You Don’t Know My Story: Engaging Black Parents with Culturally Responsive School Practices

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YOU DON’T KNOW MY STORY - ENGAGING BLACK PARENTS WITH CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOL PRACTICES

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of
Montclair State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by
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August 2020

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YOU DON'T KNOW MY STORY – ENGAGING BLACK PARENTS
WITH CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOL PRACTICES

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Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program:
Teacher Education and Teacher Development

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ABSTRACT

YOU DON’T KNOW MY STORY - ENGAGING BLACK PARENTS WITH CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOL PRACTICES

by LaChan V. Hannon

Black parents have reported feeling alienated from their children’s schooling experiences, citing weak school communications, challenges with trust, and teachers’ misperceived values of parents (Brandon, Higgins, Pierce, Tandy, & Sileo, 2010). Drawing from the tenets of critical race theory of education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Villegas & Lucas, 2002), the purpose of this study was to better understand the qualities within schools that parents experience as welcoming their participation and influencing their motivation to maintain involvement. By privileging the voices of nine Black parents using one-time, semi-structured interviews, this study began to define what culturally responsive school practices mean for Black parents. Parents reported three overarching ways schools affirm them and engage their cultural ways of being: 1) schools that have diverse leaders and teachers; 2) schools that integrate Black culture in their curricula and school culture; and, 3) schools that value parent voices in decision making. Recommendations are offered for school leaders and teachers for sustainable and culturally-responsive strategies for Black parent engagement.

Keywords: culturally responsive school practices, Black parents, parent engagement, school culture, narrative analysis
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the love of my life, Michael D. Hannon, Ph.D., for setting the bar so high and for his unconditional support. He is the right kind of help. He has helped me and the children to actualize, ‘you can be what you see’. He jokingly pokes at us that everything isn’t a competition. But when the standards are raised, we compete with ourselves and push each other to the limits of our imagination. Not everyone gets a life partner like that, and I am grateful. Nile Joyce (the light) and Avery Mekhi (the sun) are the reasons why I have this story to tell…and I said what I said. They keep my heart beating. I want to thank my parents, William C. Hutton, Jr and Beverly J. Hutton, EdD, for being amazing people who taught me how to trust my gut and follow my convictions. My sister, by blood and love, Kori T (K.T.) is the force I aim to be.

Before I started this program, Dr. Ana Maria Villegas asked me where I saw myself in the future after this Ph.D. program. Anyone who knows me knows that I was unable to answer that, and I may never be able to answer that question. For me, it will always be about the needs of the people along the way to the next journey. I still ask myself, “who do I want to be when I grow up?”. Dr. Susan Baglieri, my dissertation chair, colleague, and friend was perfect in helping me try to figure it out. She tried to quit me, but I would not let her for reasons only we know. She told me the truth, compelled me to make the hard decisions and was just plain perfect for me. She reminded me to always ask, “who benefits?”. Thank you for seeing me and this extra-long book report through to the end. Thank you for growing me and growing with me.

Thank you to Dr. Katrina Bulkley and Dr. Jeremy Price for helping me to situate my thoughts and understandings in the broader context of what is happening in our schools and communities. I will always appreciate your guidance, feedback, ideas, and perspectives. Dr. Douglas Larkin, Dr. Monica Taylor, and Dr. Emily Klein have always treated me like
colleagues. They challenged me to fight my insecurities and just “get it on the paper”. When I began to forget the power of my testimony, Dr. Priya Lalvani inspired me to reimagine why my stories were worth sharing. Thank you ALL for pushing my writing and exposing me to the many possibilities of academia.

To my parents, sisters, and brothers by marriage, my sisters and brothers by choice, and my sisters and brothers by academe, I appreciate you, your support, and motivation. We resist and persist together. I am blessed by your dopeness. Finally, thank you to the thoughtful and intentional parent leaders who trusted me and shared their stories with me. Keep disrupting and using your agency to make schools better for all students. I am them, and they are me. The future is us.

Our village is so strong, and I hope these pages meet your approval.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the Women in my life who have made me who I am. My Great-Grandmothers who came from the reservations and plantations, my Grand-Mothers who persevered through segregation and integration, my Mothers who were first generation college students, my Aunts and Othermothers who served as surrogates, my Sisters who committed to helping me raising my Children, and my Daughter who remains the first reason why all of this is possible and has meaning. Babygirl, you are named after the most amazing people I know: Nile Joyce Marcelle (Jefferson Hutton) Hannon. Please, be proud!

#myblackchildrenslivesmatter
#blacklivesmatter
#blackteachermatter
#blackprincipalsmatter #blackprinciplesmatter
#browngirlsgetphds
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Chapter One: Introduction

I am a parent of color with a child with disabilities. I am also an educator. For years, I have been trusted with the responsibility to mother my children, teach students, prepare preservice teachers, and coach in-service teachers. However, my skills are not necessarily appreciated when I am sitting on the other side of the table from my children’s school personnel defending our entitlement to a free appropriate public education (34 C.F.R. Part 104, 1973). My education, my expertise, and my knowledge as a parent is often deprioritized by school personnel, time and time again. Additionally, advocating for the most appropriate supports and resources for my children typically feels like a fight. In other words, my advocacy must convey anger in order for it to be heard and, once again, society perceives and portrays me as the angry Black woman. Ongoing tension between my values and school values was not specific to one school or one experience but rather representative of how the institution of schooling minimizes my voice as a parent, especially as a Black woman.

Being just a parent means that my identities are often compartmentalized and prioritized. I remember sitting in an academic planning meeting with one of my former students, his parents, the school psychologist, a school specialist, and a school counselor. He was a young Black teenager whose teachers were frustrated because they had to readjust their teaching style to accommodate his learning needs. The student’s mother was a seasoned public-school principal—soon to become a national principal of the year—and his father was also an accomplished professional. Yet, in this space the school personnel were treating them as if they were novices to the world of schooling. His parents’ words were dismissed, and I knew that feeling. In that moment, I was obligated to advocate for them, not because they were incapable, but because they were invisible. As a parent, it is assumed that I am not objective about my children, that I would
do or say anything to get my children what they needed, and most importantly that I am ignorant to the intricacies of school law and policy. It also means that as a Black woman, I am likely assumed to be undereducated and unprepared to speak with knowledge and authority.

It seems that being *just a parent* does not hold enough power to make a difference in the school community unless you are White, middle-class, and speak school language. I am a Black, middle-class, educated woman, yet I am assumed to be uninformed, uneducated, and financially insecure. I am overlooked, underestimated, and threatening all at the same time (Griffin, 2012; hooks, 2003; Walley-Jean, 2009). The constant battles between schools and me could hardly be considered healthy partnerships between parents and schools because when parents and schools fight, no one really wins, least of all students. As a parent, I need a way to be able to engage with, make suggestions to, and work alongside my children’s school personnel. A board of education member once told me during a board meeting, “If you want us to listen, join the PTA”. I am already a member of the PTA, and it seems that a board meeting is no place for a parent. However, I am also a working teacher and mother, and though I have tried to engage with the PTA, their meetings are inaccessible at 11 am at the local coffee shop.

When I could attend a PTA meeting, priorities were about class parties, room-mothers, field trips, and fundraising. Nothing was ever mentioned about equity or education. The issues I needed to be raised were never on the agenda. I began to wonder; *how do parents advocate for their children and work with their schools when the structure designed for them to do so isn’t interested in the experiences of parents like me? Why was the mechanism of sharing my story so inaccessible to me? Was this done on purpose to keep parents like me from participating? Was I being silenced on purpose?*
Although I am neither poor nor immigrant, the PTA has rarely been an avenue or outlet for my advocacy. As a person of color with a child with a disability, I am especially conscious of how parenting a child with a disability influences my level of involvement. Having little common ground with the local initiatives and members of the PTA, I endeavored to explore this study explores how schools invite parent engagement that extends beyond the federally mandated partnerships such as Brown vs Board of Education (1954), No Child Left Behind (2004), and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004).

Ferri and Connor (2005) argued that while the 1954 landmark Brown vs. Board of Education supreme court decision and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act helped to address some inequities in education, both failed to recognize the intersection of race and disability. Both then and now, cultural dissonance, which describes the discomfort or cacophony that often occurs when there is a clash of cultural differences in values, beliefs, and behaviors among people of diverse backgrounds, continues to identify Black culture as not being “normal” when compared to White middle-class norms and values. In fact, when compared to their White peers in racially integrated schools, Black students were seen as academically underperforming and therefore re-segregated into special education classes (Skiba et al., 2008). Many times, it was students’ demonstration of Black culture that was perceived as debilitating and thus became conflated with disability. As was the accepted practice, a Black student was either labeled “culturally deprived,” situating anything non-White into a diagnosable deficit disability, or formally diagnosed with a disability label by means of special education evaluation (Collins, 2013; Ford, 2012; Goodley, 2016). These beliefs and practices are the roots of support schools’ rationale to justify practices that privilege White ways of being and redefine the boundaries for inclusion and segregation based on color.
I have never fit the mold of a PTA mom. The existing PTA moms seem affirming and available and unbothered and White. I am critical and unavailable and bothered and Black. It seems that the PTA moms are not questioning equity in schools and the education of their children because their values and beliefs are congruent and shared. Me, I question everything and everyone. Maybe I represent the voice of dissent, the voice that demands self-reflection. I get it. No one likes being told they are wrong or that their actions flow from persisting patterns of racism. Are school systems so fragile that they can’t handle the feedback?

Statement of Problem

Some institutionalized parent-school partnerships, such as parent-teacher associations (PTA) and parent-teacher organizations (PTO) are intended to create pathways of communication between schools and parents that address the concerns of parents as well as issues of equity for not just my children, but all children (National PTA, 2017). However, the associated parent involvement activities at my school are often relegated to fundraising, volunteering in classrooms/school functions, and attending parent-teacher conferences (Ferrara, 2009; Lareau, 2000). If a family is living in poverty, are persons of color, or are immigrants who use languages other than English, those opportunities to interact with school leaders and influence school policy through traditional school means such as the PTA or at board meetings are even further unavailable when one has less access to financial resources, social capital, and school language (Desimone, 1999; Gordon & Cui, 2014; Turney & Kao, 2009).

In order to help facilitate school practices that encourage partnerships with parents, professionalization organizations such as the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA, 2015) continue to revise professional standards to better support schools and universities as they prepare teachers and school leaders. The Professional Standards
for Educational Leaders (2015) uses very specific language that addresses inequalities and access to quality teaching and promotes meaningful engagement of families and community while also supporting inclusivity, teaching for diverse populations, and greater sociocultural consciousness. For example, Standard Three: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness states that effective leaders will “ensure that each student has equitable access to effective teachers, learning opportunities, academic and social support, and other resources necessary for success” and “confront and alter institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with race, class, culture and language, gender and sexual orientation, and disability or special status” (p. 11). Standard Eight states that effective leaders should intentionally create environments that “understand, value, and employ the community’s cultural, social, intellectual, and political resources to promote student learning and school improvement” (p. 16).

Similar to the trends of the past fifteen years, in 2020 the majority of public school teachers in the U.S. are still predominantly White, female, and monolingual (NCES, 2017). Teacher preparation programs, schools, and communities are continuing to find it challenging to shift teacher beliefs and school practices toward affirming views of students and families of color because the systems for racially segregating children are embedded within the fabric of American public education (Collins, 2013; Edwards, 1993; Ford, 2012). The cultural diversity among the student and parent populations, in contrast to that of teachers and school leaders, continues to leave room for cultural misunderstandings and cultural dissonance. For example, it has been reported that parents of color may feel apprehensive about interacting with their children’s school personnel due to issues such as language differences, their own negative educational experiences, and their perceptions of what carries value as social capital in schools (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Furthermore, when cultural and linguistic differences exist between
teachers and parents, more possibilities for misaligned expectations exist (Villegas & Lucas, 2002), especially when coupled with partnership structures like the PTA and PTO that favor White middle-class values. In this way, if White middle-class values are what define socially accepted normalcy, then Black parents, their culture, ways of communicating, and their experiences are situated as culturally and linguistically divergent from the general school personnel population and the embedded structures of schools.

Black parents have reported feeling alienated from their children’s schooling experiences, citing weak school communications, challenges with trust, and teachers’ misperceived values of parents (Brandon, Higgins, Pierce, Tandy, & Sileo, 2010). When parents’ experiences are also coupled with needing special education services for their children, communication, trust, and school relationships are further strained (Rodriguez, Blatz, & Elbaum, 2014). Auerbach (2009) argues that addressing these issues requires intention on the part of school administrators and a commitment to working against the existing inequities in how schools engage culturally and linguistically diverse parents and families.

In response to the cultural dissonance between parents and schools, the purpose of this study is to better understand what qualities within schools parents experience as welcoming their participation and influencing their motivation to engage in their children’s schools. Ultimately, this study aims to elevate the voices of Black parents so that schools can learn to better meet the cultural needs of the families most marginalized by traditional school practices, and to determine what practices and strategies reflect environments in which parents not only feel welcomed, but that Black culture is appreciated and valued as an asset. Engaging parents in this way begins to define what culturally responsive school practices mean for Black parents. Explored primarily through the voices of Black parents, this study seeks to better understand successful practices in
schools with regard to communication, educational equity and access, and engagement of parents. This study is not intended to document all that is wrong with parent engagement and school practices but rather to highlight what is meeting the needs of Black parents, classroom teachers, and school leaders.

In this study, the concept of parent engagement locates the primary responsibility of building positive family-school partnerships on the schools. I use the term *culturally responsive school practices* to describe partnerships that capitalize on and attend to the sociocultural and sociolinguistic backgrounds of their parents and students. Culturally responsive school practices require schools to reshape how they value parents and the capital parents possess. Otherwise, schools will continue to marginalize students and their families by measuring them in terms of dominant cultural norms. The purpose of culturally responsive school practices is not to assimilate parents to the ways of schooling but rather to establish a set of values based on shared understandings and expectations. Acknowledging parents’ funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) creates opportunities for more reciprocal partnerships between schools and parents because language and cultural differences are used to create those shared values and expectations.

In short, the engagement of Black parents toward the academic success of their children and the voices of Black parents toward the goal of school improvement are often neglected from the collective conversations between parents and schools. In the next section, I present my research questions followed by a discussion of the background information on the phenomena that influence the shaping of parent engagement and how these questions and answers could impact the ways in which schools interact with parents of color and prepare future teachers.
Research Questions

In the conceptual and research literature, the terms parent involvement and parent engagement are often used synonymously and are not necessarily teased apart. However, the following explanation from Ferlazzo (2012) captures a sentiment that accords with my own. That is, parent involvement often describes how schools communicate with parents their expectations of parent participation and is typically demonstrated by schools holding parents accountable for how they could or should be supporting their children’s academic success. Parent engagement, on the other hand, is intended to depict a deeper level of reciprocity where schools seek input from parents for the purposes of more deliberate attempts of shared power and decision making in support of student achievement, community building, and school culture (Ferlazzo, 2012). Parent engagement is more reflective of a collaborative effort between the school and parents and very much entails “eliciting from [parents] what they have found works best with their children” (Ferlazzo, 2012, para. 6). As such, schools’ authentic parent engagement approaches seek to engage parents in co-constructing knowledge about what works for students and how partnerships with parents can be forged to support greater student achievement. This study focuses on parent engagement and how parents experience the ways schools and school personnel intentionally engage them.

The research literature more frequently discussed partnerships with parents of color as limited to behavioral modification through parenting classes and behavioral contracts (Houchins, 2018; NCLB, 2002; Sykes, 2001; Van Voorhis, 2011). This research tended to portray parents of color with a negative/deficit perspective by pathologizing their ways of being as barriers to student success. Additionally, the research discussed parents of color in relation to urban living, poverty, and disability. Less represented in the literature is research that discusses middle-class
families of color and their experiences with schools. To address this gap in the literature, I investigate the intentional efforts of schools to engage in culturally responsive school practices, as described through the words of Black parents. This study also examines parents’ motivation to engage in schools as well as their aspirations for schools and highlights the dispositional qualities that parents view as culturally affirming. The following questions guide this study:

- What are the qualities and practices of schools that Black parents experience as affirming and engaging their cultural ways of being?
  - How do parents describe the qualities of their school’s culture that are welcoming and affirming?
  - How do parents describe school practices that engage their cultural ways of being?

The Need for Black Parents’ Voices

Research suggests that engaging parents of color directly in their child’s schooling is often an underutilized dimension of effective schooling in practice because of deficit-views toward families of color (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Georgis, Gokiert, Ford, & Ali, 2014; Sanders, 1996; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Many schools across the U.S. are not knowledgeable about how to build partnerships with parents that consider the influences of race and culture on parent participation. Research also suggests that parents of color, especially those from under-resourced communities, tend to be more reluctant to engage with their child’s schools than parents from middle-class backgrounds (Georgis, Gokiert, Ford, & Ali, 2014; Lasky & Karge, 2011). This occurs for a number of reasons: parent educational attainment, how the family engages outside of school (with extended family or in community), time available to participate in school activities, and trust with schools (Carey, 1998; Colombo, 2007; Lareau, 1987; Lee &
Bowen, 2006; Zimmerman-Orozco, 2011). These findings are consistent with the later work of Villegas and Lucas (2002) regarding the dangers of deficit views of schools for students of color, and by extension, parents of color.

However, parents have a wealth of knowledge that can help school personnel, individually, and ultimately school systems understand more about their students (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Moll et al., 1992) in order to design curricula that meet students’ cultural needs. Indeed, research has shown for some time that successfully engaging parents in their children’s schooling improves outcomes for students, increases trust between parents and schools, and contributes to overall school improvement (e.g., Henderson, 2007). Studies of parent involvement have also documented the positive impact parent engagement has on student outcomes regardless of race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and parent educational attainment (Caesar & Nelson, 2014; Carey, 1998; Lee, 2006; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Shiffman, 2013) for the following reasons: it adds to the child’s network of support, helps to situate students in the context of their family, and prioritizes culturally responsive school practices. In other words, schools benefit when they actively engage parents in supportive and sustained school routines.

This study of parent voice and culturally responsive school practices was rooted in understanding how Black parents experience their relationships with schools and school personnel. Research on this topic took its’ cues from the research on culturally responsive teaching (e.g. Gay, Ladson-Billings, Villegas & Lucas). In the same vein, this study explored questions that extended beyond teacher quality and examined school culture and the conditions and practices that also “empower [parents] intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents” and engage Black parents’ funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992). The study documented how Black parents described specific interactions, as well as the school
culture and climate where they experienced intentional, healthy, and valued relationships with the various stakeholders in schools. Additionally, I examined what Black parents described as successful parent/school relationships in terms of respecting their voice and engaging their cultural ways of being, employs qualitative research using semi-structured interviews as the primary research tool.

There are several considerations embedded within this study including parent perception of intentionality, the role of school culture, and school’s motivation for parent involvement. My study would not be as useful as it could be without acknowledging how these considerations inform one another. Through narrative inquiry, I shed light on these considerations and the conditions most conducive to Black parent involvement in schools. This methodology was appropriate to investigate the research questions because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of these phenomena across multiple schools, geographic locations, and parent demography.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This literature review is presented in three sections. The first part presents a conceptual framework of the understandings that help to define cultural responsiveness and culturally responsive school practices. The second part identifies the themes I developed from my review of the empirical literature on how schools engage parents, the purposes for engagement, and the associated practices between schools and culturally and linguistically diverse parents. The final part analyzes how the framework informs my understanding of the literature. The following questions guided my literature review:

- What does the empirical research literature tell us about why schools are forming partnerships with culturally and linguistically diverse parents?
● What *types* or kinds of partnerships are being forged between schools and culturally and linguistically diverse parents as reported in the empirical literature?

● *How* do these partnerships work or function as described or reported in the research literature?

I identified four themes that emerged regarding the ways schools engage parents and the functions of those relationships: 1) Engagement for Accountability, 2) Engagement for Relationships, 3) Engagement for Knowledge, and 4) Engagement for Empowerment. These themes will be explained in greater detail, but briefly, Engagement for Accountability is intended to hold parents accountable to upholding school values and objectives, while Engagement for Relationships seem to demonstrate schools’ desire to learn more about their parents’ lives and experiences. When schools choose to engage the strengths, skills, and knowledge parents of color have, Engagement for Knowledge provides more opportunity for parents to participate in non-traditional ways. Lastly, Engagement for Empowerment focuses on helping parents to develop agency whether that be in school or in the community. It is important to note that while I initially began this review with the term partnership in mind, this no longer seems to be an appropriate term. Partnership implies a reciprocity between parents and schools that does not necessarily exist either in their formation and application of parent/school interactions.

**Conceptual Framework**

Situated between the tenets of critical race theory and the purposes of education, Gloria Ladson-Billings’ (1994) seminal book *The Dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children* places the historically neglected schooling needs of African American children squarely in the conversation on teacher quality and asks the question, *do African American students need separate schools?* Seeking to identify what makes some teachers of
African American students successful and others unsuccessful, Ladson-Billings uses a combination of carefully selected methodological tools to create a portrait of the practices, attitudes, and behaviors of eight teachers who “empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p.18). Her research portrays teachers’ practices in two ways: assimilationist and culturally-relevant. By establishing teacher quality for students of color in these binary and polarizing terms, Ladson-Billings acknowledges the harmfulness of colorblindness and teacher passivity by assimilationist teaching practices which “operate without regard to the students’ particular cultural characteristics...to ensure that students fit into society’s lower rungs” (p. 22). Her vision of a culturally relevant school proposes we examine how we recruit, prepare, develop, and support teachers toward culturally relevant practices.

Ladson-Billings also argues that teacher quality for African American students means exercising practices that are an extension of teachers’ beliefs about themselves and their students where “students are capable of excellence and [teachers] assume responsibility for ensuring their students achieve that excellence” (p.23). This application to teacher education, among others (e.g. Asante, 1991; Irvine, 1990), helped to inform early iterations of a culturally relevant teaching model. Those practices are loosely grouped into three categories: (1) conceptions of self and others, (2) social relations; (3) conceptions of knowledge. Under these constructs, we can begin to see how scholars, such as Villegas and Lucas (2002), Gay (2010), Ford (2012), and Delpit (2012), who continued research after The Dreamkeepers was written, have adapted this work to justify the preparation of teachers for additionally emerging groups of culturally and linguistically diverse student populations. The rich dataset produced by The Dreamkeepers is
still informing preservice preparation and in-service teachers almost 25 years later (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Similar to the work of Ladson-Billings, Haberman (1991) discussed the pedagogy of poverty and its implications for teaching students of color. This pedagogy of poverty undermines culturally relevant practices because it influences what teaching looks like, how students engage in activities, and ultimately what they learn about themselves and the world around them. He asserted that teachers/schools who embrace the pedagogy of poverty see students from a deficit-perspective and are more likely to teach in ways that are “directive [and/or] controlling” (p. 291) instead of promoting critical thinking and high expectations as suggested by culturally relevant practices. These beliefs about students are the antithesis of what Ladson-Billings presented as the three main domains of culturally relevant practices: conceptions of self and others, social relations, and conceptions of knowledge. Contrary to the pedagogy of poverty, Ladson-Billings celebrated teaching as an art while believing all students are capable of success. Schools with culturally relevant practices believe that “students come to school with knowledge and that knowledge must be explored and utilized in order for students to become achievers” (p. 52).

Delpit (2012) describes these kinds of teachers as warm demanders who pushed students to achieve more and warmly demanded they do so. They set high standards for their students and help them to reach those expectations through interactions that preserve students’ dignity and appreciate their cultural context. In her book, Ladson-Billings describes how “conceptions of self, students, students’ parents, and community are positive” (p. 53). In other words, culturally relevant teachers understand that school is not to help students escape their communities, but rather enhance their communities. And, although she is speaking more broadly about students of color, Delpit (2012) draws from her understanding of Ladson-Billings work when she reinforces
these concepts of teacher quality. As such, Delpit posits that many students of color often
depend on school experiences to help them develop the skills and cultural capital they will need
to successfully navigate life after school. Ladson-Billings affirms this position and the necessity
for African American students to have teachers with strong pedagogical practice and positive
personal attributes (Strong, 2011).

Villegas and Lucas (2002) further developed Ladson-Billings’ exemplars of teachers with
culturally relevant practices into a framework on Culturally Responsive Teaching. Similar to
Ladson-Billings’ research, their tenets require teachers to exercise the following components:
sociocultural consciousness, affirming views of students, teacher as change agent, constructivist
views of teaching and learning, knowledge of students’ lives, and instructional strategies for
engaging diverse learners. They argue that race/ethnicity, social class, language, and gender are
profoundly influencing factors that shape one’s experiences and identity. They impact implicit
and explicit biases of school personnel, affirm some students while distancing others, increase
the likelihood of students’ exposure to trauma, poverty, and food insecurity, as well as bring a
wealth of valuable cultural knowledge and experiences to the learning environment. Villegas and
Lucas (2002) argue these factors need to be acknowledged when considering how they influence
the structures and systems working in schools in addition to the beliefs, dispositions, and
practices of teachers.

