

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: (inter)FACE: A STUDY OF BLACK FAMILIES ADVOCATING FOR THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

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Black students are consistently overrepresented in categories of academic underachievement. Parent engagement has long been touted as an effective strategy for improving the educational outcomes of Black children. However, most parent engagement research reflects deficit based perspectives frame Black parents as problems that must be fixed or mitigated before they can positively contribute to their children's education. Consequently, parent engagement research and frameworks ignore the perspectives of Black parents and the assets they use to participate effectively in parent engagement. In this case study, I draw on individual and focus group interview data, documents, and observations, to examine how fifteen Black families, collectively known as FACE: 1) define and participate in parental engagement, 2) experience barriers to and opportunities for engagement, and 3) experience benefits of engagement for their children and their own personal development. Guided by Black Feminist and Critical Race Theories, I show how

Black families in this study used a myriad of engagement strategies to improve their children's educational experiences which were invisible to schools and how they used school-sanctioned engagement activities to meet their own objectives. Ultimately, I argue that school-centered parent engagement frameworks and models are ineffective for empowering Black families and accounting for the essential ways that these families contribute to the well-being of their children. Based on my findings, I discuss implications for theory, practice and policy, and research, and make recommendations for a more family-centered approach to parent engagement.

(inter)FACE: A STUDY OF BLACK FAMILIES ADVOCATING FOR THEIR
CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

by

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Dedication

To my grandfather, Grady Brown, the smartest man I ever met.

To my mom, Eunice Morant, without your example and sacrifice NONE of this would have been possible.

To Freedom-Madison and Justice, it's your turn now to do better than the generation before you. Make us proud!

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In October of 2011, I received a yellow notification from my youngest daughter's first grade teacher informing parents to attend an emergency school meeting regarding our children's reading ability. I thought very carefully about attending because I knew that my daughter did not have a problem with reading. In fact, she read at least six levels above the benchmark. I was working two jobs, had an older daughter with ADHD whose homework required several hours of my attention every night, and I was a full-time graduate student. Needless to say, I did not have time to attend a meeting that did not pertain to me. However, I had a neighbor who also had a first grader at the school but could not attend the meeting because she had to work. She worried that she would miss out on resources that could help her son with reading so I volunteered to attend the meeting and bring her a copy of any materials distributed.

Attending the meeting were the four first grade teachers, the principal, the assistant principal and about 15 parents, representing about 20 percent of first graders. The meeting was scheduled for an hour, so I was extremely irritated that the administrators spent the first 20 minutes griping about the parents not in attendance. We heard how they did not care about their children's education. They were the reason that first graders were struggling. But not us; we were the good parents. We cared about our children, we were told. If we were the good parents, I thought, why did our children's data look like the data of the children whose parents were not there? The administrators then proceeded to present a PowerPoint presentation comparing kindergarten reading scores to first grade reading

scores, and the latter showed a sharp decline. They said they needed us parents to do more to help them help our kids to become better readers. "More like what?" we asked. "Well you need to read to them every day." Parents said they **were** reading with their children; however, administrators stated that we obviously needed to do more. So I asked, "Well, what is the school planning to do? We gave you our best children, the same children from last year. The only change is the teachers. So how are the teachers going to alter their instruction to catch up the struggling readers?"

The principal replied, "Ms. Morant you do not need to worry, Justice is an excellent reader. This is for the other parents." At that point I tuned out. There were no resources given that night for me to share with my neighbor, and that was the last parent meeting I ever attended at that school.

This particular experience exemplifies the multiple strategies that parents use and the challenges they face when engaging with public schools. As a parent who is extremely busy, I made the sacrifice to attend a school sanctioned, parent engagement activity. My neighbor, who was not able to do the same, employed another effective strategy: relying on social networks and relationships. While the school praised my attendance, they interpreted her absence as evidence of disinterest and lack of care, although she **had** demonstrated care and concern. However, this was not recognized or validated by the school. Although my child was a successful student, when I inquired about the other children, I was immediately shut down and my efforts to engage the educators in dialogue about student achievement were thwarted. The school administrators did not recognize the problem of students' success as a breakdown in the partnership between parents and the school nor the

proactive problem solving and strategizing required from both parties. Instead, the issue was portrayed as one-dimensional; the parents were the problem.

My experience is not uncommon. As both a parent and an educator in Title I schools, I know there is always some segment of the student population that is not meeting grade level expectations, as determined by the state. As standards are continually raised and perceptions of school performance are increasingly based on standardized test scores, schools are scrambling for a “silver bullet”: that one thing that will improve student performance and enhance a school’s reputation as a high-quality school. Very often, this draws attention to the role of parents.

One commonly reported difference between effective and ineffective schools is the parental engagement (Desimone, 1999; Jeynes, 2005; Reynolds, 2014). Parent engagement has long been touted as vital to ending educational inequities and improving student achievement in schools (Jeynes, 2005; Reynolds, 2010; Bridges, Awokoya, & Messano, 2012; Reeves & Howard, 2013; Noel, Stark & Redford, 2013). How families support their children’s educational development inside and outside of schools has a direct impact on the students’ well-being. Research on the impact that parental engagement has on students’ schooling success, which has been interrogated by several researchers, is inconclusive. Nonetheless, an overwhelming amount of educational research claims that parental engagement is an effective strategy for improving student achievement and school quality (Comer, 1991; Desimone, 1999; Jeynes, 2005; Reynolds, 2010; Bridges, et. al, 2012; Reeves & Howard, 2013; Noel, Stark & Redford, 2013).

Successful, usually suburban, schools are believed to have parents who do

school work with their children at home and are actively engaged in their children's education. These schools are often praised for having an active and engaged PTA and parents who either donate time or money to assist the schools' efforts. Parents are described as being in frequent communication with teachers and other school personnel and often participating in local politics concerning the school, including school board meetings. Conversely, lower performing schools are described as having uninvolved parents who are disinterested and ineffective in contributing to a positive schooling experience for their children. These parents are often described as absent, and teachers suggest they are hard to contact or communicate with. It has become common and widely acceptable to blame parents for their children's school underachievement (Williams, 2007; Reeves & Howard, 2013). As a result, policies and programs regarding parental engagement tend to target historically marginalized groups, including families with limited economic resources, racial and ethnic minorities, and young parents (Schutz, 2006; Reeves & Howard, 2013). These groups have consistently been portrayed as a "problem" to solve and mediate.

Black, Latino, and low income parents are continuously accused of falling short on indicators of parent involvement commonly measured by researchers and the U.S. Department of Education. These include benchmarks pertaining to how often parents read with their children, help them with homework, and provide them with enrichment activities including visits to museums and libraries (Noel, Stark & Redford, 2013). Other areas in which low-income and racial and ethnic minority parents are accused of falling short is how and how often they talk to their children (Hart & Risley, 1995; Lareau & Horvat, 1999), their parenting styles (Hill Collins,

1994; Cooper, 2009), and the numbers and types of interactions they have with school personnel (Noel, Stark & Redford, 2013). Perceptions about the inadequate quality of low-income and minority parents' interactions with their children and schools is reflected in Reeves and Howard's (2013) recent report on parental involvement. Asserting that one of the major influences on the educational opportunity gap is the "parenting gap," (Reeves & Howard, 2013, p.6) the authors note that parenting quality is not randomly distributed. Rather, it is unequally distributed by income, race, education, and family type. The authors argue that policymakers need to reach the families who will benefit most from intervention services, parents in the "weakest parenting group" (Reeves & Howard, 2013, p.6), who also happen to belong to historically marginalized groups.

Since No Child Left Behind (NCLB), schools have increased efforts to engage parents in their children's education to help improve student test scores and overall performance. These engagement strategies tend to focus on either improving parents or mitigating their influence. A common strategy for increasing parental engagement in schools is to provide corrective actions or support to families in order to manage them in ways that meet the schools' needs and approval. For example, a school may invite parents to a Literacy or Math Night where parents are taught educational games or activities to practice with their children at home. Another common strategy for mitigating the negative effects of "weak parents" (Reeves & Howard, 2013, p.6) is to provide a longer school day, in which children spend less time at home. Both of these approaches to parent engagement employ a deficit-based perspective and fail to recognize families as assets and positive contributors to their

children's education.

While there is a problem with parent engagement, particularly in underachieving schools and among historically marginalized groups, the characterization of parents as the problem is misleading, counterproductive, and inaccurate. As depicted in the above vignette, parents and families do engage in their children's education in multiple ways that are not often validated by researchers, policymakers, and school practitioners (Carter, 2005; Cooper, 2007; Cooper 2009; Reynolds, 2009). Furthermore, there are very real barriers that prevent parents from participating in activities that "count" as parental engagement (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000; Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002; O'Bryan, Braddock II, & Dawkins, 2006; Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007; Howard & Reynolds, 2008). From this vantage point, the problem of parental engagement among Black, low-income, and other historically marginalized families is their invisibility and their socio-political and economic marginalization. The problem is stereotypes, biases, and blatant discriminatory practices that permeate the educational system and, quite often, the educational research (Parker & Lynn, 2002; O'Bryan, Braddock II, & Dawkins, 2006).

The mischaracterizations of low-income, minority, and particularly, Black families, as uncaring and uninterested in their children's education have resulted in a misguided approach to solving the parental engagement problem. First, it is grounded in a standard that is based on White, middle class, and female norms against which all parents are compared and measured. In applying this narrowly defined standard, Pre-School (PS)-12th grade educators often ostracize large groups

of parents (Cooper, 2007; Cooper, 2009; Reynolds, 2009). Second, researchers, policymakers and practitioners largely ignore the assets of low-income and Black parents. They discount the myriad ways these parents **are** involved with their children's education, and ignore the structural challenges that prohibit the families from engaging in traditional school-sanctioned activities. As noted by O'Bryan, Braddock II, and Dawkins (2006), "most studies on parental involvement have been conducted on White samples, and the few studies examining parental involvement among African Americans have primarily focused on risk factors for this population, largely ignoring behaviors which contribute to educational success" (p. 403).

As a result of these mischaracterizations and deficit based approaches to describing, researching, and improving Black parent involvement, we end up with a narrative that blames those who are the most poorly served by the school system. This approach does not lead to adequate responses to the challenges of building effective home-school partnerships among Black parents. The limited view of Black parent involvement and associated biases and stereotypes leave parents frustrated, and students are hurt rather than helped by these deficit based approaches to Black parent involvement. Effectively addressing the underachievement of Black children requires a multidimensional approach to providing students with equitable schooling opportunities. Any strategy that seeks to improve the students' schooling experiences must include parents as equal partners throughout the entire process. Parent involvement can have a significant impact on children's education; however, it must authentically engage parents as respected colleagues in all stages of planning and implementation.

This research study complicates the dominate narrative of the disinterested, ineffective, or deficient Black parent and Black parent involvement. While creating partnerships between Black parents and schools is an authentic challenge in public education, we need research and practices that extend conversations beyond those which position Black parents as a liability to students' success. Black parents must be acknowledged as assets and initiators of strategies for educational success rather than as risk factors and problems to mediate (O'Bryan, Braddock II, & Dawkins, 2006; Reynolds, 2010; Reynolds, 2014). Black families are often engaged in educational advocacy for their children which may not be recognized by all stakeholders as legitimate or effective; however, for the parents it is intentional and it is real.

This case study examines how Black families can and do demonstrate engagement, concern about and advocacy in their children's education in ways that may be unacknowledged by their children's schools. This is a qualitative case study of 15 Black families in a large, predominantly Black school district who have joined together to form a parent advocacy group. The group, called Families Advocating for their Children's Education (FACE), intentionally engages in forms of parental engagement that are out of the purview of schools. This case study draws on individual and focus group interviews, participant observations, and documents such as parental engagement policies and parent-school communications. The purpose of this study is to understand how FACE parents define parental engagement and engage in their children's education, the barriers to and opportunities for engagement, and what benefits, if any, engagement has for their children's education and their own

personal development. This study provides a counter-narrative to deficit views of Black families reflected in educational research, policy, and practice. Furthermore, it aims to provide insight into how school personnel can work more effectively, collaboratively, and equitably with Black parents.

Research Questions

My study is guided by the following four, broad research questions:

- How can understanding the processes of the FACE deepen understandings about parental engagement and contribute to the reconceptualization of parental engagement both theoretically and practically?
- How does the group, as a whole, organize itself and function in support of families' engagement in enhancing their children's educational and social well-being?
- How do participants describe and understand their parent engagement work during and outside of workgroup meetings?
- What benefits, if any, does participation in the workgroup have for participants' personal development and/or for their children's educational and social well-being?

Significance of the Study

The potential benefits of this study are substantial. Given the dearth of research on proactive Black family parent involvement, a study such as this is sorely needed. Black families are constantly framed as a problem in parent engagement research, and understanding how Black families are motivated and engaged in their

children's education has significance for theory, research, policy, and practice. My study deepens understandings of the assets that Black families bring to their children's education, contributing new knowledge to the literature related to Black family parental engagement. The perspectives gained from this study can inform PS3-12 schools and communities in creating effectual parental engagement strategies and help to identify inadequate strategies employed by educational authorities which attempt to address perceived deficits in or minimize the influence of Black families (Schutz, 2005). Lastly, the study provides insights into how policy-makers at the federal, district, and school levels can design more effective parent engagement frameworks and models to engage Black families in their children's education.

Chapter Overviews

In Chapter 1, I introduced the study topic, identified a clear problem that requires additional inquiry and conversation, and provided a rationale for this research study. In Chapter 2, the *Literature Review*, I review relevant literature on parental engagement and identify specific ways that I hope to contribute to this literature. In doing so, I identify structural and institutional barriers facing historically marginalized families and offer insight into the strategies these families have used to gain greater power in their children's education. In Chapter 3, *Methodology*, I describe the research design and the methodological approaches I utilized to answer my research questions. The fourth chapter, the *Theoretical Framework*, describes the theoretical groundings that guide my epistemology, methodology, and the conceptual framework I have constructed which provides the theoretical context for the study. In chapters 5 *FACE: The Invisible Activism*,

chapter 6 *Responsibilities of Being a Parent*, and chapter 7 *The Visible Advocacy: "Within the System,"* I describe the study findings. Finally, in chapter 8, the *Conclusion*, I discuss the findings, noting the theoretical, policy and practice, and research implications of my research in addition to making recommendations based on these implications.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Parental engagement continues to be a popular research topic in educational research. While school district personnel continue to try to find ways to meet parental engagement mandates set forth by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and best practices in school leadership, research suggests there are families with whom school personnel continually struggle to form connections. These parents, most often from historically marginalized groups, are often denied opportunities to form effective relationships with schools where they are acknowledged as knowledgeable and respected partners. While parent involvement is a significant thread of the educational research fabric, the studies in this area tend to lack diversity. African Americans, in particular, are rarely represented in the educational research literature as advocates of, normative models of, or success stories for parental involvement. Rather, Black families are framed as problems to be fixed, concerns to be addressed, and entities to be managed (Iruka, 2013; Reeves & Howard, 2013). Within the last 15 years there has been a slight growth in the number of educational researchers who offer alternative or counter narratives about the role of Black families in their children's education.

The purpose of this literature review is to synthesize relevant literature on Black parents' engagement in their children's educational experiences. It examines research on the structural, social, and cultural barriers that can prohibit Black parents' involvement in mainstream, parental involvement activities, and explores counter narratives about the possibilities for centering Black families' experiences and voices in the parent involvement research. First, I offer a working definition of parent involvement. Then, I present research detailing counter-arguments posed by

critical race theorists and in research on equity-based pedagogies that resist deficit theories of Black parents and their involvement in schools. Next, I review research that advocates for the acknowledgement and validation of historically marginalized families' parental involvement. The existing body of literature which identifies Black families as assets to their children's educational trajectory is paramount to conceptualizing possibilities for effective parent engagement endeavors with these families.

Parental Involvement Frameworks

In 2001, *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) provided a working definition of parental involvement for all public schools that is still used by the Department of Education today. Specifically, the law states: "parental involvement means the participation of parents in regular, two-way, meaningful communication with the school and involvement in school-related activities, which ensure that:

Parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning; Parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school; Parents are full partners in their child's education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child; and The carrying out of other activities, such as those described in section 1118 of the ESEA (Section 1118, U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

This law sets forth a common language and understanding of parent involvement that can be used by schools and communities and which identifies the variety of ways schools are expected to provide parents the opportunity to engage in their children's

education. The law also explicitly states that parents are critical to the educational development of their children.

One might assume that with parental involvement clearly defined and included in federal education law, schools would look for ways to actively involve parents in their children's education. However, the law does not give suggestions for implementing its elements. Nor does it specify a quantifiable goal for parental involvement or establish measures by which schools can judge progress or improvements in parental involvement (Reynolds and Howard, 2013). Moreover, there are no clear means for monitoring parental involvement beyond administrative self-reports. Overall, these limitations can make Section 1118 of the NCLB Act inconsequential to the ways schools address parental involvement in practice. There is a significant need to gain a greater understanding of the quantity, quality, and impact of parental involvement in each and every school, particularly the involvement of historically marginalized groups. Frequent review and assessment of the implementation of Section 1118 of the NCLB Act, beyond self-reports, are vital for at least two reasons. First, it is critical for monitoring the effectiveness of the parent engagement strategies the schools use. Second, if schools only have to self-report, there is no reason to compel school leaders, who may be otherwise resistant, to include more marginalized families in meaningful partnership with school personnel.

A distinction must be made between active and passive parental involvement and the influence of each on student achievement. Howard and Reynolds (2008) described this as the difference between parental involvement and parental

engagement, the latter reflecting “a more authentic relationship between parents and schools” (p. 84). NCLB’s definition includes both active and passive parent involvement; however, historically, schools and parents have disagreed on the extent to which parents should be involved in schools (Kuykendall, 1991; Reynolds, 2010). In addition, multiple cultural, social, and structural factors must be addressed when considering how parents can participate both passively and actively.

While researchers have defined and classified parental involvement differently, the conceptualization that most closely reflects the focus of this study is Schickedanz’s (1977) framework for examining specific parent involvement activities and their effects on the role of the parent as a partner with school personnel. This framework, although developed in the 1970s, is still relevant to the current school system and the way we understand parent involvement. It is very similar to the definition of parent involvement set forth by Section 1118 of the NCLB law and reflects the longevity of the problem. U.S. public schools have grappled with how to include all parents as active and engaged partners in their children’s schooling for decades.

Choosing Schickedanz’s framework as the main reference rather than a more recent parental involvement framework, such as Epstein et al., (2009) Six Types of Parental Involvement framework, may seem like an uninformed choice. Not only is Epstein et al.’s (2009) framework more recent, it is also referenced in more than fifteen hundred peer reviewed articles and was used to create the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement, by Epstein and the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA). However, there are several reasons why I did not choose to use

this framework to ground this study.

First, Bower and Griffin (2011) question the effectiveness and appropriateness of Epstein's framework with families in schools with large proportions of low-income students and students of color. Specifically, they argue that, "the Epstein Model may not fully capture how parents are or want to be involved in their children's education...new ways of working with parents in high-minority, high-poverty schools are warranted" (Bower & Griffin, 2011, p. 84). Additionally, Epstein et al.'s (2009) framework is practitioner-centered and appears paternalistic as it centers school personnel as the agents of change even when discussing what happens in families' homes. For example, level one of Epstein et al.'s (2009) framework, *Parenting*, is to "help all families establish home environments to support children as students" (p. 2). In Epstein et al.'s framework, even in their own homes and parenting relationships, families are considered to be in need of intervention by an outside authority. Contrarily, at each level, Schickedanz's (1977) framework describes not the roles of both the practitioner and families; although he identifies families' roles as passive. Lastly, Schickedanz (1977) framework, addresses all six of Epstein et al.'s typologies more succinctly in three levels.

Schickedanz (1977) outlines three levels at which parents can be involved in schools, ranging from passive observer to mutually engaged partner. Level one activities, the most passive form of parent involvement in schools, are documented as the most encouraged by schools and having the highest rates of involved parent (based on national assessments) (Schickedanz, 1977; Bauch, 1993; Reynolds, 2010; Noel, Stark & Redford, 2013). Level one activities include attending parent-teacher

meetings, communicating with the classroom teacher through email, phone, or notes, and attending different events and functions, such as sporting events, concerts or plays. They also include attending meetings conducted by school personnel that are intended to inform parents of curriculum or school site changes, or how parents can help their children with academic learning (Bauch, 1993; Reynolds, 2010; Noel, Stark & Redford, 2013). Bauch (1993) notes that these types of parental activities “do not challenge the expertise of the teacher or the decision making power of the school” (p. 129). While parents do engage with schools through level one activities, they are generally not involved in planning, or coordinating events. Their role is to receive information provided by the school.

As characterized by Schickedanz (1977), the second level of parent involvement includes presence and participation in the school setting. This includes parents acting as volunteers, observers, or paid employees within the classrooms, as chaperones for field trips, or actively participating in school events, functions, and fundraising (Schickedanz, 1977; Bauch, 1993). The critical difference between this level and level one activity, is in level one, families are not expected to do anything more than receive provided information. However, at level two, families are expected assist with the facilitation of various activities. At this level, parents take a more active role in the educational experiences of their children; however, their impact on the decision making processes of the school as it pertains to their children is still minimal. Parents largely assist teachers and schools in delivering their instructional programs to the children, and they are not customarily involved in any planning or program development.

At the third level of parental involvement, parents and schools act as true partners in the education of children. Parents are most actively engaged at this level, and they participate in activities “that involve parents in teaching their own children and in making decisions concerning educational policy” (Schickedanz, 1977, p. 332). Such activities include parent participation in advisory committees, home tutoring and teaching, selection of curricula, hiring and firing of school personnel, planning school programs and interventions, as well as identifying the skills they would like to develop in order to better assist their children with their educational development. At the third level of parental involvement, noted as parental engagement by Howard and Reynolds (2008), the conventional roles of the teachers and schools are altered. While the teacher maintains the role of educational expert or school authority, parents are actively engaged in the educational experiences of their children and their knowledge is considered to be valid educational information. School personnel and parents actively share and co-construct knowledge and make that knowledge accessible to all entities (parents, teachers, students, administrators, etc.) (Schickedanz, 1977).

More than thirty years after its development, Schickedanz’s framework of parent involvement maintains relevance. These three levels of parental involvement, which vary in intensity, are all addressed in the NCLB Act as indicators for successful parental involvement at the school level. Schickedanz’s third level of parent involvement is particularly applicable to this intended research study. Howard and Reynolds (2008) define the type of action described by Schickedanz’s third level parent engagement “as a dynamic, interactive process in which parents draw on

multiple experiences and resources to define their interactions with schools and among school actors” (p. 84). They assert that it is important to avoid deficit models of parent involvement and to acknowledge parents as powerful constructors of knowledge and thought and legitimate contributors to their children’s educational experiences (within and outside of school). By framing parents in this way we can better understand the assets that can be utilized to create new possibilities for inclusive, meaningful parent engagement.

Disrupting Dominant Narratives

Past research has suggested that Black parents do not adequately participate in their children’s learning experiences or are not as interested in education as they are in other areas of their children’s lives (O’Bryan, Braddock II, & Dawkins, 2006; Williams, 2007; Reynolds, 2010; Bridges, et. al, 2012; Reeves & Howard, 2013). There is a widespread assumption that White parents are more involved in their children’s education than Black parents, across all income levels (Reynolds, 2010). This assumption has influenced research and practice in a multitude of ways, one of the most impactful of which is to situate White, middle-class parenting practices and ideologies as the norm against which all families are compared. As such, this flawed perspective underlies a number of parent involvement frameworks in which it is assumed that if non-White and low-income parents could simply be taught and adopt the practices of White middle-class parents, their parenting and their children’s academic achievement would improve exponentially (Hill Collins, 1998; Iruka, 2013; Reynolds and Howard, 2013). However, when examined from a different perspective, existing data tells another story.

Structural and social barriers

is an assumption that families served by Title I schools, specifically families that are living in poverty, are in survival mode and, therefore, their children's education is not one of their main priorities (Slaughter & Kuehne, 1989; Trotman, 2001; Reeves & Howard, 2013). This argument, which stems from a deficit theory, maintains that low-income parents are so busy working and trying to meet basic needs, such as needs for food, shelter and clothing, that participating in the educational development of their children is not a priority. Resource-related barriers may limit or prohibit low-income parents from fully and regularly participating at all three levels of the school involvement described by Schickedanz (1977), and critical race scholars argue that these barriers must be recognized as structural and social and not resulting from cultural deficits (Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002). Additionally, with the ever shifting demographics of the United States, the assumption often embedded in educational research on parent involvement, that Black families are economically poor is increasingly problematic. While Black families are overrepresented in the populations defined as impoverished and working class, Iruka's (2013) *Black Family Demographics* table points out that only 26 percent of Black families' SES status is below *100 percent poverty*. The assumption that Black families whose children attend majority Black schools are impoverished and unempowered, neglects to consider the ways they draw from multiple resources including their social network, to address their children's educational needs. Educators and researchers who presume that they are victims, often dismiss Black families as advocates in their children's education, while at the same time condemning them for their lack of agency in parental engagement. By considering how families' available resources

intersect with systems of oppression to impact the daily lives of Black families with school aged children in particular, we can get a better understanding of the unacknowledged and intangible costs of parenting, and how they affect Black families.

Critical race scholars provide counter-narratives that challenge perceptions of minority families as debilitated by the conditions of their lives and as culturally deficient, by critiquing dominant ideologies of educational institutions that fail to value approaches to parent involvement that differ White middle-class norms. Critical race scholars believe that school personnel must have a sincere desire to provide opportunities to engage **all** parents in positive relationships (Howard & Reynolds, 2008).

African Americans across social classes have always expressed interest in having their children fully participate in the public school system (Howard & Reynolds, 2008). Historically, every significant era of Black American activism—slavery, reconstruction and the work of the Freedman’s Bureau, the Harlem Renaissance, the Civil Rights, Black Power, and Affirmative Action movements, and the rise of the Black middle class—included the struggle for equitable and quality education. Black families have long recognized education as a weapon against oppression and a path to liberation (Hill Collins, 1994; Cooper, 2007). Numerous researchers have conducted studies that contradict the notion that Black families do not prioritize their children’s educational experiences (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000; O’Bryan, Braddock II, & Dawkins, 2006; Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007; Howard & Reynolds, 2008). However, Black families may find certain types of

parental engagement to be more challenging than others, due to their financial circumstances or their perception of schools based on past experiences.

While not all Black families earn low-incomes; Blacks are overrepresented among those coping with the challenges associated with poverty. Therefore, they are disproportionately affected by barriers to parental involvement caused by a lack of financial means (Chavkin & Garza-Lubeck, 1990; McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000; Quioco & Daoud, 2006; Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007). Parents earning low incomes often have jobs that are inflexible and pay an hourly wage with no paid leave, which means that taking time off of work results in a loss of needed income (McKernan-McKay, Atkins, Hawkins, Brown, & Lynn, 2003; Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007). Individuals earning low wages may also need to work multiple jobs limiting their unavailability to participate in various school meetings, functions, or other second-level parental involvement activities. This may true even if such events are in the evening or outside of the normal nine to five workday, an accommodation that many schools have made in an effort to meet the needs of working parents.

