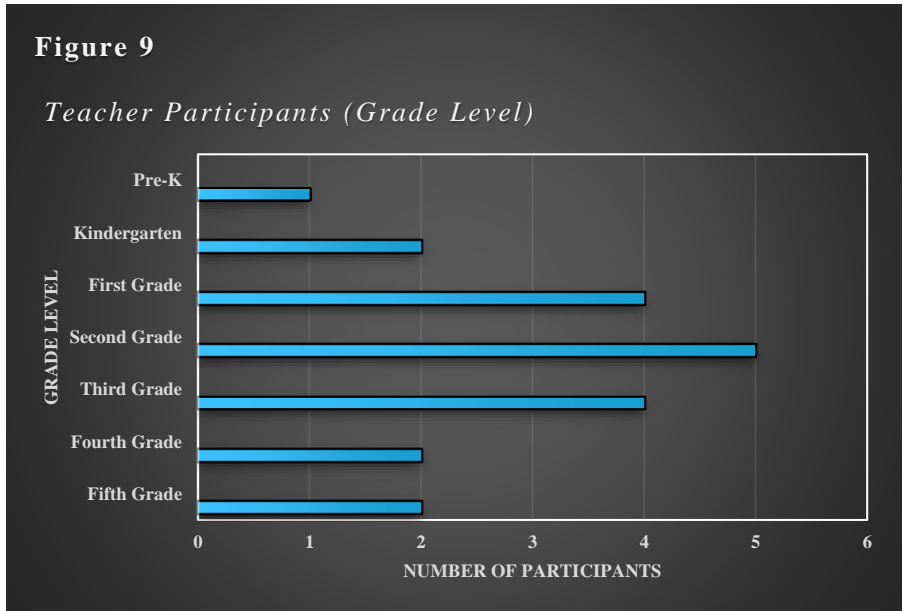
Emails were then sent to each of the administrators requesting their participation in the study. Of these, two administrators agreed to be interviewed.

The second set of data collection included interviews from Cumberland County Elementary School teachers. A stratified random sample was also used to select the teacher interviewees. Using all 51 school websites, all teachers' names and contact information were downloaded, placed in a database and categorized by school. From there, one teacher was selected at random per grade per school for a total of 252 teachers for the final sample.

Figure 10

Teacher Participants (Demographics)
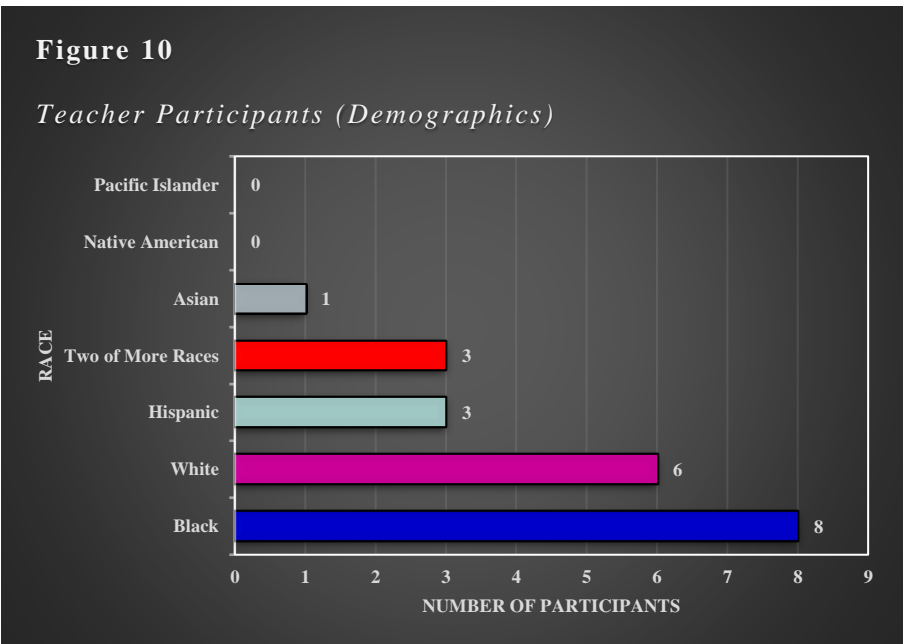
The number of teachers from each school was different because different schools have different

grade levels (e.g. Pre-K - 2nd Grade, Kindergarten – 5th Grade, etc.) Emails were then sent to

each of the teachers requesting their participation in the study. Of these, 20 teachers agreed to be

interviewed. Figure 9 shows the grade levels that participated, and Figure 10 shows the

demographic makeup of the teachers that participated. The purpose for stratifying the sample by

school and grade level was to get a greater dispersion of representation among various grade

levels and schools as possible to gain the widest understanding for the current study.

The third set of data collection included interviews from Cumberland County Elementary School parents. In selecting the parents, I used a purposive sampling methodology that focused on maximum variation or heterogeneous sample and quota sampling to intentionally select specific subjects who were parents of elementary

Figure 11

Parent Participants (Demographics)

school children in Cumberland County Schools and representative of the demographics of race,

ethnicity, and socio-economic status of the district. The purpose of this design was to gain as

much insight as possible from various perspectives and to ensure that the sample was

representative of the district.

To recruit parents, I had intended to visit the schools for sampling from a few specially

selected schools. Due to the restrictions imposed as a result of COVID19, recruiting and
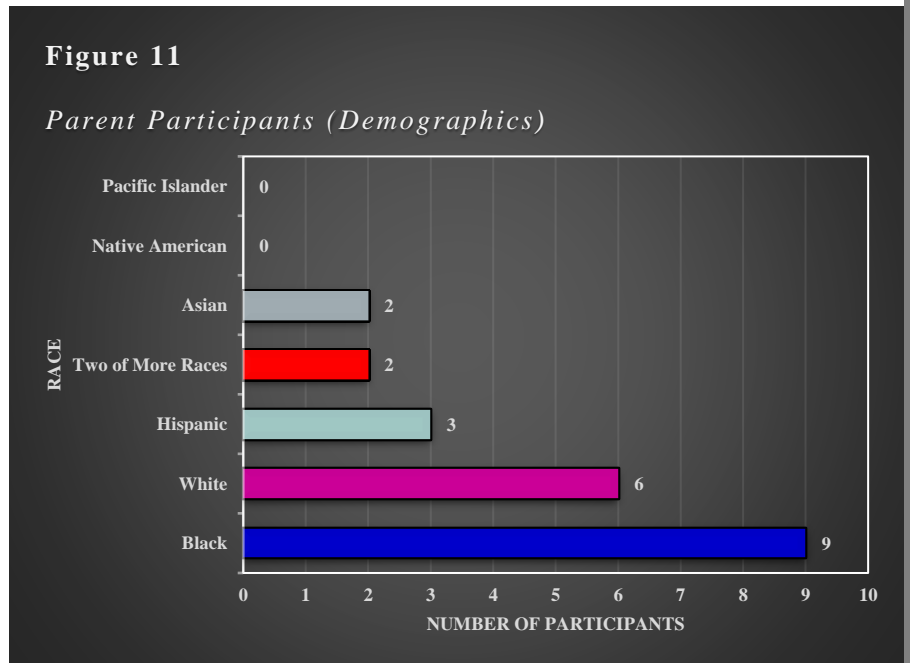
conducting interviews on-site with parents was prohibitive. Instead, I put up flyers around the city to recruit participants and offered a $10 gift card. I also posted the same recruitment announcement on several parent groups on social media sites. Prior to conducting the interview, I ensured that each participant had elementary school-aged children that attended Cumberland County Schools. In total, I conducted 22 parent interviews consisting of nine African American, six white, three Hispanic, two Asian, and two of mixed-race background. Figure 11 shows the demographic makeup of the parents who participated in the study. Figure 12 shows a side-by-side comparison of the demographic breakdown of the parents interviewed and the student demographics of the school district.