Villegas and Lucas (2002) also posit how ignoring one’s own cultural framework can
hinder a teacher’s approach to teaching and learning. This includes understanding the privilege
and disadvantage society attributes to specific populations and recognizing how that power and
the associated biases play out in the classroom. Having a sociocultural consciousness requires
reflective examination of one’s own sociocultural identity in order to understand how it impacts
the learning environment for students of different identities. For many teachers, acknowledging, understanding, and disrupting White privilege is principal to moving toward a sociocultural consciousness (Matias, 2013; Picower, 2009; McIntosh, 1988). This tension often emerges when students’ home language and school language are different (Lucas, 2011) and can be found in the literature on school partnerships with parents of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Colombo, 2007; Georgis et al., 2014; Shiffman, 2013; Waterman, 2007; Zimmerman-Orozco, 2011).

Work by Villegas and Lucas (2002) which gives special attention to supporting English language learners is informative in such efforts. One particular element in their framework for preparing culturally responsive teachers calls for teachers to learn about students’ lives—a skill that can help to encourage communication, develop trusting relationships, and “build bridges between home and school” (p. 80). By learning about students’ lived experiences and cultural values or by using curricula that connect with students’ prior knowledge, schools can gain understandings about students’ families and build relationships with parents that foster and support student achievement. This approach requires schools to consider parents’ expectations and experiences with schools in determining how to engage parents in ways that are affirming and support student success. In response to the need for culturally responsive teachers and school practices, some schools are reevaluating their strategies for engaging parents in more structured and culturally responsive ways.

**Parent Voice**

The general research literature suggests that relationships between schools and parents are most culturally responsive and beneficial for the school and parents when the motivation for building stronger engagement is to gain understanding and deepen relationships with one another
CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOL PRACTICES

(e.g. Villegas & Lucas, 2002). When parents’ voices are invited, received, and utilized in the creation and expectations of a collaborative partnership, they help to support student achievement and also help to shape school culture. On the contrary, partnerships with parents that are contractual and behavioral in nature, in that they are designed to modify parents’ behaviors to assimilate to the American ways of schooling are found to be the least considerate of the benefits of diversity. In these interactions between schools and parents, cultural assumptions and expectations are intended to assimilate parents into school culture without appreciation of cultural differences. When schools were segregated, schools and parents often shared similar cultures and values (Fields-Smith, 2005). However, the cultural demographic of America and its schools are changing. To adjust and align practices with these shifts, there is a greater need to examine how schools are engaging parents, particularly parents of color.

Understanding how and why schools engage with parents of color is important to study as schools attempt to address the needs of students of color (NCES, 2015) and comply with the parent participation requirements of federal legislation found in No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA), and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). These federal mandates encourage schools to develop relationships with parents and leverage those relationships toward the goals of student achievement. However, even with the best of intentions, research still suggests that schools and parents of color can face many obstacles that challenge the ability to actualize meaningful, reciprocal, and sustaining partnerships. These considerations have been discussed in the literature for decades.

In 1987, Annette Lareau examined the ways in which family backgrounds affect how parents viewed their role in their children’s education. She found that parents either acted as partners with schools in their children’s education or viewed the schools as the primary authority
in their children’s education. Specifically, she highlighted how social class and cultural capital influenced how compliant parents were in the school’s request for parent involvement. Lareau (1987) asserted that the misalignment between the expectations of schools and the behaviors of parents is not an issue of dissimilar values but rather a dissimilar demonstration of those values. That is, cultural dissonance and differing expectations influence how parents interact with schools. She also suggested that when parents do not engage in schooling practices in the ways that meet school’s expectations, the capital that parents possess is not valued as cultural capital (1987). Now, in 2019, not much has changed in both the conceptual and empirical literature on parents’ perceptions and experiences on school involvement.

Parent perceptions of school involvement has been researched extensively, although less with regard to culturally and linguistically diverse parents. The existing studies that reported on parent experiences of “welcomeness” and school involvement consistently reflect several key concepts that align with the barriers to parent involvement presented in this study. The concept of “welcomeness” is crucial to this study. Based on the widely accepted definition of the word welcome, I have defined welcomeness as the act of being received with pleasure and hospitality; willingly permitted or invited (American Heritage Dictionary). What is clear about welcomeness is that parents’ experiences have not significantly changed over the years regardless of the various parent engagement models that inform school practices. The more recent research studies on Black parents, in particular, reiterated what many have reported to believe and experience with regard to schools (Brandon et al., 2010; Cooper, 2009; Doucet, 2008; Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016; McGee & Spencer, 2015; Ross, Marchand, Cox, & Rowley, 2018; Spera, Wentzel, & Matto, 2008). All of these articles speak to the following six themes, in some way.
One recurring theme among Black parents is that schools assume they do not value education because of how they demonstrate involvement and/or because their children display behaviors that seemingly misalign with school values (Brandon et al., 2010). Another theme that emerged for Black parents is that schools do not appreciate the intersectional implications of race and socioeconomics with regard to how Black parents participate in school activities. That is, parents’ involvement in community activities, financial situations, and/or work schedules are not considered when making judgements about parents’ values or actions (Cooper, 2009). Third, when parents do become involved and raise concerns about their schools, Black parents report that they are perceived as angry, met with resistance, and subsequently identified as problem parents (Doucet, 2008). Fourth, in subsequent interactions, problem parents are met with fewer invitations to participate in school activities and there is a decrease in overall communication (Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016). Fifth, a lack of communication precipitates feelings of alienation and Black parents are then not given a voice in how they could contribute to the school community. In response, parents became more individualistic and focused on their own child (Doucet, 2008; McGee & Spencer, 2015), which erodes the ‘it takes a village’ belief rooted deeply in Black culture. Finally, Black parents report that their cultural knowledge and knowledge about their children is not treated as expert (Cooper 2009; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2013; Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016). Ultimately, these beliefs about Black parents privilege some parents and minoritize others, which makes clear the necessity of a more equitable plan for parent engagement.

Models of Parent Involvement

Joyce Epstein (1995) from John Hopkins University introduced a research-based engagement framework that informs how schools can involve parents in schooling. In this
model, she articulated six types of parent involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community toward the goal of increased student achievement. Epstein’s model has been widely embraced and promoted by national organizations such as the NEA (2008) and is accepted by the PTA as foundational to the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships.

While research on mainstream parent involvement is widely available (e.g. Epstein, 1995), less available is the empirical literature that discusses formal partnerships that schools forge with culturally and linguistically diverse parents. As an extension of the overall questions guiding the literature review on why schools were engaging parents and developing partnerships, it became apparent to me that how the cultural and linguistic differences between teachers/schools and parents were being considered in the formation and functioning of those partnerships was generally lacking from the already under-discussed conversation.

Instead, what I discovered was the types of partnerships being formed spoke to some of the motivations, beliefs, expectations, and assumptions teachers/schools had when engaging parents of color in their children’s schooling experiences. In what follows, I discuss partnerships as an extension of the assumption that parents are “not involved” in their children’s education because they are seen by schools to be lacking in some area: lacking values, lacking supportive family structure, lacking cultural capital, and not conforming to socially “mainstream” acceptable norms. This line of thinking supports the ignoring of parents’ cultural capital in schools, especially when cultural dissonance exists between schools and students.

**Black Parents and the PTA**

Many schools across the United States can be found engaging parents in partnerships in ways that claim to be in support of students’ academic success but do not necessarily consider
culture as contextual in schooling practices. These parent-teacher partnerships often follow schools’ traditional organizational routines such as parent-teacher conferences, participation in parent-teacher associations, and classroom volunteerism. For over a century, parent-teacher associations and organizations have remained an American institution that has traditionally represented the intentional efforts of both schools and parents to forge relationships in support of child advocacy and student educational success. Although these relationships have come to serve different functions based on the beliefs and culture of the school community, their original intention to unite schools, teachers, and parents with a common goal of supporting students’ academic success is a common thread. Since the merging of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers and the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers in 1970, millions of families, parents, and school personnel have worked together to advocate for the educational success of children. The National Parent Teacher Association (National PTA) has been a leading voice in public schools, from full-day kindergarten classes to healthy school lunch programs to family engagement initiatives (National PTA, 2017). The mission of the National PTA is for parents to engage with schools in partnerships that are collaborative, committed to the success of all students, diverse in its membership, respectful of the contributions of its volunteers, and accountable to its goals and initiatives; yet, we know from the recent literature published by the National PTA that parents of color are underrepresented in PTA leadership and membership (National PTA, 2017).

According to 2017 reporting, only 26% of parents in PTA leadership identify as members of a racial or ethnic minority group (National PTA, 2017). This is important given that children of color comprise the majority of the student population in American public schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Unfortunately, those numbers do not translate into greater
parent participation in PTA leadership or membership. Many parents who are involved in the
PTA or PTO are not active on the national level. Most commonly, parent participation in their
school’s PTA or PTO is typically seen as fundraising events for things such as the school library,
school events, or classroom supplies. While the original intent of these organizations was
supposed to provide an avenue for parent-teacher partnerships for advocacy, over the years
schools and PTAs have continued to more narrowly define parent involvement in very specific
ways: parents volunteering in classrooms, providing at-home academic and behavioral support to
children, and attending school-sponsored meetings and activities (Lareau, 2000; NCLB, 2002).
However, for culturally and linguistically diverse parents who do not represent the White
middle-class, these definitions of parent involvement can make participation difficult and negate
the ways parents are able to partner with their children’s schools.

There is research literature that traces the shifts in Black parent involvement to the
landmark ruling of Brown v. Board of Education (Edwards, 1993; Irvine and Irvine, 1983). The
1954 Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court ruling that integrated schools also paved the
way for the closing of many schools in Black communities and the firing of Black teachers who
staffed those schools. Schools were integrated not by placing White students in Black schools,
but rather placing Black students in White schools with White teachers, much to the dismay of
those in White communities. Many of these students were bussed to schools outside of their
neighborhoods which made access to school difficult for parents who did not have job flexibility
or transportation. The political and cultural climate of the time also rejected the voices of Black
students and subsequently their Black parents. Neither Black children nor their parents were
welcomed into White schools, and their knowledge was not valued as important (Fields-Smith,
2005). While the intention of the 1970 merge between the National Congress of Parents and
Teachers and the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers was to advocate for all children, many Black educators were alienated from the redefined conversation on parent engagement. Woshyner (2000) discusses how Black parent-teacher organizations under the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) partnered with PTA to address educational access in southern Black schools and argues that,

Black PTAs, unlike their White counterparts, were central to the establishment of a school system for African Americans in the South and were unified by a political agenda to promote integrated schools and interracial cooperation. The paper notes that parent-teacher groups in Black and White schools had different attitudes in Black schools. No distinction was made between parents and teachers. The focus was on the work to be done, while in White schools the focus was on cooperation between constituencies.

[Abstract]

Without autonomy of the direction of the NACW, the decision for a collective mission to serve all students began to exclude Black voices.

**Method of Review**

To identify literature appropriate for this review, I conducted a search for peer-reviewed, empirical research from major databases including ERIC, Academic Search Complete, Academic Search Premier, Education Research Complete, PsycARTICLES, and PsycINFO using the search terms *partnership, teach*, *and parent*, *involvement, Black, English language learner, ELL, and ESL*. I found that search terms like “school”, “relation*”, and “network*” were excluded from this search as those terms were either already encompassed under “teach*” or did not yield results that prioritized schools’ intentionality in developing partnerships but rather focused on the effects of parents’ participation. There was no specific publication time frame
imposed on this search. I focused on literature that discussed formal partnerships in K-12 settings between teachers/schools and parents.

To further determine eligibility, I read the abstracts for evidence of discussion of parent engagement, which describes a level of intention, cooperation, and reciprocity where schools and parents share power and decision making. Those articles that did not discuss how the partnerships functioned or primarily discussed teacher perceptions of parent perceptions of partnerships were excluded in addition to articles that discussed university partnerships with schools but did not discuss partnerships with parents. Articles that focused on the need for partnerships without describing actual partnerships were also excluded. Additionally, in looking at the literature on English language learners and Black parents, if parents’ language or race/ethnicity was not discussed as a strong motivator or consideration for partnerships, these articles were also excluded. While these excluded articles may serve as additional support to frame this discussion, they were not included as part of my formal literature analysis. Lastly, while many conceptual papers discuss how parent-teacher partnerships could benefit students and their parents, I deemed them inappropriate for this review, which focuses on empirical studies.

Ultimately, I selected 20 articles relating to English language learners and parents of color that documented a deliberate and systematic interaction between teachers/schools and parents based on meeting the following criteria: focused on interactions between in-service teachers, administrators, or schools and culturally and linguistically diverse families, involved parents in the K-12 school setting, and described formal partnerships (see Table 1). Articles for this review were analyzed in three phases. During the first phase, I reviewed each article to label key ideas relevant to this paper’s research questions: why partnerships are forged, types of
forged partnerships, how partnerships work. Next, I analyzed the articles using open coding as defined by Merriam (2009) and Saldaña (2016). Then, using a sociocultural perspective (Nasir & Hand, 2006) that examines the influence of social and cultural contexts on phenomena and looking for evidence of cultural responsiveness, I categorized these codes according to the purposes for the partnerships, types of partnerships, and patterns of key findings: Engagement for Accountability, Engagement for Relationships, Engagement for Knowledge, and Engagement for Empowerment.
Table 1

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Engagement for Knowledge</th>
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Note. POC refers to person of color. ELL refers to English language learner.

Engagement for Accountability

Engagement for accountability is designed to influence parents’ (mis)behavior. For Black
parents this often challenged cultural and generational ways of child-rearing. This also included
the learning of English for linguistically diverse parents. Most readily found in the set of studies
analyzed here is the idea of parents’ incapability to conform to school norms. Schools in these
studies create partnerships with parents to make them more accountable to upholding school
values because they view parents as not providing their children with the types of necessary
support the school desires or appreciates. This presents in the literature as behavioral contracts,
home visits, parenting classes, literacy classes, and character education. Regardless of the
intervention, these partnerships are an attempt at helping parents to assimilate to school norms
seemingly without regard for their existing cultural capital. By adopting the position of “school
knows best,” teachers are positioned as experts and enact microaggressions against parents’
knowledge because they do not conform to White ways of schooling. It is thus no surprise that
the parent voice is absent from this research literature as their knowledge is not privileged or
valued.

In 1992, for example, Evans and Okifuji examined the effects of a home visitation model
for students identified by their teachers as at risk for “educational failure on account of
behavioural problems” (p. 16). Primarily focusing on parents from urban economically
disadvantaged communities, the authors posited that student misbehavior at school was likely
linked to inappropriate disciplining skills at home. Therefore, in order to address and stop
children’s misbehavior at school, parents needed to first be taught how to help their children
behave. As an intervention, minimally trained home visitors held parents to behavioral contracts
to ensure they were following the instructions offered during scheduled home visitations.
Another goal of this intervention was to encourage parents’ accountability in school participation
(Evans & Okifuji, 1992; Morgan et al., 2015; Sanders, 1996). In response to this goal, parents
were offered parenting classes to help establish behavioral expectations for their children and to
give them strategies for managing their children’s behavior. However, because poverty had a
significant and complex influence on students’ home lives in areas such as personal safety, food
and housing insecurities, under and unemployment, these needs were seen as barriers to focusing
on the behavioral needs of the child.

As part of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002) Department of Education’s policies
on parent involvement, school-parent compacts were embedded within the very fabric of
school’s expectations for parents. In these compacts, which are continued in ESSA (2015) for
schools that receive Title I funding, parents consent to support their children’s learning in the
following ways, as prescribed and assessed by the school:

- Monitoring attendance.
- Making sure that homework is completed.
- Monitoring amount of television their children watch.
- Volunteering in my child’s classroom.
- Participating, as appropriate, in decisions relating to my children’s education.
- Promoting positive use of my child’s extracurricular time.
- Staying informed about my child’s education and communicating with the school by
  promptly reading all notices from the school or the school district either received by
  my child or by mail and responding, as appropriate.
- Serving, to the extent possible, on policy advisory groups, such as being the Title I,
  Part A parent representative on the school’s School Improvement Team, the Title I
  Policy Advisory Committee, the District wide Policy Advisory Council, the State’s
  Committee of Practitioners, the School Support Team or other school advisory or
  policy groups. (NCLB, 2002, p. 52)

More recently, behavioral contracts were used in studies by Houchins (2018), Sykes
(2001) and Van Voorhis (2011). Once again, parenting expectations and skills were addressed as
primary to effective partnerships. Home-school agreements that clearly articulated the
responsibilities of parents and teachers alike were found to be appreciated by parents of color as
it helped invite future conversations and articulate the expectations schools had of them. These
agreements also helped parents to better understand teachers’ responsibilities as well as their
own (Sykes, 2001). Conversely, teachers did not share the same enthusiasm for the agreements as parents did because when parents were more informed about teachers’ roles and responsibilities to their children, the agreements seemed to increase tensions between teachers and parents due to increased transparency and accountability. School contracts and agreements were typically issued by teachers for parents to comply with. However, a shift in power from teacher as sole authority to parent as co-authority implied by the agreements no longer privileged teachers. Teachers were also held accountable to parents as parents had always been to teachers.

Van Voorhis (2011) used a longitudinal study to examine partnerships that focused on engaging parents in students’ homework completion. Contracts with greater parent accountability dictated how schools wanted parents of color to participate in schooling. For example, parents were expected to participate in every homework activity and sign every document related to homework assignments or students would be punished by not receiving full credit for these assignments. Thus, in both these studies, partnerships were created to help ensure that homework was attended to in the ways that the schools defined as satisfactory.

The next study by Martin & Martin (2007) contrasts with the previous ones in that character education was used as the primary intervention for low levels of parent involvement. These partnerships were formed with parents of color to implement character education programs for students in a predominately minority, high poverty, urban, low performing elementary school (Martin & Martin, 2007). Many view character education as flawed because of the way that the premise situated students as value-deficient (e.g. Davis, 2003; Kohn, 1997). Martin and Martin (2007) reported character education goals for students and parents to include increased school attendance, decreased disciplinary problems, and prescribed demonstrations of mutual respect for classmates and teachers. In essence, schools did not agree with how children
were being raised and disciplined and therefore implemented a character education program to encourage parents to better align their child’s behavior to those of children from middle-class environments. As such, character education was seen as a vehicle for directly shaping and directing students’ behavior.

Interestingly, Martin and Martin (2007) found that involving parents in establishing character education characteristics allowed parents to articulate their concerns and desires for their children as well as encouraged trust between parents of color and teachers. It also seemed to facilitate greater communication and greater transparency with regard to school’s motivation for implementing character education. Additionally, the researchers found that parent involvement in designating the character education focal attributes created additional motivation for parents to participate and hold their own children accountable to the program. Still, the underlying assumptions communicated that home-life was the source of students’ character flaws and the school was responsible for implementing an appropriate intervention. Ultimately, students were still being assimilated into adopting the expected norms of their teachers and school leaders.

Unlike other studies that have teacher-established learning goals as opposed to parent/teacher joint-goal setting, Lee (2006) studied how one teacher’s assumptions and cultural misunderstandings served as a catalyst to engage parents more deeply. Lee found that when the teacher established home language-integrated classroom routines into students’ work, the communication between parent-child and parent-teacher increased and generally helped to promote greater accountability toward school participation. Caesar and Nelson (2014) researched how parent participation in pictorial storytelling helped to improve the emergent literacy skills of migrant preschool children. They found that when parents were encouraged to use their home language to label and hand-draw pictures while discussing the books sent home from school,
children’s phonological awareness improved. Along related lines, Carey (1998) found in her teacher inquiry study that by infusing concepts of time and money into everyday situations while using both school and home languages, helped children to improve math literacy skills.

In the above mentioned partnerships, teachers decided students’ academic learning needs and communicated with parents about how they could best support their child. Although learning English were the teachers’ prioritized goals for students, parents’ language was leveraged to support student learning and motivate parents to maintain a level of accountability to their child’s school work. Still, these partnerships were formed because they were focused on what the students lacked rather than the value of bilingualism. This notion reiterates English-only monolingualism as the established and acceptable norm. So, for native English speakers, bilingualism is then viewed as an asset, whereas for non-native English speakers, monolingualism is perceived as something that needs to be remediated or replaced. This mindset ultimately serves as a barrier to true American immersion (Wiley & Lukes, 1996).

In these instances, families’ native language is dismissed as secondary to learning English and viewed as a means to an end (Lasky & Karge, 2011; Lee, 2006). Working with parents in this way did not guarantee teacher’s acknowledgement of students’ or parents’ cultural capital and likely relied on deficit-views of students to establish goals. Because parents were themselves English language learners and experienced communication challenges with teachers, teacher-directed goals were likely seen as the best way to hold parents accountable to involvement, and academic goals were also prioritized over life-skills. Had partnerships between teachers and parents been less directive and more reciprocally-developed with parents, deeper relationships might have formed.
Engagement for Relationships

Engagement for relationships applies to interactions in which schools seemed to desire to learn more about parents’ lives and experiences. In these types of partnerships, schools prioritized creating spaces for parents to (1) talk with one another and school personnel, and (2) share experiences, expectations, hopes, and dreams for their children. In some cases, parents were also able to provide feedback on matters that affected their child’s experiences and give input regarding school policies. Referenced throughout these articles is the idea of creating spaces and opportunities for parents to talk about themselves. This proved to be an important tool in teachers’ understanding of how parents’ narratives could help to inform the school’s practices. Several of the authors found storytelling to be an excellent resource for schools to listen to parents’ lived experiences (Auerbach, 2009; Martin & Martin, 2007). Whether hosting a town hall meeting or a smaller gathering of parents and teachers, school personnel, in these studies, were able to use information gained from parents to develop a better understanding of parents’ values, expectation, experiences, concerns, and aspirations for their children. In the partnerships described in this theme, building relational trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002) is a cornerstone of the partnerships’ functioning, and storytelling is a vehicle for giving voice to parents of color. As a result of having opportunities for sharing their narratives, parents reported feeling more heard, respected, and validated by school personnel (Auerbach, 2009; Martin & Martin, 2007).

In addition to town hall meetings, Auerbach (2009) also studied the relevance of home visits to parent/teacher partnerships. Unlike the home visits presented in Engagement for Accountability, school personnel met parents in their homes and in the community to better connect knowledge of students with the communities in which they live. At those meetings, school personnel reported parents’ sharing “the kind of telling detail that teachers might not
otherwise know about their students’ home lives” (p. 21). Not only did school personnel see this learning as valuable, but it helped teachers to look beyond narrow definitions of parent involvement that typically reflect parent participation as volunteering in classrooms, attending parent/teacher conferences, or attending school events. In fact, teachers reported that meetings were helpful in breaking down existing cultural and communication barriers between low-income parents, parents of color, and school personnel.

Colombo (2007), who studied how schools increased teachers’ cultural competence, provided another example of Engagement for Relationships. The schools, in the study, did this by incorporating community-based field experiences into the professional development program designed for teachers. By participating in Family Literacy Nights, which “celebrated first-language and bilingualism” (p. 11), the activities included teacher and parent participation in storytelling, song-singing, and game-playing which successfully deconstructed some of the cultural misunderstanding teachers had about students, parents, and home language. Along similar lines, Georgis et al. (2014) researched how community-based agencies and cultural brokers helped to successfully remove the barriers that prohibited refugee parents from engaging more with school personnel and activities. In this case, cultural brokers proved to be an integral part of helping school personnel to understand and structure partnerships that considered the social, economic, and cultural reality of their families. Researchers found that when schools engaged cultural brokers from community sources to attend to the practical needs of the parents, trust between the teachers and parents increased. Parents were then more likely to see the school as a resource and engage in future activities (Georgis et al., 2014).

Both Barone (2011) and Colombo (2007) also found that trust was an important part of developing partnerships with parents. They investigated how parent literacy projects assisted
parents in supporting their school-age children and deemed trust an important component in building relationships. Zimmerman-Orozco (2011) also addressed the question of how schools could be more approachable despite language and culture barriers. She explored how integrating home visits could promote better communication between parents and teachers, in addition to building relational trust. She found that when teachers demonstrate a genuine interest in learning about students and their communities, it is easier to employ a strength-based and socioculturally-conscious approach to parent-teacher partnerships and stated, “more important is the match between the school’s core commitment to creating a welcoming school climate and nurturing personal relationships and the traditional Hispanic styles of interaction” (Zimmerman-Orozco, 2011, p. 66). Taking an ethnographic approach to parent involvement, Georgis et al. (2014) questioned how a three-year Transition Supports Program based on the needs and goals established by the participating Somali refugee parents strengthened the relationships and communication between schools and parents. Also, Gillanders et al. (2012) and Sykes (2001) used focus group meetings composed of African American and Latina mothers as a formal relationship to help the schools understand parents’ expectations of their children and challenge assumptions about parents’ levels of investment in the children’s schooling. Similarly, in her study of monolingual, mainstream teachers, Colombo (2007) found that spending time with culturally and linguistically diverse parents challenged teachers’ misperceptions of parents’ knowledge and values.