Moreover, Black parents “may be intimidated by the school setting because it is largely a middle-class institution with middle-class norms and forms of communication” (O’Bryan, et al., 2006, p.411). Many Black parents attended underperforming schools as children, and may have had a negative experience. Reynolds, Howard, and Jones (2015) note that parents carry their own storied histories of schooling into their children’s school settings. If parents did not have a positive experience with school and school personnel as students, it may influence how they interact with their children’s school as an adult. Prior negative experiences

may cause families to be reluctant to engage in conversations with teachers, spend time in classrooms, or assist with homework or other studies due to lack of confidence in their own capacity. These behaviors and feelings do not reflect beliefs about the value of education. Rather, it is indicative of how social structural forces prevent equitable access to school resources. This is particularly true when schools have narrow perspectives of what counts as legitimate or valuable parental involvement (Kuykendall, 1991; Lauria & Miron, 2005; Cooper, 2007), and especially when they are based on White, middle-class norms (Hill Collins, 1994; Quijano & Daoud, 2006; McKernan McKay et al., 2003; Cooper, 2009). Furthermore, some researchers contend that schools may employ practices to actively dissuade working-class parents from participating in second level parental involvement activities. For example, O'Bryan, et al. (2006) argue, "the inability of school staff to involve working-class parents and subtle discriminatory practices that may discourage the participation of working-class parents in their children's schools" (p. 411) contribute to lower parental engagement rates among low income families. Howard and Reynolds (2008) assert that middle class African-American parents face similar forms of discrimination and disenfranchisement by school personnel.

When educators and researchers consider African American parents' rates of involvement, they commonly overgeneralize or underestimate several structural challenges and social barriers. The fact that schools tend to operate on an 8am-5pm schedule can be a challenge for parents seeking to manage both their workplace and parenting responsibilities, within this set timeframe. The structural and social

obstacles that Black parents may face in accessing particular opportunities for involvement should be considered when analyzing and considering rates of Black parent involvement. Parents realize the importance of participating and being visible at their children's schools; however, they also note that particular types of engagement are more inaccessible than others due to time, transportation, and work constraints (Bridges, et. al, 2012), These challenges should not be considered as evidence of a "culture of poverty" but rather a "culture of classism," (Gorski, 2008, p.33) which tends to honor and norm the behaviors of White, middle class families to the detriment of Black and Black low income families.

Cultural beliefs

Educational researchers and policy makers have long attributed Black children's relative underachievement to Black culture, which frames Black parents and families as not adequately valuing education and supporting their children's academic development (Payne, 1996; Williams, 2007; Ford, 2010; Iruka, 2013). However, Critical race scholars assert that "culture," as an explanation for underachievement, has been misused by many educational researchers. Ford (2010) resists culturally deficit based theories which reflect a "blame the victim" orientation, and asserts Black culture is "inadequate relative to socialization practices... [and frames] Blacks and other minority groups as not only culturally but also intellectually inferior" (p. 84). Instead, Ford and critical race educational researchers propose a theory of "cultural conflict" (2010, p. 87). They argue that Black students' skills, learning styles, curricular interests, and communication and behavioral styles often are in discordance with the norms, expectations, and cultures

of most school systems (Ford, 2010; Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Hilliard, 1992). From this perspective, it is cultural conflict and not any inherent cultural deficits in Black children or families that cause challenges for Black students' academic development in schools.

Iruka (2013) posits an alternate position supporting the idea of cultural conflict theory. Iruka (2013) argues that parenting is culturally based, agreeing with Hill Collins' (1998; 2000) theory of parenting as raced, classed, and gendered. Iruka (2013) argues parenting practices are not viewed objectively. Instead, she argues Blacks' parenting practices are not only seen as different, but inferior. For example, even when Blacks use parenting approaches that are similar to Whites, they are viewed negatively, or are not similarly rewarded or acknowledged. For example, when Black families make demands of schools they are perceived as "controlling and intrusive" (Iruka, 2013, p.19); however, White parents (helicopter parents) or Asians (Tiger Moms) are perceived as effectual and acknowledged as working in the best interests of their children . Because schools often target parenting styles as an area of development for improving parental involvement, this opposition to neutral or normative parenting is critical.

Differences between Black parents' and school personnel's beliefs about the role of parents in the schools, is another example of how cultural conflict may cause significant barriers to parent involvement that is championed by schools (Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007; Bridges, et al., 2012). Van Velsor and Orozco (2007) best summarize the position of most public schools; parents should meet the needs and follow the directives of the school as they relate to the children's education, for

example, by “support[ing] school activities in the classroom, on field trips, and in the library or school office” (p. 17). However, other research suggests that Black and other historically marginalized groups have a more expansive understanding of parent engagement (Cooper, 2007; Reynolds and Howard, 2013; Dyrness, 2011). Reynolds and Howard (2013) suggest that schools often take a punitive or exclusionary stance towards families who do not meet middle-class ideals of parental involvement. There are many studies which indicate that Black families whose children attend Title I schools are often intentionally or unintentionally excluded from these second-level parental involvement activities (Bright, 1996; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Lawson, 2003; McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000; Trotman, 2001; Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002; Quiocho & Daoud, 2006). When teachers believe that parents have little to offer in terms of educational value and social capital, they often see the presence of those parents in the classroom as a challenge to their authority as well as a distraction (Lynch & Stein, 1987; Lareau, 2000; Quiocho & Daoud, 2006; Trotman, 2001; Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002; Cooper, 2007). For example, in Lareau’s (2000) study on social class and parent involvement, teachers reported being burdened with having to plan special activities for parents to participate in once they enter the classroom.

Ideas about who should initiate most of the communication can also reflect cultural differences between parents and teachers. Teachers often feel that parents should take more initiative to communicate with them and schedule times to discuss their child’s progress outside of regularly scheduled events. Often parents believe that if the teacher does not contact them about a problem, there is no reason to

schedule a meeting and spend time that could be better used elsewhere (Jackson & Remillard, 2005; Quioco & Daoud, 2006; Cooper, 2007; Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007). Regarding first-level parental involvement, according to the NCES data, teachers and school leaders seem to understand that their role is to communicate with the parents in writing regarding their child's academic performance and placement, how to better work with or support their child in some area, and any events at the school. They also recognize the need to have meetings at the school such as parent-teacher meetings, back to school nights, and general assembly meetings. Schools and teachers may feel most comfortable with this form of parental involvement because of what they learned in their teacher training programs, they are common school calendar events, or because it does not require them to relinquish much power or authority (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000; Trotman, 2001; Harry, Klingner & Hart, 2005; Cooper, 2007). This view of parent involvement is school-centered: it is based off the needs, routines, and availability of the school.

This example of teachers' perspectives reflects the ways in which beliefs, values, and practices are a part of the school's culture. An often unacknowledged influence on parent engagement is the school's culture. As a long standing American institution, schools have embedded norms, values, beliefs and practices which allow it to function and serve its purpose within the American tapestry generally, and in their local communities more specifically. In the same ways we acknowledge race and ethnicity can be drivers of culture; each school has a specific culture that have practices and traditions driven by the mission and vision developed not only by

school leadership; but, also historically ubiquitous based off the role of schools in American.

True partnership and shared power are at the heart of the third-level of parental involvement. Schools that include third-level parent involvement reflects a school culture based off the demands and needs of parents; which is rare in most schools. Black parents having significant involvement in third-level types of activities would mean significant shifts to not only their children's schooling experiences, but to the schools' governing practices. This would mean Black parents were an active part of the decision making processes that affect their children's education (Lauria & Miron, 2005; Howard & Reynolds, 2008). Specifically, they would participate in curricula selection; they are a part of the team that assigns their children to certain academic placements; they participate on advisory committees and boards; they help select which teachers their children are placed with, and take on other active roles. At this level of parent involvement, parents are not simply present or given a meaningless or an ex-officio position on a committee. Instead, parents' opinions and inputs are respected and valued. Parents receive the training that will allow them to be knowledgeable participants in the voting or hearing process, training similar to that which teachers receive when new measures, resources, or strategies are introduced. In this role, the parents are advocates for their children's education.

Research suggests that this form of parental involvement is not widely practiced, initiated, or suggested by the schools. At the same time, studies show that Black parents have expressed great interest in participating in these types of

activities (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Slaughter & Kuehne, 1989; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lawson, 2003; McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000; Quioco & Daoud, 2006; Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007; Cooper, 2007; Bridges, et. al, 2012). Even parents who do not initially believe that level-three activities are their role or responsibility, respond positively when informed about the benefits of active involvement these processes (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000; Lawson, 2003; Quioco & Daoud, 2006; Slaughter & Kuehne, 1989; Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007; Reynolds, 2008; Bridges, et. al, 2012). This suggests that if parents were made aware of activities such as serving on advisory committees, and influencing curricular materials and school budgets, and if school leaders and teachers made families feel welcome and invited to engage in decision making, parents would participate more often.

When parents are not actively included in decision making processes and schools' actions have negative effects on their children, parents often go to school to protest (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Bloom, 2001; Lawson, 2003); this is when differences in cultural beliefs between teachers and families may clash most concretely. Lareau and Horvat (1999) conducted a case study of parents involved with their third grade students at an elementary school in the Midwest, which included classroom observations and interviews with 12 Black students, 12 White students, and their families across social-economic statuses. The study focused on moments "of inclusion and exclusion in examining how individuals activate social and cultural capital" (Lareau & Horvat, 1999, p. 37). The authors (1999) noted the conflict that exists when the communication styles of families who do not have the

social and cultural capital that is valued at the school, differ from those of school instructional staff. In Lareau and Hovart's (1999) study, Black, low income parents who disagreed with the schools' decisions or actions, directed anger and criticism at the school leaders and the teachers, which school personnel deemed unacceptable and destructive (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Specifically, teachers felt the parents were undermining their authority and making it difficult for them to teach their children. Contrarily, when more affluent and White parents expressed disagreement with the school's decisions, their communication style tended to be better aligned with the communication style of school personnel. They did not criticize the schools or the teachers directly. Instead, they "monitored" situations by coming to the school and speaking with the teachers in a very informal way. They also asked questions instead of making direct requests and accusations. These expressions of dissonance were viewed more favorably by instructional staff who were more likely to respect and address these parents' complaints.

In her doctoral dissertation, Reynolds (2009) conducted a case study of 16 Black middle class families in a suburban school district outside of Los Angeles to understand these families' experiences with parental engagement, the challenges they faced, and the strategies they used to successfully facilitate school-family partnerships. Reynolds (2009) applies critical race theory to analyze the families' experiences as they navigated the terrains of the educational system. She argues that, overwhelmingly, educational research portrays the experiences of White, middle class families as the norm and Black poor and working class families as the deviants with little to no attention to Black middle class families (Cooper, 2005; Reynolds,

2009; Reeves & Howard, 2013). Reynolds' (2009) argues that while class is often thought to be the source of contention, there are unique experiences shared by Black families regardless of class. While middle class norms and values are often welcomed at schools, this does not apply equally to Black middle class families who also demonstrate middle class norms.

Individuals' choices and actions contribute to parental involvement in either a negative or positive manner. There are things that teachers and other instructional staff can do individually, to make parents feel respected and welcome; however, if the culture of the school is hostile and unwelcoming, the impact of their individual actions can be minimized. The degree and manner in which parents participate in parent engagement at the school is not merely about parents' individual decisions. Rather, it is about the actions of school personnel and the school culture as well. Obviously, when parents are able to and choose to participate, they are making the personal decision to be involved in some way, and this usually produces positive effects. Likewise, when parents are able to participate in school sanctioned parent involvement activities and consciously choose not to, they are actively choosing to withdraw from the school and its ideas of parental involvement. This does not mean that parents are choosing to withdraw from their children's education or parent involvement in general. Rather, they have simply decided not to fit into the perceptively limited roles the school has designed for them.

As McDermott and Rothenberg (2000) and Lareau and Hovart (1999) note, there are several reasons why parents may resist or make conscious decisions not to be involved in their children's schools. They may believe that instructional staff are

not supportive of their children, that school staff members are disrespectful and do not create a welcoming environment, or that they are being excluded because of race, ethnicity, class, language, or the academic or behavioral performance of their children (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lawson, 2003; McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000). Research suggests that parents who have had experiences with schools still recognize the benefits of parental involvement and agree that they should be involved to some. Feeling like their voices, concerns, and ideas are not heard and respected, they may chose not to engage directly with the school, but that does not preclude them from participating in parental involvement activities on their own or with other entities.

Cultural conflicts caused by differences in beliefs about the roles of parents in school-based parent involvement activities can cause major dissension between parents and school personnel. Parents can become resentful of “moments of exclusion” (Lareau & Horvart, 1999, p. 43) they experience when they attempt to voice a position or assume a role that school personnel does not feel they can genuinely claim. School personnel can perceive parents as neglectful, disrespectful, or hostile when they do not take on the roles or responsibilities that school staff deem appropriate. School personnel’s negative feelings or biases may result when parents voice their concern or opinions in ways that differ from the communication styles preferred by school personnel. Due to implicit biases and stereotypes associated with Black parents, they may experience these cultural conflicts at high rates; however, these cultural conflicts are not a result of cultural deficits (Iruka, 2013).

The Myth of the Absent Black Father

The multitude of research on parenting is overwhelmingly mother or female centered, and when Black families are the subjects of study, the research tends to focus more on single parents (Reynolds, Tate, & Jones, 2015). Additionally, the research on Black fathers disproportionately focuses on fathers' absence or non-resident fathers (Culp-Ressler, 2014; Reynolds, et al., 2015). When education research does include a focus on Black fathers, the focus is usually on their absence. This reflects a broader perception of Black men as "missing" from Black families. One common explanation for the "achievement gap" between Black and White children is the rate of single parent-headed homes among Blacks (66 percent) versus White families (25 percent) (Kids Count Data Center, 2016). This explanation becomes particularly salient when a father is not in the home. Based on this statistic, some researchers have assumed that most Black fathers are absent from their children's lives; however, recent research has vehemently disputed this presumption.

In 2013, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released data from a study that directly challenged the myth of the absent Black father. The CDC found that Black fathers were actually more engaged and present in their children's lives, on average, than both White and Latino fathers (Jones & Mosher, 2013). Black fathers of children age 5 and under, both living in and outside of the home, surpassed White and Latino fathers in all indicators of involvement, including talking and playing with their child daily and helping with or checking homework daily (Jones & Mosher, 2013). Black fathers of children older than 5 years old were more engaged than both White and Latino fathers except on one indicator: eating meals daily (Jones & Mosher, 2013; Culp-Ressler, 2014). Although a family headed by a woman and a

man is often considered “to be socially, morally, and economically superior to other family formations,” (Perry, Harmon, & Leeper, 2012, p.696) research suggests that Black fathers’ rates of involvement with their children is not easily predicated by marital status (Jones & Mosher, 2013). This fact, supported not only by the CDC’s study, but other research as well, such as President Obama’s Fatherhood Initiative, and other fatherhood initiatives, suggests there are widespread deficit views of Black men as parents. These initiatives and programs are meant to improve outcomes for children by focusing on the perceived deficits in their fathers (Culp-Ressler, 2014).

Two studies centering the experiences and voices of Black fathers were particularly informative to this dissertation. One study, conducted by Julion, Gross, Barclay-McLaughlin, and Fogg (2007), investigated 69 African-American non-resident fathers’ views and perceptions of their involvement. Four broad types of parental involvement emerged from these fathers’ perceptions, including: 1) sharing in activities and providing care, 2) providing guidance including teaching, training and counseling, 3) providing financial, emotional, and other tangible supports, and 4) what the researchers deemed as “culturally specific roles,” (Julion, et al., 2007, p.10) including participation in celebrations and rituals, helping children to feel proud of being African-American, and helping children deal with the outside world.

The fathers identified impediments to their paternal involvement due to their own insecurities, shortcomings, and conflicting relationships with their children’s mothers or other family members (Julion, et al., 2007). The fathers also identified the “psychological stress of being an African-American man,” (p. 11) and the competing demands of having children in multiple households as challenges for paternal

participation (Julion, et al., 2007). Although the study focused solely on non-residential fathers, their perceptions of fatherhood and impediments to paternal involvement, in addition to the researchers' centering of African-American fathers' experiences, are critical to understanding the myriad of experiences and profiles for African-American fathers.

A second study conducted by Reynolds, Tate and Jones (2015) on 16 Black fathers with differing socio-economic statuses and family structures, examined these fathers' experiences and perceptions of paternal involvement in public and private schools. In applying an intersectional analysis to the fathers' experiences, the researchers found that the fathers' interactions with school personnel led to their perception of receiving disparate treatment, their fear of school personnel, and discomfort with the fathers' presence in the school space. Reynolds, et al., (2015) note the fathers all, "explicitly acknowledged and articulated a sense of double consciousness they experienced, an acute awareness of how they were perceived by school officials who were members of the dominant culture to consider them based on their race" (p.95), and "articulated a hyper diligence in anticipating and denying stereotypes they believed the school officials espoused" (p.97). By showing how Black fathers' perceptions of fatherhood and involvement in schools are shaped by race and gender, the authors complicate limited and biased perceptions of Black fathers and show how their involvement in their children's schooling is impacted by factors beyond personal attributes.

There is a small but growing body of literature which shows that many Black fathers are both physically present and actively engaged in their children's lives in

ways that have been largely ignored or misinterpreted by research. These research findings challenge both gender and race based stereotypes related to parenting in general and Black fatherhood in particular. Given what we know from the limited number of studies on Black fathers' parenting and involvement in children's schooling, future research must include multifaceted explorations centering the voices and perspectives of Black men's experiences engaging in their children's education. Black men are not a monolithic group, it is important to consider the ways ethnicity, familial status, race, class, and gender intersect to inform not only Black fathers' perceptions of paternal involvement, but their experiences as well.

Parent Involvement-Outside of the Purview of Schools

Black families' desires for educational equity and engagement in educational activism are not new. However, as more people of color enter the Academy and critical race theory maintains a strong presence in the educational research, more studies centering the experiences and voices of historically marginalized families actively engaged in their children's educational trajectories emerge. These studies offer incredible insights into the multitude of ways that these families have organized themselves to cultivate powerful parental engagement. Additionally, these studies identify specific gaps in the existing research.

In his literature review of the influential and promising community-school partnerships and relationships, Schutz (2006) asserts that it is necessary for community members to have an active role in education reform. When successful, Schutz (2006) argues that community-school partnerships not only positively affect student achievement, but they also alter schools' understanding of "their role in

promoting a more equal and democratic society” (p.693). Schutz (2006) argues that people of color with limited economic resources generally achieve empowerment as a collective entity rather than as individuals. Therefore, anytime they can join together for activism or organizing, positive shifts of perspectives and action can occur. Schutz (2006) describes the work of several community-based organizations such as the Association of Community Organizing for Reform Now (ACORN), the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) and Local Education Funds (LEFs). He notes one of the critical problems of these groups; a community-based organization that is recognized as legitimate by researchers is almost always supported by some type of foundation, nonprofit organization, or think tank which may be politically motivating and self-serving, thus failing to represent the issues, demands, and needs of the very people they claim to serve.

Similarly, Scott, Lubienski, and DeBray-Pelot (2009) note that community-based and grassroots groups are becoming increasingly more active in the advocacy movement for school reform. However, unless they are subject to governmental and institutional oversight, analyses, and monitoring they are often overlooked by policy makers in “their ability to directly shape or indirectly influence policy at the federal, state, judicial and institutional levels” (Scott, et. al, 2009). Schutz (2006) recognizes that community-based partnerships have the capacity to create coalitions across class, race, etc. However, he argues that more research is needed on work of the individual community members outside of the larger entities that often organize them which explores how community-based partnerships can alter both schools and local communities. Schutz (2009) also advocates for community-based organizations

to include a focus on youths' development as well rounded citizens, beyond school achievement.

Cooper's (2007) study with 14 African-American mothers in an urban school district in the South who were actively engaged in educational advocacy and resistance through their use of school choice. The study included not only mothers but grandmothers as well, recognizing the Black feminist concept of "othermothers" (Collins, 1990). Drawing on interview data, the study centers the women's voices, allowing them to define for themselves their educational views, choices, and experiences, as shaped by socioeconomic and cultural factors. Cooper (2009) applies a Black Feminist theoretical lens to reconceptualize "motherwork" and, consequently, parental engagement. The study included not only mothers but grandmothers as well, recognizing the Black feminist concept of "othermothers" (Collins, 1990). Cooper (2007) argues that the mothers' advocacy was explicitly linked to the historical legacy of African-Americans' struggles for education and freedom. She states, "the legacy of Black people's social domination has fueled a culture of resistance into which most Black women are socialized: it is this culture that enables Black women to fight for personal empowerment and social change" (Cooper, 2007, p. 503).

Cooper (2007) details how the mothers' advocacy integrated the three central aspects of motherwork: survival, power, and identity. The mothers were actively engaged in seeking, applying, and financing additional schooling options for their children. They were in constant communication with their children's schools and the local school board. They also often collaborated to act in the best interest of other

people's children, realizing that some mothers were not able to engage in the same ways they did. These mothers shared resources and ideas with the other mothers in order to make advocacy more accessible. Finally, Cooper (2007) notes that the mothers were aware of the stereotypes and deficit-based views that educators had of Black mothers and wanted the educators to validate them as "good, caring parents and to recognize the abilities and potential of their children, thereby rejecting pejorative labels and low expectations" (p.505). Participants' awareness of the multiple ways discriminatory beliefs and behaviors affected them is key to understanding the unique position of African-American mothers, as several of the strategies used by the mothers were influenced by these stereotypes and biases.

Another study is Dyrness' (2011) ethnography on a community activist group, *Madres Unidas*, a grassroots, faith-based group with a history of activism in Oakland, CA. Dyrness (2011) details the time she spent engaged with five immigrant mothers on a participatory research project in which they collaborated with school officials and other community members to found and run an autonomous school in Oakland. The mothers had been on the planning committee for the creation and development of the school, and they wanted to maintain a partnership role with the school once it was fully operational. The mothers felt the school was using exclusionary practices to minimize their involvement and power in the school's operations. Therefore, the mothers formed a research group in order to maximize the results of their parent involvement efforts.

Dyrness (2011) found the close relationships and community the research group built and maintained was an essential component of the research process and

advocacy work with the school. The mothers were able to serve as a source of support and mentorship for one another in their personal lives as well as in their research and advocacy efforts with the schools. Dyrness (2011) also identified and described the conflicts (silencing, exclusion, and being identified as the problems) and the social and institutional barriers (school policies, abstract conceptualization of social justice in school charter law) the mothers faced while trying to exercise power through activism as well as the strategies they used to overcome these challenges. Dyrness (2011) notes that her research gave her participants a chance to “talk back,” (hooks, 1989) to school leaders and existing stereotypes, and offer their perspectives in a reform movement that routinely privileges professional educators while silencing historically marginalized families.

Cooper’s (2007) and Dyrness’ (2011)’s research studies offer insight into some of the ways that parent involvement can exist outside of the purview of the public school system. Their research makes three critical points that are missing from the larger body of educational research. First, historically marginalized communities are interested in being actively engaged in their children’s educations, and are especially interested in developing relationships with school personnel where they are recognized as equal knowledgeable partners. Second, historically marginalized communities utilize a number of engagement strategies on their own, outside of the purview and sanction of school personnel and school policy. Third, when historically marginalized families do engage in their children’s education, using both sanctioned and unsanctioned strategies, they often face barriers from school personnel and existing parent engagement policies that are largely

nonexistent in the parent engagement literature. Additionally, the studies' intersectional lenses offers insight into the ways race, class, gender and ethnicity can not only present challenges but can also be an asset for building relationships, providing a source of support and mentorship. While these parent involvement activities, most often level three activities, were initiated and maintained by the parents themselves, they often resulted in institutional changes at the local schools. These studies suggests additional research needs to be conducted which centers the voices of the families to better understand both the challenges families face and strategy use to participate in meaningful parent engagement.

Putting Theory into Practice: Extending the Conversation

This literature review identified research related to Black families' advocacy, activism, and agency in their children's schooling experiences. Critical race theorists in the educational research community have consistently advanced a vision for recognizing Black families as concerned about, actively engaged in, and assets to their children's educational experiences rather than passive bystanders or liabilities. The existing literature on parent engagement is limited. Gaps in the existing literature demonstrates the following areas of need: research which centers the voices and experiences of Black families engaging in parent engagement, parent engagement research representing the heterogeneity of Black families, and research which includes a focus on the multiple strategies Black families use for effective parent engagement which are not included in the existing canon of effective engagement strategies. By adopting an asset-based perspective, my research identifies cultural, social, and structural opportunities for and barriers to parental engagement that

illuminate best practices and recommendations proposed by the existing research. Additionally, my research expands the literature by addressing the dearth of qualitative studies that center the voices and perspectives of Black families who are actually attempting to define and advocate for parental engagement on their own terms. In doing so, I contribute to the emerging reconceptualization of Black families' parental engagement and advocacy, both theoretically and practically.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This case study examined the experiences of a group of 25 Black parents that organized themselves outside of their local school system to take an active role in their children's educational experiences. The purpose of the study was to understand the processes by which these families organized themselves and functioned to support their children's educational and social development, outside of school sanctioned activities. Specifically, this case study sought to understand: (1) how participants individually and collectively prioritized and responded to their children's needs, (2) how they developed and implemented their goals, (3) what assets they drew upon and how they leveraged assets to address challenges and barriers, and (4) the impact of their actions on their children's educational and social development as well as their own personal development

Central Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- How can understanding the processes of the FACE deepen understandings about parental engagement for Black families and contribute to the reconceptualization of parental engagement both theoretically and practically?
- How do participants describe and understand their parent engagement work during and outside of workgroup meetings?
- How does the group, as a whole, organize itself and function in support of families' engagement in enhancing their children's educational and social well-being?

- What benefits, if any, does participation in the workgroup have for participants' personal development and/or for their children's educational and social well-being?

Definition of Terms Used

Below, are definitions of pertinent terms used in this particular study.

Advocate: to fight or argue for something by writing, speaking, acting, or engaging in intentional forms of resistance.

Collective: Flat organizational structure where the all members of a group are responsible for or involved in making all decisions. There are no ranks or structures that make one person more powerful than another.

Educational development: growth or progress in children's academic skills or concepts or academic well-being.

Educational experiences: any incidents or encounters in which the goal is to teach the child something; this includes academic subject skills, social norms or cues, sports or games, etc.

Families Advocating for their Children's Education (FACE): a parent-initiated group of 16 families (25 adults) in Southern Regal County who collectively meet at least twice a month to discuss strategies and pool resources in order to actively engage in their children's educational and social experiences.

FACE workgroup meetings: collective meetings organized and facilitated by the FACE group. These meetings follow a very specific structure including a) critical-reflection on practice, b) problem posing/problem solving planning and c) commitments.

Parent engagement: a dynamic and interactive process in which families draw on multiple experiences and resources in order to actively participate in their children's lives, including but not limited to education.

Parent engagement work (invisible): any actions families engage in, outside the sanction of school personnel, either individually or collectively, to advocate for their children's educational or social development; this includes the facilitation or involvement in learning activities at home including homework or practice (instruments, sports, academic skills, etc.), parenting strategies and choices related to building children's images, self-esteem or self- perceptions.

Parent engagement work (visible): any actions families engage in, with school personnel, either individually or collectively in advocating for their children's educational or social development; this includes participation in meetings, participation in workgroup meetings, visits to the school, community events related to education, etc.

Social development: growth or progress in children's social skills, talents or self-perception, self-esteem.

Research Rationale

The main goal of this research project was to understand the experiences of the individuals and families that were a part of FACE, a parent-initiated work group whose members organized themselves to collectively and collaboratively cultivate and advocate for active roles in their children's educational experiences. The study sought to understand how and why participants organized themselves and functioned in particular ways to enhance their children's academic and social development.