Figure 12

Parent Interview Participants to Student Demographic Comparison
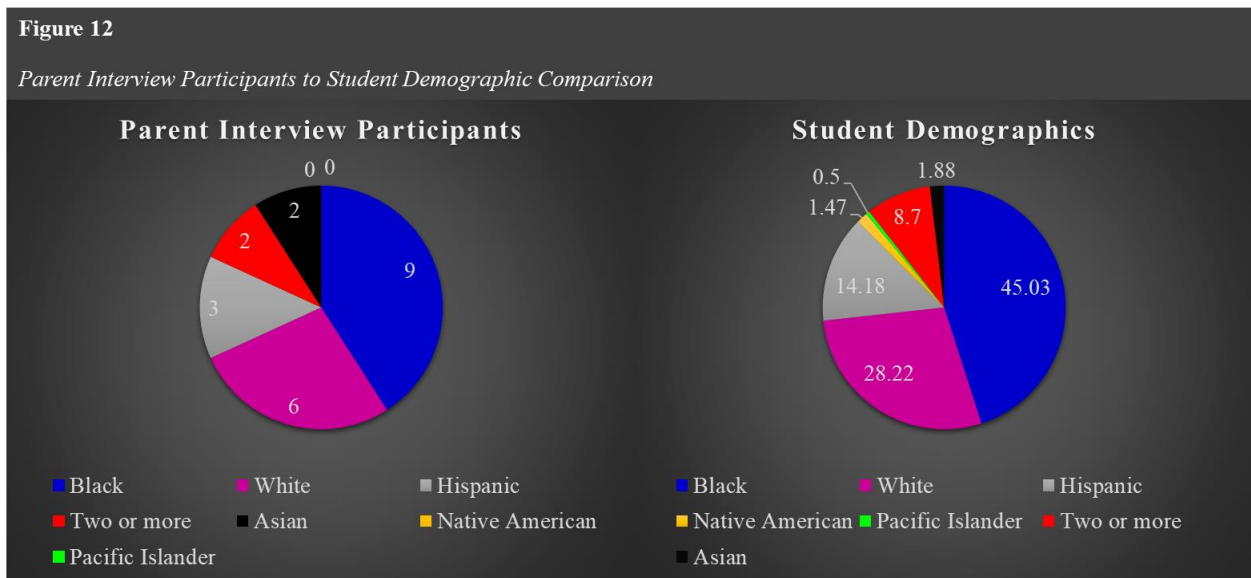
B. Data Analysis

To analyze the data, I employed a concept-driven (Gibbs, 2007) thematic analysis using Saldana's (2009) "streamlined codes-to-theory model for qualitative inquiry" (p. 12). This helped me find critical themes within the data to explain some of the challenges with parent engagement in Cumberland County Schools. This study specifically used a deductive a priori methodology relying on key concepts and codes found in the literature review and the

Ecologies of Parent Engagement framework. Coding the data using the conceptual framework as a guide simplified the process for organizing the interviewee's responses in a methodical manner to extract key themes and significant findings. This allowed me to "take the data apart to see what it yielded before putting the data back together in a meaningful way" (Creswell, 2015, p. 156).

I began by using the preselected codes to interpret and categorize the responses. I organized each code based on the interview respondents' acknowledgement or elaboration into several groups: "Educator Perceptions," "Parent Perceptions," "Common Perceptions," and "Not-Mentioned." This allowed me to understand contrasting perceptions from each group as well as areas of agreement. Using prescribed codes also allowed me to see issues (codes) that were highlighted in the literature, but not reported by participants. Of note, due to the similarity in responses between the teachers and administrators, it was not necessary to distinguish their responses. As such, they were combined into the "educator" group.

The following diagrams shows how I organized the data starting with the research question at the top, followed by the macro-level question on the far left. There were several other questions (see Appendix A, B, and C for complete list of interview questions) asked that are not listed on this diagram but fall within the scope of the listed question. The codes were then organized by color to depict which group elaborated on which codes. The next section provides the "category" which is the reconstruction of the codes combined with the response from the population. Using the code elaboration by group, the individual category construction, and then analyzing the category against the original codes provided a theme to describe the overall conditions. After analyzing the codes, categories and then combining the themes, it was possible to generate findings that better explain "why" the current conditions

exist.

    The first key concept used from the literature focused on "Barriers to Engagement,"
defined as structural barriers between the home and school that are often sustained through
the normative practices of schooling and impede parental participation (Barton et al., 2004).
This category was split into three subcategories: Educators' Perspectives, Parents'
Perspectives, and Common Perspectives. Using the deductive codes, the diagram shows how
I went from research question to findings using a concept-driven thematic analysis approach.

Research Question 1: What are the factors that prevent parent engagement in Cumberland County Schools?

Question	Codes	Category	Themes	Findings
What do you think discourages parents from participating in activities at their child's school? (adapted from Robinson, 2008)	**Educator Perceptions:** Parent's View of their Role in Education; Parent's View of Engagement; Parent's View of Education; Parents' Upbringing; Parents' Level of Importance; Parents' level of education; Parents' Language Barriers; Parents' Access to technology	Educators' perceptions of barriers to parent engagement	Teachers' perceptions of intangible barriers are based on parent deficiencies	There are a wide range of perceived physical (tangible) and psychological (intangible) barriers to parent engagement. While there is general agreement between parents and educators regarding many of the tangible (physical) barriers, there is less overlap regarding the psychological barriers to engagement. Often rooted in misunderstandings and a lack of clear communication, these barriers create friction between parents and the school which further inhibits effective parent engagement.
	Common Perceptions: Parents' Time; Parents' Job; Parents' Transportation; Parents' Competing Responsibilities; Parents' Money; Parents' Access to Childcare; Parents' Self-Efficacy	Common perceptions of barriers to parent engagement	Parents and Teachers agree on many of the tangible, resource-focused barriers to parent engagement	
	Parent Perception: Poor Communication from Teacher; Invitations from Teacher; Not Feeling Valued by Teacher/ Parents; Not Feeling Welcome by Educators/ Parents; Social Status; Lack of understanding regarding Engagement	Parents' perceptions of barriers to parent engagement	Parents' perceptions of intangible barriers are based on teacher or school deficiencies	Although many parents express a desire to be engaged in their child's education, they believe they lack the capacity due to their perception of physical and psychological barriers. Barriers are exacerbated by lack of understanding between parents and teachers.

    The second key concept was taken from the EPE framework and focused on "Capital."
Capital is defined as human, social, and material. Capital can be thought of as the human,
social, and material resources one has access to and can activate for their own desired
purposes (Bourdieu, 1977, cited in Barton et al., 2004).

Research Question 2: What prevents parents from activating the resources available to them in a given space in order to author a place of their own in schools?

Question		Codes	Category	Themes	Findings
What resources do you think parents have to support parental engagement?	Educator Perceptions	Speaking a Second Language; Knowledge of technology; Specialized Academic Skill; Upbringing	Educators' perceptions of capital or resources available to parent	In addition to traditional forms of capital, educators identified a few human capital specific skills that are useful for supporting the teacher.	
	Common Perceptions	Time is valued; Volunteering in class; Chaperoning Trips; Attending PTA Meetings; Higher education more likely have valued skills; Access to technology	Common perceptions of capital or resources available to parent	Parents and Educators agree on many of the traditional sources of capital.	Parents and Teachers are unaware of non-traditional forms of capital which hinders parents' ability to author a place of their own within the school.
	Parent Perception	Money; Strong Social Connections "Knowing People"; "Knowing the System"	Parents' perceptions of capital or resources available to parent	In additional to traditional sources of capital, parents identified a few sources of social capital from a deficeit point of view.	
	Not Mentioned	Knowledge of another country; Resilience/Perseverance; Immigrant Experience; Authority in-home; Non-traditional Life Skills	Capital or resources identified by the literature but not identified by educators or parents	Several forms of non-traditional capital or "funds of knowledge" were not mentioned by parents of educators	

The third and final key concept used from the framework was "Space." Space is defined as schools, home, and community areas ranging from formal, school-structured spaces to personal, individually authored and enacted space (Barton et al., 2004).

Research Question 2: What prevents parents from activating the resources available to them in a given space in order to author a place of their own in schools?

Question		Codes	Category	Themes	Findings
How/ Where can parents be engaged in their child's education?	Educator Perceptions		Educators' perceptions of spaces where parents can be engaged	Educators identified the traditional in-school and school associated formal activities as spaces for engagement	
	Common Perceptions	In Classroom; On Field Trips; Attending PTA Meetings; At Spelling Bee; At Math Night; At Steering Committee Meetings; At Fund Raisers	Common perceptions of spaces where parents can be engaged	Parents and Educators agree on many of the traditional spaces for engagement	The various spaces where parents can be engaged are not universally recognized as active engagement (i.e. non-academic spaces vs academic spaces).
	Parent Perception	At Sports Events	Parents' perceptions of spaces where they can be engaged	Parents identified the traditional in-school and school associated activities both formal and informal as spaces for engagement	
	Not Mentioned	At Home; At the Library; At the Museum; At Church; At the Store	Spaces identified by the literature but not identified by educators or parents	Several spaces where engagement takes place were not mentioned by parents of educators	

IX.   **Findings**

Research Question 1: What are the factors that prevent parent engagement in Cumberland County Schools?