Consistent opportunities to question and listen to parents helped to inform schools’ development of future partnership initiatives. In all studies in Engagement for Relationships, school personnel became more knowledgeable about the families of their students. Yet, many teachers still showed difficulty acknowledging how their White, middle-class cultural norms
influenced their perceptions of their parents. Ultimately, school personnel still maintained a deficit-view of culturally and linguistically diverse families. Engagement for Relationships seem to more closely align with the culturally responsive framework developed by Villegas and Lucas (2002) than do Engagement for Accountability. This could be because Engagement for Relationships helped to address issues of cultural dissonance between culturally and linguistically diverse parents and teachers. Because of their interest in growing knowledge about parents, Engagement for Relationships seemed to describe how school personnel came to recognize and value parents’ cultural capital and view them as knowledgeable about their children, as well as assets at school and at home.

In short, when the partnerships were formed for the purposes of building relationships, teachers were more likely to listen to parents and make fewer assumptions about them. Goals were also more likely to be established by both teachers and parents (e.g. Colombo, 2007; Georgis et al., 2014; Shiffman, 2013; Waterman, 2007). In this way listening and joint-goal setting became a strategy for engagement and priority in the partnerships. Parents were afforded the opportunity to express themselves. I believe this occurred because in order for parents to be more involved, teachers needed to ask and address the question, what are the barriers to involvement? When teachers heard from parents, parents’ voices became a valuable source of information worth considering in how parents wanted to be supported versus how schools assumed they needed to be supported. Engagement for Relationships helped teachers and schools to learn about parents’ funds of knowledge.

**Engagement for Knowledge**

Engagement for knowledge occurred when schools operated with the belief that parents have strengths, skills, and knowledge from which the school can benefit. Several articles I
examined discussed parent partnerships that acknowledged parents’ skills and talents through in-school volunteerism, at-home volunteerism, and recognizing parents’ cultural capital as assets to the school environment. Unlike the deficit perspectives often found in Engagement for Accountability described earlier, this approach to partnerships presumes that parents have strengths and are capable of supporting their students as well as school’s goals and initiatives. These partnerships importantly viewed parents as skilled and knowledgeable by engaging them in non-traditional types of engagement such as volunteerism and school planning (Auerbach, 2009; Gillanders et al., 2012; Sanders, 1996).

In these partnerships, there seemed to be more flexibility in how schools created opportunities for parents to get involved. For example, by studying the Baltimore School-Family-Community Partnership Program that was based on Epstein’s model for parent involvement, Sanders (1996) examined how parents’ knowledge could be leveraged as assets to improve parent participation and increase student achievement and attendance. At-home volunteer opportunities were made available to parents so they could contribute to school goals without physically being present by engaging in activities such as gardening projects, recycling projects, and tutoring services. Parents were also able to volunteer for a homework hotline, which provided homework help to other parents who needed clarification on their child’s assignments. These types of partnerships not only enabled parents to connect with one another, but they met school goals by connecting parents to specific school improvement initiatives such as increasing attendance, school pride, and fundraising. Although these Engagement for Knowledge helped the schools to meet their goals, there is little to suggest that goals were mutually decided with parents.

Similarly, Auerbach (2009), who studied family engagement in multiple urban schools,
described partnerships that both leveraged parents’ cultural knowledge and skills and sought to build relationships specifically with parents of color. In this way, parents were treated as allies. Parents were asked to serve on school planning committees for student activities as well as to develop and participate in parent workshops which could range in topic from literacy, to cake-decorating, to learning about college. Auerbach also found that ongoing programs that invited parents to share experiences with their children such as the Parents as Authors Program helped parents and teachers to interact in ways that traditional expectations of parent involvement did not facilitate. One principal reported that “she believed that the school has a responsibility not only to children’s learning and development but to the overall improvement of family and community life” (p. 17). In this case, the role of the school leader played a significant part in the success of the parent-school partnerships because of a commitment to social justice. This was found to be extremely important when partnerships were intentionally created in communities where parents of color had been historically marginalized due to race, socioeconomic status, or language differences.

Although, in Engagement for Knowledge, there were no reports of teacher learning about parents and their personal lives as in Engagement for Relationships, the general assumption guiding Engagement for Knowledge is that parents do have skills and knowledge the school can benefit from. Where social justice and equipping parents with advocacy skills was a priority for school leaders, Engagement for Empowerment emerged.

**Engagement for Empowerment**

Partnerships that I identified as the most culturally responsive were built on relationships and affirming to parents. They involved community members, a commitment to social justice, and/or were rooted outside the school and in the community (Auerbach, 2009). Partnerships like
those presented by Auerbach, viewed parents as assets and encouraged parents’ agency. School leaders realized that in order to improve the schools and school culture, the communities needed their investment. This meant involving parents and community-based non-profit organizations, such as churches and other social service organizations, that also supported families in the community to participate in parent-school partnerships. The use of familiar outside organizations helped to build relational trust with school personnel in addition to highlighting knowledge, skills, and cultural capital of parents already valued in the community. In this way, schools were able to recognize the existing cultural capital and social networks of parents and leverage that knowledge to reshape school culture. Colombo (2007) found that using community cultural brokers as liaisons between parents and teachers was one way to increase parents’ agency and self-efficacy when interacting with teachers.

Helping parents to develop agency through literacy proved to be one way to specifically engage linguistically diverse parents in opportunities to engage with school personnel. This purpose was sometimes guided by the school’s need to increase student literacy, but the attempt at helping parents to learn English also served as a means of empowering them by creating learning opportunities. Colombo (2007) stated that, “PAL (Partnership for Achieving Literacy) helps parents understand how to help their children and communicate with their [children’s] teachers” (p. 12). Waterman (2007) also examined how parent-involvement goals could be integrated into school-based adult ESL classes. For example, sampling mothers of Mexican origin, one parent reported that her experience was valuable because “it helped her to understand unfamiliar aspects of a new school system” and increased her self-confidence in supporting her daughter in school (p. 237). Along similar lines, Shiffman (2013) took an adult education approach to parent literacy. For example, in her comparative case study, Shiffman found that
focusing on parent literacy using content that was important to parents helped parents in both programs to develop greater agency and self-efficacy interacting with other parents, school personnel, the school system in general, as well as helping children with their school work.

Additionally, some parent-teacher partnerships leveraged parents’ home language or physical home environment (Barone, 2011; Caesar & Nelson, 2014; Carey, 1998; Lee, 2006; Protacio & Edwards, 2015; Zimmerman-Orozco, 2011). These studies used home language to encourage parent interaction with children, produce school-related materials, and communicate with teachers thereby allowing parents to help their children in a way that demonstrated their own literacy competence and subsequently helped them develop an understanding of what children were learning in school (Caesar & Nelson, 2014; Carey, 1998; Lee, 2006; Protacio & Edwards, 2015). In these cases, individual children were benefitting and by extension, so was the school. Parents reported to teachers and school personnel a feeling of increased confidence in advocating for themselves and their children. Parents also began to create a bigger social network by conversing with other parents, teachers, building principals, and to experience a greater willingness to participate in activities such as the PTA. And, for the very comfortable parents, they began to volunteer as liaisons between new families and schools.

Parents learned how to advocate for themselves and their children, and although it was not an explicit goal of the study, school personnel were able to hear from parents about ways schools could support families’ goals for their children. On the contrary, behavior-based interventions such as the partnerships described by Evans & Okifuji (1992), Martin & Martin (2007), Morgan et al. (2015), Sykes (2001), and Van Voorhis (2011) tended to be more school-goal driven then joint-goal driven, and thus focused on remediating parents’ behaviors to more align with traditional definitions and expectations of parent involvement. On a continuum of
cultural responsiveness, Engagement for Empowerment were the most culturally attentive, while Engagement for Accountability were the least culturally attentive. This may suggest that parents of color were generally more affirmed in partnerships when presented with the chance to share their narratives with school personnel and provide opportunities for schools to better understand their values and lived experiences.

Unlike the earlier mentioned partnerships that solely focused on influencing parents’ behaviors, joint goal-setting between parents and schools helped school personnel begin to see parents as more than deficit-based problems that needed to be remediated, and as sources of knowledge to better understand the lived experiences of their students and families. In short, when partnerships invite more reciprocal communication between parents and schools, parents are more likely to engage with schools. With the exception of Engagement for Empowerment, what I have articulated as partnerships throughout these sections does not necessarily reflect the reciprocity and joint-decision making that the term partnership implies.

These findings suggest implications for future research and practice. If school leaders want to successfully engage parents of color using culturally responsive school practices, parents need to be able to create spaces within their schools to tell their stories with one another and school personnel. This appears to be most efficacious when storytelling is a mutually shared experience with school leaders and teachers. Additionally, my analysis suggests that if school leaders want to engage with culturally responsive school practices they need to find ways to forge partnerships with parents that involve parent input and joint goal-setting. Programs that solely solicit information from parents without allowing them to contribute to school improvement efforts are one-sided and do not necessarily communicate beliefs that recognize parents as capable. Similarly, partnership initiatives that focus on parents’ perceived lack of
knowledge or sound parenting skills maintain deficit views of parents and do not use parents’
cultural capital toward school improvement efforts. Parents who diverge culturally and
linguistically from the majority White teacher population are more likely to engage with schools
when they create opportunities to hear from parents and listen to their narratives, invite parents to
engage in joint decision-making, and help parents develop their own agency.

You Don’t Know My Story

As a parent of two Black children, developing my own agency was a necessity, and as an
educator, I had already mastered school language. I understood the colonizing culture of schools
present in the ones in which I’d taught and where my children attended. I was an insider,
advising with insider knowledge. And even though my children’s schools tried to treat me as
less knowledgeable about my children and their needs, I had the privilege of my lived
experiences to support my agency. There were times when I felt alienated and muted, and in
those moments the tension was most palpable. Like me, many Black parents report an acute
awareness of race and tend to view schools as another constructed system that perpetuates
colorblindness. Because of the minoritizing consequences of colorblindness and the deliberate
ignoring of cultural differences, Black parents often prepare their children for school and the
world in similar ways, which is to teach their children about understanding systemic racism and
appreciating their culture and race (Doucet, 2008; Ross et al., 2018). This non-
compartmentalized approach to supporting their children is in direct contradiction to the
practices of colorblindness in schools that ignore cultural differences in favor of privileging
White middle-class values.

Based on my investigation of the research literature, it seems that schools forge
partnerships with parents for a variety of reasons: accountability, relationships, knowledge, and
empowerment. Therefore, it is no surprise that partnerships based on deficit views of parents or colonizing perspectives were inherently less culturally responsive and are, in essence, not partnerships because they do not reflect reciprocity between parents and teachers/schools. The kinds of partnerships described seem to suggest that teachers are still using their own goals to measure the success of the partnerships exclusive of parents’ goals for their children.

Due to the limited number of empirical articles available, it is difficult to speak with any certainty about what other ways schools are forging partnerships with culturally and linguistically diverse parents. It is quite possible that many partnerships are occurring in schools across the United States that support culturally responsive school practices; however, little is documented in the research literature. Additionally, the articles reviewed are mainly written from the perspective of the teachers and schools with little data on how parents may experience the utility and success of these reported partnerships. What this review also does not examine with any specificity is the influence of characteristics such as school and/or teacher demographics in the developing and functioning of these partnerships. While some studies reported these data, others did not do so as explicitly.

In sum, culturally responsive parent engagement practices must have affirming views of parents’ language and culture, engage with the counter-narratives of marginalized parents, establish goals with parents and not for parents, and have a commitment to social justice. I believe that these school practices can exist, because there were also moments in my experience when I felt validated as a Black parent. I felt most comfortable and least adversarial with the school and my children’s teachers when my voice, ways of knowing, and cultural values were welcomed and appreciated for their contribution to the school culture. This study aims to fill in some of the gaps in the research literature and examine similar moments in the experiences of
other Black parents with children in predominantly White schools or with predominantly White school leaders and teachers.
Chapter Three: Methodology

My methodology for this study was guided by the following research questions. *What are the qualities and practices of schools that Black parents experience as affirming and engaging their cultural ways of being? How do parents identify and describe these qualities and school practices?* Understanding the school practices that Black parents identified as supportive and affirming to their involvement was a key component of this study. Therefore, my study identified the characteristics of school personnel as well as specific school practices that helped Black parents to feel welcomed and valued for their voices and contributions. This continues to be critically important as schools are required to create a more inclusive school culture for marginalized students and their parents (NPBEA, 2015). As such, this study examined the relationship between Black parents and K-12 schools with regard to parent engagement practices and experiences of welcomeness.

Qualitative research is an important tool in understanding the relationship between school engagement practices and Black parent involvement. Maxwell (2004) writes that qualitative research helps to fulfill the “[intellectual goal of] understanding the particular context within which the participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions” (p.22). The study addressed a gap in the research literature by focusing on the lived experiences of Black parents and took an asset-based lens toward their involvement. Parents in this study were asked to identify characteristics of school personnel, school practices, and school culture that make them feel valued. Findings from this study provide a framework for all schools desiring to engage Black parents in ways that are more culturally responsive and encourage parent involvement.
My study privileges parents’ voices as the primary authority in establishing school practices and interactions that feel most valuable and affirming. Unlike the majority of research literature that examines parent involvement from the perspective of schools, this study uses parents’ narratives to capture their experiences of the dispositional qualities of their school personnel and the practices with which their schools engage them. Through a combination of storytelling and answering open-ended questions during semi-structured interviews, Black parents described how school personnel engage with them, their experiences with that engagement, and the aspirations they have that could make those interactions more beneficial for them and their children.

**Researcher Stance**

Throughout this study, I continually make transparent the intersectionality of my three roles. Rooted in Black feminist thought (e.g., Hill Collins, 1990), I firmly believe in the strength, agency, and resilience of Black women. First, I am a researcher seeking to learn about a particular phenomenon. Second, I am a Black parent, who like all of my participants, are actively engaged in advocating for their children and their educational experiences. Third, I still identify as a K-12 educator who has the privilege of knowing the ins and outs of school language, school politics, and school policies. Still, in spite of my knowledge and experience as a Black mother and educator, my cultural capital does not always grant me access to the same privileges as White mothers. I was a mother before I became a teacher. I became a mother of a child with autism while being a teacher. This has informed my understanding of working with children with disabilities and their parents. My son’s preschool teacher once said to me, “there is always something I can do to change the environment and experience for my students”. Those words remain close to my heart and continue to guide my interactions as a teacher educator. My posture
on parent engagement places the onus of responsibility on schools to create welcoming environments for parents, especially historically and currently marginalized parents. My position echoes the sentiment that there is always something a school leader and teacher can do to change the environment and experience for its students and parents of color.

The most transformative moments of my experiences as a teacher stem from how I learned how to be a better parent. In other words, I became a better teacher because my parenting required that I grow, learn, and adapt to meet the needs of someone other than myself. I began to see my areas in need of improvement as motivated by my students the same way I learned from my children. With the trust of their parents, I became an ‘othermother’ (Hill Collins, 2000; Mawhinney, 2011) to many of my students, treating them the way I wanted my own child to be treated and treating their parents the way that I wanted someone to treat me. As I grew in my mothering, I grew in my teaching and intentionally tried to create feelings of inclusivity and care for my students and their parents.

The most meaningful back-to-school night I ever hosted as a teacher was near the end of my classroom teaching career. Instead of my traditional presentation that reviewed my website and introduced the major text and projects their students were going to engage in this semester, I put the chairs in a big circle and asked one question. “What do you want me to know about your student?” It was the first time I created space for parents to openly discuss their hopes and dreams for their students. It was the first time I privileged their voices as a group. It was the first time I learned more about my students in twenty minutes than in the first three weeks of school. That singular interaction opened the door for authentic conversation to occur between parents and me, as well as among each other. It was powerful, important, and necessary. This study held
the memory of my experience as I examined the experiences of Black parents when they are in school spaces where they feel welcomed and affirmed.

Methodological Approach

Recruitment

As an educator for fifteen years, I have developed an extensive network to engage other school leaders and parents of color. My personal involvement in organizations such as the PTA, POCAN (Parents of Color Advisory Network), SPAN (Statewide Parent Advocacy Network), and SEPAG (Special Education Parent Advisory Group) have also positioned me as a member of the community represented in this study. Recognizing the importance of relational trust, I used my networks as a recruitment tool to identify other parents willing to share their positive experiences with schools. In this way, purposeful sampling was the most appropriate method of recruitment because “this is a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can’t be gotten as well from other choices” (Maxwell, 2005, p.88). Purposeful sampling ensured that the characteristics of the participants were strongly connected to the research question thus helping to make the findings more transferable to those with similar demographic characteristics.

I recruited parents through the Facebook social media platform. The recruitment flyer was posted on my personal webpage as well as the pages of groups of which I am a member. I encouraged group members and Facebook Friends to “share” the recruitment flyer within their circles. Interested parents completed a Google survey that asked them if they identified as ethnically/racially Black, to indicate their connectivity to a parent organization such as the PTA and PTO or in specialty organizations such as the Special Education Parent Advisory Council/Groups (SEPAC/G), Parents of Color Networks, Statewide Parent Advocacy Networks
(SPAN), Jack and Jill of America Inc., Mocha Moms Inc, and organizations of the like. It was important for the parent participants to be members of a larger group of parents as working in collective groups that have been shown to be successful in supporting Black parent involvement and advocacy (Martinez-Cosio, 2010). The idea of being involved in other organizations was important to this study because the idea of community and sharing a collective experience were critical components of the Black middle-class experience. It is also important to note that because organizations like these are often labored with membership fees, I acknowledge that this privileges parents with more social, financial, and even educational capital. In the initial recruitment survey, I asked parents to be willing to identify positive interactions with school stakeholders where they felt welcomed and valued. Additionally, several parents who I interviewed encouraged other parents to complete the survey as well. Thus, snowball sampling was also used as a way to recruit participants. Seventeen parents completed the initial survey. Three additional parents were invited to participate by another participant or an interested party who did not meet the research criterion. Ultimately, nine parents responded to my request to be interviewed.

**Participants**

The participants in the study were Black parents of children currently attending P-12 public school settings in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions of the United States. They all identified as Black, regardless of nationality. This includes Black American, African American, West Indian, Caribbean, African, Afro-Latin(x), or bi-racial identities. The parents in this study were all actively involved in their local school context and had identified their schools as sites that foster good relationships with Black parents. They had experiences with school personnel that indicate good practices and/or good working relationships with Black parents. They were all
also involved with community-based organizations or school organizations that support Black families or children in schools.

Because of the nature of my questions and self-selection criteria, identifying this population of parents led to a small sampling of parents. The low number may be because the selection criteria asked parents to identify experiences of feeling affirmed and welcomed by schools and to nominate their schools as places where Black parents feel welcomed and engaged. Unfortunately, many states still experience high rates of racially segregated schools (Orfield, Ee, & Coughlan, 2017). Particularly in my location in New Jersey, Black and brown students attend schools in areas with higher poverty levels than White students, and the levels of parent involvement follow this trend (NCES, 2016). Given what we know about parent involvement and the identified culture and opportunity gap between White school personnel who comprise over 80% of the teaching force and Black students (NCES, 2015), the number of parents whose children attended schools with practices that support the involvement of Black parents is likely to be alarmingly low.

All of the parents in this study were active in their children’s schooling experience. Many were educators and all were connected to additional organizations that provide community for other Black people.

**Participant Descriptions**

**Bailey.** Bailey was a stay-at-home mom and the mother of three children. She was the co-president of a local chapter of a mom’s group called Mocha Moms. Her school-age children attended a school in a racially and economically diverse suburban county where the principal was a Black woman and the student population was roughly half ethnically and racially diverse students of color. The other administrators and teaching staff were primarily White women. Her
family was new to the school district, and the quality of the schools was a motivating factor.

What she did not anticipate was the overwhelming Whiteness of the school’s culture and personnel. She said the following statement:

> We were in a district before that was much more ... I mean, that school was the opposite. It was almost all Black kids, but global Black, though. My son had Haitian friends, African friends from all over the continent. It was definitely a more Black experience.

Bailey believed in being visible and well-informed about school and community issues and used her cultural capital to stay “in the know”. She described this when she said the following:

> I've also run into the principal in the community, and she recognized me and spoke to me. You know, came up and gave me a hug, which ... it's a small school. I think there's probably maybe 400 and something kids, but it definitely feels like, okay, you're part of this family, which is good.

**Darian.** Darian was a seasoned middle school teacher with two daughters in the same school district. Both of her daughters’ schools had all White administrations. Having attended school in this district for the entirety of their school experience, only one of her daughters had been taught by a Black teacher, who was a highly respected art teacher. She recalled her daughter’s connection with the art teacher and said, “[She] kept talking about how hard her art teacher was, ‘But mommy you would love her. She wears these lapas and jewelry just like you.”

Darian deliberately exposed her daughters to Black cultural experiences such as dance, theater, literature, and various opportunities to engage with other Black children. She believed in paying membership to the PTA, but her family and work schedule were not conducive to the PTA’s expectations of parent participation. She said,
You have to commit to being at all the meetings, and being involved and stuff. You have to commit to being able to come in and to do those. And I'm not mad at that, I think that that's actually a good thing. It doesn't fit my lifestyle, so I don't do it.

When Darian was asked why it was important to participate in this study she remarked:

… because you asked me, and because you're my soror and my sister, and we do everything for each other. But also because I think that your research topic is important, and being, one, a teacher in a school district that has two Black teachers, and yet a very large population of Black students.

Harper. Harper was a seasoned special education teacher and single mother of a young daughter with Autism. Her daughter was one of three Black children in the entire school, which made Harper’s presence and participation as a parent extremely important to her. There was one Black teacher in her school, and all other administrators and teachers were White. The other three elementary schools also had all White leadership teams. Harper was very aware of how Black parents could be stereotyped by school staff. Therefore, it was very important for her to make sure she was present and visible. She said:

I'm always involved in her school activities. I'm always on top of her schedule. She's well prepared for school, so teachers won't call me or maybe talk about me or whatever like, ‘Oh, she's not the responsible parent.’ I'm always on top of everything.

Harper did not wait to be invited to participate in anything school related. She believed that if she was not assertive, she would be overlooked. She said, “…if not, you'll be sitting at the back of the bus. You just have to push yourself like, ‘I'm just as good or better than you, so move out of my way.’ That's the attitude you have to have.”
Jackie. Jackie was a working professional and single mother of a child with an IEP. She had chosen for her son to attend an arts-focused magnet school in a major metropolitan urban district. She described her school’s principal as a young Black man, and the administrative and teaching staff were people of color, as well. This was also reflective of the PTA and student population. Jackie was a very involved and visible parent with the PTA and school community in general. She believed that the school needed to see her often so that they understood whose child they were interacting with when they saw her son. She described the school environment as such, “They want parents to feel welcomed at the school. So they're very respectable to parents and just the way parents are treated when we walk in the building. It makes a difference.” Because Jackie shared common culture with the leadership and staff, she reported it as easier than if there were not a shared understanding. She said, “… certain mannerisms or behaviors towards people of the same race tend to transmit between parties as opposed to if I was a different race, I'd probably be looked as trouble-making mom [laughs] like, ‘Why is she here?’ You know?”

Kendall. Kendall was a middle school teacher and the mother of a young son with Autism. She both lived and worked in an economically and racially diverse suburban county. Both the principal and assistant principal where her son attended school were Black. It was important for her to choose a school where there was leadership of color, even if her son’s teacher was not Black. The school served primarily Black and Latinx children, although it is racially and ethnically diverse. Although the PTA meetings were usually when she was either teaching or taking a class, she was a member. She found it interesting that the PTA was majority White. She said, “Even though the population [is mostly Black and brown], the PTA is not reflective to what the student body makes of it. The PTA also probably has different incomes than the population of the students.” As a seasoned educator who understood school
policymaking, this was important to her as she advocated for equity. She believed that if teachers were more open to exploring the cultural differences between themselves and parents, it might not be as hard to engage parents of color. She stressed how important it was to her and said, “... just to know how you are going to identify. I didn't want [my son] to be in a situation where the teacher felt like she was saving him or pitying him because of his race and his disability.”