Specifically, it focuses on participants' experiences with what they considered to be meaningful engagement in their children's schooling, academic, and social experiences.

Qualitative research is an appropriate methodological approach, given this study's aim to enter and examine the participant's world as it is naturally occurring (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). A core goal was to capture and describe their stories, in their own voices, the meaning they gave to their own experiences and to understand the social conditions that shaped their experiences and perceptions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2003; Yin, 2009).

Additionally, existing research and theories about Black families' engagement in schools are largely from the perspectives of educational practitioners and outside researchers (Bridges, et al., 2012). Relatively few studies center Black parents' and families' experiences of and beliefs about their own involvement (Reynolds, et al., 2015). Capturing the counter-narratives of Black families and the processes by which multiple, intersecting social identities shape experience, as depicted in the conceptual framework outlined above, requires qualitative inquiry. Thus, this study employs a qualitative, case study methodological approach.

Case Study Methodology

Case study methodology allows the investigator to make a “detailed examination of a single subject or group or phenomenon,” (Borg & Gall, 1983, p. 488) using multiple sources of information in order to report a rich case description and case-based themes (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009). A case study is appropriate when the research seeks to “produce a firsthand understanding of people and events”

(Yin, 2006, p.112), which can enhance theoretical understandings of the phenomenon under study. One of the major strengths of case study methodology is that it facilitates in-depth examination of a case, within its naturally occurring context (Yin, 2006).

In this case study, the work and outcomes of FACE, the parent-initiated working group in Regal County, is the unit of analysis. FACE meets the criteria for unique single case (Yin, 2006), and the research centers the experiences and perspectives of the Black families participating in the group.

Although parent workgroups are not a novel idea, the context of this case study provides for a unique set of data that are not widely available. First, FACE operates within one of the largest school districts in the U.S.A., in which the majority of district and school personnel and students, identify as Black. The district is also very diverse in terms of socio-economic status, family formation, and values and beliefs. Third, FACE is a parent-initiated workgroup that operates outside of any officially sanctioned institutions, organizations, or social services. While there is some research available on other parent-based workgroups focused on educational equity (Bridges, et al., 2012), these groups are usually supported by some larger organization such as a University, PTA, or other local organization (often from the local Department of Human Services) (Schutz, 2005). The FACE group represents a unique situation that is data rich and contextually bound, allowing for an in-depth case study (Creswell, 2007). Berg (2007) defines a case study of a community as:

The systematic gathering of enough information about a particular community to provide the investigator with understanding and awareness of what things go on in that community; why and how these

things occur; who among the community members take part in these activities and behaviors, and what social forces may bind together members of this community. (p. 297)

Because the proposed study is focused on a specific group or *community*, case study is particularly appropriate as it allows the researcher to examine a variation of a larger phenomenon—parental engagement—by focusing on a smaller unit of analysis (Berg, 2007).

This study represents the perceptions, experiences, and actions of participants within the parent-initiated working group as authentically as possible. Additionally, study findings are placed in conversation within the larger body of theory and research on parent engagement in order to analyze and better understand the findings' relevance to extant literature and how this study builds, extends, or challenges (Yin, 2006; 2009) existing theories and perspectives.

Setting

This study took place from July 2014 to August 2015 in what is described as a county having a “unique mixture of urban, rural, and suburban communities,” in a state located in the mid-Atlantic (Department of Budget and Management, 2014, p. 1). Regal County is about 485 square miles with a population of about 870,000, 63 percent of whom self-identify as Black (U.S. Census, 2012). The diversity of Regal County's residents and schools offers opportunities to examine a range of experiences among Black families.

Regal County offers a diversity of schooling opportunities to its residents which include public, private, and charter schools and home-schooling. While public,

private, and home-schooling is available in many jurisdictions across the United States, charter schools, while growing, are available in a fairly limited number of school districts throughout the United States. Additionally, Regal County's close proximity to a large city offers families the additional option of enrolling their child in a charter school in that city, which has one of the largest charter school enrollment rates in the United States. These school enrollment opportunities are critical as several FACE families, similar to families' in Cooper's (2007) study voiced their displeasure with Regal County schools by refusing to participate in the public school system.

Regal County Public School Systems (RCPS) serves about 129,000 students throughout 209 schools. During the 2014-2015 school year, Black/African American students made up the largest student population, about 67 percent of the student population (RCPS, 2016). The next largest racial or ethnic student groups in RCPS are Hispanics/Latinos who made up about 23 percent of the student population. Most of the students who attend RCPS are considered "economically disadvantaged" (60 percent) (RCPS, 2016), and about 14 percent are identified as having limited English proficiency. While Black/African American students make up the majority of its student population, RCPS is still very diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, and class.

Participants and Recruitment

FACE has two branches: the North and South divisions. The South division of FACE was selected for this case study. The South division of FACE includes 25 adults from 16 families. While the North and South divisions operate as one larger unit, they are also two distinct groups, each with their own cultures, norms, values,

and beliefs which play out differently in division-specific meetings and in the larger FACE group. Focusing on one division of FACE offers the opportunity for a more in-depth study of participants' experiences and perceptions in order to address the research questions. Additionally, because the two groups often operate independently and differently from one another, one division qualified as case.

The South division presents a compelling case because many of its members belong to groups described in the research as problematic. This includes single parents, families with limited economic resources, those within non-traditional family structures, those with children attending failing schools, non-African-American Black families, and families from under-resourced communities. Additionally, unlike the North division, all members of the South division live in the same school boundary zone and, thus, have the same school board member representative. Although RCPS is large, being able to sample one portion of the district in order to determine trends was useful given my intent to examine how power relationships impact families who are facing similar organizational structures.

The members of the South division represented a spectrum of socio-economic statuses that range from receiving temporary assistance for needy families (TANF) and supplemental nutrition assistance (SNAP) to having a household income of at least \$100,000. The highest education obtained by heads of households in the group ranged from a G.E.D. to a graduate level degree. Most of the heads of household in the South division were unmarried; however, many households included persons who co-parented, and several families included extended family members such as aunts, adult siblings, or grandparents. The ages of the participants

ranged from 22 to 58. The number of school-aged children among the families ranged from zero to five. The families had children in grades Pre-School 3-12th, and their children attended public, private, and charter schools. The public schools the children attended were all within the same school boundary zone. The elementary schools serve as feeder schools for the middle school, and the middle schools act as feeder schools for the high school within the same school zone (A table summarizing the demographic makeup of the South division FACE members, according to self-report, is provided in Table 1, Appendix G).

In order to recruit participants for the parent group that later became known as FACE, an initial email was sent via my personal email contact list to everyone I personally knew who fit the research project's intended participant profile. In that email, contacts were asked to forward the email to people they knew that might be interested in participating in the project. That email communication and word of mouth (snowball sampling) were used to recruit members to join FACE. There was a specific effort to recruit members that represented diverse socio-economic statuses. I aimed not for a representative sample, but a purposeful sample to address my research question. However, all persons that expressed interests and identified as Black were permitted to join.

Data Collection

Yin (2003; 2009) suggests that case studies include multiple forms of data collection in order to build an in-depth picture of the case, and he notes three principles of data collection: use multiple sources of evidence, create a case study database, and maintain a chain of evidence. Specifically, Yin (2003) refers to six

appropriate forms of data: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts. He, Creswell (2007), and Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggest that case studies use a combination of data types. Based on these suggestions, I spent considerable time with the families, collecting multiple forms of data. Study data were collected through interviews, participant observations, and documents. Data collection occurred primarily in two locations: in participants' homes and in FACE parent group meetings.

Individual Interviews

Berg (2007) defines interviews as “a conversation with a purpose”¹(p. 89). He argues that interviewing is an effective data collection method when the researcher is “interested in understanding the perceptions of participants or learning how participants come to attach certain meanings to phenomena or events” (p. 97). I conducted face-to-face interviews with each group member individually and jointly, interviewed 14 members in a focus group. Consistent with my conceptual framework, interviews centered the participants' perspectives and elicited their views and opinions. Interviews followed a semi-structured protocol (See Appendix A) that focused on the purpose of the interview while remaining flexible to a variety of responses that arose during the conversations (Berg, 2007). This structure permitted me to follow up on any unanticipated responses and probe for further meaning and explanation. The semi-structured approach also allowed me to rephrase

¹ Through additional reading I have found that Kahn and Cannell (1957) have also described interviewing as “a conversation with a purpose”; however, I originally noted it in Berg, 2007 and he does not reference them.

questions, adjust the language used in the questions, reorder the questions based on the interview, and ask unplanned questions in order to clarify or seek any additional information (Berg, 2007). The flexibility of semi-structured interviewing permitted me to follow the lead of the participants.

One individual interview, lasting approximately 30 minutes, was conducted with each participant. Interviews occurred in participants' homes or a public location of their choice. All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim and I took notes during the interviews if anything stood out that I wanted to refer to later. Notes essentially included any thoughts related to the actual interview process and participants' responses, issues that I wanted to follow up on, and descriptions of participants' nonverbal cues during the interview. All participants were given a pseudonym to protect their identity and maintain confidentiality of their data.

In the individual interviews, participants' were asked about their perceptions of their involvement with their children's schooling, academic, and social experiences, their experiences with the FACE group, and how they managed the workload and responsibilities associated with their children's education, on their own and with others. Individual interviews provided insight into possible topics and issues to address in the focus group interview. The interview questions were aimed at understanding:

- how participants define parental engagement,
- their goals or purposes for participating in the workgroup,
- how, if at all, they feel their engagement has impacted their children's educational experiences,
- how they describe the work they do to engage in their children's educational experiences,
- any challenges and successes associated with their work,

- their perceptions of self-reliance and ownership of the work that is completed during the workgroup, and
- how, if at all, they believe that their social identities influence their experiences and interactions with other adults who provide educational support for their children.

Focus Groups

I conducted two focus groups with the FACE members after two of the regularly scheduled meetings for approximately 45 minutes (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I divided the group of 25 adults up into two smaller groups and conducted the focus group meetings consecutively, over two meeting periods. The first focus group was well attended with 9 out of 12 of the invited participants. The second focus group was not as well attended with only 6 of the 13 invited participants attending. This may be due to poor weather on the date of the second focus group. In all, a total of 15 of the 25 participants participated in a focus group.

The rationale for conducting focus groups was two-fold, as reflected by the focus group interview protocol (See Appendix B). First, I wanted to understand how members of FACE collaboratively supported their children's academic and social development. Interviewing FACE members in a focus group setting provided insight into how members related to and interacted with one another and illuminated issues of power, resistance, agency, or marginalization among family and group members. Additionally, FACE members provided a form of self-checking within the interview. For example, evidence of differences of opinions and perceptions among FACE members provided insight into the functioning of the group and how its members worked together.

Documents

Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggest that reviewing documents allows the

researcher to gather background data on the research context and the values and beliefs of participants. Document analysis can be an effective way to gather relevant data in an unobtrusive way without disturbing the research setting or participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I collected and analyzed public and private documents that helped to answer the research questions. This included public information related to parental engagement and involvement in Regal County, private documents belonging to research participants, and the research journal I maintained throughout the study. Public documents included flyers, blog posts, news articles, information posted on the RCPS website or sent out via email blasts, and meeting minutes. Private documents included group members' communications sent to or received from school personnel, notes from meetings with school personnel, survey data from the FACE group (collected in a prior, pilot study), report cards, student work with teacher feedback, messages posted to the FACE message board, and notes captured during the FACE parent working group meetings. Access to participants' private documents were requested and attained during interviews with the individuals. All documents were kept confidential. In all, I collected and analyzed a total of thirty-six documents.

In the documents collected, I explicitly looked for insight into how participants thought about parental engagement and how they organized themselves and acted to enhance their children's academic and social development. I also looked for evidence of relationships between participants' perceptions and actions. For example, were group members' aligned with or contradictory to their expressed values and beliefs? Also, did participants' experiences with the school system

reflect or contradict the district's professed mission, goals, and beliefs about parent engagement? I reviewed documents in relationship to the school's parental engagement policy and stated mission statement to determine the alignment between the schools' stated beliefs and values pertaining to parental engagement, the types of parental engagement opportunities the school system sanctions, and the experiences of the participants.

Observations

Participant observation is a fundamental method for most qualitative inquiry (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The purpose of observations is to discover and record complex interactions as they happen (Creswell, 2003). Marshall and Rossman (2006) note that the use of observations, as data collection method, assumes that behaviors are "purposeful and expressive of deeper values and beliefs" (p. 98). Observations allow the researcher to gain insight into these interpersonal behaviors and attitudes (Yin, 2009).

A major component of the participants' work with the FACE parent working group are their meetings. During the 2014-2015 school year, marked August-August, there were 24 meetings scheduled and 21 meetings that were actually held due to school closings. I attended 17 meetings and formally conducted five observations; three as a participant observer and two as an observer. Each observation lasted approximately 60 minutes. I scheduled two of the three as consecutive observations so that I could get a sense of how the meetings carried over or relate to one another from week to week. The average attendance for FACE meetings was 17 persons.

During observations I looked for evidence of how participants worked collaboratively to develop and employ strategies to enhance their children's

academic and social development and how they addressed any related challenges. Observations provided firsthand accounts of the processes in which participants engaged, collectively, and how group members interacted with one another, as individuals. I looked for any evidence of strategies for inclusion or exclusion, power negotiating or power seeking, conflict, and attempts to highlight or subvert certain voices. I also looked for evidence of self-reliance and leadership.

During each observation I took field notes in my research journal on the behaviors, activities, and processes during the workgroup meetings. Field notes included descriptive notes as well as analytic insights that I had during the observations (Yin, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In an effort to address Yin's (2003; 2009) identified weaknesses of observations, I was also able to audio-tape two of the meetings I observed. These audio-tapes provided the opportunity to check the authenticity of my notes to ensure that I was not misrepresenting the events of the meeting. I typed the notes from the observations into narrative form immediately at the conclusion of the observation.

Managing, Analyzing and Interpreting Data

In qualitative research, data collection and analysis coincide to build a coherent interpretation (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Berg, 2007; Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) notes that the process of data analysis is not a distinct step within the research process, but rather a continuous process that is iterative and occurs simultaneously with data collection and report writing. As I collected the data, I began the initial stages of data analysis, organizing and code data in ways that captured connections and trends.

Organizing the Data

All interview and observation notes were written up in narrative form, as Microsoft Word text documents. Individual and focus group interviews were transcribed verbatim from the audio files and converted into text form, and I read all transcriptions while listening to the original audio files in order to ensure accuracy. Electronic documents were organized in two file folders on my laptop (most paper documents were scanned into electronic form). In the first folder, documents were organized according to data collection type and date collected. In the second folder, pertinent documents were organized by participant. Documents were uploaded into the NVivo software program using the same organizational structures. NVivo is a qualitative data software that allows for the storage and organization of memos and files, in addition to coding and categorizing of data. I kept a log of the types of data according to dates and names (each participant was given a pseudonym) and the times and places I gathered the data. I also linked data associated with individual participants and families. This helped to manage the data and make them easier to retrieve.

Coding, Patterns, Categorizing

As I was coding, I reviewed the information to make sure I was “intimately familiar with the data” (Marshall & Rossman, 2007, p. 158). Yin (2009) notes that effective case study data analysis depends on the researcher’s sufficient presentation of evidence in addition to consideration of alternative interpretations. The general analytic strategy I used for data analysis was *relying on theoretical propositions* (Yin, 2009). These were propositions used to design the research questions, which helped to focus the data, organize the case study, and define alternative explanations

for examination (Yin, 2009). For example, a theoretical propositions of this study included the importance of relationships between participants and school personnel, Black families and specifically Black mothers as advocates for their children's education, and power relations in group work. Yin (2009) suggests case studies use their research questions to assist in developing the theoretical focus of the study. Linking the data to the theories or propositions embedded in the research questions was a key strategy for data analysis.

Based on the literature review, theoretical framework and research questions I developed an initial list of deductive codes that was revised, as needed, once data were actually collected (Appendix C). Additionally, I utilized the processes of inductive analysis to capture what was significant to participants themselves and developed an inductive code list. Once data had been coded using both inductive and deductive codes the data was then analyzed to determine the properties, dimensions, and appropriateness of codes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For example, did some codes overlap, conceptually? Are there codes that should be eliminated due to insufficient data? Are there codes which captured multiple concepts and, therefore, need to be broken down into more precise codes? The code list was revised as necessary and then the data were recoded according to those revised codes. Sometimes data codes were not revised, particularly when there was similarity in idea but difference in language used by the participants. In this case, the codes were grouped together in families and one served as a leaf under the broader parent tree.

The data analysis portion of the case study was complex and required that I maintained a focused attention to the data by "identifying salient themes, recurring

ideas or language, and patterns of belief that link people and settings together” (Marshall & Rossman, 2007, p.158). After data were coded, I then analyzed the data in order to determine patterns and to group codes together into categories, based on larger concepts that emerged. In doing so, coded data were compared to determine similarities and differences between and among individuals and families, as connected to the contexts in which FACE members carried out their work.

Validity

I am a Black mother raising Black children who live in and attend Regal County schools, and I am constantly seeking decision making power concerning my children’s education, I am as much a participant of this research project as I am a researcher. I am a parent member of FACE. However, I am also a professionally trained educator. As such, I have a set of specialized skills and knowledge that can be leveraged in conversations and interactions with school personnel as a result of my specialized education and my professional work experience. I constantly assessed and acknowledged the privilege that I have, which is different from most of the participants in the study, and I avoided negatively contributing to power struggles, power plays or vying to be recognized as a “legitimate authority” amongst the participants.

I continuously sought to identify any predisposed dispositions or unacknowledged biases I had through self-reflection and analytic memos to understand how they might impact the research and to minimize potential effects. Although I am a full member of the FACE group, I acted as a participant observer or only an observer in the meetings observed, so that I could gain new vantage points

and opportunities to “make the strange familiar and the familiar strange” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 100; Glesne, 1999). I informed group members, beforehand, that they could review my notes once they were typed in narrative form to relieve any anxiety they may have had about my role as observer during these meetings. With more than ten years’ experience as a professional educator I have had sufficient practice with observing and documenting learning experiences so I am confident that I was able to focus my observations on the study's research questions (Yin, 2006; Marshall & Rossman 2006).

Additionally, after interviews were transcribed and I had written up my observation field notes, I engaged in member-checking. I shared observations notes and focus group transcripts with all of the participants via email and each participant was invited to read and give feedback on the transcript from their individual interview. I also asked eight FACE members who had been in FACE since the beginning and had attended a focus group to read the code lists and the participant quotes I aligned with the codes to offer feedback. Finally, I sent some sections of the paper to specific members to ensure the accurate interpretation of their quotes. This helped to address Yin’s (2003) concern regarding the authenticity of the data collected during participant-observations and interviews. Additionally, because I used multiple methods (document analysis, interviews, participant observations) to gather varying data points, these data sources were triangulated through a systematic and rigorous analytic process that enhanced the validity of my findings by “establishing converging lines of evidence” (Yin, 2006, p. 115).

Managing Risks and Confidentiality

The risks for participating in this study were minimal. No participants expressed feeling frustrated or anxious as they were asked to recall specific experiences. To protect the participants' identities, pseudonyms were used for all participants as well as any locations or persons named by the participants in the interviews. To further maintain the confidentiality of the participants, I stored all audio tapes, voice recordings, transcriptions, documents, observation notes, and analytic memos on my personal computer, which is password-protected.

Prior to the study, a letter of consent (See Appendix D) and an information sheet (See Appendix E) were given to each prospective participant and data collection commenced only upon receipt of the signed consent form from all FACE group members. Each of these documents explained, in detail, the goals, procedures, risks and benefits of the study and what their participation would entail. It also informed them that they were free to discontinue participation at any point and that at such time all data collected from them will be destroyed. No one declined participation. All aspects of this study were open to full disclosure and no information was intentionally hidden from the participants. Any and all questions about the study were answered before, during, and after its implementation, to the best of my ability.

Limitations of the Study

This dissertation research study has a few limitations, one of which is the sample size. There were 26 adults representing only 16 families, who participated in this research study. Additionally while all 26 adults were Black, 19 were African-American. Thus, findings are not generalizable to all Black families or parent engagement groups. However, the study is still significant given the dearth of the

research centering the experiences and perceptions of Black families engaged in parental engagement activities outside of schools. Another limitation of the study is the specificity and rather uniqueness of the community. There are only three counties in the United States that have a similar racial and economic demographic as Regal County in 2014-2015. However, although findings may not be generalizable, they are likely to be transferable to other contexts which share some similarities and this research study provides insight into experiences that transcend local boundaries.

Significance of the Study

The benefits of this study were substantial. Given the dearth of research on active Black family parent involvement, a study such as this case study was sorely needed. Black families are constantly framed as a problem in parent engagement research and the work of Black families who are motivated and engaged in their children's education has significance for research, policy, and practice. It deepens understandings of the assets that Black families bring to their children's education, contributing new knowledge to the literature related to Black family parental engagement. The perspectives gained from this study can inform effective parental engagement strategies in Preschool 3-12 schools and communities and identify shortcomings as well as current strategies employed by authorities that attempt to either address deficits in Black families or minimize their influence (Schutz, 2005). Lastly, the study provides insights into how federal, district, and school policies can be designed to more effectively engage Black families in their children's education.

In the next chapter, *Theoretical Framework*, I describe how I used existing theory to analyze the data collected during this study.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework

As stated in literature review, there is a wealth of research discussing the lack of parent engagement in Black families, the cultural and structural barriers to engagement in schools, and the strategies that school personnel utilize to increase family engagement rates. Within this large body of literature, there is a dearth of research that centers the voices and experiences of families navigating and coordinating their children's educational experiences (Bloom, 2001; Schutz, 2006; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Reynolds, 2010). This void in the research is especially evident related to the activities and strategies in which families engage to advocate for and participate in their children's education that are not sanctioned by school systems. Of particular interest for this study is the lack of knowledge about the processes of teaching and learning that Black families may use to improve their children's educational experiences.

In *Black Feminist Thought*, Hill Collins (2008) explains that the researcher's epistemology is the "overarching theory of knowledge" which is used to "investigate the standards used to assess knowledge or why we believe what we believe to be true" (p. 270). As a researcher, my epistemology influences the questions I believe are worthy of investigation, the people I select as valid sources of information, the study methodology, the interpretive frameworks that I use to analyze the findings, and how I will use knowledge garnered from the study (Hill Collins, 2008). Two related but different theoretical frameworks influence my epistemology: Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Black Feminist Theory (BFT). These two theoretical frameworks, in addition to a proposed family-centered parental engagement framework I created after the initial data analyses from this study, helped situate and

inform the remainder of the study's analyses. This section examines these theories and how they contribute to a conceptual framework that informs the research questions, methodological design, and data analysis of this case study.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory was initially developed by legal scholars as a framework for understanding, analyzing, and critiquing the role of race plays in development and enforcement of laws and legal outcomes (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas, 1995). Critical Race Theory recognizes racism as a prevalent aspect of society and proposes that it remains engrained in the economic, political, and ideological domains of U.S. society, at both the institutional and interpersonal levels (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Tate IV, 1997; Taylor, 2006; Lynn & Parker, 2006). Critical race scholars believe racism is unavoidable and so thoroughly normalized that it is often transparent and easily ignored (Tate IV, 1997; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2005).

Ladson-Billings and Tate first applied the Critical Race theoretical framework to the field of education in, *Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education*, published in 1995. In this article, the authors argue that overall disparities in educational outcomes between Whites and African Americans result from institutional and structural racism, which affects schools and the schooling experiences of both racial groups (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). A central component of this foundational article was the link drawn from Critical Race Theory's construction of "whiteness as the ultimate property" to education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 58). Ladson-Billing and Tate's (1995) explanation of

whiteness as property and related rights (the rights of disposition, rights to use and enjoyment, whiteness as connected to reputation and status property, and as the absolute right to exclude) played a key role in establishing CRT as a new and radical framework for examining educational inequities (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). “[W]hiteness as the ultimate property” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p.58) is a central theme in the parental engagement research as motherhood and parental engagement are social constructs that are influenced by gender, race and class. White middle class women tend to be positioned as the norm to which all other parents are compared in terms of their approaches to mothering, parenting, and parental engagement (Hill Collins, 1994; Cooper, 2007; Cooper, 2009).

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) assert that racism becomes visible in education when one scrutinizes the systematic exclusion of African Americans from many of the opportunities afforded to Whites, through both historic and current school policies and practices. As stated by Critical Race scholars Lynn and Parker (2006), “Critical Race Theory with its insistence on exploring both the ideological and material manifestations of racism-could be used to explain the important connections between race and class in American schooling” (p. 266). They describe everyday racism as the result of “unconscious racial mal-intent” and define it as “institutional policies and practices that are fair in form but have a disproportionately negative impact on racial minority groups” (Lynn & Parker, 2006, p. 260). White students become the beneficiaries of these educational policies and practices related to promotion, course placement, disciplinary sanctions, and school resource allotments in a manner which reflects institutional racism (KewalRamani, et al.,

2007; Planty, et al., 2008).

Most of the research related to parent engagement frames the experiences of White, middle-class families and what schools have traditionally expected of them, as the standard for comparison (Reynolds, 2010; Reynolds, et al., 2015). Definitions and examples of parental engagement are often developed from this vantage point. In much of the parent engagement research, Black families, regardless of socio-economic status, are compared to White, middle class families in order to highlight the purported lack of cultural capital and deficits in cultural values, skills, and practices among Black families. Additionally, most of the research on parental engagement focuses on the school or school personnel as active agents. In contrast, Black parents and families are viewed as the passive recipients of measures and programs designed to facilitate and improve their parenting, their engagement with schools, and their participation in their children's academic development in their own homes. The portrayal of Black families in the literature often presents them as problems to be "fixed," objects to be managed, or risk factors to be mitigated (Reeves & Harris, 2013).

Critical Race Theory rules out individualistic and deficit approaches to investigating parental engagement and student achievement. Rather, it requires analyses of how macro-structures such as the political system, the economy, and institutions impact the experiences of African American families and students, both historically and contemporarily (Tate, 1997; Lynn & Parker, 2006). Critical race scholars investigate "the economic, political, institutional, and psychological effects of a broad cultural system in which African Americans are relentlessly, collectively,

and consistently held as intellectually and socially inferior” (Taylor, 2006, p.79-80). Rather than blaming African American students and their families for relative underachievement, critical scholars interrogate the role of school curriculum, student tracking and placement (including gifted and special education placement), standardized assessments, pedagogy, and disciplinary policy in producing particular outcomes for students of color (Tate, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lynn & Parker, 2006). Such investigations expose how racism embedded within school curriculum and classroom instruction affects students’ achievement in schools.

A primary way researchers capture students' and families' racialized experiences is by using storytelling as a way to offer counter-narratives to dominant discourses, ideologies, and beliefs (Crenshaw, et al., 1995; Tate, 1997; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Taylor, 2006). Critical race scholars have used counter-narratives as an effective tool to create authentic meaning about the experiences of disenfranchised people and to challenge and dispel myths that are purported as factual and evidence based (Delgado, 1989). These narratives intentionally, and with authority, challenge the position of dominant narratives which are the normative points of reference (Lynn & Parker, 2006). Counter-narratives offer legitimate alternatives to dominant discourses about various disenfranchised groups in educational research (Stanley, 2007).