Finding 1: There are a wide range of perceived physical (tangible) and psychological (intangible) barriers to parent engagement. While there is general agreement between parents and educators regarding many of the tangible (physical) barriers, there is less overlap regarding the psychological barriers to engagement. Often rooted in misunderstandings and a lack of clear communication, these barriers create friction between parents and the school which further inhibits effective parent engagement.

This finding emerged from eliciting responses from educators and parents regarding their perceptions of barriers to parent engagement and then comparing parent and educator responses. There was a general agreement among parents and teachers regarding physical barriers: time, transportation, competing responsibilities, lack of childcare, a job, financial resources, etc. These barriers emerged in almost every interview for both educators and parents. This finding suggests that the agreement on tangible barriers is based on the ability to easily recognize what physically exists, placing an emphasis or higher value on tangible assets that a person can access. This finding also suggests a deficit mindset whereby those who lack assets may be viewed as less capable of participating in parent engagement activities. This finding also demonstrates a traditional understanding of resources that limits how parents can contribute (Delgado-Gaitan, 1996).

A. Roles and Responsibilities:

One significant barrier that emerged from this study centered on the perception of roles and responsibilities, specifically the difference between the parents' role and the teachers' role in the

child's education. In one interview, Administrator A stated that parents play a very important role in their child's education. She stated that "they [the parents] are the child's first teacher." The Administrator went on to explain that the parents' role includes ensuring that the children are prepared for school, ensure that the child's homework is complete, the child is well-rested, has clean clothes, and has all required materials for the day. In a separate interview, but echoing this sentiment, Administrator B qualified this by adding that parents "have to make sure they have eaten and that they have a snack." She went on to explain that "there are no excuses for the kids not having food, with all of the food banks and other resources we have now." Teacher A stated that these roles are more "intuitive." But also stated that these roles were probably based on the background of the parents. Administrator A also acknowledged that her parents were very active in her education and played a prominent role, therefore her perspective is one that includes a larger role for the parents.

When asked whether there was a clear agreement between administrators, teachers and parents regarding these roles, many teachers expressed that there probably was not a broad standing agreement. Administrator A further acknowledged that this lack of clarity might lead to unmet expectations by both parents and teachers. She further added that these unmet expectations could lead to friction between parents and teachers. As the discussion progressed, the administrator acknowledged that we "needed to develop a clear understanding of the general expectations for parents, teachers, administrators, etc."

When interviewing parents about the perception of the difference on roles in education, there were a wide range of responses. Parent A stated that "parents must play an active role for their children to succeed." She went on to say that "parents must assist their child with homework, school projects, studying, etc." This contrast with Parent B who explained that "teaching is the

teacher's job, that is what they get paid to do." She continued to explain that "my job is to make sure my child has a place to live, food to eat, and other essentials." These responses demonstrate the extremes of parent responses, with other responses falling somewhere between these two. Parents were generally unaware of the specific or expected roles that delineate teachers and parents' responsibilities in terms of educating children. When looking deeper into the question of roles and responsibilities, I asked if these roles were codified anywhere and whether or not teachers and parents were aware of these roles. None of the respondents were aware of any codified or explicit roles that explain general expectations. From this study, the finding suggests that each teacher and parent had their own understanding of their roles.

B. Rules and Norms for Participation and Engagement

When trying to improve something it is important to have a clear understanding of how to define the terms as well as the indicators for success. The findings suggest that there is a significant issue for parent engagement because the terms are not clear. When I asked how parent engagement is defined or what the rules and norms are for parent engagement, there were mixed responses. Administrator A stated that participation or engagement is "different, it depends on the school and the child's needs. For example, if the child has special needs, there would need to be more participation." The same respondent stated that participation was also linked to upbringing. For example, "if their parents participated in their education when they were young, they are more likely to play an active role." She went on to explain that if the parent had a positive experience in school, they are more likely to participate in their child's education because they are more comfortable being around the school. When asked if the rules or norms for participation were clear or understood by teachers and parents, this administrator acknowledged that there was probably a lack of clarity.

In another interview, I asked Administrator B about participation, specifically "who determines what participation looks like?" She stated that it is typically the parents that are more aggressive and position themselves within the school. They tend to be white middle-class mothers. This is consistent with findings from McGrath and Kuriloff (1999) that found that the most involved mothers are the white upper-class mothers. Administrator B also acknowledged that these are the same parents that make up the committee representatives from each grade level as well. Not only do they determine what constitutes participation, they also decide what events are held and they play an active role in shaping school policies. This is important to consider because McGrath and Kuriloff (1999) found that some parents engaged in practices that alienated mothers outside of their class and racial group, such as resisting or opposing suggestions made by parents from different groups to introduce new programming at school functions. Other studies have reported exclusionary practices including making statements about needing "the right kinds of families" at their school in front of linguistically, culturally, and socioeconomically diverse (LCSD) mothers (Cucchiara & Horvat 2009); making English Learner parents feel uncomfortable for needing language translation at PTA meetings (Abrams & Gibbs 2002); and making decisions "on behalf" of families of color without consulting them (Sieber, 1982). This is important to consider as it could significantly hinder parent engagement among minority parents in Cumberland County.

These findings highlight that many parents had a limited understanding of the ways they could actively participate in their child's education aside from the at-school activities. Activities commonly mentioned were Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, fund raisers, and volunteering in the classroom. Many parents reported not being able to participate in these activities due to several of the other tangible barriers mentioned previously. When prompted,

parents acknowledged their contributions at home and many responded proudly about their parenting skills, but they did not independently associate this as a form of parent engagement in terms of education. The majority of parents' responses focused on at-school or in-class participation as active parent engagement in their child's learning. This narrow understanding of parent engagement is a significant barrier for parents who lack material means to be present in the school. This leads to the creation of other barriers as parents who are not present are viewed as less engaged or interested in their child's education.

Some parents expressed frustration because they believed that teachers viewed them as not helping. Some parents reported feeling that their actions at home were taken for granted and did not count for anything; they are simply expected to take care of the kids, but that effort does not count for anything in terms of their education. Overlooking at-home contributions demonstrates a traditional view of parent engagement. These findings suggest that in general, both parents and educators do not view at-home activities as part of parent engagement, but some parents do expect that the educators appreciate their at-home efforts. The literature argues that these at-home activities should be considered as part of "engagement" because these actions are prerequisites for the children to be able to effectively participate in classroom instruction. Not appreciating the efforts that parents take at home leads to unnecessary friction. For parents that do not recognize these actions as "engagement" or the home as a "space" to activate their individual "capital," it could affect their ability to author a space and position themselves within their child's academic process.

Finding 2: Although many parents express a desire to be engaged in their child's education, they believe they lack the capacity due to their perception of physical and psychological barriers.

Many parents report wanting to take part in school activities and play a greater role in their child's education, but because they believe they lack resources, they feel like they are unable to play an active role. Parent H explained that she has no transportation to get to the school, so it is not possible for her to take part in in-school activities. She further explained that because she cannot go to the school often, she does not really know what is going on at the school. Even though she designates a place and time for homework, incorporates study time on the weekends, checks homework daily, and ensures her son reads during the summer, she does not feel like she is engaged in his education. Similarly, Parent D expressed frustration because she wants to be active in her daughter's education, but she explained that because she cannot get to the school easily due to a lack of childcare for her younger children and a lack of transportation, she is unable to play an active role in her daughter's education. Parent D also enforces regular study and homework times, checks the school website for updates, and calls the teacher to ask questions when she is uncertain of some requirements. Like Parent H, Parent D also feels like she is not playing an active role in her child's education because of her lack of tangible resources.

Finding 3: Barriers are exacerbated by lack of understanding between parents and teachers.

This finding highlights the snowball effect associated with many barriers to parent engagement. The existence of a barrier in one area can have a profound effect on the situation creating additional barriers. As discussed above, the lack of transportation prevents parents from attending certain school-based activities. For some educators, the parents' lack of attendance at the school sends a signal that parents do not value parent engagement thus creating a perception barrier. Similarly, the misunderstandings or lack of clarity regarding parents' and teachers' roles and responsibilities has increased friction between some parents and teachers, thereby negatively affecting parent engagement. When parents fail to meet teachers' expectations, many teachers

lose confidence in those parents which creates a downward spiral of animosity and blame which then creates an environment that is less welcoming for parents.