*Pratt.* Pratt was a educational professional who worked with teachers and schools on culturally responsive and anti-racist practices. His daughter attended school in the district where he used to work as a teacher. One assistant principal at his daughter’s school was a Black woman, and the school also had a couple of Black male and female teachers. The school served a majority of students of color. As a Black father, it was important that he be present in his children’s schooling experiences. He said:

> I think because I'm male, and because people know me in the district, I have access to a sort of referent power, where people know me and I can bring attention to issues rather quickly because I have a level of prominence.

He believed his position within the school community helped to counteract his Blackness and maleness in a way that made him appear less threatening to the White teachers and administrators. He said, “... there are ways that a school can block your impact. They can do it with diversions, marginalization, speak to the secretary type stuff, until the man is rendered kind of impotent in one sense.” While his school’s PTA was mostly Black and female, he described his involvement in the PTA as “a silent observer”. He claimed that the PTA mothers were active but seemingly only on a “bake-sale level”.

*Reese.* Reese was a working professional and mother of two children, one of whom had special needs. Her children’s school was predominantly Black and the school administrators
were Black women. She reported that there was a healthy mix of Black male and female teachers and staff in her racially and economically diverse suburban community. Although she was one of the only Black parents in the PTA, Reese sat on several of its committees. She said, “I'm part of it because I want to hear the conversations. I want to hear what the relationship with the PTA and the school is… it's important that I'm there to represent my population and my group of students.” It was important for her to find a school where she felt welcomed. After many experiences of feeling like she was fighting with schools, she deliberately sought to buy a house near a school where she experienced welcoming. She said:

I need a school that's going to actually engage me and I feel comfortable and I don't feel like I'm intruding in their space. I want to feel like I'm part of the process and it's not like my kids enter and I'm out.

**Sinclair.** Sinclair was an adjunct professor and mother of two, with a daughter graduating from high school and a son in elementary school. Her daughter’s school had a Black male principal and had a Black student population of 23%. The teaching staff was predominantly White women, and throughout her four years, her daughter had only one Black teacher. This is significant for Sinclair, which is why she tried to connect her daughter with other Black personnel in the building who would look after her daughter, whether they were her teacher or not. She said, “[caring] looks like, when you pull up in the parking lot and she happens to be walking out, that she acknowledges you and wants to know, who is your student? What's your student's name? That's what caring looks like.” Sinclair recalled that her daughter and the teacher “had a very intimate relationship with each other. And this was not one of her teachers.” Sinclair was not a member of the high school PTA although she was a member of the school’s African American Parent Organization. Sinclair believed that being a Black woman influenced her
relationship with her children’s schools in that she needed to make sure that schools saw her in order to see her children.

Victoria. Victoria was a stay-at-home mother with two young girls. As a former social worker, she was aware of the challenges that could plague schools when they were siloed or segregated from one another, even in the same community. Her daughter’s school had recently experienced a significant shift in the economic and racial demographics due to a new school opening and the exit of White families leaving for the newer school. Her school was culturally and racially diverse with students representing numerous countries and ethnicities. With regard to a school that now served primarily students of color she said, “There's now this issue of how do we engage a population that seems to be disengaged.” Victoria also thought this was interesting because while her daughter’s school was very brown, the PTA was very White. She was one of two Black people in the entire PTA that were active, and none of the board members were Black. The school leadership team, which consisted of two White women, recognized that something intentional must be done to engage the parents of color who had typically been excluded, but how to do so was challenging. Victoria believed that her school was ready for the kind of work necessary to engage parents. She said, “[our principal] seems to be very aware of the cultural implications of what we're facing. She's very engaged in our community. Our school would be a good example of a school that's striving to engage their population…”

Table 2

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Personal Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bailey</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Stay at home mom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Darian</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Middle school teacher</td>
<td>Strong community support system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harper</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Special education teacher</td>
<td>Child with special needs; single parent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Jackie  Female  Undisclosed  Child with special needs; single parent
Kendall  Female  Middle school teacher  Child with special needs
Pratt   Male  Educational professional  Former teacher
Reese  Female  Undisclosed  Child with special needs; single parent
Sinclair  Female  Adjunct professor  One child in college, one in elementary school
Victoria  Female  Stay at home mom  Former social worker

Data Collection and Analysis

All research activities were conducted in compliance with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Montclair State University. I conducted semi-structured interviews with parents, which provided the basis for discussion but also accommodated the opportunity to actively listen and respond appropriately to the data being presented (Merriam, 2009). I developed questions to better understand Black parents’ motivations, expectations, and experiences when working with their children’s schools. Questions were aimed at how parents experience the ways school personnel interact with them, and I asked parents to provide me with specific examples that coincided with the questions I asked. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to follow participants’ lead when a response prompted further discussion. Interviews were conducted over the phone and using video conferencing technology such as FaceTime, Skype, and Google Hangouts. Interviews lasted between 25-90 minutes and were audio recorded and transcribed for the purpose of analysis. During the interviews, we discussed the conditions that promote or encourage their involvement as parents in school, what and who created a welcoming environment for them, and what did having “a voice” look, feel, and sound like in their school experiences. Throughout the interviews, I continued to prompt parent participants to recall specific moments or experiences that provided evidence of their experiences.
Prior to transcription, I reviewed the audio recordings and wrote notes about the participants, their schools, and major ideas or concerns they communicated. Once the interviews were transcribed, I reviewed them again with the audio-recording to capture any additional nuances. I emailed the transcript to the participants for review and member-checking. No participants provided changes or additional feedback to the transcriptions. While the transcripts were being reviewed, I reviewed them again to identify any salient thoughts, recurring ideas, or experiences that were especially compelling to me. Then, I used the qualitative coding software MAXQDA to open-code (Saldaña, 2009) and categorize the data based on the research questions or any recurring concepts. I used the frequency of codes to determine the most commonly occurring ideas across participants (see Table 3). A complete list of codes by frequency and participant are found in the appendix, Table 4: Unabridged Code Frequency by Participant.

Table 3

Abridged Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abridged Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 PTA</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 awareness of non-Black/whitespace</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 intentionality</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 involvement/input</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Impact on student/child</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 school practices</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 feeling welcomed / comfortable</td>
<td>37</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 village/community</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 leadership of color</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 teachers</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 cultural mis/understandings</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 in the know / having access</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 communication</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 trust</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From the most frequently used concepts, I identified the different ways that participants discussed the concepts and looked for similarities and differences in their transcripts and how they made meaning of the concepts. Many of their concepts were overlapping, and therefore I had to pay particular attention to how the participants were discussing each concept. For example, although all of the participants discussed the PTA, it may also have been in the context of school practices or having access. Using the coding software, I was able to create a matrix of co-occurring codes, and I used that to inform the development of my themes. Based on my first three passes through the data, I put the concepts into four broad buckets: intentionality, visibility, safety, and agency. From those four buckets, I was able to situate the most frequently used codes within each of these buckets. Recognizing that these overarching themes were interdependent, I returned to the data to find the most salient values and concerns communicated by the participants to create an interrelated connection of the themes.

Trustworthiness. Trustworthiness consists of evidence and methods that demonstrate credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (DeVault, 2018). Credibility and dependability were established through reciprocal engagement during the semi-structured interviews and member-checking conducted three times throughout my analysis. Throughout the interviews, I engaged in member checking and asking follow up questions to make sure that my sense-making aligned with what I thought I heard from the participants. Member checking also occurred when I provided each participant with a copy of their transcript and invited their feedback for corrections. Confirmability was established through my use of an audit trail. Throughout this project, I chronicled my sense making in a journal via notecards, iPhone notes, and writing in a composition book. This extended past my notes, which I recorded on my interview protocol documents. Transferability was demonstrated through my use of critical
friends which helped with sense making and overall reflection of my own stance and biases. As I was trying to make sense of the data, I engaged in informal discussions with other Black parents who did not elect to participate in my study. I asked them to talk to me about what I believed the developing themes to be and asked them if and how these themes resonated with their experiences with schools. These conversations both confirmed and expanded my understanding of the themes. Conducting research using these qualitative strategies produced me with a rich and thick data sets. As much as possible, I wrote in participants’ active voices which allows parents to be read as creating their own narratives, as opposed to being victimized by those not from the community and culture to which they identify. Using active voice repositions me to write about how policies and practices impact communities of color.

My study privileged the less represented voices in the research literature, which included college educated, middle-class Black families, active in schools, and who believe their schools create welcoming environments for their Black parents. I have interrogated their understanding, values, and narratives to better understand the intentionality, functionality, and perceived success of their interactions with schools and their personnel. On some level, participants asserted that their schools esteem parents’ presence and culture as an asset to school culture. By inquiring about the qualities and practices of schools that Black parents experienced as affirming and engaging their cultural ways of being, the data helped to inform how school leaders can encourage and support practices that engage historically marginalized parents in hopes to create a school culture that reflected the cultural diversity of its families.
Chapter Four: Common Eyes All See the Same (Findings and Analysis)

In the research literature on parent involvement, the voices of Black parents involved in school communities were seldomly represented in a way that discussed their experiences, motivation, cultural assets, and aspirations. This study viewed these Black parents and their narratives through a culturally-rich lens through which school practices could be both examined and celebrated. This study asked about the qualities and practices of schools that Black parents experienced as affirming and engaging their cultural ways of being. In these chapters, I describe and unpack the nuances of parents’ involvement in ways that can inform how school leaders and personnel are prepared to interact and engage with Black parents.

All of the parents in this study were parent leaders and highly involved in the field of education, whether that be professionally or through their children. When asked about their aspirations for the ideal school experience they would want for their children, they talked about three main characteristics. The first was that representation matters in multiple ways. Students of color, particularly Black children, needed to see teachers and leaders of color. This form of representation encourages trust and relationship building. Second, parents described schools that both celebrated and integrated Black culture in their overall school culture. This meant that celebrating Black culture was not relegated to Black History Month but was just as present and acknowledged as the books presented for the annual book fair. Third, parents discussed the importance of their involvement and how a collective Black voice encouraged their willingness to engage with their children’s school. In this way, acknowledgement of Black parents’ cultural capital in addition to their being treated with courtesy and respect also encouraged trusting relationships. Considering the definition of *welcomeness* as the act of being received with pleasure and hospitality; willingly permitted or invited, these three main characteristics were
indicators of welcomeness. Despite having negative experiences in both their childhoods and their children’s schooling, in all of our conversations parents still spoke aspirationally about the kinds of people and experiences they desired for themselves and their children. The organization of each section of this chapter begins with Black parents’ aspirations for schools based on their experiences, and is followed by more nuanced experiences. This chapter is broken down into four main sections: diverse school leaders and teachers, Black culture in curricula, (in)visibility of parent voices in decision-making, and agency of Black parents.

**Diverse Leaders and Teachers**

Having administrators and teachers of color who represent them was extremely important to the parents in this study. Recognizing that schools may not provide safety and care for their Black children even if their school leadership or teachers were culturally and linguistically similar to them, it was important for these parents to have the space to ask questions to understand if their child would be safe in this environment. In this section, I highlight Harper, Victoria, and Kendall who discussed their aspirations for schools and how the lack of diversity in school personnel calls into question the concepts of safety, trust, and having someone to care for their children. These factors helped them assess how accepting an environment would be of them and their children.

Harper, whose daughter is one of only three Black children in a predominantly White school, spoke about the intentionality of schools to value diversity in its staff. She said,

> I think diverse teachers in schools [is important]. I mean, even though you can't control the community. But I think schools can control who they want to hire. I think it's the schools’ responsibility. I mean, there are qualified teachers of color that can work in the schools. Sometimes you can't control the community about having more minority parents,
African American parents or Hispanic American parents in the community, but schools can control who they can hire. Maybe schools can hire more African Americans, Hispanic, Asian American teachers and administrators. I think that could help students also. I look at a person, and that stereotype doesn't apply, that this Hispanic woman is not working in the kitchen but she's a principal here. I think schools can control that more than the actual community. (Harper)

Recognizing that school leaders cannot control for all things, Harper had an expectation that they would still be intentional about hiring diverse school personnel. She understood that if a school leader was not intentional about diversity, the system would continue to function as designed. In this way, she saw school leaders as change agents in their schools. To her and many of the other parents, this signaled the values of the school leaders, which ultimately impacts school culture and climate. If school teachers and faculty were diverse, it might mean that the school leaders were more open to the contributions of people of color.

Victoria echoed similar sentiments.

When I see a school that has a 95% White staff, to me, it says that they're comfortable running the show. It's like they've created this environment that's comfortable for them, but I wonder, are they thinking about how it impacts the students when they go to the school and they don't see anyone that looks like them in leadership or anyone that looks like them teaching or anyone that looks like them ... you know? (Victoria)

Victoria’s comment implied how power was and should be distributed and for whom this power structure was most helpful and harmful. Kendall spoke about how cultural dissonance and dissimilar cultural contexts could be barriers to equity.
My husband and I had a lot of questions about equity and her experiences with teaching students who don't look like her, or who have the same background as her, like two parent household, the same social economic breakdown, things like that, for her in his class. And he is in a special needs preschool, and so looking at the diversity in a staff within the preschool setting… I thought that, whereas we could of chose for him to go someplace else, we kind of stayed to this school because I thought it was important for him to be at a school where the school leadership looked like him. (Kendall)

Victoria and Kendall also questioned a school’s commitment to diversity when they did not see people of color represented in the staff. Not only was this important for their children to see some staff members that look familiar, but it also makes these parents feel more comfortable and trusting.

Bailey, who recently moved and transitioned from a predominately Black school to a predominantly White school said:

The principal is an African-American woman, and the rest of the staff is pretty much all White. It was a little bit jarring not to see more people that look like my family when we come. In terms of the greetings and stuff, I feel like that's very Black cultural. Like noticing some people and making sure you talk to them. So, I give her a little bit of credit kind of… I felt very seen, and I don't know if I would have had that same experience if the principal had come up to me and hugged me had it been a principal that was not a Black principal… I know we're not going to have the United Nations as far as it comes to teachers and things like that, but if you recognize that you don't have that, then that's when you need to have images of people who look like all of your students in the library or in the media center, whatever your school happens to call it, in the hallways, on the
displays, all of those things. It's representation. Representation matters as well as teaching them the truth about stuff. Just making sure that kids are just getting an opportunity to see people that look like them in all walks, career day, whatever. Just having people there that look like them. [And], you would have more Black people in roles besides janitor. (Bailey)

In addition to making connections and building relationships, Bailey’s comments reinforced how significant it was when people of color were intentionally integrated in schools in non-domestic positions. Historically and today, Black people are often employed in domestic roles and treated as “the help.” They served in subservient roles such as janitors and cafeteria workers and have been relegated to roles with mean limited voice, position, and authority. Black persons in domesticated roles are rarely celebrated as an integral part of American culture, and when they are it is often in a tokenized display of symbolic representation. When Bailey discussed teaching children the “truth about stuff”, she was not simply talking about Black children. She understood that all children would benefit from knowing the truths of American history and its deeply secured ideals of White supremacy and White privilege. Bailey was alluding to a historical pattern of the whitewashing of American history and the supremacy of Whiteness that was and is perpetuated in American schools.

Representation, to all the parents interviewed, also meant having a voice appreciative of Black culture to influence truth-telling. For the parents in this study, having diverse leaders and teachers would hopefully decrease the likelihood of a white-washed literature and history for the purpose of White discomfort.

Pratt, Darian, Reese, and Victoria spoke similarly about these understandings and expressed why teachers of color are so important for all children. Pratt stated,
[Having a teacher of color] that's my preference but I'd more or less prefer, it's hard because I really would prefer teachers that are competent in school, rather than just focusing on color, White or Black. I feel like competence is extremely important, but if that race element isn't there, when she's older and she goes to middle school, I'm not sure it will have a deleterious impact on what she receives in her own self-concept later. I'm not sure about that. So yes, it's important. I'm not sure to the extent. My goal, my desire, which I think maybe a lot of people have, maybe not yet, is to have a very skilled educator of color in front of my children. (Pratt)

While Pratt would have appreciated his children to have been exposed to teachers of color, it was more important that they be exposed to competent teachers who knew how to affirm them and respect the cultural ways of being. Darian, a middle school teacher, spoke of what a school that valued Black culture would look like.

A school that valued Black culture would be a school that had way more diversity within its teaching staff, more than just having one teacher on the staff or two teachers on the staff. It would also be a school that had African Americans on guidance, in administration, as well as secretarial jobs, just represented everywhere. (Darian)

For Reese, diversity was not limited to race, and she appreciated that all Black people are different and express themselves differently. Therefore, the lack of diversity among Black staff reduced Blackness to a one-dimensional representation of what it meant to be Black. She stated, I think they would need to have lots of diversity in the people who work there. So not just be Black, but also diverse in how they look, how their hair is, how they show up, how they dress. Obviously professional, but still have a variety so they're not just like this
ideal of, “Oh this is what every Black person or leader looks like.” So I think that’s important. I think gender is also really important. (Reese)

For Victoria and several other parents, a commitment to diversity reflected the priorities of schools and communicated their values. A school that valued the importance of representation would have evidence to support their efforts. She continued,

First of all, I would see a more diversified staff. To me, that says that that's part of the objective of the organization of the school is to make sure that they have diversity on their staff or that's something that they value. They're not just saying it with words, but they're demonstrating it. (Victoria)

Victoria’s comments about a school’s value system is extremely important because if parents are not seeing representation in their schools, they are attributing that to their presence not being valued.

The aspirations parents articulated in this previous section spoke to the intentionality of school leaders and were informed by their experiences and those of their children. Creating a school culture that valued them and their children would be demonstrated in the diversity of their staff. In other words, having Black school leaders and teachers would be values that schools and their leaders either actualize or deprioritize. In the next sections, parents in this study described more specifically how having school leaders and teachers of color built trust and provided them with a sense of safety and community for their children.

School Leaders of Color: Lean on Me

For the Black parents in this study, trust in their public schools was complicated. Not only were parents required by law to send their children to school, but there was no guarantee that their experiences in schools would be affirming and welcoming. However, having Black
people in school leadership and other visible positions of authority who shared values, cultural understandings, and academic expectations was noted to make parents more likely to trust that the environment is safe for them and their children because of a shared experience of being Black. Five of the nine participants sent their children to schools with Black school principals or vice principals. Although echoed by most, three participants in particular spoke directly to the importance of having school leaders of color and their willingness to trust the school environment with their children. In this section, Jackie and Kendall began by explaining how having a Black principal meant they had an expectation that their school administrator would be able to communicate and connect with them in a way that reflected a shared understanding of culture. With shared Black experiences of being minoritized and a shared language that comes with being raised by Black parents, they expected to be able to relate to and connect with their Black principals. Additionally, a Black administrator signaled that the expectations of success Jackie and Kendall have for their children would be reinforced. In short, a school leader of color meant there were an extra set of eyes and ears looking out for their children due to common expectations and communication patterns. And, that there would be someone to protect their children.

Jackie, whose school had a Black male principal stated, “So I think my son kind of respects that, ‘Oh that's a guy. He's a man and he's Black and he can relate to us.’ And you know, it makes him want to go to school.” Her statement acknowledged that the significance of having a Black man in a leadership role was exponentially meaningful for her and motivational for her son. As a single parent, she expressed how having a male role model within the school helped to open the possibilities of who her Black son could become professionally. Jackie viewed welcomeness through both her eyes and the eyes of her son, and made few distinctions between
their experiences. Kendall shared Jackie’s perspective and extended her thought to include an inherent responsibility she placed on her school leader.

I'm very proud of the fact that there is a minority as an administrator at a school. Just so like, there's understanding of my son, being a Black son, being a Black male, as a school leader. You get it. And that could be unfair to expect that, but there is a certain level of comfort knowing that the administration there is Black. (Kendall)

Kendall’s comment regarding it being “unfair to expect” understanding from her school principal was another example of how cautious she has to be to expect the privileges that accompany familiarity. In other words, just because Kendall is Black, she does not presume her Black principal subscribed to the same cultural understandings. However, Kendall’s trust level continued to increase as her interactions with school leaders increased. She recalled a memory that speaks to the shared culture and experiences of being a Black American.

I think that just some of the cultural things that we say, just different things, like my son came home from school terribly upset because someone stepped on his new sneakers, and it was just a really tough day for him behavior-wise. I had a conversation with him (the principal), he was just like, ‘Yeah, you know how it is when we get fresh sneak.” And so I think it was culturally understanding the importance of new sneakers and keeping them looking new, like he kind of got that. And not that it had anything to do with economics, it’s just like, it was an understanding like culturally things that are, I don't know, well known or well understood in the Black community. He kind of got that. (Kendall)

For parents who do not have school leaders of color, Kendall’s opportunity to culturally connect and share language and understandings with her school leaders helped to build connections, relationships, and trust.
Conversely, parents who do not have school leaders and teachers of color reported cultural dissonance and communication misunderstandings, which have resulted in a lack of trust. Victoria, whose principal is White, spoke aspirationally about school leaders of color when she said:

I’m not saying that because someone shares the same racial identity that they should be granted automatic trust. But I think that there's something to be said about when you see any structure, any business, any organization, if they have diversity, that speaks to what's important to them. It says something about what they value. It says something about how they want their business to run. (Victoria)

Victoria speaks about trusting an individual person, as well as trusting an entire system and the values to which they subscribe. In other words, if creating a culturally inclusive environment by having diverse leaders was important to school leaders, maybe parents of color would also be seen as important. Ultimately, parents wanted schools that valued them, and if they did not see themselves or people like them in schools, the school did not represent a cultural safe space.

Reese, who is relatively new to her school, is active in the PTA and a visible presence in the school. Both Reese and Jackie credit their principals’ leadership to creating a school culture that made them feel welcomed. Reese stated:

I think it's the principal. I think she's the catalyst for our school culture, and she has brought everyone on board. Even the White teachers are on board with it. So I think she's been the catalyst and has made it clear, I guess, what her vision is. But she has the buy in. At least what I see of people willing to come along on that journey with her, and they understand the importance of it. (Reese)
School leaders established the culture and climate of the school building, and having the support of teachers helped to create welcoming and safe environments for its students and parents. Jackie also discussed how, as a PTA parent, her principal made sure that her relationship with parents reflected her commitment to making sure all voices were heard.

Because the leadership there, they actually do listen. You know, the principal comes in on the [PTA] meetings sometimes. And they listen, they take note, and they try to put whatever my ideas or thoughts are in place. (Jackie)

It is clear from these quotes that having school leaders of color has created a more inclusive school culture by communicating values that affirm its stakeholders. Familiar with being minoritized, these school leaders of color are perceived as having worked hard to ensure common goals and shared culture. Reese also described how her principal was intentional about making sure that shared communication patterns and the communication between parents and teachers was both open and responsive.

The principal says if you have a question or a challenge, or whatever, go to a teacher. You don't have to come to me to go to the teacher. So, there's very open lines, which I ... First, I was like, oh, you don't want to be involved. But then I realized it's empowering the staff to be more active with the parents. Also, they say if you have a problem, feel free to come in. Come to lunch, come see your student. So, I think that's really important, that response… She's very specific about the teachers she hires. She looks for people who are leaders or who can understand the community that we live in and that the needs of the students may be very different. She's really thoughtful about that and thoughtful about how she handles the group... For my daughter to go to school and see a woman in charge of the school versus a White man, to me, is super important. But I can't teach them to see
people that look like them in leadership roles. What I really loved about the school was that the leaders, the teachers, the administration were people of color. (Reese)

Recognizing that parents of color were often disenfranchised in their children’s schools, Reese was appreciative of how her principal created access and pathways for communication. Her principal’s approach also empowered teachers to be more involved and engaged with parents. This disrupts the ways that Lareau (2000) described the prescribed expectations of parent involvement. Instead of placing responsibility on parents for communicating and problem solving with teachers, the principal required teachers to be accountable to parents with their communication. The principal’s demonstrated willingness to engage with parents was a very different experience than how these Black parents remembered their own schooling experiences. Used to being ‘othered’, many parents in this study did not share a racial identity with their school leadership and did not experience practices designed to validate them, teachers, and students. Having school leaders of color was an immediate connection point that signaled reciprocal communication and expectations.