Critical Race Theory has three major principles which I leveraged to design the methodological approaches of this dissertation. First, this study centered issues of race and racism at both the interpersonal and institutional levels. Specifically, it sought to understand how, if at all, systemic racism and institutional bias and race-

based ideologies were relevant to participants' experiences even in situations where the "property of whiteness" (Ladson-Billings, 2006) was not readily apparent. For example, this may explain how systemic racism, institutional bias, and race-based ideologies might be maintained and perpetuated by non-Whites. Critical Race Theory holds that even school districts in which racial or ethnic minorities are the numeric majority are not exempt from systems and ideologies that reflect the normalization of White, middle class values (Milner, 2010).

Second, the study centers and gives significance to the voices and experiential knowledge of participants—the people who directly experience the phenomena of Black parental engagement in their daily lives. By using counter-narratives to highlight the experiences and perceptions of parents who have been described in racialized, deficit-based ways, this study challenges dominate ideologies and discourses and seeks authentic knowledge, which are fundamental principles and purposes of CRT. This is also reflected in the research design of the proposed study which rests on the assumption that Black families draw on their own valuable "funds of knowledge" (Moll, 1992) to support their children. The study does not seek to explain or "fix" the presumed problems of Black families' and their school engagement. Instead, it focuses on the individual and collective assets that Black families employ to enhance their children's social and academic development. I used Critical Race Theory to consider how institutional policies and practices and those in positions of power may present obstacles for Black families and students as well as the ways in which study participants may mitigate any potentially negative effects on their children's learning experiences.

Black Feminist Theory

As a theoretical framework, Black Feminist Thought (BFT) situates Black women at the center of analysis and develops theory around their experiences. It recognizes that much of what constitutes feminist theory fails to acknowledge the unique positioning of Black women in U.S. society. Although Black women are not homogenous, BFT insists that there are similarities in the experiences of women of African descent in the United States due to the ways in which race, class, and gender intersect in U.S. society, which place Black women, as a group, in a unique position of social, economic and political disempowerment (Carby 1987; Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw 1991; Hill Collins 1986, 1990, 2000, 2008; hooks 2000). BFT calls for collective action by Black women, families and communities, rooted in social justice, to eliminate societal conditions that oppress Black women (hooks 1981, 1989, 2000). Inherently revolutionary, the aims of BFT call for a reevaluation and restructuring of U.S. society.

In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Patricia Hill Collins (1990) articulates this theoretical framework which is context-dependent and, at its core, focuses on how Black women's experiences are shaped at the intersection of several concurrently occurring forms of oppression. Collins (1990) argues that “being Black and female in the United States continues to expose African American women to certain common experiences,” (p. 23), and her work focuses on creating and strengthening a critical “consciousness concerning our own [Black women's] experiences and society overall” (p. 24). She highlights the “essential contributions of African American women intellectuals,” noting that “the existence of a Black women’s standpoint does not mean that African

American women, academic or otherwise, appreciate its content, see its significance, or recognize its potential as a catalyst for social change” (Collins, 1990, p.33). Thus, she charges Black women intellectuals with the task of “asking the right questions and investigating all dimensions of a Black women’s standpoint with and for African American women” (Collins, 1990, p. 33).

Brown (1989) in discussing her own vision for Black feminist pedagogy, which seeks to use Black Feminist Thought as a teaching tool, highlights three principles: (1) challenge authority and mainstream notions, (2) disempower self in order to give opportunity for students to empower selves and be authorities and (3) encourage collaboration and collective work but honor individuality. Brown’s (1989) understanding of power and the role of people in positions of power in empowering others is worth illuminating. Brown (1989) states:

I do not attempt to adopt a feminist pedagogy in which the instructor uses her power to empower the previously disempowered. Rather, with great difficulty I attempt, sometimes better than others, to disempower myself and therefore give students the opportunity to empower themselves, thus allowing them to become the voices of authority in their own education (p. 926-927).

This quote is extremely powerful because it speaks directly against popular notions of and attempts to help parents participate in parent engagement. This savior mentality or helping parents help themselves is inherently flawed and has an embedded disproportionate power structure in which the parents are the receivers instead of constructors.

Radford-Hill (2000) also grapples with empowerment and what it could mean in the work of minority groups, and she argues that, “Genuine empowerment is a process not an event...Its goal is to define individual and group self-interests in the broader context of social justice” (p. 12). Similar to Collins (1990), Radford-Hill advocates for making empowerment a primary goal of any work that involves Black communities, especially communities of Black women, because it affirms the direct connection between theory development and social action. She asserts that, “energizing black women who are immobilized or unempowered is a vital part of the political socialization that is needed to rebuild a sense of community” (Radford-Hill, 2000, p. 97).

Another Black Feminist theoretical construct that is extremely pertinent to this research study is the construct of motherhood and “motherwork” for women of color. The present study focuses on Black families, and presently, a large percentage of Black families in the United States are headed by women, oftentimes single women. However, fathers are a critical component of any family whether they are resident or nonresident, and a critique of the ways in which both parenting and parental engagement in schools is not only raced but gendered is critical for this research study. Motherhood and parental engagement are social constructs that are influenced by gender, race and class; thus, theories about mothering and parental engagement shift when different voices are centered (Hill Collins, 1994; Cooper, 2007). Hill Collins (1994) argues that due to their unique positions across the social matrixes and the related social, political and economic contexts, mothering and motherhood for women of color is “inextricably linked to the sociocultural concern

of racial ethnic communities-one does not exist without the other” (pg. 47). The privileging of White, middle class female norms for mothering and parental engagement, inherently displaces Black mothers as “others” and deviants (Cooper, 2009). BFT complicates these depictions and asserts theories of culturally responsive caring and mothering that, albeit varying across sociocultural contexts, which are as valid, nurturing and supporting as the dominating narratives of White mothering (Hill Collins, 1994; Cooper, 2009). Collins (1994) states:

Themes of survival, power and identity form the bedrock and reveal how racial ethnic women in the United States encounter and fashion motherwork. That is to understand the importance of working for the physical survival of children and community, the dialectical nature of power and powerlessness in structuring mothering patterns, and the significance of self-definition in constructing individual and collective racial identity to grasp the three core themes characterizing the experiences of Native American, African-American, Hispanic and Asian-American women (p. 49).

Additional studies are needed that details Black mothers’ interests, labor, involvement, and choices related to their children’s education and it’s relation to their child rearing approaches. Especially necessary is research that “does not subsume the analysis of African American women’s moral reasoning, care traditions, educational experiences, and mothering within Anglocentric paradigms” (Cooper, 2009, p. 390). This dissertation contributes to that ongoing work.

Collins (1990) argues that researchers who wish to research or understand

Black women's political activism and resistance must consider not only the "public, official, visible political activity" but also the "seemingly invisible spheres of social life and organization" (p.217). Collins (1990; 1994) maintains that researchers must expand and be flexible in their definitions of what counts as evidence of organization, activism, and resistance and allow participants to define or identify examples for themselves. This has immediate implications for this dissertation research. In this case study, parental engagement and the meanings of active engagement, as well as evidence thereof, is defined by the participants. This includes the actions they carry out inside and outside of the workgroup, individually and with other group members (or other individuals), which are not always recognized in extant research.

Black Feminist Thought also places importance on the relationships Black women build with one another and how they leverage personal relationships and social roles, such as mother, friend, sister, aunt, etc., in their activism and resistance efforts (Collins, 1990; 1994). For example, Collins (1990) argues that, "Black women use a variety of strategies to undermine oppressive institutions...they use their families as effective Black female spheres of influence to foster their children's self-valuation and self-reliance" (p. 225). Therefore, in this dissertation, I looked for evidence of multiple types of resistance. For example, how do parents or families counteract negative images of and beliefs about their children or their children's peer groups? Finally, Collins (1990) states, "Black women's style of activism also reflects a belief that teaching people how to be self-reliant fosters more empowerment than teaching them how to follow" (p. 235). Thus, this study looked for evidence of how

participants fostered self-reliance and ownership of their work, for themselves and others, both within and outside of the FACE workgroup.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Black, minority, low-income, immigrant, transient, working class, and urban are all descriptors that have been used to describe families and parents that are a “problem” for schools and their parent involvement rates (Reeves & Harris, 2013). Often these families become part of the matrix of blame for their children’s lack of educational success and the achievement gap². However, research suggests that participation in traditional, school sanctioned opportunities for parental involvement can be challenging, particularly for Black families (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000; Bloom, 2001; Trotman, 2001; O'Bryan, Braddock II, & Dawkins, 2006; Quiocho & Daoud, 2006; Cooper, 2007; De Gaetano, 2007; Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Reynolds, 2009; Reynolds, 2010; Reynolds, 2014; Reynolds et. al, 2015; Bridges, et. al, 2012). While No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requires, specifically, Title I schools to engage all families, most schools continue to rely on traditional and limiting approaches not only in engaging families but in judging the types of family engagement that are acknowledged, rewarded, and considered valid and useful (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Reynolds, 2009; Reynolds,

² Although critical race scholars prefer to refer to the achievement gap as the “opportunity to learn gap” or the “educational debt,” here I choose to use the term “achievement gap” to describe the phenomenon as described by mainstream educational research, school districts, and the Department of Education.

2010) .

My research extends BFT and CRT to the experiences of Black families, where women are often the head of the household; however, fathers and father figures have a critical role in the daily functioning of the family, particularly when it relates to children's education. The conceptual framework for this study considers the ways in which race, class, gender, and family formation and structures intersect in U.S. society to shape the social, economic, and political experiences of Black families. Additionally, this study sought to understand how these social identities intersected to affect participants' engagement in their children's education in particular ways. There is a need to understand how Black families act as agents of change rather than passive recipients or bystanders in their children's educational experiences. This knowledge can help educators to conceptualize and develop effective strategies for creating collaborative school and family partnerships in order to positively affect the educational outcomes of Black students.

The following image captures the major theoretical and conceptual thrusts that both influenced the creation of the research question and methodological design, and both guided and emerged through the analysis of the data.

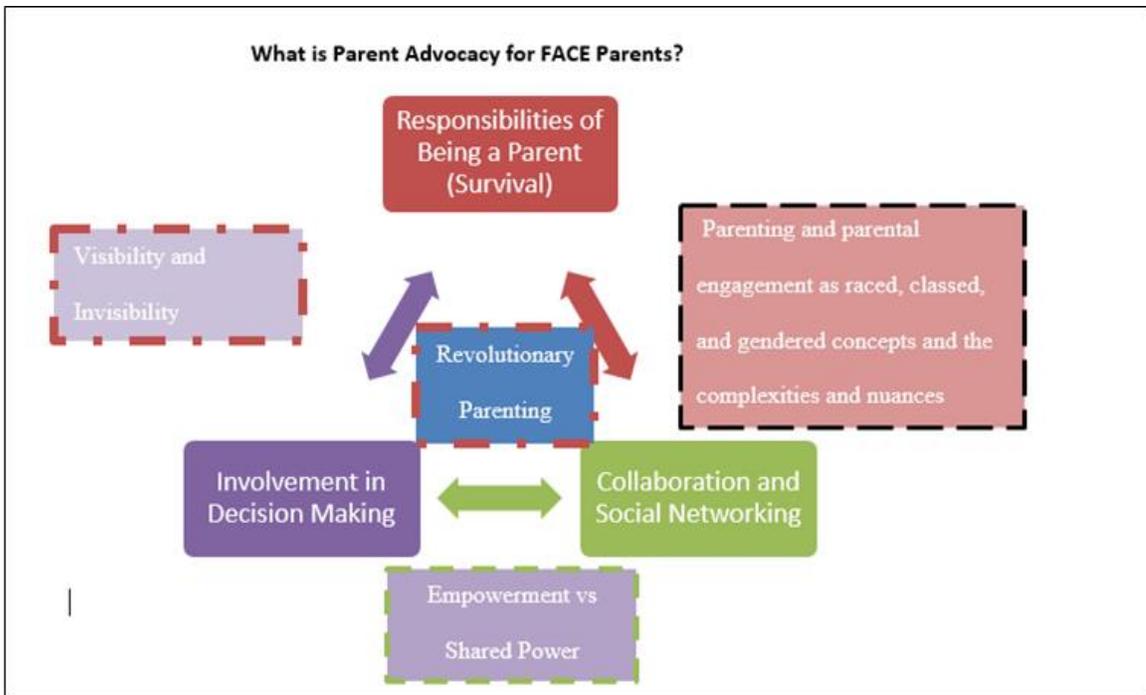


Figure 1. What is parent engagement to FACE families? This figure illustrates my initial theoretical framework.

In the next three chapters, I present the research findings according to my theoretical framework. These findings together, address the research question, “How can understanding the processes of the FACE deepen understandings about parental engagement and contribute to the reconceptualization of parental engagement both theoretically and practically?” Organized around three key concepts: 1) *The Responsibilities of Being a Parent*, 2) *Visible Advocacy Within the System*, and 3) *Invisible Activism*, I used my theoretical framework to analyze the study data in order to answer my research questions and propose a new family-centered parental engagement framework. In the next chapter, I begin with the third theme, *Invisible Activism*, which introduces the FACE group and adds to existing educational research by centering the voices and experiences of Black families outside of the purview of the education system.

Chapter 5 FACE: Invisible Activism

In 2014 when this dissertation study began, the purpose of the research project was to examine how a group of Black families conceptualized parental engagement, their experiences of engaging in their children's educations, and any barriers to or opportunities for engagement they encountered. This study concentrated on four broad research questions:

- How do participants describe and understand their parent engagement work during and outside of workgroup meetings?
- How does the group, as a whole, organize itself and function in support of families' engagement in enhancing their children's educational and social well-being?
- What benefits, if any, does participation in the workgroup have for participants' personal development and/or for their children's educational and social well-being?
- How can understanding the processes of the FACE group deepen understandings about parental engagement and contribute to the reconceptualization of parental engagement both theoretically and practically?

The next three chapters present the findings from the individual and focus groups interviews with the families, as well as participant observations and document analyses pertaining to the *Families Advocating for their Children's Education* (FACE) group. Each chapter is organized around one of the three core domains that emerged through my analysis of the data: (1) *Invisible Activism (Outside of the*

System), (2) *Parenting as Revolutionary*, and (3) *Visible Advocacy (Within the System)*).

The remainder of this chapter focuses on the first domain, *Invisible Activism (Outside of the System)*. This chapter describes the FACE group, a self-organized group of Black parents, which was the major vehicle through which their invisible activism and parental advocacy occurred. The chapter is divided into four subsections reflecting four themes that emerged from the study data that describe the FACE group's structure, function, processes, and interactions, which were the major components of their invisible activism. The four themes—(a) *Shared Power*, (b) *Shared Responsibility*, (c) *Shared Labor*, and (3) *Shared Knowledge*—were pervasive throughout the group and critical not only to the group's creation, but its survival. They encapsulated the values that were paramount to FACE members' individual and collective parent engagement. These themes represent invisible activism strategies that members employed as forms of parental engagement outside the purview of the school system. As I explore each theme, I will describe specific barriers to and opportunities for efficacious engagement.

Shared Power

In its most basic form, power can be defined as “the capacity to produce a desired result or outcome based on specific changes in individual or group behavior or on adherence to group norms” (Radford-Hill, 2000, p.19). This definition of power, consistent with Black Feminist Theory's demands for alternative ways of conceptualizing and using power does not confine power to any specific position, person, or idea. Instead, it acknowledges power as a system or a series of interactions

involving the interests, actions, and outcomes of persons working independently or collectively. Related to the concept of power is empowerment, which “is a process and not an event or endgame... [whose] goal is to define individual and group self-interests in the broader context of social justice” (Radford-Hill, 2000, p. 13). When different individuals and groups have “meaningful access to the structures that exercise power and influence,” genuine empowerment is present (Radford-Hill, 2000, p. 12-13). Radford-Hill’s definitions of empowerment and power are critical to understanding Black women’s activism, and the data from this study suggests they can be extended beyond Black women to Black families as units.

Consistent with Barkley-Brown’s (1986) assertion about the importance of Black women having “voices of authority” in their own lives (p. 926), a foundational component of empowerment is self-definition, “or the power to name one’s own reality” (Hill Collins, 2008, p. 300). For FACE members, self-definition was one of the most important factors that contributed to their feeling a sense of power as well as ownership over their approaches to parental engagement. They used a variety of strategies to avoid restrictive or oppressive leadership practices in the FACE group and to create a collaborative approach that fostered self-definition and ownership among all members, which were critical components for developing shared power.

Self-Definition

The first indication that self-definition was important to FACE participant was in their conceptualization of parental engagement. In February of 2012, at the beginning stages of the formation of FACE, participants were asked, in semi-structured interviews, to define parental engagement and to describe the types of

parental engagement in which they participated during previous school years. All participants described calling, emailing, sending notes, and attempting to schedule meetings with teachers in response to concerns regarding their children, as parent engagement. Several participants stated they had that need for only limited direct engagement with the school because they had no problems with their children's teachers. A statement by Nate, an unmarried father of two, captured the sentiment of many participants. "I mean I check in if I have a problem," he said. "I know I can just go to the teacher and express myself, but nah, I don't have no problems or anything so I'm good." Every participant said they attended parent teacher conferences to get report cards, and when promoted, they noted other types of parental engagement, including attending back to school nights and PTA meetings. For the most part, however, participants expressed the belief that if there were no apparent problems, they had little need to engage with school personnel. This belief reflects the families' perceptions of parental engagement as a problem solving tactic, and they largely did not consider engagement strategies employed outside of the school as parental engagement. For example, at the beginning of the study, only three participants mentioned homework help as a form of parental engagement.

Additionally, in the beginning stages of the group's formation, multiple FACE members were concerned with providing me, as the researcher, with the "correct" answer. For example, during interviews, participants would continually follow their response with statements like, "Is that ok?" "Is that the right answer?," or "Is that what you are looking for?" Even after assuring participants there was **no** correct answer, they continued to exhibit caution and went to great lengths to ensure they

were answering the questions in an “acceptable” manner. There are several possible explanation for participants’ apprehensive replies. First, they appeared unsure of their own definitions of parental engagement. Second, they may have prioritized my needs, as the researcher. Third, they may have been concerned about being viewed as unknowledgeable or irresponsible. Importantly, they were aware of existing stereotypes about Black families and their lack of parental engagement. This awareness and the families’ need to dispel these stereotypes sometimes took precedence over their own needs for and understandings of parental engagement. Early on in the study, families’ understandings of parent engagement were limited to definitions approved and communicated by school personnel as reflected in existing educational research. This double consciousness of how they were perceived as parents and how they actually saw themselves and their own engagement may have informed their responses to interview questions. At this time, either participants did not define their own, non-school sanctioned engagement strategies as parental engagement or they did not believe those strategies would be accepted as valid examples of engagement.

By March of 2014, after two years of being active FACE members, participants’ responses to the same and similar interview questions were more complex and reflective of the wide range of approaches that the families used in engaging with their children’s education. During semi-structured interviews with 24 participants, 13 of whom were originally interviewed in 2012, they asked, “What does parental engagement mean to you?” and “How are you engaged in your child[ren]’s education?” Participants’ responses, specifically their definitions of

parental engagement and their descriptions of their own engagement, were more diverse and inclusive as compared to those in 2012.

One of the most noticeable differences in the participants' responses was that no member sought reassurance or validation of their responses. They seemed considerably more confident in their understanding and definitions of parental engagement. Second, FACE members' definitions more accurately reflected their actual labor and their engagement with their children's education and extended beyond the school site and school personnel. Initially, families primarily described their parent engagement in response to a problem or invitations or prompts from the school. However, by 2014, FACE members described parent engagement in much broader ways which included initiating contact with school personnel, conducting strategic meetings with family members to address hopes, concerns, and developmental opportunities for their children. As FACE member, LaLani, explained, these activities addressed children's "whole selves." Similarly, Kia stated, "Everything I do for Rachel [her daughter] and Malik [her brother] is to ensure they have a great future, get to college, and just grow up to be awesome people. That's all parent engagement!" This statement was representative of the FACE families' sentiments in 2014.

As a result of participation in FACE, participants seemed to gain a more complex understanding of their labor as parents as well the validity and value of that labor and how it related to parent engagement. Participants' definitions of parental engagement as well as their descriptions of parental engagement were more inclusive of their lived experiences without regard to norms communicated by the school

district or public opinion. For example, all FACE participants mentioned homework help, expressing interests in their child(ren)'s education, contacting other parents to get a better understanding of their children's schooling experiences, and researching educational opportunities for their children as parental engagement. All of these engagement strategies are invisible in that they take place outside of the school site and are not monitored by school personnel. Additionally, all of these strategies were initiated by the families rather than being passive or reactive responses. The fact that FACE participants considered these strategies to be valid forms of parental engagement demonstrates a shift in how they defined parent engagement and understood their own engagement.

Another area where FACE members exhibited the desire and ability for self-definition and power was in defining the work of FACE. From the outset, FACE members were asked to give feedback on discussion topics at meetings. From that moment on, the co-planning of both the process and content of FACE meetings became a collaborative effort between group members, who were very committed to deciding what they would study and when. The foci of the first series of FACE meetings were intensely debated by FACE members online via Google Docs and in text messages to me, as the researcher. FACE members, almost exclusively the women, used the comment and multicolored writing features in Google Docs to offer perspectives on FACE's work. The men, with the exception of Kyle, a married father of two, all texted their feedback to the researcher and viewed but did not revise the Google Docs. Several FACE members identified the collaboration around determining the foci of the meetings as the thing they most liked about being in

FACE. For example, participants were asked, “What are the benefits of participating in FACE, why do you keep coming to meetings?” Seventeen responded in a way that related to having a voice in or being able to influence the topics of the FACE meetings. For example, Lalah, a single mother of two boys, and was also taking care of her brother’s two daughters and son, and shared parenting responsibilities with her co-habitant mother, Tamara, expressed,

I like that we have a say in what we talk about each time. Like, we don’t just show up and they hand us a flyer or read us a PowerPoint. We actually already know what we are studying because we picked it! Even if the topic you picked isn’t up this week you know it’s coming.

Another parent, Nikki, an unmarried mother who co-parented with her live-in boyfriend, stated,

I don’t mind coming out to these meetings because I know it’s not going to waste my time. We are going to talk about things that I am interested in, things that I helped plan, so I feel like it’s something specific to me.

During interviews and focus groups, FACE members made a clear distinction between their experiences at FACE meetings and similar meetings they attended, possibly at their local schools. Because members were directly involved in the planning of the FACE sessions, the meetings held greater significance to them. This reflects Radford-Hill’s (2000) assertion that true empowerment is evidenced when “different individuals and groups have meaningful access to the structures that exercise power and influence” (p.13). Being able to define and plan their own

learning and topics of discussions was empowering for FACE members and increased their commitment to and ownership of the FACE community.

Ownership

In the FACE group, ownership was directly related to shared power and leadership. A major challenge at the beginning of FACE was transitioning the group from “Tamyka’s Project” to true collective ownership. Early on, in addition to looking for validation, participants also deferred to me, as the researcher, around decision-making and leadership. For instance, if some participants disagreed with a suggestion made on Google Docs or in a meeting, they would contact me instead of the individual(s) which whom they disagreed. During meetings, participants would pose questions such as, “Well what do you [Tamyka] need in order to complete your project?” or “Is that going to slow down your graduation? We want to make sure you finish!” Recalling, Barkley-Brown’s (1986) concept of “pivoting the center” (p. 922) and understanding the futility of using one’s own “power to empower the previously disempowered” (p.926), I had to consistently be mindful of my own position and intentionally create space for others to step into leadership roles and legitimize the authority of their own voices in their experiences. In addition to “sharing the pen,” to encourage collaboration in determining the content of the meetings, the planning and implementation of the sessions increased ownership and allowed for shared power amongst the FACE members.

FACE members invested considerable material resources, individually and collectively, in order to sustain FACE over the years. Most resources needed to maintain FACE were provided by group members, and this also added to their sense

of shared ownership as members understood their attendance and provisions to be crucial. There was no budget for FACE and no financial compensation for group members. FACE members often had to pay for meeting space in recreation centers and public schools, particularly as the group increased in size. Additionally, markers, chart pads, and sustenance were donated by FACE members at every meeting, and they also drew on their networks to secure additional resources for FACE. For example, two FACE members who were Girl Scout leaders arranged for the group to meet at the local elementary school for \$2/hour. They extended their Scout meeting by two hours to allow FACE members the use of the school space at their discounted rate; the regular rate was \$25/hour. Additionally, they created a badge which their Teen Scouts could earn by providing child care services to the FACE participants while they attended the meeting. While some contributed more than others, every member contributed to the group in both material and nonmaterial ways.

Finally, the strongest indicator of shared ownership of FACE was the fact that FACE membership grew as a result of existing members recruiting their own family members, friends, and associates to the group. FACE began with seven members, all of whom were recruited by me, as the researcher; I was also a member. Two years later, at the outset of the research study, there were two divisions of FACE—South and North—both of which had over twenty members. If participants had continued to view FACE as “Tamyka’s Project” or “Tamyka’s club,” they would not have believed they had the authority to invite additional members into the group, which they did without asking for my permission. FACE members also felt free to and often did bring non-member guests to meetings, and they engaged in FACE parent

engagement strategies with non-FACE members. This collaborative approach to growing the FACE community is the most impactful and earnest demonstration of shared ownership and power. It acknowledges participants' commitment to the FACE community and the ways in which "people belong to overlapping or in some cases multiple distinct communities with their attendant divided loyalties" (Radford-Hill, 2000, p. 18). Although FACE members had been in the group for various lengths of time, they all had a sense of community and saw themselves as legitimate and equitable partners. Each member also felt comfortable bringing the work of the group to their extended networks, which demonstrates a sense of empowerment influenced by the FACE group's identity as parental advocacy group (Radford-Hill, 2000).

FACE was built around the assumption that shared power was crucial in order to both recruit and retain active group membership and build a thriving community. One resounding quote providing evidence of shared power came from Karen, who no school aged children but shared in the parenting responsibilities of her great nieces. She noted, "It's good the way we run these [FACE meetings] because it doesn't matter if you're [Tamyka] here or not, Ruby not here, I'm here, whoever, we all can just keep it moving." Black families must have a voice in how they spend their time; especially their out-of-work time. In order for participants to consistently choose to come to FACE meetings, members had to believe it would be a pleasant and valuable experience.

Engaging families in planning what they learned, who they learned with, and how they participated in FACE was a critical impetus for not only their engagement

in FACE but in their larger parental engagement and activism as well. By defining parental engagement, as well as the work of the FACE group, for themselves, participants perceived themselves as playing an active and meaningful role in the FACE community and in contributing to the group's outcomes. Face families' determination to unapologetically create, define, and implement their own conceptualizations of parent engagement provided an energy amongst FACE members that served as the impetus for their parental advocacy.

Shared Responsibility

Study participants used FACE meetings as a significant strategy for engaging in effective parental advocacy, and as stated earlier, they committed considerable time and material resources in order to sustain group meetings. A critical component of the efficacy of both the FACE meetings and the new parental engagement strategies the participants were employing was shared responsibility and leadership. FACE members' readily accepted the additional responsibilities that came with new initiatives and held each other accountable for meeting those responsibilities, which was key to the functioning of the group and to the ways their families functioned and perceived their own efficacy as related to parent engagement. In the next section, I show how shared responsibility and accountability were fundamental elements of effective parent engagement for FACE families by describing the function and organization of the FACE meetings.