This finding suggests that some barriers engender additional barriers unnecessarily. Some parents expressed that negative experiences during their own education created some challenges engaging with the school. These parents also expressed that they felt unwelcomed by the school (teachers and administrators) which made them more reluctant to engage with the school. They believed that teachers looked down on them because they are not on the same level in terms of education or economic status. Some parents reported not feeling welcome when they are able to come to the school because they are not at all of the school events. Doucet (2011) explains that when marginalized parents are less engaged in schools it perpetuates the myths of apathy among these parents. This finding demonstrates how barriers can produce additional barriers. For example, the lack of material capital (transportation) reduces the parents' ability to participate; that lack of participation creates poor attitudes toward parents making them feel uncomfortable, and because parents do not feel comfortable, they decrease their attempts to participate which then causes teachers to consider these parents disengaged which reinforces biases about lower socio-economic groups in terms of education.

Parent C in this study explained that she works fulltime and is not always available to be at school events, but when she is able, she does not feel welcome. Parent J also acknowledged that she too did not feel welcome. She stated that because she does not have money, she is unable to participate in some activities like chaperoning field trips and contributing to the PTA. She believes that the teachers look down on her because she is unable to participate in these activities. She explained that the negative environment that she experiences makes it even more difficult to go to the school. Parent E also reported not feeling welcome in the school. She

attributes this to her lower level of education attainment and the fact that she does not have money. She reports wanting to play an active role in her child's education but becomes frustrated with the school and teachers because of the way she feels she is being treated.

Parent E explained that she has problems understanding some of the homework and why her children are required to do so much homework. She explained that they spend anywhere from two to four hours doing homework most nights of the week. When she attempted to express these concerns to the teacher, she felt as though the teacher ignored her concerns. This can create additional problems because parents who feel unwelcomed or excluded from schools can become critical (Diamond & Gomez, 2004) and sometimes angry. This can further lead to parent and educator disagreements about what is best for the education of the children. Although schools express a desire to have minority parents included in important conversations impacting school policies or curricula, their voices and ideas are often unwelcome and perceived as aggressive or self-serving (Graue et al., 2001; Shannon, 1996).

These are just a few examples of some of the factors that prevent parent engagement in Cumberland County Schools. These findings suggest that tangible barriers are just one aspect that needs to be addressed. More importantly, the intangible barriers appear to play a much more significant role in preventing parent engagement due to misunderstandings that create friction between parents and the school thereby further inhibiting effective parent engagement.

Question 2: What prevents parents from activating the resources available to them in a given space in order to author a place of their own in schools?

Finding 4: Parents and Teachers are unaware of non-traditional forms of capital which hinders parents' ability to author a place of their own within the school.

This study used Barton et al. (2004) and Bourdieu's (1977) definition of capital as the human, social, and material resources one has access to and can activate for their own desired purposes. The findings, however suggest that both parents and teachers rely primarily on a narrower understanding of capital that focuses on material or other traditional forms of capital. Most responses to questions about capital or resources centered on some aspect of time, money, and education. This narrow understanding of capital is constraining, especially for parents with limited means of traditional forms of capital.

Time as a source of capital was viewed through parents' actions as having time to volunteer in the class, time to attend meetings and time to go on trips with the students. As such, time and the activities enabled by having time were both viewed as a valuable source of capital because they were able to assist teachers. Having money was also viewed as a source of capital through the parents' access to transportation, their ability to support events and their ability to go on trips with the students. Education was likewise viewed as a valuable source of capital as parents with an education were able to assist in the class, help the school in other administrative ways, and participate more effectively in school events.

Administrator B did provide one anecdotal instance of how she was able to leverage one parent's non-traditional form of capital when she was a teacher. She had one student whose father did not speak English, but the father was very handy at fixing things. So, she invited him to help make things for the class. She later invited him into the classroom as a guest for Spanish class to read stories in Spanish. These small adjustments allowed him to contribute in a meaningful way and provided him a position of value within the class. While this was a good news story, this was only one story from a person with more than 30 years in education.

A few parents pointed out that they believe one source of capital to be "understanding the system" or "knowing people." Parent F stated that if you "know people" your kids will be very successful in school. This is consistent with several studies that have documented the power and importance of social networks, specifically in acquiring insider knowledge about teachers, school practices, policies, and avenues for meeting their own and their children's interests (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 1999). Parent G mentioned that "knowing the system" made it easier for some parents and their kids to get better grades. This is also consistent with Doucet's (2011) findings that knowledge about and understanding of an educational system represent powerful forms of currency that parents can activate to provide their children with an educational advantage.

The non-traditional forms of capital defined by some of the literature: life experience, cultural knowledge, hard work ethic, resilience in hardship, etc. were generally not acknowledged by educators or parents. These could be viewed as potential "funds of knowledge" (Moll et al., 1992; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992) that are being overlooked which could be used to contribute to the overall improvement of education and parent engagement. Overlooking these potential funds of knowledge as legitimate sources of capital means that parents who lack traditional forms of capital may continue to be excluded from the engagement process. Parents and teachers that fail to recognize these resources limit what resources parents can activate to better position themselves in their child's academic experience. Continuing to exclude these parents could relegate them to passive consumers of the education system rather than active participants. This will also reduce their ability to gain greater influence in their child's school. These findings suggest that teachers do not recognize or understand all of the potential forms of capital that might exist within their classroom. Likewise, because they are unaware of alternate sources of capital, they do not know how to help parents activate non-traditional forms of capital.

Not only does this limit how parents can actively participate, it also represents a potentially significant loss of capital that each parent could otherwise bring to the classroom. This finding also highlights the power of the educators' position in dictating the terms of capital and how that impacts a parents' ability to participate. If the educators do not recognize certain forms of non-traditional capital, those parents that only have non-traditional capital may continue to be excluded from having a position within their child's school.

Finding 5: The various spaces where parents can be engaged are not universally recognized as active engagement (i.e. non-academic spaces vs academic spaces).

There was overwhelming agreement between teachers and parents regarding the spaces that parents can play an active role in the child's education, however these responses significantly limit the totality of spaces where engagement can and does occur. Barton et al., (2004) define spaces for engagement as schools, home, and community areas including formal, school-structured space to personal, individually authored and enacted space. Respondents from this study however only identified spaces at the school as places where parent engagement occurs. Specifically, the classroom was most often identified first as a space where parents can be engaged in their child's education. From the teachers' perspective this engagement was focused on volunteering in the classroom to assist the teacher, whereas the parents' responses focused on participating in the classroom as a way of assisting the child.

Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings was another space that was identified by most teachers and about one-third of parents as a space for engagement. For teachers, they defined parent engagement in this space as a way to take an active role in supporting the teachers in educating their children by understanding the curriculum and other functions of the school. Parent F reported that PTA meetings were a space for engagement because "that is how you get

to know people." She went on to say that "knowing those people will help your child in school so that is an important way and space to be engaged."

As discussed above, these findings suggest that activities that are conducted in the home and in other spaces throughout the community are not viewed as engagement. This limited understanding of spaces where engagement can occur shapes the way parents who can and cannot participate in at-school activities are viewed by educators and other parents. Narrowly defining space as at-school activities overlooks the multiple ways parents participate in their children's education because they do not correspond to normative understandings of parental involvement in schools (Barton et al, 2004). This also limits parents' ability to leverage the capital they have within a given space to author a place of their own in schools.

Question 3: What prevents parents from using or expressing that place to position themselves differently so that they can influence life in schools?

Finding 6: The combination of multiple barriers and a narrow framing of capital and space prevents parents from authoring a place in the school which further inhibits their ability to position themselves differently to influence life in school.

These findings suggest that parent engagement in Cumberland County suffers from multiple converging issues that prevent parents from full engagement. Full engagement in this sense refers to the parent's ability to position themselves differently to influence life in school. Most of the issues are grounded in some form of barrier, either physical or psychological. These range anywhere from a lack of material resources to misunderstandings, and further to the very perception of engagement, capital and space. For example, the lack of traditional capital, combined with a lack of understanding of non-traditional forms of capital make it difficult for many, especially marginalized parents, to activate the capital available to them in a given space.

Likewise, the inability to be present at traditionally recognized engagement spaces combined with a narrow view of engagement spaces outside of the school, limits the perception of engagement that might be possible for "given space." These findings suggest that those parents that lack specific capital and cannot participate in "recognized" spaces, are prevented from authoring a place in the school. Because they cannot author a place in the school, they are less capable of influencing life in the school, thereby limiting their engagement.

Similar to the previous findings, this finding has the most significant impact on lower socio-economic members of the community. Members from lower socio-economic groups who have many obstacles that inhibit parent engagement also suffer from a lack of understanding regarding other assets that they might be able to contribute as well as a lack of recognition for actions they engage in that are outside of traditionally recognized educational spaces. This combination of factors prevents them from full engagement that would otherwise allow them to author a position to influence life in their child's school.