The Black parents in this study did not presume to be welcomed until an intentional effort was made to be inclusive of them and their children. They all expressed some form of expectation that they would be overlooked or excluded. Just as White parents might feel a greater sense of trust with White school leaders, Black parents felt a greater sense of trust when there was a school leader who more closely reflected their own culture and ways of knowing. This also mattered as Black parents tried to expose their children to teachers and support staff of color. The need to build community and help their children find support within the school often came in the form of a school member volunteering to watch over their children.
Othermothering: The Power of One

Throughout the interviews, Black parents consistently spoke about the ideas of trust and relationships. Often those kinds of relationships occurred with other persons of color within the school. In these relationships and interactions, parents expressed an even greater feeling of safety and care in the environment for them and their children. Recognizing that trust in any school system could not be inherently presumed, parents understood that even if a school served a majority of students of color, had administrators, and teachers of color, school was not necessarily functioning as a Black space. Instead, school and the institutions it represented were White spaces in their structure, intent, and practices. Therefore, parents approached trust from a variety of positions. One common position was in regard to how navigating this White space will impact their children. Othermothering was a protective factor that influenced how parents navigated issues of trust. In this section, Harper, Darian, and Kendall explained their concern for how the lack of diversity could cause their children to be overlooked and isolated from other people of color. For them, supporting their children in White spaces meant making sure they had someone (e.g., othermother) to whom their children could turn to in the school building. The othermother and sense of community was an additional layer of safety for them and their children.

Harper, who was a special education teacher and had a daughter on the autism spectrum, stated, “My daughter is one of the only. I believe there are only three African American children at my daughter's school: my daughter, a young boy, and another girl. Maybe there are about 300 students there.” Because there was no one else in her school that filled the role of othermother, Harper was as present and communicative as possible in her daughter’s school. Similarly, Darian, who taught middle school and whose daughters attended a predominantly White school...
said, “Being the mother of two young Black girls, it's important. I think, for these types of discussions to be had because they're long overdue, and they affect my kids directly.”

Darian understood that she needed to educate her daughter’s on what it meant to be a Black girl in America. This meant explaining racism, microaggressions, and bias in a way her daughters understood. It also meant instilling in her daughters the significance of being a strong Black women. Both Harper and Darian recognized their children as minoritized in their school environments simply because of the lack of diversity in the student and teaching populations. Their concern of being overlooked or ignored was exacerbated by the lack of diversity in their school’s leadership and teachers. Sinclair, who had a daughter in college and a son in the third grade, echoed a similar sentiment. She acknowledged that sometimes her daughter was overlooked because she does not struggle financially, academically, or behaviorally. In this way, the emotional and mental risk of providing safety in White spaces was paramount. She said:

It’s like, but what about the kid not in a bad neighborhood, who’s like my kid, who goes to a predominantly White school? She faces adversity, all the time...My kid, yeah, just because their grades are straight, doesn't mean that they’re not ‘at risk’...Because the mental toll that it puts on them, to be in that environment, is a lot. (Sinclair)

Sinclair understood that the likelihood of her daughter being isolated and unsupported was greater if she had no one to connect with interpersonally inside the school building. The parents asserted that although they have an understanding of schooling culture, when they experienced a genuine feeling of care and concern, they were more willing to trust that the school environment was also safe for their child(ren). This idea especially resonated for three participants.
Victoria, who recently relocated into a new school district, described her experience trying to orient both herself and her daughter to the school. During the summer months, she and her first-grader visited the school during business hours. She stated,

One of the Black women that work in the front office was the one that took us on a tour of the school when we weren't [scheduled] ... I think one of the other women in the office was like, ‘They can't see the school yet,’ or whatever. Then she told us, ‘I'm going to show you.’ She gave us a tour and showed [my daughter] her classroom. Then when we got further down the hall, she was like, ‘I'm here.’ She knelt down, got eye level with my child and was like, ‘I'm here if you ever need anything. I'm in the front office.’ To me, I felt that was affirming. It was like, ‘Okay, there's someone that looks like us that works here that I know will probably look out for my daughter’. (Victoria)

Victoria described feeling reassured that she’d made the right choice for her daughter’s school, and that even though she could not be physically present every day of the school year, she trusted that the front office woman who offered her support would be there for her daughter as a resource. This was another layer of safety that Victoria appreciated. No one asked the staff member to avail herself in this way, but she seemed to understand the importance of reassuring and reaffirming new parents and students. It was this act of caring that led to Victoria’s feeling her daughter would be safe outside of her immediate care.

In a similar vein, Bailey, who was also new to her school district, echoed Victoria’s sentiment. Bailey, who has two children in the same school, recalled a moment about her youngest child. When a staff member articulated her willingness to look after her daughter, she was more trusting of the school as a whole.
We have my daughter who is there for Pre-K, there is a teacher's aide who is a Black woman, and also was very much like ‘I got you’. Like, ‘I'm looking’... you know what I mean? Because I was a little nervous when my daughter started, because she was little and I felt a little bit like, oh, she has to get in there and make her way. Our interactions with that particular staff member is always like, ‘No worries. Oh, I fixed her bow’ and feeling very much like she's okay. She's here. I noticed her, like that. (Bailey)

Bailey was initially hesitant about the school and how she and her daughter might be welcomed. She was concerned that although she was an active member of the PTA and her school had a Black principal, the teachers and students were mostly White. No school personnel had specifically given her a reason to feel unwelcome. However, interacting with a person of color who showed a genuine interest in the success of her child eased some of her concerns about being a parent in the minority with a son and daughter as minorities in the classroom. Both Victoria’s and Bailey’s hypervigilance to attend to their children’s social and emotional safety tended to be eased when a person of color offered to stand in as a proxy for them. These and other acts of othermothering not only address ideas of safety but also build community between students, parents, and school personnel.

Reese, whose child attended a school with Black school leaders and predominantly Black teachers and students, reinforced the idea that trust was easier to establish when there seemed to be genuine care for her children. She stated, “When I would go, the teachers, they would know the student's names and they would ... The students would be happy to see them. So that for me was really ... It was really nice. Just very nice.” Even what appeared to be a simple acknowledgement of all students helped Reese to feel more trusting that her children were also being looked after and cared for. Kendall, who was a middle school teacher, articulated that she
intentionally chose to treat her students how she would want teachers to treat her son. For some students, she fulfilled the role of othermother and reinforced the idea that she wanted school personnel to show her the same kind of courtesy that she, as a teacher, showed to any parent. Othermothering is not a role that one can assign themselves. Since it is built on relationships, trust, and responsibility, students or parents must grant permission to those attempting to othermother (Hannon, 2019a). Kendall, who described herself as an othermother to her students and who also gave permission for her son’s White teacher to othermother him, described how her demonstration of love, respect, and care for her students was modeling the expectations she had for her son’s teachers and moved past being a warm demander. She stated:

For me and my students, like I love them, and [for some] I'm school mom from the time that they enter my classroom to the time that they leave. I love and care for them and teach them just like they were my own. So it’s important for me, for him, for my son, to have that when he goes to school. I want him to love school... I want him to love the people there. So that's important for him to have positive relationships with the people who are there. The social-emotional part of school is just as important as the academics, and I want him to feel included, I want him to know that this is a safe place and feel like he can be himself. So he can get out of school without his spirit almost being unscathed. (Kendall)

Ultimately, Kendall wanted her child to have school experiences with people who did not judge him based on his race, gender, or disability. She understood implicit bias and how it worked, and she desired something better and more affirming for her son. Kendall knew she treated her students and parents with kindness and respect. She also recognized that her intentionality was not everyone’s frame of reference or experience. In working as a teacher, she had encountered
many others who had implicit bias towards Black boys and did not take the time to examine or adjust their perspectives in consideration of the actualities of their students’ experiences. As a Black family living with Autism, Kendall sought after teachers, regardless of their race and cultural identity, for her son who exhibited many of the same qualities and practices she exhibited in with her own students. She recalled an incident at school when her son’s White teacher was not present.

There was an incident that happened where he fell, he bumped his head. I was like, ‘Well what happened here?’ With his assistant principal, we had the whole conversation about it. She was just like, ‘I just wanna let you know his school mother was not here.’ She affectionately called her his school mom, and how she takes care of him. Like the bus was late one afternoon, and she really had to go and was just like, ‘I can't leave him, like I can't leave him.’ And [the assistant principal] said that she really had to let [his teacher] know like, ‘It's okay, I will be here with him.’ (Kendall)

The concept of othermothering and having someone, especially a person of color, to stand in proxy for Black parents resonated with most of the participants. Their children’s safety in the school setting was an indicator of how welcomed they felt in the school.

Unfortunately, not all of the parents who referenced trust did so in positive ways. Victoria, for example, while very active and present at her school recalled her experience visiting her daughter’s school. Her recount spoke to the implicit bias Kendall also described.

I spent a day at my daughter's school in the classroom. They had the parents come and spend a day. I saw just certain body language, certain things like ... What I saw were White women, teachers, everywhere. They all had their classrooms, and their classrooms were primarily brown students. As with any classroom, there's children that have special
needs. There's children that require more attention than others, but I could see the body language, the eye language between the teachers when they were in the hallway passing each other. It's like ‘uuhhh’ (side eye). I don't know what they're thinking, and I'm not going to speak for them, but I just wonder sometimes what the conversations are when the kids aren't around. Are they tired of dealing with all these Black kids? I don't know. I don't know. It's just certain things caught my attention. (Victoria)

Although her interactions were with different staff from the same school, Victoria did not experience the teachers as demonstrating the same genuine care and concern for all children. As such, she questioned their motives. This experience raised questions about the trust she had in the school staff, and did not make her feel welcomed and affirmed. She continued:

I'm a hands-on parent. You know what I mean? Black or not, my race aside, my ethnicity aside. I feel that because I quickly noticed the makeup of the school staff, that was a red flag for me. I feel like because of that, I need to be involved because I cannot completely trust ... I don't know them. You know what I mean? I don't know what they're pulling. (Victoria)

Her feelings of uncertainty were directly related to race, racism, and how we are taught to trust people in our formative years. Just as many parents teach their children about “stranger danger” as a protective measure, her life experiences with racism and prejudice signaled possible safety issues for her daughter and other Black children. She was concerned that there were quiet conversations and implicit biases about Black children that might be impacting interactions in the classroom. This fueled a real skepticism and heightened sense of vigilance to ensure her child was being cared for.
Ultimately, when a school has cultural norms that encourage courtesy and respect such as acknowledging one’s presence and showing genuine care and interest, Black parents feel more welcomed and are able to reciprocally engage with these dispositional expectations. Reese captured this sentiment in describing her interaction with her school’s Black principal and recognized that one person and one interaction had the power to either make someone feel welcomed or unwelcomed. She said, “It felt very natural. It didn't feel like... Like I felt comfortable immediately.” This experience made Reese more trusting in her principal. Sinclair echoed the idea of comfort in her interaction with a school counselor. While this school counselor was not assigned to her daughter, as the only school counselor of color, she looked out for Sinclair’s daughter and offered her support. Sinclair appreciated this demonstration of care and disclosed, “She definitely keeps us in the know of what's going on, not just in our school, that's beneficial for our students, but what's going on in our community, that would be beneficial to our students.” As a parent, the feeling and experience of knowing that someone availed themselves to look after your child was significantly impactful in how welcomed and affirmed they felt. This ultimately translated into how welcomed and safe they believed their children to be. While the experiences of the parents in this section helped to encourage trusting relationships, the following section builds on this concept and discusses how being intentional adds a layer of stability to those relationships.

All of the excerpts from interviews in this section reference trust and mistrust as rooted in the presence of Black teachers and leadership. For these parents, putting their trust in the school system has to be earned. It cannot be assumed. As a Black woman raised during my formative years in a Black community, we were taught that respect among peers was to be earned. Respect to older adults and authority figures was deferential. School authorities were also an extension of
the same deferential treatment. Schools continually perpetuate the ways that esteem them as an authority and alienate and segregate Black students and families. As such, the demand of obedience and assimilation is felt differently within the Black community which understands these kinds of privileges and practices as White supremacy. In this way, there was, for parents in this study, an inherent mistrust in the practices of schooling. Unless intentionally disrupted by school leaders, trust was not immediate. The hegemony of White culture was predominant not only in interpersonal interactions, but also in curricula

Curricula and School Culture

Integrating Black culture throughout the school is a second important part of parents’ aspirations. Parents discussed how schools that were affirming provided opportunities for students to see cultural representation within the curricula, in addition to important holidays and traditions. For example, all of the parents had explicit expectations and aspirations about the celebration of Black History Month. Darian and Bailey discussed how they aspired for schools to be more intentional about how Black culture was valued and affirmed in their schools. They also viewed the lack of intentionality as devaluing of their desires for their children. Although they all wanted to see Black culture more broadly integrated into the school culture with representations in books, posters, and curricula, Black History Month was overwhelmingly important.

Darian recalled an experience when her daughter was assigned a research project during Black History Month, and although the research project was not focused on Black history, it was a missed opportunity to help her daughter make cultural connections through the curricula. Darian described how unintentional her daughter’s teacher had been and how much she’d noticed.
I think [my daughter] told me that she picked Helen Keller. I said, ‘We're not doing that. We're not doing that.’ Not that Helen Keller did not offer things to history. I said, ‘To me, it would be no different if it were November, December, you know, January, or July.’ But I said, ‘In this here Black History Month in this year of our Lord, what you're not going to do is to research a biography on Helen Keller.’ ... I think she actually ended up doing Gabby Douglass that year because it had to be three ago because it was somewhere like not too far past the Olympics. When [my daughter] has different projects to do, she'll put that little spin on it. Every little poster she does, of course, the characters and the things that she's drawing or that she's making, they're brown because she’s making it like herself. But I don't feel like there's a push or an expectation. We need to make sure that our students, all of our students, are engaged and are learning about these important parts of history and culture.

Being in the racial minority, Darian was intentional about making sure her daughters affirmed and celebrated their culture in as many ways as possible. As a parent and teacher, she believed it was her responsibility to provide her daughters with cultural opportunities that supplemented the school’s curricula. Her need to do this was rooted in her understanding that White culture was dominant school culture and that there was no consistent teacher or school leader who tried to disrupt that. She wished her daughter’s teacher had been aware enough to encourage her daughter to choose a person to research who was more closely related to her own culture.

Whereas Darian understood that Black history is American history, she was convinced that the teacher’s approach to American history separated Black culture from American culture. She also knew that all students benefit from multicultural approaches to teaching and learning.
Bailey spoke specifically about Black History Month and how schools could affirm Black culture and be more culturally inclusive.

It doesn't have to be a special month, but if you're by the gym you have Serena and Venus as the posters up there or spotlight on Serena. Things like that where it felt like it was authentic, part of the experience, would be helpful. That would be an ideal situation for me having Black culture just be interwoven, where just having the music around and not feeling like a one off, but just actually feel like it's just really ... it's there. I taught in DC public schools when I first came out of college, and so many things were through the Black lens in terms of the music that we picked for the assemblies, the performers that came to the school and all that… So, a very Black experience. We wouldn't miss obvious things like Black History Month to do some kind of acknowledgment whether it was a full on performance or if it's just saying things on the PA system. But, those are the kind of things that we need to have… I would see a concerted effort to acknowledge Black History Month, have cultural events… at least not being afraid to have dialogue about issues that impact Black people in the school… So, that's how I would want it to be for Black culture. Just be a part of the normal every day. (Bailey)

Bailey’s aspirations for schools spoke to the very heart of what all the parents wanted for their children, which was deliberate and considerate representation within the school culture. Bailey also grew up in a culturally diverse neighborhood where exposure to other people’s religions, food, and celebrations were known, understood, and respected. She wanted her children to attend schools that normalized and reflected all cultures. She desired for their children to feel emotionally safe as well as culturally affirmed by seeing themselves reflected in everyday school
life. Not having access to personnel, curricula, and activities that valued cultural diversity contributed to feelings of mistrust and experiences of being unwelcomed.

Pratt also shared his aspirations for a school that affirmed Black culture when he said the following statements.

There would be more of an emphasis on diversity within the school staff. There would be, the texts that are in English language arts would be reflective, even if they have to go outside of the curriculum to supplement what is in the text. Those examples would center the Black experience, not marginalize it. White history is told, [and curricula] would not be from a euro-centric perspective. It's so endemic because I believe that the default setting of schools is actually White and middle-class. So what it will look like would be that there are pictures of Black people in the school. The examples that teachers give when they give metaphors for deeper understanding of concepts will have Black people at the center of what are Black experiences. The significant invention achievements of Black people would be a regular feature. Not just in Black History Month but throughout the year. And there would be a public accounting of how well they serve specific Black kids. It needs to be an account of, ‘This is what we hold ourselves to with this population that has been historically minoritized. Here's what we are going to be held accountable to.’ I would rather them use Lift E’vry Voice and Sing every day in addition to the Star-Spangled Banner. (Pratt)

Pratt, who worked with schools on developing anti-racist practices, understood that making sure all students were able to see themselves in their school culture required more than symbolic representation. Symbolic representation represented tokenism. Pratt believed that all students should be exposed to diversity. He was especially passionate about making sure there were ways
to be accountable to diversity initiatives. In fact, he saw his role as a parent as serving one of those accountability measures. His presence, asking questions, working with teachers, and supporting his children were his actions towards holding schools accountable to their goals and what they claimed their values to be.

Pratt, Bailey, and Darian articulated their aspirations for schools to be inclusive of Black culture with integration of Black history, art, music, and literature into the curricula. They did not ask for the entire school system and culture to be dismantled, but were hopeful about how embracing cultural diversity across all domains would provide a more welcoming and culturally rich environment for all students. Ultimately, they agreed that celebration of Black culture in their schools requires intentional engagement. For this to occur, school leaders and teachers alike had to be in a position to disrupt the status quo. Participants in this study noticed when school personnel intentionally tried to engage them and create opportunities for relationships to develop and even deepen.

**Intentional Practices - Excuse Me Miss**

U.S. schools have continued to succeed in segregating children in schools by race. De-facto segregation continues through access to accelerated classes, bussing policies, academic tracking, discipline practices, or special education practices (Skiba et al., 2008). The Black parents who participated in this study were keenly aware that unless these systems were intentionally disrupted, there was a strong likelihood that the same unwritten rules that applied to their schooling experience will also be applied to their children, such as the racial disproportionality of discipline, referrals to special education, overt racism, and microaggressions. As such, Black parents noticed when school personnel and school practices intentionally engaged Black families in positive ways.
In this section, I examine how Reese, Kendall, Pratt, and Sinclair discussed the ways their schools intentionally engaged them on a school-wide and/or a personal level. This was done through informal interactions, formalized positions designed to engage Black families, or specific organizations formed for the sole support of Black families. In these instances, the parents felt that they were being appreciated for their knowledge, input, and cultural capital. Reese, whose children attended a racially diverse school with more than 80% children of color, noticed how the interactions that teachers had with parents outside of the classroom helped to build relationships and inform their practices. Reese stated:

You'll even see [parents] engaging with the teachers. And I watch them. The teachers are all there and make themselves available in the mornings and after school outside. But no matter where you are in your academics or in your life, they try to meet you, no matter what. I believe that they try to take into account what they believe the community needs, whether it's through people expressing it or whatever, they know about the students or the families. (Reese)

In this way, Reese’s school created ways to interact with her and other parents in deliberate and intentional ways. These opportunities for personal interaction allowed for relationship building between parents and teachers outside of the classroom. None of the other parents reported such practices for relationships that were built into the daily routines of teachers. This reflected an understanding that school means more than what happens inside the school building. This school practice did not differentiate students by academic performance but rather showed respect to all students in their parents. Reese appreciated this as a way for parents and teachers to get to know more about one another, but more importantly, for teachers to learn more about her and her family. Similarly, Kendall, the middle school teacher with a child with special needs, recalled not
being able to volunteer in her son’s classroom. However, because she and the White teacher had been working collaboratively to best support her son, the willingness to create alternative ways for participation was intentional.

Kendall recalled using technology to visit with her son’s class, and this option was subsequently offered to other parents. She recalled:

I said I still wanted to be involved, but because I wasn’t a stay at home mom I couldn’t volunteer in the classroom. She came up with a way that I could be involved. She had these moments where I could FaceTime her because they have iPads. I could FaceTime during the day and be involved in story time. I was able to read a story to the class. And so the kids were able to watch it on the screen, and it still was convenient. I still felt like, ‘Hey I’m doing something for his class. I got a chance to read a story to his class’, but I didn’t physically have to be there. (Kendall)

This may seem insignificant and commonplace, but for Kendall and parents like her who are traditionally marginalized and excluded, the teacher taking the time to brainstorm and try to accommodate Kendall’s needs was reassuring and affirming. Something as simple as taking the time to be intentional was not necessarily how Kendall was used to experiencing teachers. Because of their relationship, Kendall and her son’s teacher were able to be flexible and redefine what participation looked like. Had there not been a history of open communication and familiarity between them, it is not likely that this flexibility and accommodation would have been extended by the teacher to Kendall.

Pratt also believed that his school was intentional in engaging his children and him. As a celebrated teacher and career educator, his knowledge of both positive and negative school cultures informed how he evaluated his children’s school. Pratt recalled the school reaching out
to him specifically because of his visibility in the community. He appreciated being recognized for how he could contribute. He stated:

They seem to really want to get it right by kids. I appreciate the way they have responded to most parents. For example, last year the principal had expressed to me that they were really in need of some money, and it's really hard for them to do fundraising for whatever reason, which I think is a common thing in any school anywhere really. Especially with minoritized children. I said, okay. I went down to the nearby grocery store and basically asked them for some money, and they gave me $500, which they then used over the course of the entire year. (Pratt)

Pratt, who was a teacher leader in the school district where his children attended school, felt affirmed and appreciated when he was given the opportunity to participate in ways that relied on his cultural capital. In other words, when he was asked to help, volunteer, or provide a service, it allowed him to further demonstrate his knowledge, skills, and abilities outside of teaching. As a parent, Pratt’s school treated him like an important contributor to the school community as opposed to an intrusion. While he hoped most parents were treated well by school personnel, he was unsure. He spoke about how he believed his teacher leader status and well as maleness positioned him differently from other Black parents. He had access in ways that they did not. Pratt understood that schools were not used to fathers’ involvement in the ways that he engaged, so to have one that worked in the district made him safer and more trustworthy to school personnel. Although he felt seen, affirmed, and appreciated, he recognized that his position as a teacher leader informed school personnel’s familiarity with him and intentionality to further engage him. In some ways, he was one of them, and in other ways he was a parent. Because of
his access, Pratt did not have an overwhelming desire to be an active member of the PTA. He was a paying member but did not use the PTA to enact his agency.

For many of the parent participants, the PTA provided affirmation and an avenue for them to become involved in school matters. Although the participants who worked outside of their homes were not necessarily in PTA leadership positions, they were still involved in their school’s PTA on some level. Victoria was appreciative that her school’s PTA recognized the work she was doing and sought to capitalize on it:

My husband and I are very active in everything that our children do. Every PTA event that they have, we show up. Every event if we can volunteer, we chaperone. We do what we can. I think that's probably why they approached me because they see that I'm an active parent of color, and they're excited about that. I thought this was interesting because [my daughter’s] school is very brown and the PTA is very White. I am one of two people [of color] in the entire PTA that are active and none of the board members are. I was presented with the opportunity [and] they invited me or encouraged me to run for an E-board position for next year, so I'm very likely going to be on the executive board. (Victoria)

Victoria had been recognized for what she could add to the PTA leadership. Being asked to participate was both intentional and signaled that other parents had taken notice of her skillset and visibility in the school community. Although Victoria expressed feelings of being tokenized, she did not allow that to influence her participation. Her comments stressed how important it was to be intentionally engaged and not overlooked by school personnel or other parents.
Several other parents reported that intentional engagement helped them to feel more welcomed by having access to knowledge, teachers, and school leaders. For example, Reese appreciated how participating in the PTA provided her access to knowledge. She stated:

I want to be part of the PTA because I want to know what are the conversations that the principal had when she went to the board meeting and came back with it. I'm part of it because I want to hear the conversations. I want to hear what the relationship with the PTA and the school is...how the teacher representatives are thinking, and what they have planned for the school so I can impact it. (Reese)

As a parent new to the district, Reese viewed the PTA as an access point and understood the significance of building trusting relationships. In order to have influence, she needed to have access to knowledge and personnel that impacted experiences for students of color. As such, she intentionally positioned herself in a way that would grant her access. Although Reese’s school did not have a dedicated staff person whose job was to support and advocate for Black families, four parents reported having dedicated personnel and initiatives at their schools for Black students and families.

Referred to as Black parent liaisons, these positions were specifically designed as part of a larger initiative for Black families to help Black parents access academic support services, school activities, and community events. These positions were created with the intention of addressing opportunity gaps in schools. Although they served as cultural brokers in a way, they did not necessarily help bridge the gap between teachers and parents, but rather communicated with parents on behalf of the school. Jackie was familiar with the role of her Black parent liaison and made the following statements.
She's responsible for trying to get parents into the school, you know, for activities. She sends information to the parents about what's going on at the school, what programs are available, and how she can connect teachers to the parents to talk. Let's say for instance the teacher is having a tough time getting to the parent, the parent coordinator might step in and explain how important it is to come to the school and meet with the child's teacher.