FACE Meetings and Shared Leadership

The FACE meetings, which followed a consistent protocol, were the most consistent component of the FACE group. The families engaged in three central

activities in each meeting: (a) sharing parental advocacy experiences that participants worked on or learned since the last meeting; (b) discussing and defining the new parental advocacy topic of the week; (c) identifying the parental advocacy strategy participants would attempt to implement following the meeting. Each meeting followed the same format³.

The most obvious way the FACE members demonstrated shared responsibility as a core value was through shared leadership in the facilitation of meetings. There was no designated leader of the meetings or the group. Unlike other school-based parent involvement organizations, there was no hierarchy including roles such as President, Vice President, etc. Instead, after participants what work needed to be done, they shared the tasks. An average of 15 people attended each meeting, and there were four assigned “job slips”; however, more than four jobs actually needed to be done. For example, participants brought and set up food and materials and cleaned the meeting space—tasks for which there was no job slip. No one person took on the same role for consecutive meetings, and there were no disagreements about meeting responsibilities. There seemed to be an unstated rule that no one individual would take complete ownership of any particular role.

The random selection of meeting roles was Angela’s idea. Angela, one of the oldest and most respected members of FACE, had a high school aged son and shared care giving responsibilities for him and her granddaughter with her adult daughter, Kia. When asked why she made the suggestion to have jobs slips that members would randomly choose, she shared,

³ For details about the process of FACE meetings, see Appendix F

I was so damn tired of the time we wasted at the other meetings and I just could not do that again. All this time with an agenda, committees, who is going to do what, then the fighting to be in charge, like it really matters who is in charge. Just do it! They just do too much. It's not that serious and it was beginning to feel like a second job instead of something we were coming to because we wanted to. So the slips just makes it easier. We do not need 50/11 emails going back and forth about this and that, just show up, pick a job, and do it. It's just that simple.

Two aspects of Angela's quote are worth highlighting. One is how she juxtaposes the South division's FACE meetings and the "other meetings." Originally, there was a single larger FACE group that met at a recreation center in Regal County. FACE members who lived in the southern part of the county decided to have what were supposed to be additional meetings; however, many of the members attended *only* these meetings. One of the complaints about the larger meetings was the way they were facilitated, so the process for running the "additional" FACE meetings, which eventually became the South Division, was intentional. Second, one factor that made the FACE meetings so consistently well attended was their ease and convenience. Angela intentionally reduced the number of responsibilities placed on FACE members by streamlining planning and facilitation processes. In finding ways to eliminate unnecessary burdens, group members made the FACE meetings accessible for the families to participate.

Another way the meetings demonstrated a commitment to shared responsibility and leadership was related to content and the process. First, participants

spent the majority of the meeting sharing their experiences of implementing the advocacy strategies they identified in the previous meeting. This meant that all members had to hold themselves accountable for implementing their designated strategies in order to have something to contribute to the collective learning of the group. For example, one week the topic was “What to do with children over Spring Break?” Participants came to the meeting with flyers from camps operating during the week, answer keys to the school counties’ spring break homework packets, and a list of places to take children to during the day, such as parks and museums. Another week, the topic was “Applying to College,” and two participants who did not have children in high school, brought guests with them to contribute to the conversation. One member, LaLani, who had a 2nd- and a 5th-grader, brought her friend whose son was a sophomore in college. Another participant, Renée, who had an 8th- and a 5th-grader, brought her husband, who was not a FACE member, but was a high school counselor. She stated,

This topic was not for me because my children are too young, but I agree it’s an important topic. I’m lucky my husband deals with this stuff every day so we are going to be fine, but I still wanted to make sure I was able to help the other parents because that college process can be a lot. I do not really know myself but that’s why I asked my husband to come and talk to everyone.

In addition to the guests, other participants shared copies of information packets they had received from other meetings, information about locally advertised college fairs, and SAT test taking practice workbooks. Participants saw a clear purpose for the

meetings and came prepared to engage and share in the parent advocacy topic of the week, even if the topic was not immediately relevant to them.

The participants spent considerable time before, during, and after the meetings discussing their experiences with implementing various strategies and sharing artifacts, such as emails from teachers, flyers, notes, student work, and commercial resources. As each group member was simultaneously a giver and receiver of information, participants were always in control of the meeting's agenda. If the participants did not come prepared to share, then there would be no content for the meetings. While not every participant came to every meeting prepared to share experiences or artifacts, every participant shared often enough so occasional lack of preparedness did not cause a problem to the larger community. The structure of the FACE meetings offered the participants clear and concrete responsibilities. Equitable contribution, shared voices, and participation were expectations for the meetings. The FACE participants' commitment to trying a specific strategy and bringing the results back, to advance the work, demonstrates a shared sense of responsibility for and accountability to the group collectively and to one another, individually.

Challenges

Disagreement within FACE about the group's identity

There were some challenges related to shared responsibility and leadership that consistently arose. Most were related to social dynamics within the group and disagreement with the group's identity or culture. Specifically, some participants attempted to dominate conversations and take on more responsibilities as ways to gain power over other participants, which challenged the shared leadership structure of the group. For example, one specific member, Ruby, constantly challenged the

shared leadership structure and championed for a more formal leadership structure similar to other parenting groups. Ruby asserted that without a designated leader or contact person, the group would have difficulty gaining traction and sustaining itself. Additionally, she contended meetings would be more efficient with a more ordered approach to the way participants shared their experiences and information. For example, she suggested that members sign up to share at meetings in advance and that no more than five members be allowed to share at each meeting. Ruby shared her opinions frequently; however, none of the suggested changes were implemented. Several FACE members began to suggest that Ruby was a nuisance and they did not understand why she continued to attend South FACE division meetings, especially since she lived in the North region. In fact, Ruby was the only FACE member who several other participants mentioned, specifically by name, as causing a problem. For example, Koron's husband Mike shared, "Yo she really gets on my damn nerves. She brings too much shit with her! We don't need all that." Angela noted,

She wants to be in charge, she wants to do all of the work, let her think she is doing it all. Let her run around like a chicken with its head cut off, and while she is running around planning this and that we can continue meeting without her interruptions.

For the other members, the validity of Ruby's suggestions was irrelevant due to the way she consistently pushed her ideas onto the group. Her viewpoints went against the grain or general sentiment of the larger community. This suggests that the South Division of FACE had a particular culture that the vast majority of members wanted to maintain.

Another related challenge occurred early in the school year when another member expressed a difference of opinion about the group's approach to the meetings. Vicki was a member of FACE who did not have any school aged children, but she was a teacher at the school where meetings occurred. Since she often worked late and was in the building when the meeting was in session, she would stop by to participate in the group. As an employee of the local school district, Vicki had a lot of knowledge that would have been helpful to the group; however, after a couple of meetings, some participants began alienating her from the group. They perceived Vicki as being negative, counterproductive, and attempting to overpower the group with her own agenda. For example, when members made suggestions for strategies to address a disagreement they had with a teacher, Vicki would often challenge their position. She would take the perspective of the teacher, which then centered the teacher or the school and decentered the experience of the FACE member. If a member stated they wanted to try a certain strategy, Vicki would tell them it was a waste of time because "that's now how it works in a school." It may have been true the strategy was not feasible or prohibited by school policy, but FACE members did not appreciate Vicki constantly taking that stance. They wanted to try some things out for themselves. Also, not having any children and being a school employee caused the group to mistrust Vicki. They began to perceive Vicki's tendency to disparage the group member's suggestions or constant corrections as an intentional strategy to disrupt the group's work. FACE members began to cut her off when she was speaking, leave her off group emails, and not respond to emails she sent. Vicki came to believe that the group was not a good use of her time because she felt they did not

want to listen. Vicki's attendance at the meetings dramatically decreased and at the time of the last observed meeting, she had missed seven meetings in a row.

Shared responsibility was a major component of FACE. Members' commitment to one another and to the group was demonstrated in very specific ways including how they shared leadership and participation during group meetings and engaged in agreed upon parent advocacy strategies and shared of experiences. The social dynamics of the group led to productive engagement for the vast majority of members. The members' commitments to their shared norms, beliefs, and traditions were enveloped into the FACE culture which was critical to the group's identify and functioning.

Shared Labor

As a result of participating in FACE meetings, members added additional strategies to their parent engagement repertoires. These new strategies caused changes to the families' daily and weekly routines; thus, FACE members asked family members to assist in ways to which they were not accustomed. FACE members also reached beyond their families and collaborated with one another to strengthen the support network, or village, for their children. They turned to other FACE members and friends, within and outside of FACE, to engage in shared labor. Shared labor in this case can be described as members collaboratively working together to facilitate the work and responsibilities related to child rearing, including but not limited to those related to the children's schooling experiences.

Shifting Roles for Families and Friends

One critical change for FACE members was the way families began to redistribute the work load related to parent advocacy. FACE members reported either asking or being asked to participate in ways they had not participated before. Kyle, a married father of two, captured this in the focus group, saying,

Generally I left all of that stuff to Krystal [his wife] because she's the mother and she knows, and plus I didn't want to get up there and get to acting crazy because someone has pissed me off. But now it's, ok I am off this week, I have time to go up to the school and see what's going on in this math class. Or I know that I'm supposed to see an agenda book everyday so they [their children] already know soon as we walk in the house, give me the book and get to work. And that's it. That counts! That's a critical action that matters that I do every day that has caused them, especially Kyle [Jr.] to do better in school.

Krystal's response further reflected this shift in responsibilities. She recounted,

He could have **been** doing that because they have had those agenda books since the first grade [their daughter was in 7th grade and her son was in 9th grade]! But I guess now he sees the other fathers here doing it, he knows what to do.

Angela interjected, "Well did you ask him before?" to which Krystal responded "No," and Angela responded, "Ok then, there you go!" While Krystal may have meant to be flippant when suggesting that Kyle's new found engagement was a result of peer pressure from the other men in the group, study suggests that a number of FACE members, both men and women, were more likely to engage in FACE if other

members who were a part of their immediate social circles (friends and families) were actively engaged as well.

The exchange between Krystal, Kyle, and Angela encompasses two critical viewpoints expounded upon throughout the remainder of this chapter. First, FACE participation caused members to engage in specific conversations about parent engagement more intentionally and more often with family and friends. As a result, members began to reconsider their current labor allocations related to parental engagement. This was true for both women and men. Data suggest that at the beginning of FACE, many of women, particularly mothers, felt that the responsibility for parental engagement belonged to them. However, by the end of the study, they were much more likely to call on their extended networks including their co-parents, family members, and friends in planning their parent engagement strategies, rather than when they were in a bind and needed help.

For example, Aaliyah was having troubling reconciling a problem that occurred with her son's teacher, and she reached out to Ruby, another FACE member, for assistance. She stated:

Oh, I talked to Ruby. Oh, okay [*everyone busts out laughing*]. But just for advice on how to approach certain teachers I'm having problems with. She helped me...I've been struggling with getting through to the teacher...she helped me with how to word it properly [an email]...And it was all good.

That could have gone tragically– but that email helped.

This example is particularly illustrative because a number of FACE members tried to avoid Ruby, as described above, which explains the other FACE members' reaction.

However, Aaliyah recognized she needed help employing a new strategy and went to a member of her social network in order to get support. Aaliyah recognized her own limitations and identified someone whom she felt had expertise from which she could draw.

Another group of five FACE members whose children attended the same school collaborated around the responsibilities of participating in parent engagement activities at the school. The group included one married mother, Renée, three unmarried mothers, Lalah, LaLani, and Nikki, and one unmarried father, Daveon. They took turns attending PTA meetings, visiting one another's children's classrooms, attending school events and meetings hosted school staff members, such as Literacy Night and the Science Fair Informational Meeting, and chaperoning school trips. During his interview, Daveon commented,

They have been a real blessing, because as much as I would like to, I just can't be everywhere. I can't. When the schools say, 'Come to the meeting for your child to get extra credit, of course I would like to go and get it for them, but I just cannot be everywhere at the same time. This way all of our kids get the benefit, you know, but each of us just has to do a little, just what we can.

Neither LaLani nor Renée, who were friends prior to joining FACE, had relationships with any of the other members of their parenting team, even though their children knew each other from school. By teaming up in this way, the parents were able to share the labor of attending events so they did not miss any information due to absences. This collaborative and community-based approach was an effective and

sustainable strategy for parent engagement that resulted directly from FACE membership.

Participants' support networks included not only FACE members and friends who were not FACE members, but also family members. Nikki, a single mother of two daughters, who struggled to make visits to her daughter's classroom, call to her sisters immediately after one of the FACE meetings, seeking their assistance, and they obliged. After the call, she remarked, "They sit home on the computer, 'cause they have phone jobs. That's a thing, right? So they are lucky to have home jobs so they can step away during the day, no problem." When I inquired why she hadn't asked them before, she said, "It just came to me when Lalah [another FACE member] said she was going to have to get some help on those visits, 'cause I am going to need help too!" Nikki had previously used her sisters' help with child care and transportation; however, this was the first time she thought to ask their assistance with parent engagement. Later, during her interview, Nikki mentioned her sisters as a support system for assisting with homework, school observation visits, college tours, and parent-teacher conferences when she was unavailable.

Likewise, the men in the study, particularly the fathers and uncles, were more likely to initiate involvement related to school or academic engagement, rather than wait to be called on when the mother was in despair. This was, in part, a direct result of the structure of FACE as a group and the FACE meetings. As outlined in the minute notes from meetings, FACE members had clear, concrete, manageable, and actionable next steps to implement immediately. Additionally, spending time developing ideas for parent engagement augmented members' understandings of their

role as engaged parents. While FACE members' implementation of different parental engagement strategies was, in fact, increased labor, participants began to acknowledge how their daily labor related to child rearing was akin to and often doubled as meaningful parent engagement. As described above, Kyle's acknowledgement of the impact of his actions, which had become a part of his daily routine, along with Krystal's assertion that these actions had been within in his grasps for years, demonstrates a shift in Kyle's perception of his role in the family as an informed and engaged parent: a role he had previously reserved for Krystal.

Marshawn, LaLani's brother who did not have any children of his own, also shifted his perception of his role in parent engagement. During his interview, when asked how he got involved with FACE even though he did not have any children, he said,

LaLani had class one night y'all changed the day of the meeting and she couldn't miss class so she asked me to come instead. That's my sister and I got her, whatever she need. I came and I had fun. I learned a lot and it was good seeing other brothers in here 'cause usually you don't see that. So I just kept coming. I just think it's really important to be there for them [his nieces]. I know it makes a difference having your parents in your life. My mom and my dad passed away when I was really young and it was just me and my two sisters. If I would have known all of this stuff about school when we were coming up, I could have done more for my sisters and myself. Now Lola and Trice [his nieces] are going to be alright.

In a separate interview, LaLani co-signed her brother's influence and support, saying,

My brother is the best, even with my children. My brother has always played an active role in my daughter's life and now he does stuff for their schools too. Even when their dads were not around and my brother stepped in, like Father-Daughter dance, Men Make a Difference Day, all that. And to this day when they want to do something they want their uncle. If the school has an event requesting fathers, they'd rather call their uncle. They want to do something, "Well I'll go ask Uncle."

Marshawn and LaLani have a close relationship, and Marshawn had always played a role in his nieces' lives. However, as a result of LaLani's and his participation with FACE, Marshawn's understanding of how, as an uncle, he could play a direct role in parent engagement evolved.

Greg, Aaliyah's husband also saw his role in parent engagement shift. During the focus group meeting he said,

I usually let my wife handle all that stuff. She went to college and she is the smart one. But lately, I have been doing a lot more, not as much as her, but I have been in there. I don't come to some of these [FACE] meetings with her. Before she went to the report card meetings by herself, I go with her now. The teacher has a website with a code where she puts the answer key to the homework, I check the homework now, so when 'Tima gets home all she has to do is help them if they didn't understand the work. Lil' Greg's college tour, I went with him. Again, I'm not saying I am as involved as Bun [Aaliyah] but I do my part.

In a separate interview, Aaliyah described some of the shifts in their family's approach to parent engagement. Her need for support caused her to confront her husband on his lack of involvement. She shared,

My husband, he helped with more of disciplining when I need that extra voice, but, other than that, I was doing it. Homework, everything. Projects. PowerPoints. Everything. A teacher calls the house? Instead of him talking to them he still wanted to call me on three-way. I finally told him, 'Look, not knocking you, but parent-teacher conferences, college tours, progress reports, everything, you **have** to be there. I'm by myself. And they need both of us. With Lil Greg, having a black male, you need to step up and kinda be on it'. And I been holding him to it. Reminding him every day. Ever since then, he has been trying, he really has.

Initially Greg doubted his ability to be an actively engagement parent because he had no completed college like Aaliyah. Like Kyle, Greg saw parent engagement as the domain of his wife. However, once Aaliyah specifically asked him to be involved and shared with him specific ways he could help her, Greg stepped up and identified himself as an engaged father. Aaliyah and Greg, who have two sons and one daughter, acknowledged that Aaliyah could not do it all on her own, and her husband's presence in school and academic related activities was especially critical for their sons.

Finally, a few parents shared an unexpected perspective. Several FACE members noted they involved their children in parent engagement responsibilities. In separate interviews, three FACE members, described encouraging their children to

take on traditional parent engagement activities in an effort to teach them how to advocate for themselves. Lalah, shared,

But as far as education, actually, as they've gotten older, believe it or not, it's more in line of what are **you** [the child] doing, how are **you** [the child] doing it, teaching them to be more of advocate for themselves, 'cause, you know, it's their lives.

JaQuan, who co-parented three sons with Lorraine, and had another daughter, emphatically stated,

I think financially you can give the kids money, but education is something that they'll never forget. You have to teach them, how to ask questions, talk to teachers, respectfully disagree. If they disagree with a grade or they think their teacher is treating them unfairly, they need to email the teacher and talk to her themselves. So essentially you teach them how to fish and they'll fish over and over again. So they'll be better served.

Finally, Nikki noted that when there is a problem with a teacher, she encourages her daughters to handle the issue, then she follows up if the problem is not resolved. She described having a face-to-face meeting with a teacher who did not listen to her daughter. She said,

At first, I let my daughter handle it for me. I believe she has to be given a chance to solve her own problems first, speak up in her own voice, but I kept seeing the grade didn't change. She was absent and it kept saying zero instead of exempt.

Nikki was committed to teaching her daughters to speak up for themselves; however, she still monitored the situation and acknowledged that she sometimes needed to step in. Nikki, JaQuan and Lorraine, and Lalah all had at least one child in high school, so the older age of the children may have been a factor in why they used this strategy. These parents acknowledged their children would be on their own soon and wanted to ensure they were the developing self-advocacy skills they would need as they transitioned into adulthood and college.

All FACE members expressed how they had begun to conceptualize their social networks as an asset for participating in parent engagement. FACE members, especially the mothers, began to extend their supportive networks, to cultivate a “village” to help raise their children. The men in the group expanded their views of and their role in parent engagement as a result of the women in their lives expecting and requesting more and the examples the men provided for one another in the group. The FACE members began to strategically share the labor and responsibilities of parent engagement with family, friends, and even the children. A number of the strategies the FACE members employed, including communicating with teachers, attending school events, and assisting with homework were visible by the school and largely recognized by research as effective parent engagement. However, the various ways they identified and utilized their social networks to employ these strategies and the sacrifices and negotiations involved in building these networks were largely invisible.

Challenges

While shared labor proved to be an extremely effective strategy, FACE families had to navigate several challenges in its implementation. First, the

invisibility of some of their engagement activities, from the school perspective, caused school personnel to believe that the families were not involved at all. Second, school personnel had a limited view of who was a legitimate representative for the children. Third, as engaged parents, some of the men experienced a lack of respect from school personnel.

Invisibility Does Not Equal Disengaged

A number of FACE members mentioned feeling disappointed and exasperated by the perception of them as disengaged parents by school personnel and other parents. Members reported being at PTA meetings in which leaders talked about their attendance in negative ways. For example, as participants described, the PTA meeting host would comment about rarely they attended meetings, how they needed to be more involved, how important it was that they were finally there after not attending consistently. FACE members reported feeling unfairly judged and embarrassed, and they expressed annoyance at the PTA leaders' perceptions that they were not involved with their children's education. Renée said,

I resent the fact they insinuated just because we do not come to PTA meetings regularly that we are not engaged in our children's education and even more so, that we care less about our kids than they do about theirs. Attending PTA meetings is not the only way to be engaged. It is not even the most useful way. Their judgment was unnecessary.

Chimeda, who regularly attended PTA meetings also expressed frustration about the leaders' comments, saying, "It made me feel bad because they are speaking about my friends and they don't know how much they care about their children." It

was not only other parents who assumed that FACE families were uninvolved when they did not participate in "visible" engagement strategies. School personnel also expressed a similar perception. For example, Nikki supported her high school aged daughter, Taylor, in advocating for herself. Instead of emailing teachers herself, Nikki would help Taylor to craft emails to the teachers. Ironically, Nikki was considered to be disengaged from Taylor's education. She shared a copy of meeting minutes she was sent from school personnel from a *School Support Team (SST)* meeting she had with three of her daughter's teachers, a school counselor, and the assistant principal. It read,

An immediate recommendation the team suggests is that Ms. Marshall becomes more engaged at Sunnybrook HS and in Taylor's education. Ms. Marshall should engage in ongoing communication with Ms. Krystal [the teacher] to monitor Taylor's progress in class. Ms. Marshall should communicate with Ms. Krystal and the front office when Taylor will miss school due to her illness, so that Ms. Krystal can have the opportunity to put a work packet together for Taylor to complete in her absence.

The notification reflects the school's perception of Nikki as an uninvolved parent. Because school personnel did not specifically see Nikki's work in helping Taylor to learn to speak up for herself, they assumed that Nikki was shirking her responsibilities. The recommendation of "more" engagement as part of a remedial action plan, clearly signals the school's perception that Nikki's lack of engagement was negatively impacting Taylor's success. Nikki's engagement strategy was invisible to school personnel as a valid approach to parent engagement.

Legitimacy of Representation

Another challenge FACE members experienced in implementing a shared labor approach was also impacted Nikki and other families that used child advocacy as a parent engagement strategy: legitimacy of the parent representative. Just as some school personnel did not recognize students as legitimate representatives in parent engagement activities, they sometimes did not recognize parents' chosen surrogates. For example, the group of parents that collaborated to engage in school activities, faced a lot of resistance from teachers. For example, members expressed having to complain to the principal when the children did not get extra credit even though the parent from the group that was in attendance listed all of their names. LaLani described having to go to principal after the teacher refused to grant her daughter the extra credit. She explained, "I told them Daveon was there for all of us and the teacher said he is not her parent. I said, 'So what, it's like a family, and he shared the packed from the meeting so I still got the information'." Renée expressed a similar sentiment,

I went to Lola's [LaLani's daughter] class right after I left Pandora's [her daughter] and the teacher asked why I was there. I explained [and] she said I needed to go to the office because that wasn't allowed. Luckily I had already confirmed the policy and told her, "No, I am sure it's fine. If you have a problem you can call down to Mr. Beldin [principal] I already cleared it with him." After that, she just gave me the evil eye until I left.

FACE families continued to find ways to make their invisible strategies, specifically shared labor, more effective. Despite the challenges it presented, FACE

families continued to utilize others from their social networks was an effective strategy for parent engagement.

Legitimate Parental Figures

Another challenge that connects to the idea of legitimate representatives and was most relevant for the male FACE members was the treatment of men by the schools. Every one of FACE's male members reported having at least one of three experiences: school personnel did not recognize men as a legitimate authority in their children's education; teachers or other school personnel expressed fear or intimidation in their interactions with men; or the men felt fetishized and minimized. For example, during the focus group, Greg, Aaliyah's husband, noted,

I went to talk to [the teacher] but she just looked scared like I was going to do something to her. Then when she told me she was going to email me the assignment sheet, I gave her my email and everything, but she still emailed it to Aaliyah.

Another father, Kyle, shared,

I went to the talk to the teacher, and you know me, I'm a pretty peaceful guy. She tells me I need to meet her in the principal's office because he needs to be there. I text Krystal and ask if this is typical and she said it has never happened to her. I think she was scared I was going to go off on her or something. I was not angry and didn't have a problem. I just wanted to look through Ayana's book to see if she was making a lot of mistakes on the classwork, but because the teacher felt like she needed security, I couldn't even see the work.

The men's perceptions that teachers were intimidated by their presence is significant because it made them feel unwelcome in the school. Additionally, the men had to be particularly conscientious about how their presence affected teachers, which took their focus away from their purpose in coming to the school: their child. This consciousness often caused them to monitor or restrain their responses to teachers and in situations that could affect their children.

Another father, Daveon, who was co-parenting, three children with two mothers, noted that he attempted to check in on his youngest son, the teacher would not allow him entry into the classroom or give him information because he was not on "the list." This was despite the fact that Daveon's name was listed on the child's birth certificate, he was noted as the father on the child's school registration form, and he was listed as an emergency contact. He requested that the office manager add him as a contact and send him a copy of everything they sent the mother; however, he recounted, "They said I needed to get a court order." Because neither parent had custody and their current arrangement was not court ordered, the school deferred to the mother to decide if Daveon could be listed on the contact list. Daveon said, "She will add me sometimes, then when I piss her off, she contacts the school and takes me off again. Next year I am going to try to go the first day and get my name in early that way I can have the power to add her." Daveon did not have this problem with his other two children's teachers, one of which was in the same school, so he knew this was not a universal policy. However, he believed, "The teacher has her own history or issues with men. Maybe her baby daddy ain't shit and she is trying to apply that to me, I don't know." Again, it appears that the teachers' perceptions of Daveon

negatively affected his access to his children's information, which he needed to make informed decisions. The teacher had constructed barriers to parent engagement based on her perception of Daveon's legitimacy as parent.

Another father, Nate, commented, "Even though they know Lil Nate's mother will not do anything, and that he lives with me, they will still call [his mother]. I have told them several time, if there is any problem at all, call me." It is not clear why the teachers defaulted to Lil Nate's mother even though Nate was the custodial parent; Nate believed it was intentional. He charged, "They call her because they know she will just say 'Ok, I will take care of it,' but not do anything, and especially not hold them accountable. They know when parents aren't really involved because they can get away with a lot of bullshit."

JaQuan also mentioned feeling disrespected when he attempted to communicate with his children's teachers and attend school meetings. He said, "They act like they have to ask Lorraine for her permission about my child, like I am not as much the parent as she is." JaQuan was frustrated when he asked for the weekly progress report, and the teacher informed him that she had already given it to Lorraine. He pondered, "What does that have to do with me? How hard is it for her to make a copy? I even told her she could take a picture of it and send it to me." Teachers' unwillingness to engage the fathers and provide them with the same levels of access to information as they provided to the mothers, presented a unique set of barriers for the men who participated in FACE. This was especially true for the men who were not married or cohabitating with their children's mothers.

Finally, a number of the men expressed disdain for what Kyle described as, “A dog and pony show,” when they visited the school. The men suggested when they were invited into the schools, it was more for publicity than for meaningful involvement. For example, Kyle and Marshawn both complained that the only time they were invited in the school was for Men Make a Difference Day, a yearly event that usually involves media and local politicians. They also said that when they visited the classroom, the teachers often change their regular schedules to entertain them. As Marshawn described,

I came in for Trice and she made a big deal like, "Oh we are so happy to have some men involved," and then she had the kids start making paper ties or something. When I came in they were reading. I preferred Trice to work on her reading than an art craft.

Several men expressed feeling like a novelty rather than respected as a parent who played an important role in the children’s academic development and success. Mike put it best, saying

While I know as men it is important that the children see us and you want to encourage men to come out, but if you make them [men] think it’s all fun and games with no real responsibilities, then don’t be surprised when they don’t do any of the real work.