C. Recommendations

The following recommendations to help improve parent engagement are based on the findings from the data in this study and informed by the literature as well as the Ecologies of Parent Engagement framework. The foundation for these recommendations is based on the need to resolve the various barriers identified above. In order to improve parent engagement, it is essential for educators, administrators, policy makers and parents to work together to reduce the impacts of the physical (actual or material) barriers (money, time, etc.) while striving to eliminate perceived barriers. Because of the barriers that exist, this effort will require intentionality and a deliberate approach. Resolving barriers will allow parents to activate all of the capital (human, material, and social) available to them in order to author a space within their

child's school (physically or virtually) to position themselves differently so that they can influence life in their child's school.

Recommendation One: Create an inclusive sense-making environment with strategically invited administrators, teachers, and parents to gain insight from diverse opinions to identify and understand the various barriers that inhibit engagement and then develop tailored approaches to resolve these barriers. Overcoming barriers is the most important prerequisite for improving parent engagement and possibly the most complex. Resolving barriers is important because most of the other issues that negatively impact parent engagement are derivatives of some form of barrier and in turn create additional barriers. This is complex because barriers are interconnected and will vary from year-to-year and from school-to-school. This recommendation is consistent with Baker et al., (2016) who argue that improving parent engagement requires intentional and consistent attention to addressing barriers with connected solutions.

Once the schools have a good understanding of the physical barriers, they can request or adjust resource requirements to help reduce the impact of barriers, specifically the physical barriers. For the psychological barriers, these will need to be addressed through deliberate engagement between the school and parents to resolve the multiple complexities that currently exist. The foundation for resolving many of the psychological barriers requires open dialogue and building trust. Communication will be a central aspect of breaking down the psychological barriers, especially those that center on perceptions.

Recommendation Two: The next recommendation is informed by the findings that highlight the need for a shared understanding regarding parent and teacher roles and responsibilities. To address this, the school system needs to develop co-created (parents and teachers) common understandings of the roles and responsibilities for parents and teachers. Similar to

recommendation one, the schools should invite a diverse group of people, beyond the traditional PTA members, to ensure the widest range or perspectives are represented.

A clear understanding will identify responsibilities for specific tasks thereby reducing misunderstandings between teachers and parents, thereby reducing friction. Additionally, developing clear roles will provide parents a respected position within the child's school based on the wide range of day-to-day activities outside of the classroom that parents do to support their child's learning and development. Acknowledging these out-of-school contributions allows parents that have significant physical barriers to play a recognized and respected active role in the child's education. This recommendation is supported by research from Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) that suggests that parental role construction is a significant contributor to parents' decisions about becoming involved in their child's education. Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1995) explain that parent role construction establishes, at a personal level, the range of activities that parents are likely to construe as important, necessary, and permissible for their own actions with and on behalf of their children's education. Adding the co-creation and codification of roles expands the concept of role construction beyond the individual so that educators and parents take part in the decisions, and both have a clear understanding of those roles.

Recommendation Three: Using the same inclusive sense-making space identified in recommendation one, the schools should work with parents to expand the scope of what is considered parent engagement. In order for parents to have buy-in, schools should develop clearly defined, co-created "rules and norms" for engagement so that parents and teachers understand how and where parents can be and are engaged in their child's education. Machen, Wilson, and Notar (2005) note that parents are an important part of the process of improving schools, as is giving parents an effective voice in decision making in the school. "Overall, the

key to parent involvement is providing meaningful engagement opportunities that offer concrete ways for parents to build knowledge of and the capacity to involve themselves in the educational system" (Jarmuz-Smith, 2011, p. 3).This co-creation of rules and norms of parent engagement is supported by Abdul-Adil and Farmer's (2006) research that argues specifically that African American parents have responded positively to parental involvement programs that emphasize themes of empowerment, outreach, and indigenous resources. Their research explains that empowerment helps individuals overcome multiple obstacles faced by inner-city African American parents because programs that promote empowerment acknowledge the strengths of and build rapport with historically disenfranchised inner-city African American parents. Co-creation of rules and norms is a form of empowerment that provides a way for traditionally marginalized groups to play an active role in reimagining parent engagement.

From this study it is clear that there is a lack of clarity surrounding many aspects of parent engagement including the various spaces where engagement can occur. Educators must develop a better understanding of the multiple spaces so that they can support and encourage the parents in the spaces where parents are able to be engaged. This is especially important for low-income families. Many low-income families have low self-esteem and parents with low self- esteem tend to doubt their ability to help their children which also causes them to avoid contact with the school (Martin, 2015). Because of this, Smith (2006) explains that there is a need to acknowledge and encourage even the smallest efforts made by parents to support their children's education.

This expanded understanding of engagement should incorporate non-traditional forms of capital as well as academic and non-academic spaces so that both parents and educators understand and appreciate the multiple ways that both parents and teachers can be engaged in the

child's education. Peña (2000) argues that moving from parent presence to engagement may require a profound attitude shift that focuses on the strengths and resources that families can bring to their child's education. Some additional events that take part outside of the school that could be considered parental engagement include verbal encouragement, attending community events, and volunteering at local agencies. Participating in these activities provides opportunities for parents to help their children do well in school and allow families to spend time together (Hall & Quinn, 2014). Additionally, participating in both school events and non-school events, such as church, YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, library and attending their child's extracurricular activities, demonstrates parents' commitment to the importance of education (Baker et al., 2016; Carpenter et al., 2016). Viewing all of these activities as equally important forms of parent engagement can elevate parents' perceived value as a contributing member or as a fully engaged parent. These are ways that parents can activate the capital they have in a variety of spaces to author a place within their child's education.

Recommendation Four: The next recommendation is based on the findings that suggest there is currently a lack of inclusion, specifically of parents from minority groups, to determine what should be considered a valued contribution. This recommendation is also informed by the view that many parents lack capital to contribute to the education process. To resolve these issues, the school system should develop training for teachers that helps teachers identify non-traditional skills or other "funds of knowledge" that parents possess. This recommendation is supported by Trumbell et al.'s (2003) assertion that, with some professional development on cultural value systems, teachers can develop an understanding of families to help build better relationships with parents, greater parent involvement in schooling, and positive effects on students.

Through this training, teachers will become more aware of the additional resources that parents have to contribute. This will also create a more inclusive environment that is representative of the student body. As teachers develop a more inclusive understanding, their appreciation and respect for these non-traditional skills and assets can create better relationships between parents and teachers. When parents feel included in the process, their participation will likely increase due to the mutual respect and a greater sense of self-efficacy. A shared understanding of each parents' value will also help parents develop a greater sense of agency, thereby improving parents' confidence, engagement, and ultimately their influence within the school.

Prior studies have shown that parents gained self-confidence through their participation in school activities (Carpenter et al., 2016). Likewise, parents gained self-efficacy through their involvement and engagement (Blok et al., 2007; Carpenter et al., 2016; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). As parents discover and employ their strengths and assets through engagement, they appear to translate their perceptions of confidence, trust, and efficacy into a sense of competence. As parents become more involved, the parents' view of their role in their child's education can change. Hoover-Dempsey and Jones (1997) found that parental efficacy motivates higher levels of parent-focused behavior within parental role construction and emphases on parent-focused behaviors within role construction support the parent's sense of efficacy for helping the child succeed.

Recommendation Five: As our country becomes more diverse, the traditional models, school policies, and engagement practices that were created using traditionally white middle-class views, may be less relevant and feel more exclusionary for the current population. The recommendation is to create a deliberate plan to welcome all parents, with a specific focus on

non-dominant groups, into the parent engagement community of practice. This will ensure that previously underrepresented voices are heard and that their contributions are included in the development of future policies. Demonstrating a desire to be inclusive and then including diverse voices could also make the school environment more welcoming for those that often feel out of place or unwelcome in their child's school.

Several studies have found that when school personnel exhibit positive attitudes toward families, there is an increase in parents' feelings of being welcome in the school (Baker et al., 2016; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Waanders, Mendez, & Downer, 2007). For educators to be more successful with "minority" students, they must "connect with families and identify their needs in a respectful and nonjudgmental way" (Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001, p. 279). Creating a positive environment at the school and positive experience deliberately contributes to reducing the barriers associated with an unwelcoming school environment.