(Jackie)

As a parent who is already involved, Jackie was not overly impressed by her relationship with the coordinator, but she understood the importance of the role for parents who may be less involved. Sinclair also spoke about how this initiative in her school was intentionally integrated into the school’s functioning and recalled her experiences with two different parent liaisons.

[With the first liaison], if your child wasn't ‘at risk’, then she didn't have a connection with any other students, except students she would consider ‘at risk’. Where once, this new person came, she was then like an advocate, the eyes and ears for every African American student who is there. So, that helped tremendously. That’s a good practice to have someone that's in the building, who’s looking out for your kid and kids that look like your kid. It has mattered, a lot. She’s been there two years and the communication for us, as parents, through her, has grown tremendously, once she got the position.

(Sinclair)

Sinclair spoke of communication, connection, and advocacy. She understood how impactful it was to have someone specifically dedicated to working with Black parents in the building and who is also a person of color.

Sinclair appreciated the support of the liaison but also questioned why it was necessary. If all teachers were being prepared to teach all students, why did the school need to have a
separate person just to support Black families? Her questioning further highlighted that White school culture did not self-identify as problematic for Black families and something that needed to change. Instead, responsibility for assimilating was placed on Black parents. She also acknowledged biases when determining the criteria by which students and families are identified as needing support. This highlighted the fact that her school was a White space and needed a parent liaison. With the new liaison, her trust in the school grew when she felt her daughter would have a safer experience and an ally at school. For Sinclair, having staff dedicated to working with parents of color was viewed as a helpful way to connect more deeply with school personnel and bridge communication and knowledge gaps. She also reported her school forming a parent organization for and by Black parents for the purpose of supporting and affirming Black students and families. Her daughter’s high school began an African American Parent Organization that was fully endorsed by the school’s Black principal.

I haven’t been extremely involved, just because my child is a senior so I wasn’t on the leadership team. But I have come to support. So they had one [meeting] where they highlighted parents that are in our community and how they could be, like you should know who these people are. They highlight different parents, like the skill sets that they have and how that you as an African American parent, could be able to use them as a resource. They’ve had the principal come, and we were just like ‘Okay, so this is why we think we need this organization.’ And having conversations like, ‘Yeah, my son was at the guidance counselor and he got, almost, a perfect score on the SAT.’ And the guidance counselor says, ‘Oh, I didn't even know you were college material.’ Like having these conversations with the principal. Like this is unacceptable for this to be happening here…
The parents’ group also helps facilitate a Kente Stole Ceremony, a senior celebration, for the seniors. So that was the first. Every African American student was celebrated, regardless of their GPA. And the need for that is they have a school wide celebration. You know senior night, senior award celebration. And people who were like us, aren’t the ones who are getting those awards. (Sinclair)

Sinclair reminded me what it felt like to be overlooked and how this was one of many effects of being in the minority. She highlighted emotional harm to their children as a major concern of parents, which is why they were intentional in creating safe spaces for them and their children.

Recognizing the need to create Black spaces within White spaces was critical for the affirmation and success of their children. Black parents at her school needed a place where they could talk about the common experiences they had, including the microaggressions levied against them and their children. Creating an event, such as the Kente Stole Ceremony, affirmed all of the Black children simply because of who they were and not because of any particular competition or accomplishment. For these parents, creating community with one another for the sake of their children encouraged feelings of welcomeness and belonging. Using their collective parent voice to advocate for a community within a community was necessary for the social, emotional, and cultural protection of their children. The Kente Stole Ceremony represented a push back against cultural assimilation and allowed the students to be seen, heard, and validated in their school by the people who mattered to them.

Intentional engagement by teachers, PTA members, and school liaisons all contributed to parents’ feelings of welcomeness. Although these efforts were appreciated, the way Sinclair experienced the formation of the African American Parent Organization (AAPO) particularly resonated with me. Like any other organization necessitated by the exclusion of people of color,
the formation of the AAPO signaled that the school was not engaging Black parents in a way that parents valued. If the parents felt included and a part of the school community, there would not have been a need to have a separate parent organization. The recognition of Black students and the support that came along with the gathering of community was a primary goal. With the support of the school leadership, this organization was able to validate the Black students and celebrate them in ways that traditional school organizations had not. Therefore, a separate community within the larger school community was necessary to create. While Sinclair's school was not the first to create a separate organization within the larger school community, other schools have also developed parent organizations that are separate from the school’s PTA and meet very specific needs of a smaller community. For example, this can be seen in parent organizations that focus on students with disabilities. Ultimately, Black parents appreciated having an intentional space that met their communication and cultural needs. Having these opportunities increased Black parents’ feelings of visibility and provided a platform for engaging their agency.

**Visibility and Agency**

Parents, especially Black parents, have historically been excluded from school operations and have been prescribed very specific ways of participating. The parents in this study understood how important their presence in the school building, at meetings, and in their child’s classroom was for the success of their children. The last ideal and aspiration that they articulated was about this understanding and how increased visibility provided ways for them to exercise agency. Similar to the sentiment captured in the writings of Ralph Ellison, Black parents in this study worked diligently to combat the oppression of invisibility. Experiencing situations that deprioritized and ignored the priorities they had for their children made being present in their
children’s schools especially salient and necessary. Consequently, schools that were affirming and welcoming would demonstrate being intentional about how they engage families of color, support spaces for parents of color to engage with one another, and contribute to the emotional and cultural health of their children through cultural celebration in personnel, artifacts, and curricula.

On visibility and agency, Pratt spoke to the importance of being visible in his children’s school. As a father and educational leader, he connected to his own experiences and why his involvement was necessary for his children:

I have been extremely engaged with our children’s schooling as well. We think that it’s important you put it into practice and the most important piece to it is, at least in my opinion, with your research question, which is what are the practices the school’s need to be doing? Because I find that the burden of involvement and engagement is on parents rather than the school. I think the parent, to me, is a missing ingredient and is not tapped into nearly enough. I’m interested in informing the work of what schools could be doing better to that end. I also come from a legacy within my whole family of heavy parent involvement. My father was very involved. My mother was so involved that she would actually be after school as a substitute teacher sometimes, to keep track of me. [Being a Black man] forces me to be, I feel like I have to be in advocation mode a lot, or be ready to advocate at a moment’s notice because of how historically students of color, minoritized students have been disenfranchised by the schools. I’m always ready, I feel like I have to always be ready. Either educate or to advocate. I think that’s, I wouldn’t call it a burden, but it’s something that I think about. (Pratt)
As a parent, Pratt acknowledged how parents, not schools, were often held responsible for their school involvement. However, as a Black parent, this responsibility was layered, complex, and often riddled with others’ implicit biases, assumptions, and racism. In other words, not attending a meeting meant that all Black parents’ competency as parents was challenged and translated into a lack of caring about their child’s education. Pratt internalized this conflict and described it as a burden because flexibility, courtesy, and respect were not necessarily extended to him without advocating for himself or his children.

Victoria, whose husband was also a strong presence in their daughter’s school, recalled a situation in which her husband was excluded from participating in the very ways that parents were prescribed and expected to participate.

My daughter had a field trip. I wanted my husband to go on this field trip, and the teacher was like, "Oh no, we're good. We're good. No, we don't need any parents." I'm like, "No, I really want my husband to be there because we like to engage with our [daughter] ... We like to be there for our kid. I don't really know these other parents who are signing up to be chaperones. Therefore, I can't really ensure the safety of my child. I would feel much more comfortable if my husband was on this trip. She didn't say she didn't want him to go, but in so many words, I know she didn't want him to go. Anyway, I wrote her back and I was like, ‘No, he will be going on the trip even if it’s not in the capacity of a chaperone. He’ll be there because I don’t feel comfortable with my child being in the care of someone that I don't know.’ She couldn't say anything to that, so he went… (Victoria)

For very legitimate reasons such as safety, familiarity, and a genuine interest in the experiences of their daughter, Victoria and her husband resisted being told that they were not welcomed in a space that also concerned their daughter. In her narrative, Victoria did not mention the idea of
othermothering, surrogacy, or someone who availed themselves to be a resource for their daughter. The failure of the school to provide Victoria with a sustained and trusting environment fostered her necessary vigilance and informed her need to be visible and enact her agency.

Jackie and Darian also discussed the neglected opportunities to build relationships and develop understandings with school personnel in ways that were culturally affirming and inclusive. They drew attention to how easy it can be for schools to create unwelcoming environments by dismissing and disregarding parents. Jackie spoke about being present in her child’s school. She stated:

When your presence is felt at the school, it kind of shapes how your child behaves in school as well. I don't think parents realize that goes together. I definitely attend any meeting, any parent-teacher meetings. I participate in the school's PTA. Whatever events and fundraisers they have, I make it a point to be there. I would tell them that staff have to be told or taught that they must welcome parents when they're coming in. You know, don't give them a hard time because some schools... I don't know in [my city] it tends to be like that. The staff is just, you know, very [stand]off-ish. It makes you not want to speak to them sometimes. (Jackie)

Because Jackie was visible in her son’s school, she was more confident that the school personnel were aware of the values that surrounded him. She used her presence to help communicate her expectations for her child in addition to the expectations she had of school personnel. She stressed how important it was for her relationship with school personnel to be reciprocal in that if they wanted her to be present, they needed to make sure they were approachable.

Darian also described how being visible created opportunities for personnel to learn about families and their lives. She stated,
I just think they miss certain opportunities to have a personal connection with parents. And I don’t know that I’ve ever felt like they really were trying to reach out and to engage us. i.e., to my knowledge. They have a lot of things that happen in the district, but I’ve never seen something that was specifically like join us for this cultural experience, or join us for cultural night. Now, there may be some people who feel like you shouldn’t be doing that in 2019. I’m not one of those people. I think that you should be. And I don’t know that I’ve seen that. I’ve definitely seen come join art night, or come and do this, but not intentional engagement for families of color or for parents of color. (Darian)

Darian spoke to the lack of intentional engagement and knew that her PTA and school did not take an active stance in engaging its parents of color. Therefore, they were complicit in allowing the status quo to continue, not considering who was included and excluded. She recognized that her capacity to be involved was not being utilized and appreciated in a way that was affirming. For her, this was another way of being overlooked and ignored.

As mentioned in the participant selection criteria, the parents involved in this study were similar in that they were already very visibly involved in the education of their children and the education system. They had been active regardless of feelings of welcomeness or affirmation. They were also from professional backgrounds and highly educated. All of the parents acknowledged the role that their financial and cultural capital played in advocating for their children. Kendall and Darian, both teachers, said the following about understanding school culture and school language. When asked about how she leveraged her agency, Kendall said, “I have a little bit more flexibility, I have a say in some of the decisions, like outside of the academic or even within the academics.” On the other hand, Darian’s forthcoming comments highlighted the dismissive undermining of knowledge often experienced by Black parents.
I feel like my experience is slightly different than probably other Black parents within, not just our district, but in districts in general, because I'm an educator. So when I ask certain questions or when I'm talking about certain things, I know what I'm talking about, and I let that be known from the very beginning. And I know what questions to ask to get my point across and to try to get to some resolution. I think a lot of parents don't know how to do that, and especially Black parents, not because they're not educated, but because they don't have [the knowledge], especially within education. And we all know that it's a lot to navigate. It shouldn't have taken me three teachers and a supervisor to finally get the answers and to get things that I needed. And had I not been a teacher, I don't think that they would have ever given me the information that I was looking for because they would have just assumed that I didn't know what I was talking about, or I didn't know how to process that information. (Darian)

There was an expectation of her to not question the teachers, and to defer to their authority. Her knowledge was dismissed by school personnel, which was why it was necessary for her to persist in spite of the presumptions being made about her. Darian believed anti-Black bias to be the reason her daughter’s teachers did not extend professional and parental courtesies to her. It was because of presumptions, dismissal of knowledge, and implicit bias that parents needed to be vocal for their children’s well-being.

Victoria attributed being asked to participate in the PTA as an attempt to help close the racial gap in parent visibility, while also noting the racial disparities in the parents’ visibility and participation in decision-making.

It’s probably just their honest attempt to try to engage our population. I think it’s probably a part of what they feel they need to do to bring more people in because I think
they think maybe if I’m there, then others will follow or maybe I will have influence in certain corners of the community that they don't have influence in. I see people come out to the events, but I don’t see anyone from the various minority groups that make up the school actually participating to help those things happen. There’s a very small group of White parents that represent the very small White population in this school running everything about the school and in a sense serving this overwhelmingly brown population. What I brought up in discussion with [PTA] as well is the language barrier and maybe even cultural barriers. The fact that people look at our school, they see who the PTA is and maybe they feel that they don't ... They feel intimidated by that or they may feel apprehensive to engage because of a cultural or language barrier. (Victoria)

Victoria addressed what she believed to be several barriers to Black and brown parent involvement in the PTA. She surmised three things: 1) parents of color noticed there was no representation in the decision making of the PTA; 2) the cultural understandings of the PTA were not the cultural understandings of the parents of color; and, 3) the language barrier between parents of color and White parents was a deterrent to involvement. It was not that Victoria’s PTA was intentionally being exclusive, but in not knowing how to successfully engage parents of color, it was implicitly unwelcoming to parents of color. Victoria and the rest of the PTA leadership hoped Victoria’s presence and visibility would attract more parents of color. Although she felt tokenized, it did not inhibit her involvement.

Parents in this study demonstrated consistent behaviors that disrupted the oppressive practice of being ignored. They did this by being parent leaders and using their voices and presence to be seen and heard in their schools. There was also a distinction between being involved and being visible in schools. They were all heavily involved in their children’s
schooling, although some were not as visible as others. Regardless of how schools defined involvement, visibility spoke to a physical presence and how actively they used their knowledge and skills in the school. On the other hand, involvement spoke to how they engaged in the schooling activities of their children. Some were sporadically visible, lacking physical presence in the school while being involved and interacting with their children, school assignments, and teachers. For others, they were both visible and involved, choosing to use their physical presence to influence how school personnel responded to them. Parents communicated that as leaders in their homes and communities they needed to be involved and visible for the academic, social, emotional, and cultural safety of their children. Still, the parents discussed what they would like to see in schools that would make them feel that it is also a welcoming place for their children. Those three ideals were more administrators and teachers of color, more integration of Black culture in schools, and increased visibility for parents of color.

*Invisible Man - Say My Name*

Yosso (2005, p. 77) defined cultural community wealth as “an array of knowledges, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and used by Communities of Color to survive and resist racism and other forms of oppression.” For the Black parents in this study, the concept also applied to school settings and how they navigated those relationships. All parents in this study communicated how important and validating it was when school personnel took the time to recognize them and the contributions they make to their families, professions, communities, and schools. It is therefore no surprise that Black parents feel affirmed when there is an intentional acknowledgement of them, their contributions, and knowledge. Black parents confirmed that they need to be seen in the schools because schools have historically ignored and marginalized them. Sinclair spoke with clarity when she said,
If I'm not seen and heard, I feel like things can slip through and my child is not seen or heard. I think we have to be engaged and involved in a way that I think people [who] are not African American can, at times, be more passive in their children's education.

(Sinclair)

Not only did she convey her own experiences with being ignored, but she assumed the same would happen for her children. Sinclair’s simple yet layered statement addressed safe space, (in)visibility, intentionality, and voice. She acknowledged the likelihood that most White parents probably did not have to be so vigilant in making sure their voices were heard and their children were seen.

Pratt and Harper reported similar understandings regarding why their voices were necessary for schools. Pratt stated, “I think parent engagement is just vital to really helping minoritized students and populations engage in what historically has been an institution, talking about education, that has not welcomed or adequately educated students of color.” Harper approached visibility from a different perspective. Understanding that her child was only one of four Black children in the entire school, she could not create a Black space within the school. Because there were so few Black parents and students, her presence was noticed rather than her absence.

I just join in. That's it. That's my personality. I'm just like, ‘Okay, I’m here,’ and I’ll sit down or whatever. Other people don’t bother me, but I just want to make sure that I transfer how I feel so my daughter can be a confident young woman when she grows up. It’s absolutely important that they have to see me and my child first, first, as equal, but also as arm and arm in the community and it’s important that we be socially conscious of what we say and be aware how we say things. (Harper)
Harper knew that because there were not many Black families at her school, there was no need for her school to culturally consider her and her daughter. In turn, she intentionally made her presence known and expected to be treated with the same dignity and respect as the White parents. She believed that if she had to negotiate understanding what it meant to be in a White space, other parents and school personnel should not ignore her cultural identity by claiming colorblindness.

When asked about what kind of interactions and school practices make her feel affirmed, Sinclair, who had one child in college and one in second grade, recalled a recent interaction with a front office secretary that left her feeling intentionally dismissed. She described returning her son’s musical instrument to the school’s main office.

Firstly, she wasn’t acknowledging that I was standing there. And she was like, ‘You can't leave that here’, and she didn't even hear what I said. I'm like, ‘Well, what would you like me to do?’ I tried to pull up the email to show her that this is what the people were telling me I’m supposed to do. And at the same time, I was there early, for an early dismissal, so I'm waiting for [my son] to come and she was saying, ‘You can go stand out there, you can go find that email out there’ and pointed for me to leave out the office, and sit at this little bench that’s outside. (Sinclair)

Not only did Sinclair feel dismissed, but she believed it to be intentional. The front office worker first ignored her, then reprimanded her before finally ordering her to leave the office. Sinclair perceived this as the staff member reminding her that she did not belong in the school and that she was not welcomed. She also made it clear to Sinclair that she was disinterested in anything Sinclair needed to communicate. Sinclair acknowledged that being intentionally kind and respectful should be a reasonable expectation of school staff. She said, “I mean it can be
something simple as acknowledgement.” Over the years, Sinclair’s foci and priorities have changed. When her daughter was in elementary school, Sinclair prioritized academics, always ensuring that her daughter was doing all she could to succeed academically. Now, with a young Black son, she is less interested in conforming to school procedures that do not reflect her family’s needs. Rather, she pushes back with regard to how schools accommodate her young, gifted, and Black son. She continued her story:

And just acknowledging [parents], goes a really long way. It seems like something small, but to have a front staff who is welcoming when you come into the office and look up from their computer when you walk in, like greet you with a smile, like it will determine if a parent is willing to be engaged or disengaged. I’ve had experience with both. So I would say when you have an engaging front staff, it’s something that really works.

(Sinclair)

Interactions with front office staff was an immediate gauge for how welcome you might be in your child’s school. Experiences like Sinclair’s can immediately make a parent feel like an intrusion. Jackie, whose children attend a majority Black school with a Black male principal, agreed with the importance of creating a welcoming atmosphere the moment parents walk on the school property. She stated:

I mean just common courtesy, you know… If I come into the building, ‘Good morning. Good afternoon. What are you here to do?’ As opposed to just sitting there and waiting for me to say something or ask, ‘Okay, what are you here for?’ or just saying, ‘What are you here for?’ You know what I mean? It’s the way that you’re greeted. It’s just common courtesy. Common kindness, I should say. (Jackie)
Sinclair and Jackie’s comments underscored the need for school personnel to be kind and courteous and that everyone deserves to be respected simply for their humanity. In fact, all of the participants emphasized how critical it was to feel seen and heard by school personnel, which to them was a demonstration of respect.

While these Black parents understood what it felt like to be invisible, when asked what it means to them to feel seen and heard, there was an overwhelming agreement of how validating it was. Darian, Sinclair, and Victoria recalled their feelings of being heard by school personnel and the value it has for their children. Darian described:

Oh my God, [feeling heard] means everything. It means that my concerns and my needs, and my children’s concerns and needs are being considered. To me, it means that the school is making it a point to show their commitment to the success of all students. When I feel heard, this means my concerns are important. When I feel heard, this means I can feel more successful and respected. Anytime I have a question for the rest of the time that my children are at [their schools], [the supervisor is] the person that I will be going to because I respect the fact that she gave me that respect, and she was able to answer my questions… she understands and recognizes how important this is to [us] and wants to see her be successful in the way that [my daughter] wants to be successful. Respect to me looks like engagement. It looks like immediate response and feedback. Respect looks like progress. It looks like understanding, and it looks like participatory conversation.

Participatory conversation meaning you’re not giving me the runaround. If I’m having a conversation, and I want to be heard, hearing me is not giving me lip service saying uh-huh, yes, sure, mm-hmm, sounds good. That’s not participatory conversation.

Participatory conversation is asking questions to delve deeper into whatever it is that I’m
talking about, offering solutions, offering suggestions, and even pushback, which is fine as long as there is a basis behind that pushback and not just pushing for the sake of I’m not really trying to hear what you have to say. (Darian)

Darian reiterated the importance of being seen, heard, and responded to, and she attributed it to teachers and staff showing respect. Darian’s reference to “all students” communicated that in her experience the status quo often excluded students of color. She attached the feeling of being respected to that of success. In other words, successful relationships demonstrated mutual respect and reciprocity. Darian believed that a respectful relationship also helped students to feel more successful because they were not feeling dismissed, neglected, or misjudged. Darian’s last sentence referenced receiving pushback from school personnel and how it is handled. In her experience, Black parents were expected to accept at face value the word and authority of those working in schools. However, if she had feedback to offer, receiving pushback on that feedback was an attempt to silence her concerns and invalidate her experience. While she welcomed pushback from teachers that accepted responsibility for their actions, she understood that pushback for the sake of maintaining power and control was dismissive.

Victoria expressed a similar sentiment regarding her school principal.

I feel appreciated. I feel affirmed. I feel acknowledged. I feel like there’s an active, intentional effort being made to include me. I think it’s because they’re so excited to see a Black parent that’s active. You know what I mean? It’s like they try to encourage it. I feel that they’re grateful. In that sense, I feel encouraged to do it more. It’s encouraging for me to continue to be the involved parent that I am not just for my kids, but because I know that it’s appreciated at the school. I feel that the principal and the assistant principal are very affirming in the sense that they acknowledge people. I never feel overlooked. I
never feel underappreciated around her. I feel like she goes out of her way to do that. Even just for the fact that she memorizes the students’ names. I see her out there and it’d be a Black student or White student, whatever. She just treats everyone the same. She’s just a caring person, and she doesn’t discriminate based off of who the students are. I feel like that’s affirming to know that the principal values all of her students. She doesn’t look at her minority students like they’re going to downgrade the school. I never sense that she doesn’t want them to be there. (Victoria)

Victoria felt affirmed because her principal took the time required for developing individual relationships with her students and parents. In response, Victoria was inclined to participate more. By being asked to be a visible parent leader via the PTA, Victoria was proud about how she could contribute to the entire school community. She felt a part of the community, not separate from it. Not only did she feel safe in her school, but the individual acknowledgment from the PTA and principal made her feel visible and accepted. Again, parents mentioned their role in helping their children to be seen and acknowledged. Being seen and heard extended beyond parents’ physical presence.

Several parents discussed feeling seen and heard when describing how they communicate with their children’s teachers. Reese described her school’s open door policy in the following way.

So one of the things I do like about this school, versus some others in this county is that they have a very open door policy from administration to the teachers. There's not a lot of hierarchy. So the principal says, ‘If you have a question or a challenge, or whatever, go to a teacher. You don't have to come to me to go to the teacher.’ (Reese)
Reese’s comments spoke to having access to teacher and school leadership as well as them being open to feedback and suggestions that might better support their children. All of the parents had experienced being denied access, thereby requiring their vigilance and active participation. Whereas Darian reported having to speak with three different teachers in order to receive the information she needed about her daughter’s progress, Reese appreciated the culture of communication initiated by her school’s principal. Kendall, whose son is on the autism spectrum, described how important it was to be able to offer feedback as well.

I think [my feedback is] received well. She doesn’t ever seem agitated or irritated. She usually gets back to me fairly quickly, like if I reach out to her in email in the morning, she’ll respond like, ‘I saw your email, busy day,’ usually she gets back to me within maybe about 24 hours. She’s willing to meet before the IEP meeting to address some of my questions and concerns before we actually have the meeting. She’s happy as long as it takes for her to go over everything, or my questions, or additions or things that I want put in or taken out. When I do meet with her in person, she always has a lot of data for me to look at, ask questions… I'm all about reverse accountability, like if you expect for me to do things as a parent, I expect a lot of you as his teacher. So I think that's the whole back and forth thing, but then also that I ask a lot of questions. (Kendall)

Kendall’s interactions with her son’s teacher, whom she gave permission to serve as an othermother, went above and beyond compliance with the IEP and the obligation to meet the minimum requirements of her job. Kendall recognized and appreciated this. The interactions created trust and pathways for them to establish expectations of each other and hold each other accountable to those expectations.

Harper, who also has a child with autism, remarked:
I just think that I always email the teachers. Whatever [my daughter] needs, she always has, so I make sure that door’s open. For example, a couple weeks ago, [my daughter] decided to get up at three o’clock in the morning, so I contacted her teacher saying, ‘If [my daughter] is a little off today, that’s the reason.’ I’m glad I did, because she fell asleep on the bus and the school nurse called me and thought that [my daughter] had an undiagnosed sickness. I’m like, ‘No, she just decided to get up at 3:00 a.m. and she’s tired now.’ I think by having that door open, that open communication with the teachers and the school, they know they can call me anytime, and I can reach out to them.