While it is important to utilize various strategies to engage diverse groups of parents in their children’s education, it is not effective if the strategies are getting parents into the building or counted on ledgers but not actually involved in their children’s education. FACE members’ use of diverse strategies for parent engagement,

including sharing labor amongst families and friends, they still faced barriers and challenges to productive parent advocacy. When parent engagement frameworks are limited to only the parents who share a household, it creates a barrier to more creative and collaborative approaches to families' engagement.

Shared Knowledge

The structures in place that facilitated the ongoing sharing of information between FACE members were a critical component of the group and one of the key levers that facilitated the co-learning. The structure of the meetings was the most formal and consistent way FACE members shared information with one another. Another way, was through their informal networking and communications with each other outside of the meetings. One major benefit of the FACE group was the number of people in the group, who represented multiple schools. Because FACE membership was not bound by a particular school or school system, participants were able to share knowledge about a variety of schools, of different types. Every FACE member mentioned the availability and sharing of information as a significant benefit of participating in FACE. For example, Koron shared,

I love that it's so many people that are just willing to be real and share! I try to find out what other people are doing, what programs they're in, how they're enriching, how they enhance, different techniques they might be using that could help because I have two totally different kids and maybe somebody out there has figured out this works with this type of kid and that works with this type of kid.

Another FACE member, Tamara, reiterated the value of the exchange of information amongst FACE members, saying,

I belong to a couple of the Regal County social networks and I don't find that it's that helpful for the kids. But there's one that I find very helpful and that's our group [FACE] because there's a lot of sharing that goes on, a lot of sharing.

And another FACE member, LaLani, recounted,

Yeah, Karen [another FACE member] was the one who told me about the PEARL project. I can't remember what we did. Oh, we went to – you know like the Tiger Woods Foundation – at the Tech high school. Then I told her [her daughter's] TAG coordinator about it and I think she told other parents. So talking to other FACE parents, that's how I find out about things. That, church, and friends.

A critical takeaway regarding the importance of sharing for FACE members is the ways in which they shared with one another. In addition to FACE meetings, members used emails, text messages, and social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, to exchange ideas. Several members noted how these networking venues increased their access to information and, in turn, their ability to advocate for their children. For example, during the focus group, several participants mentioned how they communicated with other FACE members outside of FACE meetings:

Aaliyah: I'm always asking for just more of a support system. And now that we have social media, use it. Everyone's here [FACE] doing Facebook, whether it's email, Instagram, Twitter...

Kia: Talking to other parents, Facebook, you know the kind of social media applications, I think parents are sharing a lot of stuff. I like to think it makes me more engaged and [a] more informed mother.

The increased availability and use of social media presented opportunities for FACE families to quickly share information with multiple people. It also helped members to stay informed and engaged when they could not attend meetings. In this way, they could still be connected to the network and the work of the group and access information that was critical in making decisions about their children's education.

Challenges

The various strategies the FACE members utilized in order share and access information illuminates a number a challenges to effective parental engagement. The most glaring was the lack of equity and consistency across the schools in the county. For example, although equitable resources and opportunities were supposed to be available for all Regal County students, this was not always the case. Certain information about opportunities was not readily available on the school district's website, and members only learned of some opportunities from FACE members. The school districts' failure to make available information that FACE members deemed critical was a common source of frustration. For example, while discussing the dates and information for a high school fair hosted by RCPCS, Lorraine, who had an eighth grader noted,

Well, I was on the website today. And couldn't find it [information for high school fair]. I heard about it from somewhere, and I can't remember where it

was. So I went to the website and I can't find anything ever. And they changed it and you still can't find anything.

Because the website was not as informative or easy to navigate, FACE participants spent a lot of time researching and tapping a number of other sources to find information.

During the focus group, the lack of transparency and clear communication from the school district came up as a topic of conversation. FACE members noted,

Renée: I find that sharing of resources most valuable. Because that information is knowledge. I mean there are things that I find out from FACE that I should find out from the schools and I don't. Someone will share something and I'm like WHAT?!

Lorraine: Basically, I spend so much time just researching it. No one tells you. There's not a form or there's nothing in the school that will say, like, you know what?

Talay: No one tells you. You just have to hustle. So luckily we get a lot of information from the other parents.

Aaliyah: Just another day of life. And the website is not very helpful either. It would say, like, student transfer deadline. And I'm like, okay, well, how do I transfer? And, like, what do I need to transfer? There was an email address listed, I emailed, but no response, I was like, oh, well, that's not a real option.

Marshawn: It has been hard to find out about the choices and how – like, how do you know what your choices are and how to get them?

During the course of the research study, I collected a number of documents which represented communications from the schools. While most were school specific, a few were county-wide such, as text messages, website announcements, and flyers. However, it was difficult for FACE families to follow up on county-wide mass communications. The website rarely provided information that was easy to locate, and available documents were often outdated, as much as five years in some cases. The sharing amongst FACE families met a crucial need for information.

Furthermore, FACE members perceived available resources to be scarce, and if they believed they were privy to a resource that was limited, they sometimes hesitated to share the information. For example, some FACE members reported sharing information only after they had capitalized on it. As a result, some participants learned of opportunities only after they were no longer available. Additionally, participants wondered why some members were informed of opportunities and others were not, especially when they attended the same school. FACE members expressed a concern that they did not have adequate access to certain opportunities due to circumstances beyond their control, such as socio-economic status or their children's particular school, academic track, or teacher. For example, Tamara shared,

I still think it's very much in a lot of ways – well it's the know and the know nots. It's definitely not the haves and have nots. You know, some people are in the know and the people who don't know, either don't know, or don't have the capacity to take on any more. I don't know what it is. I don't want to say that they don't care. Every human being cares about their child.

Renée talked about an opportunity to participate in a biology class offered by the community college to which her daughter was invited, but her neighbor's child was not. When she inquired why her neighbor's child had not received a flyer, the school counselor told her she did not think his mother could arrange transportation. Renée stated,

It doesn't make sense, because, automatically, you're taking out a certain population of people who don't have parents with flexible hours that can drive them there or who don't have a car or who you think can't afford the fee. I wonder what opportunities Charlize [her daughter] hasn't been invited to because of what they think they know about our family and what we can or cannot do.

In some ways, school personnel were gate keepers of information. They had the ability to share school-related information when and with whom they wanted. For example, Renée noted, "Like, it's not a single, consistent policy throughout. That's frustrating, because then you're just at the helm of whoever is there. And they can tell you anything. And they do. They tell you what's convenient." However, through the social network created by FACE members, school-controlled information was shared among more people, and although this did not ensure that FACE members could take advantage of every opportunity, knowledge of resources was extremely valuable for the families in the study.

Conclusion

FACE members identified themselves as legitimate activists. Over the course of the study, they increasingly believed that they had power and gained benefits for

their children by utilizing a number of advocacy strategies. FACE, as community group, held a number of norms, beliefs, values, and traditions that allowed the members to work together to employ parent engagement strategies and parent advocacy in ways that are not currently well documented in the parent involvement literature. Shared power, responsibility, labor, and knowledge were paramount to the functioning of FACE and the related strategies of FACE members. These aspects of FACE affected how participants saw the connection between their parenting and parent engagement, as well as the way they engaged in and interpreted their engagement within the school system's existing parent engagement framework.

Participating in FACE provided families with multiple ways to meet their children's educational needs without engaging in school based activities they did not find valuable and effective. Additionally, FACE provided opportunities for families to develop their own sense of authority and claim their daily labor as legitimate parent engagement work. In one way, engaging in FACE gave a name and formalization to the parent advocacy work they were already doing in their daily lives. Being in FACE, with the support of their fellow FACE community members, also gave participants the knowledge and encouragement to try new strategies. Therefore, participating in FACE itself was a consistent act of advocacy and resistance to deficit views of Black families. Merely being a group of Black families who were doing the very thing that they have been accused of being ignorant about and disinterested in, is, in itself, a form of activism. The FACE members both welcomed and relished in this idea.

Hill Collins (2000) notes, “The power to save the self lies with self. Other Black women may assist a Black woman in this journey toward personal empowerment, but the ultimate responsibility for self-definition and self-valuation lies within the individual woman herself” (p. 119). This quote can be extended to the entire FACE group. The group’s significance for its participating families; though shrouded under a cloak of invisibility to the mainstream, was visible to them with significant clarity. FACE members' participation in the various advocacy and parent engagement strategies discussed in this chapter demonstrate the “desire for grassroots activism on behalf of families and communities” (Radford-Hill, 2000, p. 101). While this chapter described the processes, organization, and functioning of the FACE group as a community, participation in the group not only changed how these families interacted with one another and approached parent engagement as a collective. It also shifted the ways they individually defined, understood, and participated in parenting and parent engagement. The next chapter, describes how FACE members began to understand their parenting responsibilities as revolutionary, and as a specific form of parental engagement.

Chapter 6: Responsibilities of Being a Parent

This chapter elucidates the FACE members' understanding of fulfilling the *Responsibilities of Being a Parent*, as not only an impetus, but also a specific strategy for parental advocacy. FACE members explicitly described their effective implementation of parenting and parental responsibilities as a revolutionary and liberatory practice similar to the way in which Hill-Collins (1991) conceptualizes "motherwork," also known as caregiving. For FACE members, their advocacy work for their children and their parental engagement were unambiguously and intimately tied to their understanding of their responsibilities as a parent or caregiver. Due to educational research and mainstream media outlets' negative perceptions of Black mothers, they are often "forced to expend energy (as if being a parent isn't hard enough) trying to outrun the idea they are bad mothers who birth and then neglect bad kids with uninvolved, baby daddies" (Winfrey Harris, 2015, p. 67). When asked how they engaged in their children's education FACE participants frequently gave examples related to the child's well-being or survival. FACE members' perceived their ability to implement effective parent strategies as revolutionary.

Participants perceived performing "motherwork" or care work satisfactorily and taking care of their children as parental engagement, or rather, parental advocacy. Although it can be argued that every parent sees care work as a part of their basic parental responsibilities, FACE members maintained that performing parental duties and responsibilities were paramount to their advocacy and engagement as related to their children's schooling. This is significant as Winfrey-Harris (2015) notes, because Black mothers' efficacy at domesticity and care work for their own children is not often not acknowledged, thus, "it is easy for people to miss the elements of

universality in parenting experiences-they worrying, the work, and the joy” (p. 68). They were concerned with developing their children’s best selves and described engagement with their child’s development as a basic parental responsibility or duty. This interpretation challenges the work of earlier social scientists who posited that Black families were too bogged down by meeting their children’s Maslow’s needs to have much time to care about anything else, particularly academic, social, or emotional development or well-being. It also challenges the perception that Black people as a cultural community were not as interested or invested in their children’s academic development and success as they were other areas, such as their sports abilities or street smarts. These popular assertions were known by FACE families, and was an active part of their subconscious. FACE members’ choices and actions were often motivated by the desire to be considered and respected as “good parents”; especially the male members.

By ensuring their children’s well-being and survival, the participants saw themselves as strategizing, maneuvering, and advocating against existing challenges and societal ills that disproportionately affect Black children and have adverse effects on their futures. For the participants, fulfilling these parental responsibilities and ensuring the survival and well-being of their children was an intentional investment in not only their children’s lives but their own lives and well-being. These responsibilities corresponded to the three sub-themes examined below: (1) the *children’s academic and cognitive development*, (2) the *children’s mental and physical health*, and (3) the *children’s social development and well-being*.

Supporting Academic and Cognitive Development

FACE members expressed a responsibility to ensure their children flourished both academically and cognitively, and they believed that their intervention was necessary in order for their children to receive high quality academic support in school and in other settings outside of the home. FACE members utilized multiple strategies to improve their children's academic and cognitive outcomes including engaging children in school readiness practices, assisting with homework, and acquiring outside support such as tutoring when students were in danger of falling behind academically,

Parents perceived academically preparing their children for school as a primary responsibility, and believed in "doing whatever they had to do" in order to meet that responsibility. For example, Koron, married, with two daughters, said, "I just think there's a lot of responsibility on the parent to educate their kids to fill all these gaps that aren't being met, to check and know where the gaps are." This sense of responsibility to educate her children, to make sure they were academically prepared for school, and to address any gaps in learning that may not have been addressed by the school was a direct impetus for Koron's parental advocacy. Likewise, another participant, Krystal, felt that in order for her children to be academically successful, she and her husband Kyle had to supplement the learning opportunities provided at school. She stated:

At the beginning we started out with a supplemental reading and math program for them when they were about three years old, so they got a jump on math. We didn't want them to struggle in school. We saw too many times that children struggle, and with the classroom sizes increasing, the kids

weren't given an opportunity to truly learn at a comfortable pace, which put a lot more pressure on the child and the parents at home.

Although Krystal mentioned this parental engagement in reflection as it happened several years prior, she clearly believed it was her responsibility to support her children's academic development. Krystal's statement reflects the sentiment of many of the FACE families' apprehension or distrust of their local schools. FACE families routinely expressed a lack of belief and faith that the schools would adequately support their children's academic development. As a result of this mistrust, families felt it was their responsibility to provide additional learning opportunities for their children.

Many of the parents viewed their efforts to support their children's academic success as an investment in their children's and their own well-being. The families saw this investment as something that would pay dividends for many years to come. Aaliyah, stated:

Sometimes, I feel, honestly, as a mother, like, they didn't ask to be here and so it is my responsibility to make sure that they are academically on track.

Basically, they're my investment, because what they do will affect me.

Eventually, they're gonna take care of me.

Aaliyah expressed a feeling of a responsibility, as a mother, to ensure her children were developing academically. Kyle, Krystal's husband, also talked about his engagement in his children's academic development, particularly sending them to a private school, as an investment, saying,

We don't like the expenses that come with paying to attend a private school. That kind of irritates us, but we realize that pay now or pay later. It's an investment...I've always taught them that if they don't do better than me, then I failed them, and they failed, and that's not an option. So we're doing all we can right now.

Marshawn, who did not have any children of his own but supported his sister's two children, responded to Kyle's statement in the focus group discussion, saying, "That is the truth. We have to rely on this generation. These are the ones that are going to be taking care of us later so if we don't make sure they right, we all in trouble."

Participants defined their commitment and interests in their children's education as parental advocacy and acknowledged it as their responsibility as parents or caretakers. The children's life outcomes impacted the parents' lives in many ways. One, in present day, parents were aware that they and their parenting were often judged based off the students' present day performance and behavior as people often saw this as indicative of their future outcomes. Second, parents believed if the children were not able to thrive once they grew up, they would continue to be a financial burden to the parents into adulthood and would not be able to support the parents in their own old age. The fulfillment of parental responsibilities as an investment in the children's life outcomes was a popular sentiment among FACE participants and underscored a lot of the decisions and sacrifices they made for their children.

Another responsibility that participants mentioned as being a core component of their parenting or care work was helping with homework and taking advantage of existing support systems outside of the school (e.g. tutoring) to provide their children

with additional academic support. In fact, when asked how they engaged in their children's education, each and every participant mentioned homework as a strategy for parental engagement and educational advocacy. Renée, a mother of two, argues:

I mean at the end of the day I only really have three responsibilities when it comes to the school and that's making sure my children come every day on time, that they come to school either haven eaten breakfast or with money for breakfast, and that I help them with their homework. That's it. Anything else they ask of me I can choose to do or not do.

With this statement Renée acknowledges a self-assigned responsibility of helping her children with their homework, among other things related to care work. Of the three things that she considers absolutely essential (including providing nourishment), Renée lists providing homework help. Her listing homework as this core responsibility essential to both her children's well-being and her role as a mother is significant. To Renée, homework help is an essential responsibility.

Homework help was also a way that FACE members who do not have school-aged children expressed supporting children's education. For example, Mariabelle a grandmother who assists her daughter Talay with her middle school aged son acknowledged:

One thing I always do is make sure Bryan gets his homework out. I help him every day and I check it over. Talay [her daughter] doesn't get home 'til late so it's my responsibility to make sure that homework gets done.

Mariabelle and Ms. Karen, FACE members without school-aged children, both provided homework help as an act of caregiving. Ms. Karen, who led the Girl Scouts at the elementary school in which FACE meetings were held, said,

You know it's really important that the girls have time to do their homework, and it's a lot for the parents. They are running here, there...so I always make sure I give them some time to do their homework, and I look it over. I feel it's the least that I can do because these parents got a lot going on.

Ms. Karen and Mariabelle sharing the parenting role and responsibilities are significant contributions to not only caregiving but also to the academic growth and development of the children. Homework help is a traditional expectation of parental engagement shared by both the FACE members and parental engagement literature; however, by only polling mothers and fathers, the help of extended family members and other adults is lost. Both Mariabelle and Karen are two of the oldest members of F.A.C.E, both are over 55 years old; however, both are actively engaged with supporting children's education. Extended family members as a resource for child rearing and parental engagement was a consistent source of support and strategy for effective parental engagement strategy for FACE members

Finally, in addition to homework help, a few participants reported choosing outside support to help with the academic development of their children. Even if families felt unprepared to offer support in a particular area, regardless of their own educational backgrounds, perceived limitations, or financial challenges, ensuring their children's academic preparedness was paramount. If family members were not confident in their own ability to provide adequate academic support to their children;

they made additional sacrifices to locate the support they perceived was necessary for their children. FACE families recognize their own personal limitations in helping their children with their studies and saw it as their responsibility to seek outside help for their children, even if it meant an economic sacrifice. This type of support is worth mentioning separately as even though participants chose this type of engagement as a way to meet their identified responsibility, it presents a unique set of challenges, especially economic. The most common type of such support was tutoring by a private tutor or a center. The price FACE members reported spending for a tutor ranged from \$15-\$65 dollars an hour. FACE members reported having a tutor for children as young as 6th grade up to 11th grade.

Math was the most common topic reported for tutoring, with science and foreign language support tied for second place. Families reported acquiring the support of a tutor or educational center most often for one of three reasons: a lack of confidence in their own knowledge or skillset to support the child based on perceived changes to the content or strategies used to (often in reference to Common Core State Standards shifts), a lack of patience or available emotional space, or a lack of time. For example, Talay mentioned the way the math has changed and doubted she had the necessary skillset to effectively support her son:

My son has a math tutor. We got him a math tutor so that he could actually pass math. If it wasn't for the tutor, he would fail math. And they do math a different way than we did. I don't even know how to do it.

Another participant Renée, mentioned she sought tutoring support from a local learning center for her daughter, also for mathematics. Renée shared:

I had to send her to *ABC Learning Center*⁴ to help her with math. I tried to help her at home but I just didn't have the time or the patience. I noticed it was changing our relationship and I was yelling and screaming all the time and our time together was becoming increasingly hostile. So I just decided to suffer through it and pay the money for a tutor. I'm glad I did because it did help her understand the math better.

The sacrifices these families made to invest in the additional instructional support for their children are significant. While they understood it was their responsibility to help their children academically, they did not feel they personally had the knowledge or skills to help them, particularly with mathematics. The combination of accepting this as a responsibility and not feeling adequately prepared to meet that responsibility adds some additional burdens to those families. One, both Talay and Renée are the sole income earners in their homes. The tutoring they have chartered for their children is not free, and is an economic sacrifice for both families. Every family that paid for tutoring for a child lamented about the price of the services and the challenges with being able to sustain the support on an ongoing basis. However, the cost for not paying for tutoring seemed to outweigh the actual financial cost of the tutoring. For Talay, she believes that her son would fail math, a core content course, without the support of the tutor. Renée is paying for the price of a tutor in order to not pay the cost of compromising and harming her relationship with her daughter.

Generally, the participants recognized their children's academic development as, ultimately, their responsibility as parents or caregivers, which was the impetus for

⁴ Pseudonym

their utilization of diverse strategies for parental advocacy. In direct contradiction to the narrative that Black Americans do not value education or are not as engaged in their children's education as other cultural and ethnic groups, the FACE families maintained four key perspectives and beliefs that were critical to their advocacy. First, the FACE families understood their current advocacy and engagement as an investment in their children's future. FACE members were playing the long game and identified sacrifices they were making in the present day as deposits into their children's futures. Second, FACE families spent a lot of time supplementing the education children received from the school. FACE families, were not wholly reliant, dependent, or trusting in the school personnel's ability to provide their children with everything they required for future success. Relatedly, the families recognized their own personal limitations in supporting their children's cognitive development and sought to augment the support they were unable to provide when necessary. Finally, as described in the previous chapter, FACE members were committed to sharing the labor and responsibility of supporting the children's academic and cognitive development with their extended family. This utilization of their extended network was an effective strategy for families in order to increase the amount of support available for the children.

The scope of mainstream parent involvement frameworks are much too narrow and limiting to capture the way FACE families approached their responsibilities for ensuring their children's cognitive and academic needs were supported. The impact of FACE families' advocacy for their children's academic development went far beyond their school experience and performance. Instead,

families consistently contradicted perceptions of Black families' as deficient, disinterested, and disengaged in their children's academic development.

Social Development and Well-Being

Amongst FACE families, taking responsibility for their children's social lives and social development was also an important aspect of parental advocacy. FACE members felt that their children's out of school time was as important as the time they spent in school in terms of their development. They communicated beliefs which supported the idea that their children's social lives not only presented additional learning opportunities but also directly impacted their quality of life. For example, in discussing her children, Ruby shared, "On paper they look outstanding, you know? Personality wise, they still need some shaping socially, but my job is to put them on a path so they can be successful." FACE members constantly referred to the idea of putting their children on a particular pathway towards a desired social network or outcome as a way of investing in their future.

Several sub-themes emerged which captured how FACE members understood their responsibilities related to their children's social development. Generally, they wanted to raise happy, healthy, well-rounded children. Specifically, they believed *limiting or choosing children's social networks* would put their children in social positions that would have long-lasting benefits. Some parents associated these benefits with children's access to social networks of individuals who shared values and beliefs. Oftentimes, their desire was not necessarily to have their children *opt-in* but instead, to *opt-out* of certain social experiences. FACE members actively sought ways to contribute to their children's social development as an active form of parental

advocacy by being intentional in their selection or restriction of extracurricular activities and their children's social groups.

Choosing or limiting children's social networks

The company the children kept was an omnipresent concern of many FACE members. Eight FACE members expressed a desire to place their children within social networks they felt were productive and "acceptable." The definition of acceptability fluctuated among group members, and, in some cases, was deeply rooted in beliefs and understanding of race, age, class, and gender. Although, no FACE members mentioned class explicitly (unlike race and gender) they referenced it in a variety of ways. FACE families were very conscious of existing stereotypes and discriminatory actions that their children might experience as a result of their race and gender and actively engaged their children in experiences they believed would protect or shield their children from these harmful practices.

In the 21st century children have access to all types of different media, resources, and imagery their parents were not always able to control. Stereotypes, beliefs and images of all gender and cultural groups are constantly represented in different forms. However, particularly for Black youth, these images are often negative and detrimental to their psyche. FACE members were aware of these images and perceptions of Black youth, and actively sought to both make and prove their child was a counterexample to these negative images. Families believed in addition to the child's disposition, the company they kept played a role in developing their personality. Additionally, the company the children kept also informed others about

the type of children they were. Therefore, the children's friends and social networks were a constant concern.

One strategy FACE members used to choose their children's social networking was linking up with families or organizations that shared the family's values, beliefs, and worldviews. For instance, when discussing their parental engagement strategies, about a third of FACE families mentioned putting their children in situations where they could be with children from "like-minded" families. For example, Kyle stated,

With the swimming, they [his children] get to be around like-minded people. We find ourselves interacting with the parents. They're all like-minded, they all have their kids play sports, they are involved in the schools, and boards of education, and all that. Their kids' friends and their surroundings, they understand that they are their surroundings, so they act accordingly. So the choosing of their friends is strategic under the parents, but also they select their own friends from that mold, and they see when their friends are out of order and doing things that aren't appropriate.

Kyle, and other FACE members, assumed that children from "like-minded" families were appropriate peers and friends for his children. According to Kyle, like-minded parents were those who provided structured activities for and were involved in the formal education of their children. He refers to the children as being reflections of their "surroundings" and those surroundings impacting their behavior, which seems to infer neighborhood dynamics or class. Kyle believes these social networks will help

his children to develop a particular set of norms and behavior which are desirable to his family.

JaQuan, also referenced actively choosing his child's social networks as a strategy for positively affecting their social development. However, in this case, JaQuan's primary goal was help his children to avoid potentially negative influences. Speaking of his son, he reported,

I signed him up for basketball so he can have something to do outside of school. Our network of friends is really small, and I was talking with my son about that today that we don't allow anything to cross our threshold that's trouble. Yes they can play at the court up the street, but he needs to watch the company he keeps. I don't want them to grow up like we grew up where you have the interesting home bullshit drugs and violence and looking at those dynamics. So on one hand, I see it being beneficial, because it's a lot less stress for myself and them, and their environments are grief free.

Other FACE families also enrolled their children in particular organizations or schools based on the social networks to which their children would be exposed. For example, Talay commuted 56 miles a day (round trip) four times a week so her son, Bryan, could be on a swim team with other Black children, even though there were at least five swim teams within a 10 mile radius of her house. For Talay, who was is a single parent, placing Bryan on the swim team was a significant financial commitment. Although Bryan received a scholarship to help offset the cost of swim team membership, the additional time and transportation costs presented a challenges for Talay. During the interview, she was asked why she kept Bryan on this particular

swim team given the financial and time inconveniences. Talay explained how his varying social networks affected many of her choices about the types of organizations in which Bryan engaged, including school. Bryan engaged in multiple sports activities located in different neighborhoods from his home and school. Talay moved to her current neighborhood in order to have access to what she believed was a better schooling option for Bryan. However, Talay determined that the social networks there and at Bryan's school were not advantageous for him. She acknowledged the inconvenience of going outside of her immediate neighborhood to enroll Bryan in various activities. However, this gave Bryan access to social networks which Talay felt would benefit his social development, specifically, those that were more racially diverse. Although Talay identified herself and her son as Black, her mother who lived with her was Biracial and most of the relatives they were close to, including Bryan's stepfather, were not Black. Bryan not living with nor having a relationship with his Black father, or any other Black relative may have played a significant role in Talay's decision to keep his social network filled with as significant a Black population as possible.

Renée was also interested in choosing her children's social networks which played a role in her decision to send her oldest daughter to the magnet middle school rather than her neighborhood school or a private school. Similar to Talay, race was also a major consideration for Renée. She shared,

All the kids from Charlize's TAG elementary decided to go to the TAG middle. So by the time she got to middle school, she already had a social

network in place so it just kept moving...I didn't send her to *Margaret*⁵ [all girl's private school] cause I will be damned if she is "the Black girl" all through high school.

Similar to Talay, race and the diversity of the social network her child would experience played a huge role in Renée's decision she made not only for the types and locations of the extracurricular activities they enrolled their children in, but the schools they would attend. Both Talay and Renée valued communities heavily populated with Black people, and wanted their children to be a part of those communities. They both communicated some uneasiness about their child being the only one or one of a few Black children in the school or organization. They desired for their children to be amongst other Black children, maybe because they felt they would be more comfortable, in Renée's case, or would become indoctrinated in the Black community and learn pertinent information to being a Black male, as in Talay's case.