D. **Discussion**

This project aimed to use theory and data to assist the Cumberland County School System improve Parent Engagement to ultimately improve student outcomes. Three research questions served as a guide to understand the current challenges to parent engagement in order to develop recommendations for improvement. The findings suggest that one way to improve parent engagement would require the schools to work to reduce the impact of actual and perceived barriers by exploring innovative ways to include parents including leveraging non-traditional forms of capital both inside and outside of the school so that parents could have greater influence in their child's education. Key to the success of improving parent engagement is breaking down generations of structural barriers that have led to exclusionary practices that have created unnecessary tensions between parents and educators. Based on the findings from this study,

breaking down barriers and expanding the understandings of capital by exploring the funds of knowledge as well as deliberately welcoming historically underrepresented groups into communities of practice will have a profound impact on parent engagement and ultimately student success.

Limitations

As with most studies there are limitations that affect the applicability of these findings. This study began in early 2020 with the onset of a global pandemic which greatly impacted the lives of billions of people around the world. This also had an impact on the researcher's ability to collect data on-site through in-person interviews and observations. As a result, the researcher was forced to use online and telephonic communication platforms to conduct recruitment and interviews. This limited the ability to take notes on such things as body language, gestures, and other non-verbal reactions and responses to interview questions that could have provided additional context.

An additional limitation to this study is that because of the pandemic, the school system in general was overwhelmed in trying to provide services to students. The school system administrators were forced to adapt quickly to address many unexpected challenges that emerged as a result of the pandemic. These included working from home, managing thousands of teachers remotely, resourcing digital curriculum, providing internet services for distance learning, getting meals out to students, and many other challenges. Likewise, the Cumberland County teachers were forced to work longer hours to train on new instructional platforms, ensure that they were prepared to deliver content online, and support a variety of other online learning and hybrid learning issues. This increased time commitment meant that administrators and teachers had little time to participate in the interviews for this study making recruitment challenging. This resulted

in a total of 22 educator interviews (20 teachers and 2 administrators) and 22 parent interviews. While the interviews provided many valuable insights, the limited number of interviews means that the findings may not be representative of the entire school district.

Conclusion

Findings from this study are aligned with the current literature regarding the impact of physical and psychological barriers to parent engagement and the impacts barriers have on parents' ability to play a more active role in their child's education. Also consistent with previous studies, the findings suggest that various structural issues related to socio-economic status and power relations exist which prevent parents from becoming more engaged in their child's education.

Recommendations in this study were informed by the findings and the existing literature from multiple studies. Recognizing the value of family engagement in a child's academic success, the Cumberland County School System has expressed its desire to support parents and provide parents and family members with meaningful opportunities to become involved. The recommendations in the study include ways to achieve this by identifying the underlying structural issues that prevent engagement, dismantling those structural impediments and reimagining all the ways and spaces that parents can be engaged in their child's academic journey.

In conclusion, the Cumberland County School System has demonstrated an understanding of the importance of parent engagement and has expressed a strong desire to improve engagement across the parent population. The school system also has a diverse student and parent population from which to draw a rich variety of resources to not only enhance parent engagement, but also improve the overall quality of education. Creating an inclusive environment by welcoming all

participants (teachers, parents, administrators, community leaders) into the community of

practice as full participants and leveraging their capital, has the potential for exponential

improvement. Doing this will not only improve the lives of these children, it will provide the

resources our country needs to overcome the challenges of the future.

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XIV. Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Protocol Parent

Interview Protocol Parent

Parents Interview Questions
The following questions are designed to guide a semi-structured interview. The interview will help develop quantitative survey instruments to further examine parental engagement in their child's education. Using the Ecologies of Parental Engagement Framework (see Barton et al., 2004) as a guide, these questions will explore the "hows" and "whys" of parental engagement as well as the barriers to participation.

<u>Interview Questions</u>

<u>Education in General (Identify the interviewee's perception of education)</u>

1. Could you tell me about your own experience with education?
    a. Probe:
        i. How was your school experience as a child?
            1. How has that impacted your life?
            2. How has your experience affected your view of education for your child?
        ii. What role has education played in your family's life?
        iii. Did your parents, grandparents, siblings complete high school?
            1. How has that impacted their lives?
2. How important do you think formal education is today?
3. What role do you think education plays today?

Roles and Responsibilities (Identify the interviewee's perception of roles and responsibilities related to education)

1. What do you believe is the parent's role in their child's education? (adapted from McMahon, 2010)
2. What factors do you believe impact parents' choices to get involved in their child's education?
3. What do you believe is the difference between the parent and teacher's role in a child's education? (McMahon, 2010)
    a. Probing Question:
        i. More specifically, what is the role of the parent in their child's education in terms of: (McMahon, 2010)
            1. At the school? (McMahon, 2010)
            2. At home? (McMahon, 2010)

3. In contributing to communication between the home and the school? (McMahon, 2010)
4. In creating relationships between the home and the school around academics? (McMahon, 2010)
   b. Further Prompts (as needed): (McMahon, 2010)
      i. In contributing to curriculum decisions? (McMahon, 2010)
      ii. In contributing to budget choices that impact instruction? (McMahon, 2010)
      iii. In attending and/or creating programs and events at the school around academics? (McMahon, 2010)
      iv. In fundraising at the school towards academic needs? (McMahon, 2010)
4. Do you feel that these roles are clear within your school?
   a. Probe:
      i. Do you believe that parents and teachers agree with these roles?
5. How are these roles determined? Who decides on these roles?
   a. Probe:
      i. Are parents involved in establishing these roles?
         1. If so, which parents?
6. How are these expectations (or roles) communicated to parents and teachers?
   a. Probe:
      i. Is this communication sufficient?
      ii. If not, what would make it better?
7. How do these roles affect relations within the school?
   a. Probe:
      i. With the staff?
      ii. With the teachers?
      iii. With other parents?
8. Do you have any recommendations regarding roles within the school?

Rules for Parental Engagement (Identify the interviewee's perception of the rules (norms) for engagement)

1. How would you define parental engagement?
2. What do you feel constitutes parental [engagement] in school? (Martin, 2015)
3. Do you think parents and teachers share this understanding of parental engagement?
4. What encourages you to participate in the activities at your child's school? (Robinson, 2008)
   a. Probes:
      i. What things have gotten you interested in participating in the school life of your children? (Robinson, 2008)
      ii. Are there reasons why you choose to participate in school activities? (i.e.: school events, parent conferences, school activities). (Robinson, 2008)
5. What discourages you from participating in activities at your child's school? (Robinson, 2008)
   a. Probes:

         i. What things hinder you from participating in the school life of your children? (Robinson, 2008)

        ii. Are there reasons why you do not participate in school activities or reasons for you not participating as much in the school life of your children? (i.e.: school events, parent conferences, school activities). (Robinson, 2008)

6. What resources do parents have to support parental engagement?
    a. Prompts (as needed):
        i. Life experience?
        ii. Education?
        iii. Cultural knowledge?
        iv. Language skills?

7. How can parents be engaged in their child's education?
    a. Prompts (as needed):
        i. At school?
        ii. At home?
        iii. Other spaces

8. How important is parental engagement?

9. What do you believe are the overall effects of parental engagement?
    a. Probes (as needed):
        i. How does it affect a child's education?
        ii. How does it affect the school community?

10. How does your school invite parents to be engaged in their child's education?
    a. Probes:
        i. At school?
        ii. At home?
        iii. Other spaces?

11. What opportunities does the school and district provide for parents to volunteer both in school and out of school? How are you prepared and encouraged to participate? (Robinson, 2008)

12. How do they assist parents from varied backgrounds and in varied situations with being involved (i.e. low income, minority, varied ethnicities, working parents, single parents, etc.) (Epstein, 1997 cited in Robinson, 2008)?

13. In what ways does the school and district include parent ideas in the curriculum; encourage parents to support student advancement by informing you about school and classroom activities; and involve you in student work at school and at home?
    a. Probes i.e.: through homework experiences, class sharing's school events, etc.) (Epstein, 1997 cited in Robinson, 2008)?

14. How are parents involved in collaborating on school "decision-making, governance and advocacy" (Epstein, 1997 cited in Robinson, 2008))?
    a. Probes: Are parents involved on committees or organizations that help in school planning and decision-making (Epstein, 1997 cited in Robinson, 2008)?