(Harper)

As a special education teacher, Harper was particularly aware of how important reciprocal communication is between teachers and parents. Not only did it help to establish expectations but it built familiarity, which extended to parents and children the benefit of the doubt. It was important for Harper to have an avenue to communicate with her daughter’s teacher with the expectations that the teacher would, in turn, respond and be considerate of her daughter’s needs.

Pratt echoed this sentiment regarding teacher responsiveness.

[Feeling heard] means that something that I expressed as an issue was first responded to and second actioned, a follow up was initiated. I want to split those two things. And then follow up and implementation is, they’ve gone into their exploration, they’ve gone into their studies, they have come to a conclusion, and they implement to change it. They reflect, as best possible, my wishes for change. (Pratt)

However, not all parents have experienced reciprocal communication with their teachers. Victoria appreciated that when she reached out to her daughter’s teacher, she generally responded expeditiously. On the other hand, if their communication was something the teacher
perceived as challenging or criticizing, she would take longer to respond. What might usually be a twenty-four-hour response window from the teacher would become a week. She stated:

If it’s something like, ‘Oh, [my daughter’s] going to take the school bus home today, make sure she’s in the school bus line’, I’ll get an immediate response like, ‘Okay.’ If it’s like, ‘Oh, [my daughter] came home yesterday and she told me that she had a particular experience in the classroom yesterday. Can you talk to me more about that?’, it might take her a couple of days to get back to me. (Victoria)

Victoria expected her daughter’s teacher to respond to her in a timely manner the same way she responded to the teacher’s request. The teacher’s delayed response was a silencing and dismissal of Victoria’s concern. This breach in communication caused mistrust and a necessary vigilance in Victoria.

The most salient and consistent undercurrent from parents in this study was in regard to the actions and experiences of being seen and heard by their schools. Invisibility was the greatest inhibitor to being welcomed and affirmed. Not only did invisibility represent a dismissal and lack of respect, but it also translated into a lack of trust for school personnel, including PTA parents. Victoria, in particular, discussed how disingenuous she perceived many teachers to be, which ultimately contributed to her hypervigilance and constant involvement in all school dealings with her daughter. At the risk of being labeled a “helicopter mom” and pathologizing of her actions, Victoria, like all of the other parents, persisted in making sure that her presence was acknowledged, her voice was heard, and her suggestions attended to. The Black parents in this study experienced visibility when their cultural community wealth was not simply acknowledged, but requested (Yosso, 2005). They used their physical presences, professional expertise, financial resources, and educational experiences to act as change agents and resist
invisibility for them and their children. As parent leaders, they felt obligated to use their agency to create more equitable experiences and opportunities for their children, recognizing that their feedback and contributions had implications for all students, especially students of color. Sometimes, the feedback parents offered school personnel was received favorably. Other times, it had negative consequences that impacted their children.

**Offering Feedback - The Sweetest Taboo**

It is important to note that when the participants chose to communicate with teachers, they had to be willing to accept the consequences of those interactions. In many cases, those consequences led to teachers’ lack of responsiveness to parents, adverse effects on their children, and stereotyping. Parents expected their children’s teachers to create pathways for communication with them, but they did not assume this would always occur. Parents in this study were proactive in establishing communication patterns with their children’s teachers. When school personnel and school organizations were open to feedback, the Black parents were more likely to feel more welcomed and continued communication. Additionally, being affirmed for contributions was particularly important when parents provided feedback to school personnel that not only helped their children, but other students as well.

Several parents remarked that one of the first steps to combating invisibility and respecting Black parents voices in schools was having open attitudes and avenues for parents to voice both compliments and concerns with school personnel. The second step was responding back to parents in a timely manner. The third step was actualizing and applying the feedback parents provided. The participants discussed offering feedback in a number of ways. One way was through their involvement in the school’s PTA. Another way participants discussed
feedback was in their interactions with teachers. Lastly, participants discussed feedback in terms of confronting stereotypes about them and their parenting competencies.

Kendall and Bailey discussed the openness of PTA parents. Both of their schools had PTA’s whose leadership and active membership consisted primarily of White women. They generally had positive responses from the leadership. Kendall stated:

I think they take my feedback or into consideration, and I could see it implemented into the school in some way. If I make a suggestion at the PTA or my child's teacher, I see it. It’s not just a potentially lip service ‘oh okay’. I actually see them making some changes or trying to have a program or something like that. (Kendall)

The notion of teachers giving parents ‘lip service’ was recurring when discussing feeling heard. Hearing required action and follow up and not empty words. Similarly, Bailey discussed her PTA parents and how she experienced their willingness to tackle topics of diversity.

I like to think that when we’re at the PTA meetings and the things that [the PTA] suggests, if the leadership seems like they’re welcome to it, that means something to me. But also it means something to know that [the leadership] already thought about things.

So, that it’s not that we’re the ones who are bringing [diversity issues] up. (Bailey)

For her, it was reassuring to know that diversity issues were already on the radars of the PTA and the school leaders and they were open to having discussions about them. This spoke back to the importance of intentionality. Bailey was more trusting of her PTA and school leaders because they were not shying away from talking about race and equity. Kendall, on the other hand, also acknowledged that while they may listen to her, she was not convinced the other PTA parents listened to other parents of color. This feeling and experience of being patronized or placated was recurring when the parents discussed respect, being heard, and openness to feedback. She
described how, in her school, the racial and socioeconomic diversity could typically be identified based on the types of houses in which families reside. For example, the more affluent families lived in single-family homes, who, according to Kendall, also seemed to have more stay-at-home moms and active PTA moms. Conversely, the families who were renters with one or two working parents and who also generated less income, typically lived in the townhomes and apartments. She recalled taking particular notice at PTA meetings and events.

School wide, we are Title I, so just thinking about what they needed to qualify for the whole Title I, but then looking at what the PTA looked like. It was just very different to me. I think that they have things that, potentially culturally cater to the things that they want to see and not necessarily the needs of the community. I don’t think that some of the activities that they have hosted take into account all of the community and what all of the community potentially might wanna see. It’s very narrow in a sense that, okay this is what our kids and our families are into, but not thinking about some of the other families. That's not with all the activities, but I think some of the activities are that way. (Kendall)

Kendall saw the lack of diversity in the PTA as a missed opportunity for White parents to understand the needs of the Black and brown communities. The inaccessibility of the PTA for parents of color did not leave room for them to offer feedback about what meets the culturally unique needs of their families. Lack of trust, lack of relationships, and a difference in shared understandings exacerbated the distance between parents of color and White parents. In other words, there was no collective avenue for them to provide feedback to the PTA.

Pratt spoke specifically about how much it meant to interact with teachers when offering feedback. After having experiences with teachers and school leaders in which his comments and thoughts were ignored, he stated:
I think first a response is really key and that’s not just acknowledging receipt of what I’m saying, like an email. But it encompasses validating what I’m saying, empathizing with what I'm saying, and then providing some sort of early explanation before going into more exploration. That's the response. (Pratt)

Pratt expressed a desire for teachers to have empathy in understanding that not everyone experiences the world in the same way. Both Kendall and Pratt discussed that, for them, recognition always required there to be some sort of follow up or action. That is, once you’ve acknowledged a person’s presence or voice, there was still more that needed to happen to encourage engagement.

Many parents had often encountered negative responses from teachers with regard to feedback they provided. Whether feedback yielded positive or negative consequences for their children was influenced by the teacher’s disposition and ability to accept suggestions or even criticism. Victoria, in particular, had accounts of when her feedback negatively affected her daughter’s classroom experience. In her story, a teacher verbally thanked her for being an engaged and vocal parent until she offered feedback that made the teacher uncomfortable, and then her daughter suffered the repercussions. Victoria’s experiences describe a challenge to the emotional safety of her daughter and the undermining of the trust she developed with her daughter’s teachers, which caused further apprehension about the teacher’s intentions. She recalled the discrepancy in the administration of her school’s reward system and the mixed messages she received from the teacher. Victoria told the story of the owl feathers, which captured the issues of feedback, communication patterns, and harm.

They get these things called owl feathers for doing good things at school like if they follow directions or if they did a particularly good job on an assignment or a class project
or something. They earned them. [At a] parent-teacher conference with her teacher, I had brought up some criticisms, some things that I've noticed. I noticed after that meeting, my daughter stopped getting owl feathers. My daughter told me that her teacher had moved her so she was no longer in the front of the group… She was in the back, so she felt her teacher was no longer noticing her or paying her any attention or when she would raise her hand. She loves going to school. She felt like every time she’d raise her hand for every little thing, her teacher would stop calling on her as much as she used to and stop calling on [her] to be the leader, the line leader and things like that as much as she used to. I think it was really bothering her. My daughter told me about that. When we had our last parent-teacher meeting, I brought this up. The teacher immediately … she turned red I think because I called her cards. Then she was just like, ‘Oh, I've got to talk to [your daughter].’ She just was putting on this show like she was so remorseful. She apologized to my child. Then after that she started giving [her] owl feathers. [She] would come home like, ‘Oh look, I got owl feathers.’ It's been a whole month and a half where you didn't have not one owl feather, and we used to get them every day. Now you’re getting them again. Okay. Hmm. She went a whole couple of weeks of getting owl feathers and then all of a sudden, they stopped. We started experiencing the same thing. I don’t know what it is. I try not to read into it. I'm trying to be an active [parent]... (Victoria)

Victoria’s concerns with trusting teachers were continuing to be reinforced. Victoria was concerned that her daughter would be overlooked, and her daughter was, in fact, overlooked. Victoria was concerned that the emotional toll of being invisible would influence how much her daughter loved school. Victoria wanted her daughter to be in a position to reap the benefits of her hard work, yet she had become the recipient of the passive aggressive actions of the teacher that
were targeted to the parent. Her daughter was moved to the back of the room with no explanation, which limited her ability to be seen, and she was not being recognized, which limited her opportunity to be validated. Given what is known about how schools treat Black girls, Victoria’s hypervigilance to protect the social and emotional health of her daughter was a top priority (Morris, 2016).

Victoria’s story represents the voice of every Black parent that I have ever spoken to about how they experience schools. They each have their own “owl feather” story, but there is a dance between how visible and invisible you can be, how vocal or silent you can be, how critical or complicit you can be, how abolitionist or assimilationist you can be, how angry or docile you can be, and how engaged or disengaged you can be. The Black parents, in this study, all felt the same way. We walk a tightrope between what is the acceptable level of harm to which we are willing to subject our Black children to make the schooling system more equitable and just.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study illustrate that Black parents appreciate when schools intentionally hired administrators and teachers of color because those personnel are indicators of disrupted school norms. For the parents in this study, school leaders and teachers of color represent a shared culture, a feeling of safety, and trust. Although there is no guarantee that having an administrator or teacher of color will create an affirming and welcoming experience for their children, Black parents are more likely to trust that the environment is safe for their children. Parents in this study also note that when there is a person, particularly a person of color, who demonstrates sincere care and engages in oothermothering, their sense of safety and trust increases. This kind of representation through personnel, in addition to other representations of Black culture within the curricula and broader school culture, provides their Black children with
images and messages that affirm their cultural ways of being. For schools to embrace Black culture, they must intentionally disrupt the supremacy of White middle-class norms that already exist. When intentional disruption of the prescribed expectations of parent involvement occurs, Black parents in this study notice. Parent liaisons, cultural brokers, and Black parent organizations are also ways that schools demonstrate intentionality to engage their Black parents. Because of how schools marginalize the parents in this study, experiences where they are seen and heard is critical to their motivation for enacting their agency and offering feedback. All of this is toward the goal of creating a more equitable experience for all children.

While most of the parents in this study report experiences that are affirming and welcoming, they do not communicate that these are done for the purposes of recognizing or appreciating Black culture and the cultural community wealth they possess. The parents in this study are already parent leaders and therefore rebel against the status quo practices of schools that historically marginalize their children and invalidate their voices. They do this by showing up without being invited, volunteering on their own terms, creating organizations separate from the PTA, and forging relationships with school personnel with whom they feel comfortable, among other things. There are dispositional factors and beliefs that are present to make Black parents feel welcomed and affirmed, which signal openness to reciprocal engagement. Two of these qualities are respect and trust. When parents report feelings of dismissal, it is because they are being disrespected and overlooked with regard to their presence, knowledge, or communication style.

For the parents in this study, their involvement in schools is an extension of their cultural community wealth and the agency they exercise in their homes and communities. Every act of engagement they have with schools is a manifestation and exercise of their capital. We see this in
how they hold schools accountable, and the reasons why they need their children to experience
Black school leaders and teachers. We see this in how they decide which relationships are
necessary to pursue and how allowing someone to othermother their children is an extension of
trust and shared expectations. We see this in how they use their knowledge and skills to advocate
for their children at the risk of negative perception and negative consequences for their children.
Finally, we see this in how having a collective platform leads to their enhancement of the school
community and disruption of inequities.

Although my study forefronts the positive ways that Black parents experience their
schools as affirming and welcoming, it is not the entirety of their stories. There are just as many
experiences, if not more, that document episodes of racism, inequity, and disrespect they endure
in their schools. My study aimed to unearth and unpack the qualities and characteristics that
parents experienced as validating. In this way, I privilege the voices of these parent leaders who
are active in their child’s education, their schools, and their communities to be sources of
recommendations for positive action. The participants who speak school language navigate
school culture, and therefore they influence the schooling experience for their children. Because
of this, their feelings and experiences vacillate between a concern for their children and a
concern for all children. They re-live these tensions with me and demonstrate it through their
parent leadership.

For example, Darian is an inactive member of the PTA but wholly vested and visible in
her daughter’s education. At the same time, she demonstrates her parent leadership as a teacher
in her classroom advocating for students and providing them with the education she wants for
her own child. All of the participants shared the commonality of being parent leaders. It was this
quality that uniquely qualified them to engage in school culture while concurrently undermining
it. Similar to Ladson-Billings referring to culturally-relevant teaching as subversive (1994), I describe these parent leaders as subversive in the same way. Because of this, they may never truly be welcomed in schools that do not share their values.

Chapter Five: If This World Were Mine (Discussion & Implications)

In spite of the barriers and microaggressions levied against these Black parents, they still persisted and remained active in their child’s education. The participants described the following motivating factors as driving their interest in this study on parent engagement and schools, and why they are involved in their children’s schooling experience: school inequities, child’s safety, and Black culture. For these Black parents, the concern for school practices that perpetuate inequities spoke to the direct experiences that they had with schools over the course of their lives as both students and parents. The personal experience of being in K-12 schools was one reason why all participants are involved in the education field or school culture in some way. As the parents assumed different roles in schools, they recognized how schooling was different for them, is different for their Black children, and remains different from their White counterparts. Their participation in this study was an opportunity to use their voices and platforms to contribute to the research that informs how schools engage other Black parents.

Another motivating factor for their participation in the study is because of the social, emotional, and academic impacts school inequities have on the well-being of their children. Recognizing that disproportionality of discipline is a real phenomenon and that most of their schools position them as minorities, they are concerned about what and how their children were being taught to engender pride in themselves and their culture. Their participation in this study was a way to highlight the models, messages, and images in their children’s schools that affirm them and their children. Following Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs, they understood that
schools were often harmful spaces for Black children, and therefore, safety and well-being was the most immediate concern. Safety and well-being are found in all of the participants’ narratives.

As people who were invested in trying to make schools more equitable places for their children and other children of color, they have also chosen to participate in the greater conversation in order to support *Black culture and the Black agenda*. In other words, they engaged in this study for the benefit of the village, or as Black urbanites would say, “for the culture.” These parents believed that their contribution to this endeavor might serve as a way to break the stereotypes attributed to Black parents. Supporting the Black agenda means prioritizing ideas, concepts, and initiatives that affirm Black people and extend beyond privileging one student or one family to also include a community or culture within a community. This belief system is in direct contradiction to the individualistic value system embedded in White supremacy. Therefore, parent involvement “for the culture” was an important factor in Black parents’ developing agency in schools and creating change that supports Black students. For the parents in this study, the misalignment of why schools engage parents and how parents experience the ways schools engage them is reflective of the fact that schools are inherently racist spaces, and if not disrupted will harm Black children and by proxy, their Black parents (Love, 2019).

**Discussion of Themes**

The research that informed this study was situated in four interrelated ideas. The first identified teaching as either assimilationist or culturally-relevant and discussed the harmfulness of colorblindness (Ladson-Billings, 1994). In this study, I describe this in the aspirations and experiences of all the parents who felt more affirmed and welcomed when the cultural capital of
Black school leadership, teaching staff, curricula, and school culture were appreciated and visible. Additionally, the harm of colorblindness is evident in the invisibility that parents described as unwelcoming and not affirming, as visual representation of Black people were missing from school culture.

The second grounding idea was Delpit’s work regarding warm demanders (2012). In her study, school personnel showed genuine care and concern for the participants’ children and helped to reinforce the expectations parents have of their children and schools. For most of the parents in this study, these warm demanders were teachers and leaders of color who personally decided to not only look after the participants’ specific children, but preserved their dignity and appreciated their cultural context. Similar to the concept of othermothering (Mawhinney, 2011), trust between parents, students, and teachers modeled an extended familial relationship in which one assumes care for a student. When this occurred, Black parents were more likely to believe their child’s physical, social, and emotional needs were being met.

The third concept looked at the practice of culturally responsive teaching, specifically with regard to teachers’ examining their own sociocultural consciousness and learning about students’ lives (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). For many teachers in their studies, acknowledging, understanding, and disrupting White privilege was principal to moving toward a sociocultural consciousness (Matias, 2013; Picower, 2009; McIntosh, 1988). In my study, parents’ willingness to offer feedback and a school’s ability to receive that feedback was dependent on the dispositional qualities of school personnel. That is, those interested in having discussions about race, equity, and school practices possessed the disposition to handle feedback that challenged the status quo. Additionally, the willingness of school personnel to build personal relationships
to better understand cultural differences was also a dispositional quality that made Black parents feel more welcomed and affirmed, which further encouraged their participation.

The fourth concept discussed parent involvement and how cultural dissonance, social class, and differing expectations of participation influenced how parents chose to interact with schools (Lareau, 1987, 2000). However, Lareau highlighted how this was not an indication of how much parents valued school. Black parents in my study aborted narrow definitions of parent involvement described in many studies and chose to engage in schools through their communication with teachers, visibility in school organizations, and relationships with school personnel. By understanding school language and using their cultural capital, Black parents created change for their children within the classroom and the broader school community.

Using the foundational understandings of culturally relevant teaching, warm demanders, sociocultural consciousness, and cultural dissonance to examine why schools seek to engage with parents revealed four main purposes: accountability, relationships, knowledge, and empowerment. In the next section, I revisit each purpose for engagement and discuss my findings from the perspective of why parents choose to engage with schools and how they experienced their interactions with school personnel and school practices. There was a clear contradiction between findings in research literature on how schools engaged parents and how parents in study experienced engagement. My study revealed that there are inherently competing factors as to how and why Black parents choose to be engaged in their children’s schools, which is specifically tied to feelings and experiences of welcomeness. This tension and discrepancy undergirded my study to find the intersection of what schools do and how parents experience those interactions.
Participants in this study were keenly aware that how school personnel engaged them was primarily in ways that benefitted the school system and not them. They had experience with *Engagement for Accountability*, which challenged their cultural ways of child-rearing and presumed that they were incapable of conforming to school cultural norms. Black parents understood how when they were *engaged for the purposes of building relationships*, it meant they had to take risks disclosing information about themselves and their children that might be used against them. The parents in this study also recognized that *Engagement for Knowledge* required an investment of time and resources on the part of school personnel to get to know and understand how their strengths, knowledge, and cultural capital could benefit the school community. The lack of investment meant that they had to take the initiative to involve and advocate for themselves. Lastly, participants in this study understood that if they were going to experience *Engagement for Empowerment*, they were going to have to advocate for themselves and use their individual and collective agency to disrupt the cultural norms that existed in schools to create space for themselves.

Therefore, while schools are reported to engage parents for purposes of parent accountability, building relationships, gaining knowledge, and encouraging empowerment, the parents in this study reported a different set of objectives for how they engage with their children’s schools and what makes them shy away. The Black parents in this study discussed how these school practices were interrelated and dependent on one another for their success. In the section that follows, I explain what parents identified as motivating factors for why they choose to engage with their children’s schools.
Engagement for Accountability

Engagement for accountability is designed to influence parents’ (mis)behavior, with regard to how schools expect them to support their children’s academic success (Evans, I. & Okifuji, A., 1992; Martin, D. & Martin, M., 2007; Morgan, Y., Sinatra, R., & Eschenauer, R., 2015; Obeidat, O. & Al-Hassan, S., 2009; Sanders, M., 1996; Sykes, G., 2001; Van Voorhis, F., 2011). Experiences that reflected this deficit-based approach to interacting with parents raised red flags for the Black parents in this study because it signaled a telling of what to do, not an asking, and it did not allow for dialogue between them and the teacher. In all of their narratives were situations in which they held teachers and school personnel accountable for their children’s academic success. Sometimes they referred to it as an open door policy, but Kendall spoke about reciprocity and how, if there are expectations that the teacher had of her, she should be able to articulate the expectations she had for the teacher. This sentiment was fundamental to the parents’ understanding of how schools were inequitable and needed to be held accountable for their personnel, practices, and policies.

For example, for Victoria accountability was a pathway to trust. When her daughter stopped receiving owl feathers as a reward after Victoria provided undesirable feedback to the teacher, Victoria continued to question the additional ways that her daughter might be dismissed and invisible. In this way, it seems that when a school primarily sees parent engagement as purposeful for parent accountability, the communication and expectations are one-sided: schools prescribe, parents comply. However, when Black parents initiate engagement for school accountability, the communication is delayed and sometimes hostile, and consistently undermines Black parents’ cultural capital. In both of the examples of Kendall and Victoria, school inequities are addressed. For Victoria, this also extended to protecting her child from
explicit and implicit biases. However, when Victoria experienced school personnel as genuine in their concern and care, she availed herself to more participation and more conversation.

**Engagement for Relationships**

Engagement for relationships was reflected when there were spaces for parents to (1) talk with one another and school personnel and (2) share experiences, expectations, hopes, and dreams for their children (Auerbach, 2009; Barone, 2011; Colombo, 2007; Georgis et al., 2014; Martin & Martin, 2007; Zimmerman-Orozco, 2011). These activities built relational trust and information gained from parents, which were used to develop a better understanding of their values, concerns, and aspirations for their children and schools. Bailey, who chose her children’s school because of its Black leadership, expressed this sentiment when discussing the informal gatherings and conversations that were happening between parents and teachers during student drop-off and pick-up. For her, the opportunity to interact with teachers outside of the classroom allowed for more organic conversation to get to know one another better. Engagement for Relationships were helpful in breaking down existing cultural and communication barriers between parents and school personnel. Additionally, Bailey spoke to othermothering and the value it had for trusting that school personnel would support her daughter physically, emotionally, and academically. Bailey, along with all of the other parents who described othermothering, understood it to be an exercise of capital in itself. Othermothering was not something a teacher could assign themselves but rather it had to be offered to and accepted by the parent recipient (Mawhinney, 2011).

On the other hand, Reese approached Engagement for Relationships differently and was more concerned about engaging with her school’s PTA because she desired to have a better understanding of the relationship between the PTA and the school’s leadership. Although she
was asked to join the PTA leadership, she would have engaged in it without an invitation. Reese understood that as a result of being engaged in the PTA, she would be privy to the inner circle conversations from which parents of color are often excluded. Reese’s desire to leverage her cultural capital was a way of gaining access to the decision-making and functioning of the school in order to disrupt the PTA leadership and make it more inclusive.

**Engagement for Knowledge**

Engagement for knowledge occurred when schools operated with the belief that parents had strengths, skills, and knowledge from which the school can benefit (Auerbach, 2009; Gillanders et al., 2012; Sanders, 1996). Creating pathways for parents’ to leverage their cultural capital expanded the narrow definitions of what counts as knowledge and what counts as participation. Pratt referenced his cultural capital when being asked by his school’s leaders to use his expertise to help problem solve and obtain outside resources. Similar to Auerbach’s study (2009), when Pratt was treated as an asset to the school, he appreciated how his presence was acknowledged and his skills were utilized for the betterment of the school. Additionally, developing an opportunity with Kendall to participate in her son’s class without physically being there aligns with Sanders (1996) study as well as with Epstein’s model for parent involvement. Although these Engagement for Knowledge helped the schools to meet their goals, there is little to suggest that goals were mutually decided with parents.