For a number of FACE members, like Renée, access to social networks had a strong impact on their perceptions of and decisions around their children's schooling. In addition to race, gender was also a critical factor for many families. Several FACE families worried about their daughters hanging around girls who were interested in boys, were promiscuous, or as Koron put it "wanted to be members of the *Bad Girls Club*." Koron expressed concern that her 13 year old daughter would be easily influenced or susceptible to bullying by others as, "Kathryn acts more like an 8-year old. And she's always been behind that maturity curve. It just caused a problem and

⁵ Pseudonym

everybody sees it. Always behind that maturity curve.” Koron worried about the type of people Kathryn would form relationships with in school and, in response, organized what she described as “teenage playdates” for Kathryn to build positive peer relationships.

Kyle reported that he removed his daughter from her neighborhood public school and placed her in a private school because he did not approve of the friendships she was forming. Once he removed her from the old school, he also limited her ability to communicate with friends from her previous school. He explained,

The conversation she and I had in the car when I picked her up from school showed that her mind was no longer on her hair, how many friends she had, how many followers she had on Twitter and she don’t wanna go back, because she knows the level of learning wasn’t there. Now, the conversations are different. For her, the concentration was on being liked by her friends in a social dynamic of girls, and now a lot of the girls, they’re a lot sharper than she is. Furthermore, you hear her in the science room — she was never into science or anything. It’s what high school they’re gonna go to, and what college they’re gonna go to. In the old school her whole thing was what she ate for lunch, and now she can go over verbatim what she did in every class and the assignment, and so now she understands how she needs to organize her life and her thoughts. It’s very systematic.

Here, Kyle describes how children's social networks can impact their academic development. He felt it was his responsibility to enroll his daughter in a school where

she would be around children who were focused on schoolwork rather than socializing which, he felt, was more productive and appropriate.

The boys' social networks were as much of a concern for FACE members as the girls'. However, the boys' social networks were of particular interests to the fathers. The mothers' spoke of the boys' social networks mostly in regards to getting them involved with sports organizations. However, the men mostly strategies for keeping the boys out of the streets. No father mentioned keeping his daughter out of the streets; only their sons. This suggests the parents saw the streets as more of a threat for the boys than girls. The men, in particular, felt personally responsible to see that their boys were not influenced by the streets. The danger of street life emerged in one of two ways. Either they worried about their boys being genuinely drawn to the streets and street activity, and or, worried they would be hanging out with street-identified youth, even if they were not street themselves, and as a result, be stereotyped as a "thug" and receive the aligned consequences. They expressed their concerns as their male children being perceived as "guilty by association" (Nate) or as Marshawn put it, "becoming one of these rockhead, fake, go-hard thugs out here in Regal County."

FACE members were extremely sensitive to stereotypes and perceptions of Black males and they actively attempted to exclude or limit their children's access to social networks that included members who reflected these stereotypes. For example, during the focus group meeting Kyle shared that he did not allow his son, Kyle Jr., to join a particular Parks and Recreation basketball team with Nate's son, who was Kyle Jr.'s friend, because he felt the team was:

Full of little roughnecks and Kyle is not ready for that. You can see it in his face, just like a lot of the boys in this group [FACE] you can look in their faces and see they're good boys. They wouldn't know what to do in that type of environment and would get eaten alive.

Kyle's, as well as Nate's and Marshawn's, perspective suggests a line of demarcation between "good boys" and "bad boys," which they described as "thugs" and "roughnecks," who were unsavory and possibly unsafe. On the other hand, the fathers especially were concerned that they would be too overprotective of their boys or shelter them so much that they did not know how to handle themselves out in the real world, particularly, the streets. Marshawn, followed up to Kyle's comment and said:

But on the other end, I worry about the social aspect when they are not under my wing, how are they gonna react when they happen to encounter some of these people that are just different? But we'll cross that bridge. But we do have these conversations, so hopefully they won't look shook like they've never eaten a hot dog before in their life, you know?

This suggests something that is in the back of many parents' minds. What happens when you can no longer protect or shelter your children from unfavorable situations and people? Is it actually counterproductive to their social development if they are not engaging in more diverse communities and situations? FACE families employed specific strategies to negotiate and rationalize the tradeoffs between protecting their children and keeping them safe; but also, making sure their children were well rounded and knew how to code-switch in language and behavior between multiple environments. By choosing their social networks, families were able to surround

themselves around Black people with similar values which was for them, the best of both worlds. Whatever the case, any challenges or problems the children faced as a result of the choices the parents made would have to be dealt with later and they would as Kyle said, “cross that bridge” when they get to it.

For the participants, limiting and choosing children’s social networks were similar strategies but the manner in which they were expressed and experienced was different. Limiting social networks was often related to preventing children from socializing or building relationships with people whom participants felt would have a negative influence on their children's lives, or networks they felt posed a safety issue for the children. Contradictorily, when families expressed choosing their children's social networks, which may have been informed by stereotypes and biases, the main goal was to expose their children to more diverse, inclusive social networks. There were certain behaviors or values they believed were present in these social networks and they wanted their children to acquire or develop those behaviors and values as well. Interestingly, sometimes parents were trying to get their children into social networks, and the parents within those social network were, unwittingly, trying to exclude their children from joining.

For example, Kyle and Krystal’s children were actively engaged with their local Boys and Girls Athletic Clubs. Depending on the season, the children played soccer, basketball, football, cheerleading or lacrosse. In Regal County, Boys and Girls Clubs are open to any county resident, regardless of boundary. Marshawn and Nate heard Kyle discuss the club and the two of them, plus a couple of their friends and families went to join that specific Boys and Girls Club. They specifically were

interested in their lacrosse which was not available at their local Boys and Girls Club and also basketball because that team was better ranked than their local team. When Kyle saw Nate's brothers and their children he made a disparaging remark to Nate about, "Talking to the coach about the hoods that were trying to join their gym," not realizing they were related to Nate. Kyle was judging the families based off appearance and had not considered that they were one, related to Nate, and two that they were families with similar values and beliefs as his. The desire to keep his children's social network controlled and void of any and all unsavory images, beliefs, or behaviors, outweighed his desire for diversity.

Raising them right

Finally, FACE families expressed a sincere commitment to what several members referred to as "raising them right." FACE members expressed a fear of raising Black children in today's world. They worried the girls would be violated or taken advantage of sexually, and they worried the boys would meet a violent end either at the hands of another Black man or the police. FACE members expressed two different approaches to teaching the children social skills to survive based on gender. They believed the girls would mostly benefit from developing a positive self-image and self-esteem. The approach for the boys, however, was to explicitly teach them survival skills and to develop their physical strength. FACE members utilized a number of strategies including finding role models and giving advice to develop the necessary social skills for girls and boys. Additionally, they reported signing the girls up for organizations or programs focused specifically on developing girls' self-

esteem, and the boys for athletic programs and organizations, to help them improve their physical strength.

For example, Malaysia reflected, “I spend a lot of times with my girls. I want them to feel like they can talk to me and tell me anything. It is important to be honest with them about what’s out there in the world.” Renée added, “Yeah, you don’t want them to be naïve like I was. They listening to some boy tell them he loves them, they loving that attention, then the next thing you know they pregnant.” Similarly, LaLani added, “I know what I was like at their age and what I went through. I do not want them to be afraid to tell me different problems they may face or questions they may have, especially about boys or sex.” Relatedly, Mike, Koron’s husband stated, “I do everything for my daughters. I make sure I’m their first dates. Their first boyfriends. I school them to game. That way, anything a [brother] says to them they have already heard it and they peep game.” FACE members advocated for talking to their daughters about the opposite sex and teaching them about the dangers that can come from engaging in relationships, both emotional and physical, with boys. FACE members also mentioned being supporting their girls with developing positive self-images. Renée shared,

I am very careful to only expose my girls to reaffirming images. Them both being natural, I do not want them to feel negative about their hair or to think it’s ugly or nappy. I also don’t want them bullying or putting other girls down. When people compliment Pandora I make sure to compliment Charlize because she is just as pretty, she is just darker. I do not let them play with White dolls. I make sure to constantly point out other beautiful Black women

with dark skin, natural hair, and different bodies. Beyoncé, of course, she is beautiful. But so is Kelly, Lauryn Hill, Jill Scott, Janelle Monae, Amber Riley, all of them. I do not want my girls to grow up thinking that they are not beautiful or not having a positive self-esteem based off their looks. Once you have low self-esteem, you will fall for anything.

Lalah also noted, “I signed Monica up for that Debutante program at Parks...she can learn how to be a lady, etiquette, build her self-esteem because it is like a beauty pageant. Plus she will meet other girls who have done it before.” Families believed by finding appropriate role models for the girls to look up to, giving them meaningful compliments, and teaching them about positive self-image was a great way to build their self-esteem and increase their social skills and ability to relate to others, especially boys. FACE families believed if the girls were confident and self-assured they would not have a lot of social problems, especially related to dealing with boys.

FACE families were equally concerned with teaching boys social skills; however, the male members took more of a responsibility for implementing that social education than the females. The mothers tended to direct their sons to athletic organizations and teams in order to develop their social skills. For example, Talay stated, “Bryan is on a lot of different teams because that brotherhood is important for boys. They learn teamwork and how to get along with others.” However, the fathers took a more direct approach. Although they all supported their boys engaging in athletics, they mentioned more direct teaching and apprenticeship type programs to as Nate put it, “teach my son how to be a man.” Specifically, the men attempted to teach the boys how to protect themselves and how to avoid problematic situations.

Daveon, father with three sons, discussed what he called “an introductory course to the streets” for his sons. Daveon shared how he took his sons places with him and took time to narrate situations as well as what could have happened if he had made a different choice. For example, he shared, “I take them to the store, show how to make sure they stay alert, go in and out, look like they know what they came for, money not out but already in hand, squared up ready for whatever.” Nate described a similar situation, “Go to the court with your mans, make sure y’all aware, looking out for one another, have his back. Soon as shit feel like it’s about to pop off or it’s getting a little hot, roll out. No questions, no talking.” Kyle, shared an email with the group explaining how he taught his son how to deal with the police if he were to be stopped or pulled over the police, including what to say, where to position body, body language, eye contact, etc.,. When asked if he taught it too his daughter too, he explained, “No unnecessary. Being a female, she is not as much as a threat so she is not going to have to deal with the same shit. These police live to harass and kill Black men, so this is necessary for Kyle [Jr.] and all brothers really.” Finally, JaQuan, mentioned why a lot of his time with his sons was spent in the gym. He reflected,

Yeah we spend a lot of time in the gym, not necessarily because I think they are going to the NFL, but because I want to make sure they can throw them hands. I don’t want them to be a little bitch, so we square off. As long as someone is going to give them the fair one, they good.

When asked if he spent time with his daughter the same way, JaQuan noted, “Of course we have our father-daughter time together but I am not going to have her in the gym bulking up. We do other things like dinner, movies, I went with her once to

the nail salon, which was an experience.” While parents spent a considerable amount of time socializing both their male and female children; they took different approaches and had different concerns, based on what they perceived to be the actual threats the children could encounter.

Mental and Physical Health

The final sub-theme describing FACE members’ perceptions of their roles as advocates for their children’s educational experiences included issues related to the physical and mental health of their children. While these issues came up more infrequently than academic or social development, all of the participants referenced health and wellness in some way. Providing for children’s mental and physical well-being is a basic parental responsibility. However, when parenting Black children, one has to be attentive to the ways in which daily living presents unique challenges to well-being for these children. As children spend a great deal of time outside of the home in schools, participants were concerned with how their children’s schooling experiences were affecting their health. Participants noted being propelled into action based on concerns for their children’s physical and mental health. Additionally, FACE participants discussed making decisions to improve the health and well-being of their children and taking their children’s mental and physical health into consideration when making decisions related to their education. At least seventeen participants' mentioned health-related concerns for their children related to school pressures, teachers’ perceptions and biases, and children's self-esteem.

Physical Health

Taking care of their children and helping them stay healthy was as much a concern for the FACE families as other families. A number of the children had ongoing medical issues such as asthma, severe food allergies, diabetes, or sickle cell anemia. These families mentioned attempting to not only keep their child educated on their own condition, but taking the time to educate the adults that interacted with their children so that they could also support their health. One parent, Renée, whose daughter had severe food allergies and asthma mentioned,

It's a lot, but my greatest fear is something happens and no one knows what to do. That's why talk about it so much, not to keep people in my business, but to just make them aware. If I mention enough that she is allergic to dairy, you will think twice about offering her a cupcake, and if you forget, maybe someone else will see it and say something.

Another parent, Chimeda, whose daughter had diabetes, mentioned making sure to make copies of her daughter's emergency health plan, and share them with her child's teachers. She noted, "They told me I needed to just make a copy for the nurse and leave it there, but her classroom is on the other side of the building. She will be DEAD by the time they get her to the nurse or the nurse gets there." Chimeda's child teacher kept a copy of the emergency plan, but Chimeda mentioned requiring her daughter Ife to keep emergency medication in her backpack even though it was against school rules as all medication was required to be held in the nurse's office.

A physical health concern a number of families mentioned was weight, particularly they did not want their children to be overweight. Talay, felt her son

Bryan was overweight and mentioned creating food plans for him, taking him to a nutritionist, and encouraging him to get exercise to lose the weight. She stated,

He is embarrassed to take off his shirt, I say ‘well you need to lose weight then!’, he’s too embarrassed he will not swim on the high school team because he thinks people will make fun of his weight. So I am doing what I can to help him.

Another parent, Aaliyah, mentioned the location of the school from her house was a consideration when she was choosing schools for her youngest son, because she hoped, “The daily walk would give him some much needed exercise.” Renée also spoke often about her daughter’s Pandora’s weight. She sometimes called her “Fatty Patty” or made flippantly, seemingly mean remarks about her daughter’s weight. Talay confronted her saying, “Don’t do that! Do not call her fat! She’s fine. If you think she needs to lose weight, you are the Mom, monitor her diet, make sure she gets exercise, but don’t call her names, you are going to make her develop a complex.” Renée, acknowledged she was wrong and said she would “attempt to reduce the name calling, but, if she is fat, it is important for me to tell her before it gets too out of hand.” Another member, Lalah, overheard and shared a website for quick smoothie recipes which were supposed to be healthy and kid friendly, noting, “She [Pandora] can make them herself. They are so easy.” FACE members often challenged one another if they felt the other member was not acting within the best interest of the child. However, they also supported one another with suggestions for how to manage the children’s health, including recommendations for meals or exercise activities. Renée later signed Pandora up for cheerleading.

Finally, a number of FACE families mentioned their children were “stressed out.” They expressed concerns that the children’s schedules and school coursework were stressing them out. Lalah observed, “Jermaine comes home and he is exhausted. Between school, swimming, the commute over the bridge, he is DONE. He be going at Elijah [his brother]. He is a mess.” Additionally, Angela mentioned, “Malik is stressed out, you hear me? It’s not like when I was younger. No, they have to have this class and that class, do this community service, go to this activity. It’s a lot. He is going to snap one day.” Sometimes, they made comments to one another about their children. For example, Ruby mentioned to Aaliyah, “Is Marcus ok? He looks zoned out!” to which Aaliyah replied, “Girl, he is just stressed. He has a lot on his plate right now.” FACE families were very perceptive of their children’s mental and physical state and reached out to one another as well as others to try to get support for their children. Whether it was a chronic or long standing health concern or a temporary or newly emerged situation, FACE families felt it was their responsibility to not only notice when their own child was facing physical challenges, but other children as well. FACE members very much considered that interests a part of their parent engagement and parental advocacy.

Mental Health

Mental health was a major concern mentioned by more than half of the FACE participants who mentioned health concerns. One expressed concern was the stress and mental anguish that students experienced at school as a result of pressures to succeed academically. Sometimes these pressures came from the schools and school personnel. Sometimes they came from family members and sometimes the pressures

came from the children themselves. Either way, although families wanted their children to be academically successful, they were not willing to compromise the children's mental health. Participants felt that, as parents, it was their responsibility to alleviate the pressures they believed negatively affected their children.

Many FACE families were concerned about the amount of school work students were asked to do in short periods of time. This was a particularly true for participants whose children attended magnet and specialty schools⁶. For example, Malayshia's daughter, Takara, attended fourth grade in a specialty school. She worried about the stress that Takara experienced in trying to keep up with the workload and responsibilities of school and her academically successful peers. Malayshia asserted,

I worry everyday about Takara. She comes home and she is drained and then she still has another three hours left of homework. And Takara is smart. She's always been smart but you know now she is seeing stuff that she's never seen before and it's getting a little difficult. Like one thing that is coming up lately is fractions. And she gets frustrated so I know at that point we need to maybe go on some of the homework help sites. I know for her it was fractions and she gets frustrated and she wants to cry so I try to encourage her that you can do it just be patient. But she just cries and cries and I worry about her stress level.

⁶ Specialty schools are schools with a special focus that do not require that students meet certain academic admission requirements. They differ from magnet schools which are schools that are reserved for students who perform extremely well academically as demonstrated by grades and standardized assessments. Specialty schools are more aligned to interests such as language immersion, trades (carpentry, hospitality, cosmetology, plumbing, child care, etc.), or military.

Similarly, Aaliyah, a parent of a high school student reported that school-related stress caused concerns for her son's physical health. For example, Aaliyah discussed how taking multiple advanced high school courses, as recommended by a school counselor, was negatively affecting her son. She said,

Greg was stressed out! He wasn't sleeping, he had started gaining weight because he wasn't able to go to swim practice because he had so much homework to do. I know those classes are important, but I feel like he needs an avenue for after all the hard classes, all the requirements, he needs to get in the world to offer him stress relief. Like an art class or photography class or one of those barber or chef classes. The science classes, it's all nice but it's just too much.

These concerns for students' mental health are not signals or examples of parents undervaluing or devaluing education. The parents wanted the best for their children and were their strongest advocates. However, the parents were concerned about the impact the stress was having on their children's mental health, and intervened to do something about it, even when their suggestion contradicted a school level decision.

Again, FACE families did not completely trust the school's ability to protect their child and always act in their best interests. There is a lot of competition these days for schools which they can often pass down to their students. For examples, the efficacy of many schools is judged by the number of advanced placement courses that are offered, the number of students taking and passing the courses, the number of students taking advantage of dual enrollment courses, and of course grade point averages and graduation rates. Additionally, students and families may feel pressured

to take a high number of advanced courses and course overloads in order to be considered as college and career ready. FACE families saw it as their responsibility to ensure their children were well-balanced and emotionally fit. They ensured their children did not sacrifice their mental and emotional well-being in order to excel academically or meet the ever increasing demands of academia.

Teacher perceptions and interactions.

Participants also expressed concerned about how teachers' perceptions of and interactions with their children affected their mental health. Daveon felt that teachers were treating his sons unfairly, disliked them, and were causing them to not only dislike school, but to develop doubts about their own abilities. He expressed particular trepidation for his oldest son who was in middle school. He said:

Those teachers already seem to have it out for Randall. They look at him and say, 'Ok yeah he is Black, he is big, and he probably doesn't care about school so we aren't going to waste too much time on him.' So now he frustrated because he feels like he is not getting the help he needs and is starting to say things like, 'Why bother if they are not going to help me anyway', and that's a problem. He is too young, too early in the game to be giving up.

Oleywai was dismayed by the way her grandson's teacher compared him to his siblings whom she had previously taught, and how those comparisons caused discord among the siblings. She shared, "The teacher was really messing with Oyinde's self-esteem... [The constant comparisons] was causing him and his sister to go back and forth arguing. I worry about his self-esteem. But I mean what do you do?" Oleywai knows that her grandchildren are academically capable; however, she mentions

conversing with teachers and urging them to view each child independently and individually based on their own unique needs and talents, and not lump them together and compare them not only with other children, but to their siblings as well. She notes the teacher's comparisons had an observable impact on the children's self-esteem and thus self-worth and mental health.

Other participants raised concerns about school personnel's implicit or explicit biases in their daily interactions with their children. For instance, Renée reported that teachers held significant biases against her oldest middle school daughter which was having a severe impact on her daughter's self-esteem. Renée shared,

Charlize comes home distraught and upset because her teachers will call her male pronouns or say smart things to her or when they mess up and mistake her for a boy instead of apologizing and making the correction they say things like, 'Oh well you look like a boy', in front of the whole class and she feels embarrassed. Then she comes home and cries to me and then I have to go up to the school. Luckily now it's only the substitutes that do it, but I still feel there should be some kind of punishment because it really ruins her day. I have asked her teachers to let me know when they would be out and I will just keep her home that day or pick her up early so she doesn't have to deal with that. The counselor said I couldn't do that but she promised that Charlize can come to her as soon as it happens without penalty. Hopefully that makes things better but I feel a little bit like she is getting bullied, and not by the kids by the adults!

Renée believed that the biased behavior exhibited by certain school personnel were severe enough to remove her child from school. Whether this in the long term is an effective strategy remains to be determined; however, Renée's concern over her child's mental health, propelled her into advocacy and engagement with the school. She notes that the situations that were happening at school were carrying over into her home after school and affecting the child's mental health, specifically her happiness. Renée's strategy, is one that would not be validated by the school; however, in that moment she made the best decision she knew how.

Teachers have a major influence on children's self-perception and mental health. Teachers' perception of children's abilities, talent, and personalities can affect the ways they interact with the students, specifically, the things they say and the opportunities they afford to them. FACE families' perceived some teachers to have race and gender biases that directly affected the way they interacted with their children. Other teachers compared students to others which caused students to doubt their own abilities. Teachers' negative comments to and interactions with students had an impact on their self-esteem and their mental health and well-being.

Children's self-esteem and perceptions of self.

Similar to when FACE participants specifically referenced stereotypes and images when discussing their concerns with their children's social development; they also related this to their children's mental health as well. While participants referenced these stereotypes in relation to the children's social development with a goal of making sure their children were engaged with peers and in activities that would provide direct contradictions to these narratives; when they mentioned the

stereotypes in relationship to mental health they were specifically concerned with how their children were internalizing these negative and assaultive stereotypes and beliefs. Participants were not considering backup plans per se in case their plans for directing and steering their children's social lives failed to yield the results of being counterexamples to these dominant narratives. Instead, it was an admission that these stereotypes, images and beliefs were out there regardless of how applicable they were to their children or their families and they were not able to control children's access to these narratives, nor the behavior of people who accepted these narratives. Therefore, participants mentioned being intentional with building their children's self-esteem, helping students develop positive self-perceptions and showing them continued love and support. For example, Nikki shared:

We just want to be able to love our children in the ways that come naturally without facing the scrutiny that frankly others don't experience. I do not need to be told I need to use tough or physical discipline with my son or he is going to grow up to be in the streets. I got him. Thousands of young men grow up to be successful, go to college, and they have never been hit or popped once. I am not raising a child with a slave mentality.

It is a deceptively simple statement; however, it captures the tension some participants felt living within while simultaneously fighting against racist and classist stereotypes and imagery. This showcases the extra burden of work that Black parents have to deal with. In one way they have to do the basic development of their children's self-esteem that all parents must do with their own children. However, Black parents have to also circumvent the pervasive stereotypes, messages and

images the children face from society on a daily basis. Embedded in Nikki's statement is also an awareness of the beliefs, messages, and stereotypes that others have internalized or believed and then project onto their relationships and perceptions of the students.

For example, one FACE member discussed how stereotypes and popular images affected her children's beliefs and self-perception, and how she actively tried to counteract the effect these stereotypes had on the children. For example Nikki wanted to sign her daughter Yanni up for one of the STEM events offered by the local parks and recreation community center; however, her daughter had very specific ideas concerning who could be engaged in STEM activities and did not see herself as one of those persons. Nikki expressed frustration and expressed how she intentionally began to shift Yanni's mindset and improve her self-perception and self-esteem. Nikki declared:

I saw that girls' STEM program in the brochure and showed Yanni and told her that would be a good activity for her to participate in. And she says to me, "No, I am not Phillipino, I am not good at math and science, that's for Phillipinos." I asked her where she got that from because Yanni gets good grades in math and science and my son gets good grades in math and science and in school I did well in math and science you know?

Nikki's attempt to access additional educational opportunities for her daughter uncovered a deeper concern that simply giving Yanni access to educational programs would not address. A student's lack of self-efficacy or confidence in pursuing and succeeding in an educational opportunity can have a direct effect on the students'

educational outcomes. A logical strategy here, as Nikki realized, would be to address the child's self-perception not simply to sign her up for a program.

Several members of FACE mentioned reaching out for mental health support for their children stemming from situations they experienced at school.

Coincidentally, three of the four FACE members who mentioned reaching out for additional counseling did so for their middle school aged daughters. Families' became concerned about shifts of behaviors or moods in their daughters and nieces which prompted them to seek additional support. For example, Lalah shared:

Lalah: Kayla is not a talker, she doesn't express herself so we had some emotional problems going on. We got counseling for it though.

Interviewer: How did you notice that? Was it something you noticed or that the school suggested?

Lalah: I noticed it.

Interviewer: And you asked for counseling at the school?

Lalah: No I went on my own on my own health insurance and got us some counseling for it 'cause we were bumping heads a lot and I was like I don't know if this is seventh grade hormones or what's going on.

Married FACE members Krystal and Kyle both separately mentioned acquiring therapy for their middle school daughter. Krystal remembered receiving an emergency call from her daughter's school and being terrified. She recalled:

I was on my way home and I get a call from Ayana's school telling me I needed to come pick her up. I'm like what's going on? Did she miss the bus? 'No, Ms. Maxwell you just need to come up to the school.' So I get there and

they said, ‘Ayana mentioned wanting to kill herself and that she had a plan’. Now I know my daughter so that did not make any sense to me whatsoever. I immediately went through my Aetna site and found a counselor to work with her. Come to find out she was being bullied and not fitting in with the ‘cool girls’. I decided right then and there that would be her last year at that school.

Mental health and well-being were a common concern for many FACE members. Some of the members came up with different strategies to help support their children themselves, and others reached out and acquired professional assistance. It is interesting to note that no FACE members mentioned any mental health concerns for their sons. This may be because there are none, or perhaps because boys’ mental health challenges manifests themselves in ways that are more difficult for parents to perceive. For example, a number of the participants mentioned “stress” as a concern for their sons, noting certain situations were stressing them out, affecting their sleep, ability to complete tasks, etc.,. However, they referenced the stress as more of a physical health concern than mental health. Either way, whatever the method, participants sprang into action to attempt to mediate the effects of mental health challenges on their children’s development. The concern for the children’s self-esteem and self-worth was a significant concern for other FACE participants. Nikki adequately summarized many FACE member’s perception when she argued, “Freedom is sending children to school and not having to wonder if their minds are being poisoned against their own best interests.”

Challenges

FACE members largely recognized their children's school years are formative years towards investments in their children's lives. Although often challenging, FACE members recognized that sacrifices had to be made today in order to reap better outcomes later. Participants were largely committed to what they identified as good parenting in order to improve their children's position in life and help them develop into successful and healthy adults. For example, during the focus group Nikki was discussing how grateful she was that her youngest daughter had been accepted into the same school as her oldest daughter. Mike, Koron's husband, remarked that she must feel lucky because, "you don't have to go back and forth to different schools and stuff." Nikki responded, "You know, that doesn't bother me, 'cause, you know, I find that me and a lot of parents would just do what's necessary to make sure our kids get into good schools." Another FACE member Nate, when weighing his son's schools options for the following year stated, "I have to do my research and make sure that I put him in the best situation that will benefit him versus a convenience. So I have to make an adjustment." FACE members were aware that sometimes the most convenient choice was not always the best choice; however, they willingly made sacrifices in order to ensure the best outcomes for their children.