15. What opportunities are there for you to partner or collaborate with school staff? (Robinson, 2008)
    a. Probes:

       i.   Are there parent and school partnerships at your child's school?

      ii.   [If so] How are parent and school partnerships set up? (Robinson, 2008)

16. How might parent [engagement] be encouraged at your child's or children's school? (Robinson, 2008)
    a. Probes: What things could increase parent [engagement] at your child's school? (Robinson, 2008)

Barriers to Engagement (Identify the interviewee's perception of the barriers to engagement)

1. Do you think there are any barriers to parental engagement?
    a. Probe:
        i. If so, what do you think are the most significant barriers to parental engagement that hinder parents (you) from actively participating in their (your) child's education?
2. Does Socio-Economic Status affect parental engagement?
    a. Probe:
    b. If so, how does Socio-Economic Status affect parental engagement?
        i. Prompts (as needed):
            1. Access to transportation
            2. Access to childcare
            3. Time
            4. Work schedule
            5. Education levels
            6. Job Type
            7. Income
            8. Race
            9. Gender
            10. Are there any other Socio-Economic Status factors you can think of that affect parental engagement?
3. Is the school building welcoming to you? How is it welcoming or how is it not? (Robinson, 2008)
    a. Probes:
        i. How comfortable do you feel at your child's or children's schools? (Robinson, 2008)
        ii. What makes you feel comfortable or what makes you feel uncomfortable? (Robinson, 2008)
4. Do you feel that the school personnel are welcoming when you visit the school? Why or why not? (Robinson, 2008)
5. How do you view school staff? (Robinson, 2008)
    a. Probes:
        i. The teachers? (Robinson, 2008)
        ii. The principal? (Robinson, 2008)
        iii. Other school personnel? (Robinson, 2008)

6. How would you describe the relationships between school staff and parents? (Robinson, 2008)
   a. Probe:
      i. What do you think school staff thinks about parents? (Robinson, 2008)
7. Do you feel that the teachers respect you as the parent and truly see you as an important participant in your child's education? How is this shown or not shown? (Martin, 2015)
8. How do you think the school environment affects parent's desire for engagement?
   a. Probe:
      i. Friendliness of staff
      ii. Teacher approachability
      iii. Other parent's friendliness
      iv. Are there any other school environment factors you can think of that affect parental engagement
9. Are you in touch with other parents at your child's school? Why or why not? (Robinson, 2008)
   a. If so, how many parents are you involved with at your child's school? (Robinson, 2008)
10. What ways can you get to know other parents at your child's school? (Robinson, 2008)
    a. Probes:
       i. What opportunities are there for you to get to know other parents at your child's school? (Robinson, 2008)
11. Do you think other parents at your child's school would be willing to interact with you? Why or why not? (Robinson, 2008)
12. When you need assistance or have questions about something regarding your child's school or education who do you consult? (Robinson, 2008)
    a. Prompts (as needed):
       i. Parents? (Robinson, 2008)
       ii. School Personnel? (Robinson, 2008)
       iii. Other individuals outside the school? (Robinson, 2008)
       iv. Why do you consult these individuals? (Robinson, 2008)
13. From whom and how do you get your information about the school, district and school events or the performance of your child and the children in your school? (Robinson, 2008)
    a. Prompts (as needed):
       i. From school personnel? (Robinson, 2008)
       ii. From other parents? (Robinson, 2008)
       iii. From those outside your school community? (Robinson, 2008)
14. How does the school accommodate barriers to engagement?
15. Is there anything else regarding barriers to engagement that I have not asked that you think is important?

Final reflections
1. Is there anything else you might like to share about parental [engagement] at this school that I might not have asked? (Martin, 2015)

Appendix B: Interview Protocol Teachers

Interview Protocol Teachers

Teachers Interview Questions
The following questions are designed to guide a semi-structured interview. The interview will help develop quantitative survey instruments to further examine parental engagement in their child's education. Using the Ecologies of Parental Engagement Framework (see Barton et al., 2004) as a guide, these questions will explore the "hows" and "whys" of parental engagement as well as the barriers to participation.

Interview Questions

Background

1. Please tell me a little about your background.
   a. How long have you worked in the field of education?
   b. What inspired you to become interested in education?
   c. How long have you been a teachers at this school?
   d. What was your previous position?
2. I now have a few demographic questions
   a. Gender
   b. Race
   c. Education Level
   d. Household Income
   e. Zipcode you currently reside

Roles and Responsibilities (Identify the interviewee's perception of roles and responsibilities related to education)

1. What do you believe is the parent's role in their child's education? (adapted from McMahon, 2010)
2. What factors do you believe impact parents' choices to get involved in their child's education?
3. What do you believe is the difference between the parent and teacher's role in a child's education? (McMahon, 2010)
   a. Probing Question:
      i. More specifically, what is the role of the parent in their child's education in terms of: (McMahon, 2010)
         1. At the school? (McMahon, 2010)
         2. At home? (McMahon, 2010)
         3. In contributing to communication between the home and the school? (McMahon, 2010)

4. In creating relationships between the home and the school around academics? (McMahon, 2010)

  b. Further Prompts (as needed): (McMahon, 2010)

      i. In contributing to curriculum decisions? (McMahon, 2010)
      ii. In contributing to budget choices that impact instruction? (McMahon, 2010)
      iii. In attending and/or creating programs and events at the school around academics? (McMahon, 2010)
      iv. In fundraising at the school towards academic needs? (McMahon, 2010)

4. Do you feel that these roles are clear within your school?
  a. Probe:
      i. Do you believe that parents and teachers agree with these roles?
5. How are these roles determined? Who decides on these roles?
  a. Probe:
      i. Are parents involved in establishing these roles?
        1. If so, which parents?
6. How are these expectations (or roles) communicated to parents and teachers?
  a. Probe:
      i. Is this communication sufficient?
      ii. If not, what would make it better?
7. How do these roles affect relations within the school?
  a. Probe:
      i. With the staff?
      ii. With the teachers?
      iii. With other parents?
8. Do you have any recommendations regarding roles within the school?

Rules for Parental Engagement (Identify the interviewee's perception of the rules (norms) for engagement)

1. How would you define parental engagement?
2. What do you feel constitutes parental [engagement] in school? (Martin, 2015)
3. Do you think parents and teachers share this understanding of parental engagement?
4. What do you think encourages parents to participate in the activities at their child's school? (Robinson, 2008)
  a. Probes:
      i. What things have increased participation in the school? (adapted from Robinson, 2008)
5. What do you think discourages parents from participating in activities at their child's school? (adapted from Robinson, 2008)
6. What resources do you think parents have to support parental engagement?
  a. Prompts (as needed):
      i. Life experience?
      ii. Education?
      iii. Cultural knowledge?
      iv. Language skills?

7. How can parents be engaged in their child's education?
    a. Prompts (as needed):
        i. At school?
        ii. At home?
        iii. Other spaces
8. How important is parental engagement?
9. What do you believe are the overall effects of parental engagement?
    a. Probes (as needed):
        i. How does it affect a child's education?
        ii. How does it affect the school community?
10. How does your school invite parents to be engaged in their child's education?
    a. Probes:
        i. At school?
        ii. At home?
        iii. Other spaces?
11. What opportunities does the school and district provide for parents to volunteer both in school and out of school? How are parents prepared and encouraged to participate? (Robinson, 2008)
12. How does the school assist parents from varied backgrounds and in varied situations with being involved (i.e. low income, minority, varied ethnicities, working parents, single parents, etc.) (Epstein, 1997 cited in Robinson, 2008)?
13. In what ways does the school and district include parent ideas in the curriculum; encourage parents to support student advancement by informing you about school and classroom activities; and involve you in student work at school and at home?
    a. Probes i.e.: through homework experiences, class sharing's school events, etc.) (Epstein, 1997 cited in Robinson, 2008)?
14. How are parents involved in collaborating on school "decision-making, governance and advocacy" (Epstein, 1997 cited in Robinson, 2008))?
    a. Probes: Are parents involved on committees or organizations that help in school planning and decision-making (Epstein, 1997 cited in Robinson, 2008)?
15. What opportunities are there for parents to partner or collaborate with school staff? (Robinson, 2008)
    a. Probes:
        i. Are there parent and school partnerships at your child's school?
        ii. [If so] How are parent and school partnerships set up? (Robinson, 2008)

16. How might parent [engagement] be encouraged at your school? (Robinson, 2008)
    a. Probes: What things do you think might increase parent [engagement] at your school? (Robinson, 2008)

Barriers to Engagement (**Identify the interviewee's perception of the barriers to engagement**)

1. Do you think there are any barriers to parental engagement?
    a. Probe:

         i.   If so, what do you think are the most significant barriers to parental engagement that hinder parents from actively participating in their child's education?