For Darian, she engaged with her school because she needed knowledge from them about her daughter but also because she needed the school to know that the capital she wielded was able to be deployed as power. As a teacher, Darian was well versed in school language, yet her questions had been ignored and she was pushed off onto another teacher until finally reaching a supervisor. It is clear that for her, the school was not interested in her knowledge, feedback, or
participation outside of the traditionally prescribed ways of involvement (Lareau, 2000).

However, parents in this study both reiterated the importance of having an asset-based lens and flexibility toward what counts as knowledge and participation. Finally, Engagement for Knowledge was culturally responsive for Black parents when they were able to offer feedback to teachers, leaders, and/or school organizations that feedback was accepted, responded to, and acted upon.

**Engagement for Empowerment**

School practices that demonstrated Engagement for Empowerment required intentional development of relationships, appreciation of parents’ knowledge, and the strategic elevation of marginalized parents’ voices in the school community (Auerbach, 2009; Colombo, 2007; Shiffman, 2013; Waterman, 2007). They were also found to be the most culturally responsive and were built on relationships affirming to Black parents. Because empowerment involved community members, a commitment to social justice, and had ties to community resources, every experience the parents engaged in was an enactment of their cultural capital and empowered agency. From the perspective of the schools described by Black parents in this study, it may have looked as if they were empowering parents when, in reality, the Black parents were already empowered. The assertion of their individual and collective voice in breaking down barriers of invisibility was how they exerted their power and agency emanating from their empowerment. For the parents in this study, empowerment was most closely illustrated by their own parent leadership. The parent participants in this study did not wait for the school to give them permission to intentionally create safe spaces for themselves and advocate for their children. They did so because they recognized how important it was for them to be visible and involved.
For example, Sinclair’s fellow parents created a community within the larger school community to specifically support and affirm Black students. Similar to Auerbach’s analysis (2009), it helped to build relational trust with school personnel and highlighted knowledge, skills, and cultural capital of parents already valued in the community. However, it was different in that it was homegrown within the school community as opposed to being initiated by the school. The use of cultural brokers and/or parent liaisons also encouraged relationships and trust between parents and school personnel (Colombo, 2007). Parent liaisons proved to be an integral part in helping school personnel to understand and structure opportunities for involvement that considered the social, economic, and cultural realities of their families. While parent liaisons were avenues for communication, the purpose was to help parents assimilate to school culture by providing additional support. It was not necessarily about shifting culture but encouraging conformity. However, for parents in this study, they were appreciative for the opportunity to build a community with Black school personnel and other Black parents.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. Parents in this study were asked to identify their schools or school personnel as welcoming and affirming. Based on what we know about how Black parents perceive their interactions with schools, this factor may have limited the number of people who believed themselves eligible to complete the recruitment survey. Recruitment could have also been expanded by including all parents of color. Additionally, my study was limited to one interview per participant. A focus group would have provided more data and the opportunity for participants to further validate each other’s experiences. In fact, all of the participants expressed interest in the experiences of the other participants.
Finally, while it was an intention of this study to include the voices of the specific school leaders and teachers positively described in this study, it is important to note that school central office administration denied me access to the school leaders and teachers who contributed to the feelings of welcomeness and affirmation reported by Black parents. In short, this study was not welcomed by their schools and their voices were silenced. This denial underscored a major finding of this study which was the limiting of Black parents’ voice. The districts’ restriction of access to Black teachers, Black school leaders, and affirming school practices does not represent culturally responsive school practices.

**Implications for Practice**

Implications for practice are foretold by the experiences, aspirations and motivating factors of the Black parents in this study. These factors were common among the participants and supported by direct evidence from their reported experiences. Because the participants described school inequities, child’s safety, Black culture, and parent leadership as the motivating factors driving their participation in this study, these motivations also signaled what schools can do differently to engage them and why they are involved in their children’s schooling experience. Across all participants, there seemed to be a common belief that their presence is inherently unwelcomed in schools, and therefore their involvement is necessary and critical for their children’s social, emotional, and academic survival.

**The Need for Culturally Responsive Parent Engagement**

Schools that engage in culturally responsive school practices have taken steps toward educational equity. As the American cultural and political climates at the time of this writing have shifted more toward openly biased and discriminatory practices, the communities and the schools that serve them are also vulnerable to those climate shifts. Political agendas aimed at
disenfranchising Black and brown people, immigrants, women, and other minoritized populations include the non-renewal of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) (Hope, Keels, & Durkee, 2016; Talamantes & Aguilar-Gaxiola, 2017), the separation of parents and children at the U.S. border (Teicher, 2018), America First globalization politics (Hu & Spence, 2017), Make America Great Again dog whistles (Ngo, 2017), the acceptance of police brutality toward Black people (Hope, Keels, & Durkee, 2016; Mayorga, & Picower, 2018), and most recently, the dismissal and mocking of sexual violence against women (Darwish, 2018), to name a few. It is becoming even more important to pay attention to how our beliefs as school personnel inform the enactment of our responsibilities as educators. In this time of overt racism, sexism, and ableism, our schools are challenged to demonstrate a commitment to social justice and greater cultural sensitivity and cultural competence toward reaching educational equity in ways that undermine the explicit and implicit systems of oppression in our classrooms and schools. The efforts of teachers to be good teachers for all students speaks not just to a commitment to social justice, but an enactment of social justice. Their enactment of social justice is also an important measure of teacher quality for students and parents of color.

The Black parents in this study acknowledged that schools historically ignored and marginalized Black families and students. Morris (2016) discusses marginalization in her book, *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*. In recognizing the involvement of mothers in schools, this idea can also be extended to Black parents in this study. In this way, Black parents described how crucial it was to be both visible in their children’s schools and also have their voices acknowledged by school personnel. However, parents often felt cautious about using their voice in schools based on how they were perceived by school personnel. In the past, many had been made to feel too visible or too involved, too loud or too angry, tokenized by the
expectation to be the voice of all Black people, and finally dismissed or placated. Parents have attributed the disconnect in expectations to a cultural dissonance and a general lack of respect and empathy for them.

Warren (2018), whose scholarship focuses on White teachers’ empathy, teaching dispositions, and culturally responsive pedagogy, defined empathy as “the piece of the student-teacher interaction puzzle that connects what a teacher knows or thinks about students and families to what he or she actually does when negotiating appropriate responses to students’ needs, or when the teacher is arranging learning experiences for students” (p. 171). Parents in this study would likely agree that there is no way to attend to students' needs without understanding how those needs are influenced by their familial and cultural values. Additionally, the burden placed on Black parents and many parents of color to help their children learn how to attend to their own cultural traditions and ways of being while also being expected to master White middle-class values and school language is not traditionally a burden reciprocated by White school personnel. It is a double and sociocultural consciousness that allows Black parents to use their cultural community wealth to navigate through the U.S. public school system to influence the amount of damage inflicted on them and their Black children.

Quality teachers are an important part of culturally responsive parent engagement and they matter in the education of our students (Darling-Hammond, 2002; Freire, 1998; Goldhaber, 2002). For students of color, one salient measure of teacher quality is the ability of a teacher to connect, respect, and demonstrate a commitment to social justice, as evidenced by disposition, practices, and pedagogies that appreciate diversity and respect the lived experiences of its students and parents. The social justice agenda rooted in the literature that calls for culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1996; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) focuses on teacher

These additional measures of teacher quality are dispositional, and reflect what Freire called the “indispensable qualities” that cannot be taught but can be developed (1998). However, the discourse on teacher quality has been a recursive conversation in the research literature, board meetings, annual review meetings, classrooms, and homes. Its multi-layered definition has yet to be agreed upon. In some ways, the construct of teacher quality has been embattled, and it pervades our thoughts on the qualifications for preparing a good teacher (Darling-Hammond, 2000), infiltrates our classrooms through rigorous evaluative measures (Marzano, 2012), and resonates in our quest to teach for social justice (Freire, 2000).

Identifying culturally responsive school practices is not simple and cannot be measured by teacher quality alone. Culturally responsive school practices are also measured by the quality of a school and the organizational routines that facilitate positive school culture for all students and their families. Positive school culture may be equally as difficult to measure as teacher quality. Unfortunately, the construct of a positive and supportive school culture for many families of color has been narrowly defined by White stakeholders while neglecting the voices of diverse parent perspectives (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Jarvis, 1992; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004). For many schools, measuring school culture primarily through a lens that lacks diversity is not inclusive of a supportive school culture for families of color, especially those who have been historically marginalized and excluded from decision making opportunities. In other words, parents whose perceived values and culture most closely align with those of the schools are most likely to be affirmed and engaged by the school.
Even when armed with an awareness of the dangers of educational inequalities, schools often resort to using their authority to maintain position, role, and control over students (hooks, 2009). Traditional school expectations of classroom management and discipline practices are firm in this way. This stance neglects the appreciation for student diversity and perpetuates an assimilationist approach to schooling (hooks, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1995). With an educational system and teaching force that is struggling to make sense of how the shifting growth toward a more culturally and linguistically diverse student population influences teaching and learning (Yoon, 2008), I find myself wondering what inequities schools are enacting with regard to diversity and if they know how to use diversity as a learning opportunity?

Similar to other studies that examine teaching through a critical lens, my parental and personal experiences strongly influence my professional choices (Arce, 2013; Milner, 2007; Skerrett, 2006). The raced, gendered, able-bodied, classed, and intersectional approach to meeting the needs of the families and students I taught, especially those who had been marginalized, meant that I needed to learn how to engage with parents and their children in ways that stretched beyond the pervasive whiteness that provided the basis of my teaching pedagogies. I did this by taking a person-centered, strength-based, flexible, and critically-reflexive approach to understanding my students and my own biased practices (Hannon, 2019a).

I am a Black teacher prepared by teacher educators, most of whom do not share my cultural experiences and beliefs about students, families, and schooling. In my experiences as a student, parent, and former teacher, there are beliefs, policies, practices, and values that I am charged to carry out that contradict my personal truths with regard to race, gender, and ableism. This internal rub has required me to engage in self-reflection that is both critical and informative to my teaching and learning. In these times of conflict, my commitment to educational equity
and social justice often means maneuvering around stronghold policies that marginalize students of color and their parents.

Through this study, I assert that when educators and educational institutions begin to situate social justice and equity as the cornerstone of teacher education and teacher development by privileging marginalized voices, school personnel can better appreciate how school norms may impact the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse parents. By acknowledging the systemic practices that disenfranchise some families and affirm others, schools can be better prepared to meet the needs of all its students and families.

For parents, even those with children in schools whose majority were children of color or had leadership of color did not feel like school was a Black space in the sense of cultural representation integrated into the culture and curricula, cultural understandings, and communication patterns. In this way, schools were still White institutions and White spaces regardless of who was in charge and who attended the school. To help shift this White-centered culture and support a more culturally and linguistically diverse approach to what schooling looks like for the children of color who represent 52% of students in U.S. public schools, I, along with the support of my parent participants, recommend the following considerations for future practice and professional development. First I list the recommendations and then describe them in detail below.

- A commitment to hiring school leaders and teachers of color
  - Increased access to cultural brokers and parent liaisons
- A commitment to supporting the development of special interest parent organizations
  - Communities within the school with which parents of color could culturally identify
• Professional development on acknowledging and addressing the inequities in schools
  ○ School practices and the (un)intended consequences for Black families
    (Engagement for Accountability)
  ○ Trust building between schools and Black parents (Engagement for Relationships)
  ○ Facilitating the social, emotional, and academic safety of Black children
    (Engagement for Knowledge)
  ○ Demonstrating empathy and critical self-reflexivity (Engagement for Empowerment)

Commitment to the Cultural Capital of School Leaders and Teachers of Color

When they are within the space of feeling on the outside of schools, having leadership of color establishes a different enactment of agency and trust in parents. Because parents can anticipate familiarity, of some sort of shared experience, shared value, and/or shared expectation of their children, having administrators and teachers of color helps them feel more connected to school leadership and school teachers. Parents value the cultural capital of school leaders and teachers of color. Therefore, intentionally racially diversifying staff and faculty encourages the value of cultural representation and helps Black parents maintain and reinforce cultural pride in their children. Having faculty and staff of color also helps parents identify people who can serve as othermothers and provides safety in the forms of physical, social, and emotional support for their children. Othermothering is also an extension of the trust Black parents have in school personnel of color. Experiencing school personnel who share a culture and demonstrate sincere care for them and their children creates a more welcoming environment for Black parents. Feelings of care and authenticity encourage trust between Black parents and school personnel.
Additionally, feelings of genuine care and concern soothed but did not alleviate Black parents’
defensive posture and need to be on guard in order to advocate for and protect their children.

Additionally, schools that had personnel, such as parent liaisons, dedicated to providing
information, helping parents navigate school resources, and helping teachers to communicate
with parents contributed to Black parents feeling that their family’s needs were being met. These
liaisons shared information about academic programs and community programs, as well. It is
important that a cultural broker is a person of color and/or represents the culture of the people
they are serving.

*Creating a Homeplace of Resistance*

Even when Black families were in the majority at school, they expressed the need to
create Black spaces that created a sense of community with shared values for their parents and
children. bell hooks described homeplace as “the construction of a safe place where Black people
could affirm one another and by so doing heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist
domination” (1990, p. 384). As such, Black parents need the opportunity to connect with each
other and create spaces that they define as welcoming and affirming. It is not enough to join an
already existing traditional school organization that is already steeped in assimilationist tradition
and assumptions. Most parents experienced these organizations as anti-Black and rejecting Black
culture. As in the case of the development of an African American Parent Organization or in the
community-based affiliations parent participants are already involved in, when parents who share
culture are able to connect with one another, they are able to provide support, ideas, and
strategies to help their children navigate school, in addition to building a stronger community.
Isolating Black parents from one another is a continued enactment of slave law that did not
permit Black people to congregate and assemble. In a homeplace, parents are empowered to use their collective voice forth betterment of the school community.

**Professional Development for School Leaders and Teachers**

In general, professional development for preservice and inservice teachers rarely focuses on the skills and dispositions necessary for communicating with parents, building relationships with parents, and learning from parents about how to support students in school. Regardless of race, class, and ability, working with parents is typically approached from a compliance perspective. That is, schools work with parents for the purposes of accountability. Therefore, more professional development regarding parent engagement is critical for engaging all parents. Based on my findings, I propose professional development in the areas of culturally-relevant, culturally-responsive, and culturally-sustaining practices for the continued development of all school personnel, but especially the 80% White female U.S. teaching force (NCES, 2017).

Unless disrupted, teachers teach from their own perspectives (Villegas & Lucas, 2002) and devalue the experiences of those different from them. Broadening those perspectives supports the inclusion of people of color and their cultures and informs how they connect with families of color. Professional development objectives for school personnel align with the four purposes for engagement and what Black parents in this study reported they desired school personnel to do to support them. Teaching both preservice teachers and in-service school personnel how to be accountable to parents can be done by designing professional development that explores the following topics.

**Professional Development for Practicing Accountability**

- Understanding schools as unsafe spaces for Black children
Parents understood how schools were inequitable and needed to be held accountable for their personnel, practices, and policies.

How deficit-based approaches to accountability resist reciprocal dialogue

Parents spoke about reciprocity and how if there are expectations that the teacher had of her, she should be able to articulate the expectations she had for the teacher.

Parents referenced an awkwardness in that teachers did not often know how to talk with them about their children.

Professional Development for Building Relationships

Trust building between schools and Black parents by confronting cultural dissonance

Parents spoke about how invisibility was the greatest inhibitor to being welcomed and affirmed. Not only did invisibility represent a dismissal and lack of respect, but it also translated into a lack of trust for school personnel.

Creating a school culture that foster genuine care and concern for families of color

When a school had cultural norms that encouraged courtesy and respect such as acknowledging one’s presence and showing genuine care and interest, Black parents felt more welcomed and were able to reciprocally engage with these dispositional expectations.

Professional Development for Engaging Knowledge

Fostering esteem in Black children through curricular representation

Parents desired teachers to be aware and encourage their children to celebrate people and history reflective of their culture.
○ Parents desired for schools to be inclusive of Black culture with integration of Black history, art, music, and literature into the curricula. Providing authentic representation of cultural diversity would provide a more welcoming and rich environment for their children.

● Understanding parents’ cultural capital
  ○ Parents communicated how important and validating it was when school personnel took the time to recognize them and the contributions they make to their families, professions, communities, and schools.
  ○ Parent leaders felt obligated to use their agency to create more equitable experiences and opportunities for their children recognizing that their feedback and contributions had implications for all students, especially students of color.

Professional Development for Empowerment

● Developing empathy and critical-reflexivity in teachers
  ○ Parents have attributed the disconnect in dispositional expectations to cultural dissonance, miscommunication, and a general lack of respect and empathy for them.
  ○ Parents described a dance between how visible and invisible, how vocal or silent, how critical or complicit, how abolitionist or assimilationist, how angry or docile, and how engaged or disengaged they could be and attributed this to how they were perceived and treated by school personnel.
Parents felt obligated to use their agency to create more equitable experiences and opportunities for their children recognizing that their feedback and contributions had implications for all students, especially students of color. Professional development that attends to developing the skills and dispositions to communicate effectively, develop healthy relationships, utilize parents’ knowledge, and create safe spaces are recommended for preservice teachers, in-service teachers, and school leaders.

**Implications for Future Research**

It is my hope that this study inspires other researchers to reframe how all stakeholders experience public schooling in the U.S. Understanding Black parents’ lived experiences and their interactions with schools requires more intentional research. While my study privileged the voices of parents who were already engaged and leaders in their children’s schooling experience, hearing from more parents like this, as well as parents from a variety of socio-economic statuses, as well as those who have been disenfranchised by schools would be beneficial to understanding what they describe as affirming and welcoming school practices. Additionally, their voices and aspirations for schools shed light on the kinds of topics and considerations that would help prepare teachers to teach all students and school leaders to support practices that empower all families. Additionally, five of the nine schools where parents reported they experienced welcoming and affirming environments were led by Black school leaders, four of whom were women. Understanding in more depth how Black female school leaders create or support culturally responsive school practices as described by the parent participants may shed additional light on the qualities and dispositions Black parents find affirming in their school leaders.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study aimed to center Black parent voices, which are missing from the
existing research on education and schools. Hopefully, this study began this much needed conversation by documenting how Black parents experience the practices implemented by schools. This study stood and continues to stand on the shoulders of game-changing researchers such as, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Hill-Collins, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Ana Maria Villegas and Tamara Lucas. It highlights the need for Black parents to be represented as they are and not how schools intend for them to be. My hope is that future research is conducted in a way that acknowledges White privilege, the necessary double consciousness of Black parents, and ultimately is person-centered, strength-based, flexible, and critically-reflexive (Hannon, 2019b). All in all, for the sake of their children’s safety, Black parents need their children to experience Black teachers in their classrooms, Black culture in their curricula, and Black parent groups for them to connect, share ideas, and support their children. Until then, schools will continue to minimize the knowledge, skills, and talents of its students and parents.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Announcement

I am exploring how schools engage parents in ways that affirm and value cultural diversity.

- Have you had interactions with your child’s school that made you feel welcomed and valued?
- Do you racially identify as Black (Black American, African American, African, Afro-Latin(x), and/or Afro-Caribbean)?
- Are you a member of a school or community parent organization?
- Are you able to participate in two interviews, approximately 60 minutes in duration?

LaChan Hannon, Doctoral Candidate in Teacher Education and Teacher Development is conducting this study. If you are interested in participating, please take a brief survey.

For questions, please contact hannonL1@montclair.edu

This study has been approved by the Montclair State University Institutional Review Board, MSU IRB-FY 18-19-1277
Appendix B: Screening Questions

Google Survey Screening Questions and Survey Hyperlink

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeq90Z5egcg2gVV5k4J0jqrhXEBv-L9Gf31EmUrzgrwe-V7oQ/viewform

- Do you racially identify as Black (i.e. Black American, African American, African, Afro-Latin(x), Afro-Caribbean, and/or Biracial)?
- Do you have at least one child in a public, charter, or private school?
- Are you involved in a parent organization (e.g., PTA, PTO, Special Education Parent Advisory Council/Groups (SEPAC/G), Parents of Color Networks, Statewide Parent Advocacy Networks (SPAN), Jack and Jill of America Inc., Mocha Moms Inc, fraternity or sorority)?
- Do you feel you have an active or influential voice in your child’s school?
- Have you ever had an experience or interaction with school personnel that made you feel like your voice and culture as a Black parent were welcomed and valued?
- Are there activities, programs, or practices at your child's school that you believe engage parents in ways that are culturally affirming?
- Would you be able to recommend your school or school personnel as an example of successfully engaging its Black parent population?
- Are there other Black parents at your school who might share your sentiments and be interested in this study?
- Please use this space provided below to indicate any other experiences you believe may be important to this study (gender, child with disability, etc). (open-ended)
- Are you available for one interview (60 min) and one focus group (60 min) scheduled in advance over the next three months?
Appendix C: Consent Form

ADULT CONSENT FORM

Please read below with care. You can ask questions at any time, now or later. You can talk to other people before you sign this form.

Title: Engaging Black Parents with Culturally Responsive School Practices
Study Number: IRB #FY13-19-1277

Why is this study being done? The purpose of this study is to better understand how schools learn to meet the cultural needs of the Black families and to determine what practices and strategies are most culturally affirming for black parents. This study seeks to better understand the successful practices in schools with regard to engaging parents. This study is not intended to document what is wrong with parent engagement and school practices but rather to highlight what is meeting the needs of black parents.

What will happen while you are in the study? Prospective participants can expect to:

- Read and complete a short screening questionnaire. This form serves to determine your appropriateness for the study and collect basic demographic information.
- Schedule and participate in an initial interview. This interview will be approximately 60 minutes in duration. It will be strongly encouraged that this interview face to face. However, digital formats such as Skype or Google Hangouts can also be used.
- Receive a copy of your initial interview transcript and be asked to review it for accuracy.
- Schedule and participate in a focus group interview. This interview will be approximately 90 minutes in duration.

Time: This study will take about approximately two hours to complete, spanning two separate interviews.

Risks: You may experience discomfort when discussing issues related to your lived experiences. However, we do not anticipate any significant emotional or psychological risks associated with this study.

Benefits: You may benefit from participating in this study as it offers the opportunity to speak candidly about your personal, lived experience. Additionally, others may benefit from your participation in this study, as the data obtained can be used to inform both teacher education, educational leadership development, and school practices.

Compensation: There is no monetary compensation related to your participation in this study.

Who will know that you are in this study? Your interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. However, your identity will not be directly linked to any presentations or publications related to this research. I will keep who you are confidential. However, specific quotes you share may be used publicly after all identifying information has been removed.

You should know that New Jersey requires that any person having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to child abuse or acts of child abuse shall report the same immediately to the Division of Youth and Family Services.
Do you have to be in the study?
You do not have to be in this study. You are a volunteer! It is okay if you want to stop at any time and not be included in the study. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

Do you have any questions about this study? Please contact me directly at hasencl1@montclair.edu. You can also contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Susan Baglieri at baglieris@montclair.edu.

Do you have any questions about your rights as a research participant? Phone or email the IRB Chair, Dr. Katrina Bulkeley, at 973-655-5189 or reviewboard@montclair.edu.

Future Studies It is okay to use my data in other studies (your data and information will remain confidential in any and all future uses):

Please initial:  _____ Yes  _____ No

As part of this study, it is okay to audio record and transcribe our interview:

Please initial:  _____ Yes  _____ No

One copy of this consent form is for you to keep.

Statement of Consent
I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement, and possible risks and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. My signature also indicates that I am 18 years of age or older and have received a copy of this consent form.

Print your name here  Sign your name here  Date

Name of Principal Investigator  Signature  Date

Faculty Sponsor  Signature  Date
Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Semi-structured Interview Protocol

Research Questions:

- What are the qualities and practices of schools that Black parents experience as affirming and engaging their cultural ways of being?
  - How do parents describe the qualities of their school’s culture that are welcoming and affirming?
  - How do parents describe school practices that engage their cultural ways of being?

Parent Protocol:

- Primer: Why did you want to participate in this study?
- Can you talk to me about the make-up of your school leadership and teachers?
- What does it mean to you when you feel heard?
- Talk to me about a specific interaction or memory you had with your child’s school (teachers or administrators) that made you feel heard or listened to? How did that make you feel?
- How do you think that being Black or a person of color influences your relationship with your child’s school and how your child’s school engages with you?
- Can you recall for me an experience when you feel/believe Black culture was appreciated in your child’s school?
- Are there things, practices, ways of including or inviting you to participate that you appreciate about your school or school personnel? Do you think any of those things have to do with the fact that you are Black?
- What do you like about the ways your school/personnel try to engage you as a parent?
### Unabridged Code Frequency by Participant

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