2. Does Socio-Economic Status affect parental engagement?
   a. Probe:
   b. If so, how does Socio-Economic Status affect parental engagement?
      i. Prompts (as needed):
         1. Access to transportation
         2. Access to childcare
         3. Time
         4. Work schedule
         5. Education levels
         6. Job Type
         7. Income
         8. Race
         9. Gender
         10. Are there any other Socio-Economic Status factors you can think of that affect parental engagement?
3. Do you think that the school building welcoming to parents? How is it welcoming or how is it not? (Robinson, 2008)
4. Do you feel that the school personnel are welcoming to parents when they visit the school? Why or why not? (Robinson, 2008)
5. How would you describe the relationships between school staff and parents? (Robinson, 2008)
   a. Probe:
      i. What do you think school staff thinks about parents? (Robinson, 2008)
6. Do you feel that the teachers respect parents and see them as an important participant in child's education? How is this shown or not shown? (adapted from Martin, 2015)
7. How do you think the school environment affects parent's desire for engagement?
   a. Probe:
      i. Friendliness of staff
      ii. Teacher approachability
      iii. Other parent's friendliness
      iv. Are there any other school environment factors you can think of that affect parental engagement
8. How does the school communicate important information about the school, district and school events and the performance of children in your school? (adapted from Robinson, 2008)
   a. Prompts (as needed):
      i. Letters?
      ii. Phone calls?
      iii. Social Media?
      iv. Text?
      v. Etc?
   b. How often do you communicate with parents about their child?
9. How does the school accommodate barriers to engagement?

10. Is there anything else regarding barriers to engagement that I have not asked that you think is important?

Final reflections

1. Where in the school do you feel parental engagement needs to improve?
2. What recommendation would you make for improving parental engagement?
3. Is there anything else you might like to share about parental [engagement] at this school that I might not have asked? (Martin, 2015)

Appendix C: Interview Protocol Principals
Interview Protocol Principals

Principals Interview Questions
The following questions are designed to guide a semi-structured interview. The interview will help develop quantitative survey instruments to further examine parental engagement in their child's education. Using the Ecologies of Parental Engagement Framework (see Barton et al., 2004) as a guide, these questions will explore the "hows" and "whys" of parental engagement as well as the barriers to participation.

<u>Interview Questions</u>

Background

3. Please tell me a little about your background.
    a. How long have you worked in the field of education?
    b. What inspired you to become interested in education?
    c. How long have you been a teachers at this school?
    d. What was your previous position?
4. I now have a few demographic questions
    a. Gender
    b. Race
    c. Education Level
    d. Household Income
    e. Zipcode you currently reside

Roles and Responsibilities (Identify the interviewee's perception of roles and responsibilities related to education)

9. What do you believe is the parent's role in their child's education? (adapted from McMahon, 2010)
10. What factors do you believe impact parents' choices to get involved in their child's education?
11. What do you believe is the difference between the parent and teacher's role in a child's education? (McMahon, 2010)
    a. Probing Question:
        i. More specifically, what is the role of the parent in their child's education in terms of: (McMahon, 2010)
            1. At the school? (McMahon, 2010)
            2. At home? (McMahon, 2010)
            3. In contributing to communication between the home and the school? (McMahon, 2010)
            4. In creating relationships between the home and the school around academics? (McMahon, 2010)

b. Further Prompts (as needed): (McMahon, 2010)
    i. In contributing to curriculum decisions? (McMahon, 2010)
    ii. In contributing to budget choices that impact instruction? (McMahon, 2010)
    iii. In attending and/or creating programs and events at the school around academics? (McMahon, 2010)
    iv. In fundraising at the school towards academic needs? (McMahon, 2010)

12. Do you feel that these roles are clear within your school?
    a. Probe:
      i. Do you believe that parents and teachers agree with these roles?

13. How are these roles determined? Who decides on these roles?
    a. Probe:
      i. Are parents involved in establishing these roles?
        1. If so, which parents?

14. How are these expectations (or roles) communicated to parents and teachers?
    a. Probe:
      i. Is this communication sufficient?
      ii. If not, what would make it better?

15. How do these roles affect relations within the school?
    a. Probe:
      i. With the staff?
      ii. With the teachers?
      iii. With other parents?

16. Do you have any recommendations regarding roles within the school?

Rules for Parental Engagement (Identify the interviewee's perception of the rules (norms) for engagement)

17. How would you define parental engagement?
18. What do you feel constitutes parental [engagement] in school? (Martin, 2015)
19. Do you think parents and teachers share this understanding of parental engagement?
20. What do you think encourages parents to participate in the activities at their child's school? (Robinson, 2008)
    a. Probes:
      i. What things have increased participation in the school? (adapted from Robinson, 2008)

21. What do you think discourages parents from participating in activities at their child's school? (adapted from Robinson, 2008)

22. What resources do you think parents have to support parental engagement?
    a. Prompts (as needed):
      i. Life experience?
      ii. Education?
      iii. Cultural knowledge?
      iv. Language skills?

23. How can parents be engaged in their child's education?
    a. Prompts (as needed):

     i. At school?

     ii. At home?

     iii. Other spaces

24. How important is parental engagement?

25. What do you believe are the overall effects of parental engagement?

  a. Probes (as needed):

     i. How does it affect a child's education?

     ii. How does it affect the school community?

26. How does your school invite parents to be engaged in their child's education?

  a. Probes:

     i. At school?

     ii. At home?

     iii. Other spaces?

27. What opportunities does the school and district provide for parents to volunteer both in school and out of school? How are parents prepared and encouraged to participate? (Robinson, 2008)

28. How does the school assist parents from varied backgrounds and in varied situations with being involved (i.e. low income, minority, varied ethnicities, working parents, single parents, etc.) (Epstein, 1997 cited in Robinson, 2008)?

29. In what ways does the school and district include parent ideas in the curriculum; encourage parents to support student advancement by informing parents about school and classroom activities; and involve parents in student work at school and at home?

  a. Probes i.e.: through homework experiences, class sharing's school events, etc.) (Epstein, 1997 cited in Robinson, 2008)?

30. How are parents involved in collaborating on school "decision-making, governance and advocacy" (Epstein, 1997 cited in Robinson, 2008))?

  a. Probes: Are parents involved on committees or organizations that help in school planning and decision-making (Epstein, 1997 cited in Robinson, 2008)?

31. What opportunities are there for parents to partner or collaborate with school staff? (Robinson, 2008)

  a. Probes:

     i. Are there parent and school partnerships at your child's school?

     ii. [If so] How are parent and school partnerships set up? (Robinson, 2008)

32. How might parent [engagement] be encouraged at your school? (Robinson, 2008)

  a. Probes: What things do you think might increase parent [engagement] at your school? (Robinson, 2008)

Barriers to Engagement (Identify the interviewee's perception of the barriers to engagement)

11. Do you think there are any barriers to parental engagement?

  a. Probe:

     i. If so, what do you think are the most significant barriers to parental engagement that hinder parents from actively participating in their child's education?

12. Does Socio-Economic Status affect parental engagement?
    a. Probe:
    b. If so, how does Socio-Economic Status affect parental engagement?
        i. Prompts (as needed):
            1. Access to transportation
            2. Access to childcare
            3. Time
            4. Work schedule
            5. Education levels
            6. Job Type
            7. Income
            8. Race
            9. Gender
            10. Are there any other Socio-Economic Status factors you can think of that affect parental engagement?
13. Do you think that the school building welcoming to parents? How is it welcoming or how is it not? (Robinson, 2008)
14. Do you feel that the school personnel are welcoming to parents when they visit the school? Why or why not? (Robinson, 2008)
15. How would you describe the relationships between school staff and parents? (Robinson, 2008)
    a. Probe:
        i. What do you think school staff thinks about parents? (Robinson, 2008)
16. Do you feel that the teachers respect parents and see them as an important participant in child's education? How is this shown or not shown? (adapted from Martin, 2015)
17. How do you think the school environment affects parent's desire for engagement?
    a. Probe:
        i. Friendliness of staff
        ii. Teacher approachability
        iii. Other parent's friendliness
        iv. Are there any other school environment factors you can think of that affect parental engagement
18. How does the school communicate important information about the school, district and school events and the performance of children in your school? (adapted from Robinson, 2008)
    a. Prompts (as needed):
        i. Letters?
        ii. Phone calls?
        iii. Social Media?
        iv. Text?
        v. Etc?
    b. How often do you communicate with parents about their child?
19. How does the school accommodate barriers to engagement?
20. Is there anything else regarding barriers to engagement that I have not asked that you think is important?

Final reflections

4. Where in the school do you feel parental engagement needs to improve?
5. What recommendation would you make for improving parental engagement?
6. Is there anything else you might like to share about parental [engagement] at this school that I might not have asked? (Martin, 2015)