FACE members, while acknowledging the sacrifice and commitment of their parental responsibilities, sometimes felt like they still weren't doing enough. FACE members often wondered if they were going enough, or if they could do more to support their children. Koron stated, "I just wish I could do more. I wish there was like another hour in the day that I could devote to just that and do that [parenting]." Time or the lack thereof, was a constant challenge for many FACE participants. It

wasn't that they were not choosing to invest the time into being fully committed to their parental responsibilities and to advocate for their children. Instead, members noted that they had so much going on simply with living and the basic responsibilities of being adults outside of parenting that they had to be very intentional and flexible with their time and sacrifices. For example, LaLani, a mother of two with a strong familial network, reflected:

I wish I could do more with them definitely during the week like I said 'cause I'm in school and some nights I can't make it to the PTA meeting. I really want to be there or some recitals I might miss at school. Field trips I may miss. So it's been a struggle the last three years I've been in school on making decisions to go to school or cut back because my children are young and these are the golden years of their life. These are the ones they remember. So every year when I register it's a struggle – should I keep going or should I just wait till my kids are a little older when they understand more 'cause they don't understand that mommy has to go to school or I have to work late so I can take classes early. They're still young. They want me there.

LaLani's sentiments express a longing to be more present for her children. She longs to take part in more their school activities such as field trips, PTA meetings, recitals, etc. She wants to be actively present in what she notes are the "golden years of their life"; however, LaLani also recognizes that in order to improve the quality of their lives she has to make some investments in herself which may call her away from her children. This too, one could argue is a way of advocating for children. Although it is not hands on with the children, LaLani's commitment to making a few sacrifices now

to not only work, but to also attend school to improve her own education, will result in a clear positive outcome for her children as well. Like most parents in America, the FACE parents had a lot going on in their daily lives; however, they did recognize the value of sacrificing for and investing in their children. When asked during the focus group meeting how she is able to have so much energy and get everything done that's on her plate, Aaliyah, mother of three children exclaimed:

It came from somewhere. So I'm up – I'm doing it. I'm putting stuff aside. I'm getting ready. And I let them be my strength. They don't know and they'll probably know when they get older that I had to go through a lot through the years just being able to keep on.

Whilst how you choose to use it is flexible and abundant, time is finite.

Conclusion

These sub-themes of *Parental Responsibilities* domain, (a) *children's academic and cognitive development*, (b) *children's mental and physical health*, and (c) *the children's social development and well-being*, formed a tight triad for parental responsibilities families expressed being fully invested in as a strategy for improving their children's quality of life. These three foundational subthemes were critical as each and every time FACE members made a decision to advocate or participate in any type of parental engagement it was in response to or aligned with what they identified as their responsibilities as parents or caregivers. FACE families, regardless of family structure, were very thoughtful and intentional in their efforts in raising their children. While aware of negative stereotypes and perceptions of Black mothers and fathers, FACE members purposefully and intentionally attempted to be

counterexamples to these stereotypes. FACE families believed the act of parenting responsibly and responsively, on their own terms was a revolutionary act of activism. When First Lady Obama stated, “At the end of the day, my most important title is still ‘mom-in-chief.’ My daughters are still the heart of my heart and the center of my world,” Black feminists recognized that statement as revolutionary (Winfrey Harris, 2015, p. 73). Winfrey Harris (2015) argues, “That proclamation was not business as usual. Many black women, who struggle each day to have the glorious complexity of their motherhood noticed and valued, saw it for what it was—an act of rebellion” (Winfrey Harris, 2015, p. 73).

FACE members’ decision to center the needs of their children and their families’ values in defining not only what counts as effective parent engagement but the most efficacious strategies for implementation were incredibly empowering. FACE families have so many challenges and barriers in their daily lives as a result of their social locations amongst race, class, gender, and familial structure, that implementing parenting responsibilities that may be considered universally basic, required a great deal of intention and negotiation. FACE members continued to employ *shared power, shared responsibility, shared labor, and shared knowledge*, the key domains that made FACE as a group effective, outside of the group and into their personal lives in order to raise their children and put them in the best possible position for success into adulthood.

Although challenging, FACE participants were very conscientious of the commitments, sacrifices, and investments they were making today and how they may affect their children’s futures. FACE members firmly believed that fulfilling their

parental responsibilities and being “good parents” according to their own definitions of parental responsibilities were intentional acts of parental advocacy. A persisting notion was these were small deposits into the children’s future wells in order to decrease the likelihood the children would not be able to take care of themselves or frankly, their parents, when they reached adulthood. As Kyle and some of the other FACE participants have argued, you pay up now, or you pay up later, either way, you are going to pay, so it makes more sense to pay now when the cost is expectedly cheaper and is an investment rather than rehabilitative.

Chapter 7: The Visible Advocacy: “Within the System”

Fulfilling their responsibilities as parents, to support their children’s academic and social development in addition to their health and well-being were major impetuses for FACE members’ parental advocacy. The FACE families’ understandings of their responsibilities as parents and caregivers played a major role in the choices and decisions they made regarding their children. Relatedly, when FACE members felt their children’s academic, social, physical, or mental well-being was being compromised, they sprang into action. Both Schickedanz’s (1977) and Epstein et al.’s (2009) frameworks for parental engagement include parents’ communication and interactions with schools, participation in school events, volunteering in the school, and classroom visits as valid examples of parental involvement. FACE members also included these activities in their definition of parental engagement and named them as strategies for parental advocacy.

FACE families reported engaging in a range of parental engagement strategies widely referenced and described in the parental engagement literature. These strategies included communicating with school personnel, meeting with teachers and school administrators, conducting classroom visits, volunteering in schools and classrooms, attending events (e.g., special performances, field trips, and parent workshops), engaging in school-based parent organizations (PTA, PTSO, PTO), and in more political activities at the district level (e.g., Board of Education functions, country or state wide activities). These parental engagement strategies were consistent with the school’s sanctioned system and structure for parental involvement, and as Bauch (1993) notes, they “do not challenge the expertise of the teacher or the decision making power of the school” (p. 129). Schickedanz (1977) and Epstein et

al., 's (2009) frameworks refer to communication with and volunteering in schools as passive forms of engagement in which parents are passive recipients of information and programming constructed by the schools as opposed to active decision makers. Contrarily, FACE members name *communicating with school personnel* and *observing or volunteering in schools* as strategies for affecting decision making. FACE members utilized these as targeted strategies to not only challenge the expertise and decision making power of teachers and school administrators, but also to inform decisions that directly impacted their children.

FACE members' participation within existing systems and structures of parental engagement can be defined as *visible advocacy*: strategies can that be observed, monitored and reported by schools. However, when FACE members operated within existing school-related systems, their purposes were not always aligned with those of the school. FACE families and the school personnel were not always aware of or in agreement with each other's intentions. FACE families often manipulated and flexibly engaged in the existing school sanctioned system for parental engagement for reasons that were not obvious to educators or other observers. While some of the FACE families' were "visible," without highlighting their perceptions, it is difficult to truly understand their intentions and actions.

Schickedanz (1977) and Epstein et al., (2009) both name *decision making* as a distinct strategy for parental engagement that is separate from communicating with school personnel and volunteering in schools. However, the idea that participating in school and district sanctioned activities is a form of passive involvement supports the idea that the only school personnel able to employ power and agency in these

activities, which directly contradicts and dismisses the lived experiences of FACE families. By effectively defining parental engagement for themselves and engaging in school sanctioned structures of parental involvement on their own terms, FACE members were able use "passive" forms of engagement for active parental advocacy.

By sharing the FACE families' perceptions of their interactions in their own words, this chapter provides insight into how study participants utilized these strategies as active forms of advocacy. For example, *communicating with school personnel, conducting classroom visits (observations), volunteering at the school, attending meetings with school personnel, and participating in school-based parent organizations (PTA)* were ways that FACE families took advantage of existing parental engagement opportunities that were sanctioned by the school system. By employing their own power and agency within these opportunities, FACE members manipulated the system for their own purposes in ways that were not always evident to school personnel. This chapter illuminates how FACE families used "visible" parent engagement strategies to meet their own and their children's specific needs.

Communicating with School Personnel

Communication between families and teachers is a widely acknowledged form of parental engagement. With the technological advances of the 21st century, instantaneous and frequent communication is not only possible; it is expected. Many teachers and schools utilize a variety of communication strategies to get information to parents. FACE members reported that teachers initiating communication via students' agenda books, weekly letters, emails, phone calls, class websites, and robo-call or texting services. Similarly, FACE families initiated communication with

teachers and school administrators via phone calls, text messages, pick up/ drop off check-ins, handwritten notes and emails. FACE members felt comfortable contacting teachers, by any means necessary, using multiple forms of communication or as Nate put it, via “Emails, of course. Phone. Pigeon. Whatever.” FACE members expressed the importance of open communication in order to get specific information or meet some other goal. FACE members identified a few specific criteria for open communication including timely, consistent, responsive, and respectful. For example, Nate shared,

My communication level with [my son’s] teachers are on a daily basis. I talk, I question his homework, his schoolwork, his behavior – all subjects with everybody. You know what I’m saying? I just believe communication is key. If you can’t talk about nothing, you can’t talk to somebody about nothing – you know, how are you gonna be understood or heard if you can’t tell someone how you feel? Nobody can respect that.

Nate expressed not only the importance of communication with school personnel but also an expectation that interactions should be bilateral. He placed great responsibility on himself to initiate communication with teachers, and he also expected his ideas and perspectives would be heard and respected. Additionally, Nate believed that in his communications with his children’s teachers, they were obligated to respect him and to care about or at least listen to his opinions and concerns. Another FACE member, Malaysia expressed similar sentiments, saying,

I go up and talk to the teacher face to face every day, ‘How was her day?’ Strong points, weak points, things that need to be worked on. Because she is

the teacher, she knows what's going on. And when she is in class and stuff like that it's a different – kids will show a different side than when they're with their parents. So the teacher's the one that's there. So the teacher is the one that has the educational – the learning cause they let us know, 'Hey, this is the area that your son and daughter is struggling in. They had a good day, this wasn't well'. So it's a very verbal communication.

Malayshia and Nate's points represent many FACE families' desire to have open, frequent, communication with teachers in order to monitor their children's school performances and to identify any potential problems. Malayshia's remarks also indicate a general respect for the role of the teacher and an understanding that communicating with the teacher gives her access to information that she may not be able to get elsewhere. This contradicts how parents have been framed as passive listeners in existing literature. These parents were not just passive receivers of information; rather, they actively sought out and initiated contact with teachers to access information they deemed pertinent to their parenting and child rearing responsibilities.

FACE families' perspectives on and strategies for initiating communication was especially interesting to note in contrast to the school districts' policy on parent communication. The Regal County policy communicated in the Mushroom Elementary school family handbook read:

If you have information, questions, or concerns, feel free to call the school. Teachers are available to take telephone calls after school between 2:10 PM and 3:00 PM and time permitting, during their planning period. Teachers are

usually not available before school as they are preparing to receive their students. You may call and leave a message or e-mail your child's teacher (Regal County Mushroom Elementary, 2013-2014).

FACE families desired fairly open access to the school and school personnel; which was not encoded in school policy. Incidentally, most families were not aware of the school policy related to teacher availability and parent engagement. As a result, FACE families perceived teachers' availability to extend far beyond the limited time periods noted in the policy. While several FACE members were successful in initiating communication with and visiting teachers before or after school, others were not. For example, Renée, reported that when she attempted to go to the teachers' classroom before school started, she was stopped by security because she "needed an appointment to visit with a teacher." Talay said, "I have tried to email teachers, no response. I wrote a message for the teacher in the agenda book no response. I try to communicate with teachers all the time, I just can't get a response back."

The difference in the families' and teachers' perceptions of the teachers' availability can present challenges for home and school communication. Families may not be aware of policies pertaining to communication with school personnel. They may attempt to communicate with teachers when they have the time (e.g., during drop off/pickups or if they happen to be in the school for a visit), and they may interpret teachers' inability or unwillingness to accommodate them as disrespect. Lorraine shared, "The teacher brushed me off and told me I had to come back because it was her planning time. If that is not a good time to meet with teachers, I don't know a better time. She was just being rude." Teachers may react dismissively because

they feel families are intentionally violating school policies and procedures or disrespecting their time and work. This may, in part, explain why some FACE members felt their communication with school personnel was not always effective. Both Nate and Malaysia mentioned wanting to engage with teachers face-to-face, which is not endorsed by the Regal County School District without an appointment. Some participants benefitted from the fact that their children's teachers were willing to make themselves available when they were not required to do so. Data suggest that other teachers were not so obliging.

Teachers' lack of responsiveness and failures to communicate relevant information in a timely manner was a problem expressed by a number of FACE members. Tamara mentioned she was not happy with one of her grandson's schools because, "they don't believe they should involve you unless there are really problems and then they involve you too late." This was reflected during a discussion about home and school communication in second focus group interview of FACE families.

Angela: But if the teacher is giving me that line of communication back, then I feel comfortable. If the teacher responds to the emails and then that's communicating. That's letting me know. If I go through the school year and the teacher isn't saying anything, that's a problem.

LaLani: Right but I don't want to come back later – we done had this fabulous weekend out of town and Monday you tell me – that she [her daughter] showed off on Friday. Call me that day. Email, text – it doesn't matter...I don't have to hear about it when it gets to the boiling point that my child is in the red. Let me know when she makes that first bad mistake.

Koron: Well I haven't been able to figure out if I was going to get a call back at all or not. Mrs. Douglas is a great principal but she has this unique skill set of being able to evade –Principal 101. She knows you're bringing a topic that she may not want to deal with. You usually, it's not rudely done but it's really hard to get on her calendar. The teachers are good because they can't avoid you. You see the kid, you see them. But it's being heard and knowing you're being heard and getting response time is a problem.

Kia: It is frustrating, irritating, and I just keep right on emailing, showing up, leaving messages until they get the point that I need to engage with you around whatever it is.

Similar to Nate and Malaysia, these four FACE members believed that home-school communication was important, and they enacted multiple strategies to initiate and facilitate this engagement; however, participants experienced varying degrees of success. The greatest of concerns was the timeliness of teachers' responses. For example, LaLani and Angela informed children's teachers that they were available and interested in receiving reports concerning their children and that they expected communications from the school to be timely. Contact at the onset of a concern gives families time to intervene and affect the course of action for their children. One strategy families used when communication from the school was not timely was persistence. Even when FACE families' attempts to initiate conversations with school personnel were thwarted; they were tenacious and consistently pushed the issue until their needs were addressed in some way.

Koron suggested that schools' response time may be based on whether or not school personnel are interested in addressing the topic of concern. In the example previously shared, Koron attempted to meet with the principal to get her child transferred to a different math track. She wanted to challenge the principal's authority on class placements and engage in the decision making process; however, Koron believed the principal was only willing to engage in a conversation with her on his terms. In contrast, Ruby talked about a very different experience with a principal at a different school:

The principal takes time out for me. Two weeks ago, I went in and talked to him because I was like, "I really don't know what I should do in terms of high school for Zachary." He took the time, we sat down in his office and he listened to my concerns and everything else, and validated what I had to say, and everything else was very useful.

Unlike, Koron, Ruby was able to effectively engage her son's principal in a conversation concerning an issue that was important to her. In both situations, the FACE participants asserted themselves as equal partners in their children's education; however, only Koron attempted to "challenge the decision making power of the school" (Bauch, 1993, p.129). However, in order for them to fully realize their position as equal partners, school personnel had to be willing to share power and authority. Whether or not this occurred appeared to be highly dependent on the particular school staff members and the culture of the school.

Nate reiterated the need for mutually engaging and equal partnership. He shared,

You gotta talk to the teachers, you gotta talk to the principal, you gotta talk to the staff. You have to pay attention to what the school is doing to build anything. Because everybody has to put their ideas together to work together: the parents, the teachers. To find the problems and the solutions together. It can't be – it's like a quarter. A quarter has two sides. No for real though, it's always a question, there's a solution. You gotta ask questions to follow along to the solution. I believe communication is key.

Communication initiated by schools is the form of parental involvement that is most often by both schools and families, which was reflected in the current study. However, the complexities, quality, and effectiveness of that communication are not captured in national data (Noel, Stark, and Redford, 2015). Both Epstein et al.,'s (2009) and Schickedanz's (1977) frameworks note that communication from schools is the parental involvement strategy that engages parents the least. Current parental engagement frameworks do not account specifically for communication initiated by families. Additionally, data on this communication is not collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). While it may be possible to capture the number of times that parents initiate contact with schools, the various methods they use and their intended outcomes can only be understood when parent-initiated communication is recognized as an active form of parental engagement.

Active Presence in Schools

Communication, and the lack thereof, often prompted FACE participants to enter the school building to observe classrooms and participated in volunteer opportunities. While Epstein et al.,'s (2009) and Schickedanz 's (1977) frameworks

describe classroom observations and volunteering at the school site as passive acts of parental engagement, the FACE participants' perceptions of and intentions for engaging in these types of activities was distinctly purposeful. FACE families attempted to gather information so they could have more power and influence in decision-making processes affecting their children. Specific strategies they utilized were forming relationships with school personnel, and making their presence and commitment to advocating for the well-being of their children apparent.

Volunteerism

Several FACE members identified volunteering at the school and conducting classroom observations as a way to form relationships with school personnel and to provide some benefit to the school that they could use as a "bargaining chip" at a later time. For example, Chimedeta volunteered at the book fair, chaperoned field trips, and attended the honor roll assemblies that were held during the school day. If she was not able to make it, she asked her mother, Oleywai, or her sister, Malayshia, to attend in her place. Chimedeta shared, "I want them to see me. To know me. So later [if] something happens to him [her son], if there is a problem, they will trust that I care. They will know I'm a good mother and they will work with me." Chimedeta's quote reveals a multi-layered perspective. First, her intentions for being present and volunteering were not only to help and support the school, but to communicate a narrative of care. She believed that being physically present would have an effect on the school personnel's perception of her, which highlights another aspect of her perceptions. Chimedeta actively used this strategy as an investment or a deposit from which she could withdraw if her son faced a school-based challenge in the future.

Lastly, Chimededa's comment reflects a belief that school personnel view certain activities, such as volunteering, as a demonstration of care or effective parenting and that they may be reluctant to work with individuals who they believe are not "good parents" who care about their children.

Ruby also spent considerable time volunteering at the school. As a professor at a community college, Ruby had a flexible work schedule and was often available during the school day to provide this type of on-site support. Ruby described her purpose for conducting classroom observations and volunteering at the school as two-fold. First, it allowed her to develop personal relationships with school personnel, and to have a direct impact on both the curriculum and teachers' curricular strategies, both of which can be leveraged to gain power and influence at the school. In the following statements Ruby made during individual and focus group interviews, her intentions, strategies and resulting influence are apparent:

My son's homeroom teacher this year, the young one, has my number in his cell phone and will call me, and be like, 'Oh, he's having trouble with so and so. Will you work with him X amount?' And then in that same light when I work with him, he'll be like, 'I don't know what you did, but he really gets it. Great job. Can you come — whatever you did, can you work with the rest of the class, because they're having trouble with that.' Also, depending on the teacher and how nicely they ask, I will go in and do [science] presentations and actually teach the various grades [science lessons].

A major concern of Ruby's was the possibility that the school would not offer Algebra I to capable 8th-graders. It was very important to Ruby that her oldest son,

who would soon be in the 8th grade, have the opportunity to take this course. She reflected,

I can't even fault them as a school. It was the county as a whole, because I had to pull stuff from Folklore County to be like, 'Here's the things they're saying is valid,' And I was like, 'If you don't do this for my child, he is going to be leaving. He's going to be somewhere he can take Algebra next year, because you're not going to put him a whole year behind in science because of this.' So it was that advocacy that then, you know, the second to last day of school, they're giving me a letter saying, 'Yes, we're going to offer Algebra I next year, and he will be in Algebra I.' And that allowed other kids who they were gonna place in Math 8 Honors, and he just took Math 8. That's basically repeating the same thing. Who allowed that? So me being vocal and everything else benefitted other kids

While such influence on schools was rare among the FACE group members, Ruby's experiences provide a window into possible examples of shared power between schools and families. If school personnel were willing to trust parents' knowledge, believe parents have something to offer that can benefit the school as a whole, and engage families in decision making by sharing institutional power, FACE families may have had a more demonstrative influence and impact on schools, overall. Ruby's advanced degrees may explain why school personnel were willing to grant her decision making. While the types of services and insights she provided the school were similar to that of other parents, the school appeared to respond differently to Ruby. This may be due to Ruby's social capital. In addition to holding an advanced

degree, she also was an active and vocal member of the school community with influence over other parents. Additionally, because her son was a high performing student, the school was likely invested in retaining him. Finally, Ruby's position at the local community college presented possibilities for the school to form partnerships and get access to resources. Thus, there were benefits for the school in making Ruby feel welcome and comfortable. Similar to the gender inequities detailed in chapter 5, class was another indicator for inequity the responses and opportunities provided by school personnel.

Observations

Several families also visited classrooms as a strategy for challenging the expertise of school officials and advocating for their children in order to provide them with better learning experiences. For example, Koron was uncomfortable with the amount of homework assigned to her youngest daughter, the amount of school time devoted to standardized test preparation, and what she believed to be her daughter's lack of understanding of mathematical concepts. Koron expressed disagreement and disappointment with the school's instructional decisions and the anxiety that testing caused for her daughters. While Koron communicated her concerns about testing to staff members at the school and district levels, no changes were made. Koron explained that she then began visiting the school to monitor how teachers were using instructional time and what she uncovered during her visits:

Koron: In our school we have segregated classes, which I don't know if –

Interviewer: What does that mean?

Koron: No, no, we have segregated classes in learning – it's not by learning styles but learning ability.

Interviewer: Oh you have tracked classes?

Koron: I know that because I've sat in my daughter's class and occasionally I'll go into the other class and I'll do an experiment. I will time how long the teacher takes on each part and compare the types of problems she gives the kids. So let's say it's division, and one class you can move very fast with it, another class you can't, and the kids know that they're in the fast class because they say things like, 'I'm in advance math but those kids over there aren't,' and I don't know that that's the best. I don't know why they do it. I'm not an educator, but I hate to be the kid who wasn't in the in the advanced class. Because what does that mean about you, you're in the slow class. Yeah, you're in the slow class. You're not as smart. So they perform at that level.

Koron suspected that the focus on test preparation, lack of attention to other instructional areas, and a lack of homework were negatively impacting her daughters' achievement. To confirm her suspicions she utilized school visits, not as a strategy for observing her daughter as the Regal County visitation policy suggests, but rather to observe and compare teachers' instructional strategies and students' performances. Koron then analyzed that data and drew the reasoned conclusion that the school's tracking policy was having a negative effect on her daughter's mathematics performance and her self-esteem. While Koron was not a professional educator like Ruby, she was still able to gather and analyze information from her observations in order to better understand how the school's policies were affecting her child. However, Koron did not have the power to influence school and district testing policy. Nor was she able to compel school personnel to engage her in conversations around changing policy.

While Koron used classroom visits to gather information about the causes of her child's academic challenges, Aaliyah used visits to challenge teachers' professional determinations that her oldest, high school aged son was achieving at a high level. Aaliyah identified a discrepancy in the academic work her high school son brought home and the grades he received:

I sent emails to Greg's teachers and I couldn't get a response. I couldn't take anymore absent calls. And so I used my sick leave, took off work, and I lived there. Every lunch, I was in there working the hall. I was just walking in. It was so bad. I had challenges with math, science, English, and it was a mess. Those kids were literally just sitting in there on their phones. Most people will say, "Why? They were giving him A's" and I knew –But he wasn't earning them. And they wasn't holding him accountable. He's getting A's, not going to class, straight A's. That's crazy. I'm not asking you to fail the boy, but, man, hold him accountable. Teach him something.

Aaliyah said she received robo-calls from the school system informing her that her son was absent from class on days that she believed he was in school, which likely meant that Greg was cutting classes. However, he received straight A's. Aaliyah used parental involvement strategies to gather evidence that she could use to challenge teachers' assessments of her son. Furthermore, was able to use this evidence to confidently support her beliefs that teachers' assessments of her son were both incorrect and having a negative effect on his educational experience.

According to Regal County policy, the purpose of school visits is not for visiting family members to intervene in lessons or classroom dynamics in any way: a

critical difference between school visits or observations and volunteering. However, FACE families used school and classroom visits to gather information and to prepare themselves for potentially contentious conversations with school personnel. This information helped them feel confident in asserting themselves as equitable collaborators and partners at school meetings. It also helped families to question and challenge school personnel's expertise and empowered them to direct conversations within school personnel. Additionally, Chimeda used school visits and volunteering to construct a positive narrative about herself as a parent and as an investment into the "grace bank" she believed existed for "good parents." Current parental engagement frameworks suggest that school visits do not involve much active parental engagement. However, FACE parents used such visits purposefully, as an advocacy strategy to negotiate power and gain the information they needed to challenge the power and expertise of school personnel.

Respect

When FACE participants initiated communication with school personnel, they encountered varying types and degrees of responses. However, once FACE members began diversifying their attempts to be heard by school personnel and to have more power in school decision making processes, some staff members heightened their resistance. In addition to ignoring, avoiding, or dismissing their concerns, FACE members reported that some staff members became blatantly dismissive and disrespectful. It was often difficult for participants to receive satisfying responses from schools that made them feel their concerns were heard and respected.

Koron talked about a challenge her family was having with a particular teacher which she felt would “Be better served in a face-to-face conversation, us going there. But those are hard to get.” Even Ruby, who concluded, “They love me there,” had challenges communicating and meeting with certain staff members. For example, Ruby felt that her oldest son, Zachary, had not received credit for work submitted to his Russian language teacher, and she believed that Zachary should have been allowed to make up assessments he missed due to excused absences. Ruby called, “The crazy Russian teacher is not emailing me back. I have called her, emailed her, no response. I went by her classroom during her planning time and she wouldn’t meet with me.” Ruby leveraged her relationship with the principal to schedule a meeting between herself, the Russian teacher, and the principal. By the end of the meeting, Ruby and the teacher were able to reach an amicable solution. However, other FACE members were not as successful in rallying school support to meet their needs.

Talay shared an experience of successfully scheduling a meeting with her son’s teachers:

It’s an open school. You can show up whenever you want. But they really don’t have anything to say to you. In the meeting that I called, they kind of put it like they called it, and they only spoke to Bryan. It was nothing with me. They pulled him from his class and basically spoke to him and didn’t really speak to me. I don’t know why. I got what I needed out of it as of the make-up work so he didn’t fail the two classes that they had him failing in, but yeah, it

was basically like a meeting that they could've called just with him. So I was finally able to get a meeting. They didn't have anything nice to say.

Talay's description of this meeting contains several troubling signs of disrespect from both school administrators and teachers. For example, she notes that while the school had an open door policy, meaning that family members "can show up whenever you want," this policy did not result in her engaged by school staff. Further, although Talay called the meeting and clearly communicated the issues she wanted addressed, the teachers and administrators did not allow her to guide the conversation. Finally, and most troubling of all, Talay felt that they personally disregarded her during the meeting and communicated primarily with her son, who was a 7th grader at that time. Talay felt that she was not respected as an equal partner who was expected and allowed to be engaged in the decision making process.

Talay was aware that she pushed school personnel out of their comfort zone, and she worried about retaliation against her son. She made them attend a meeting they likely did not want to attend and she informed administrators the teachers had not been responsive; she felt her son might be punished for these actions. She reflected,

His English teacher, she's just lazy because I find her on Twitter all the time, but she will not email me back, not once the whole year. She has not emailed me back once. They have a 24-hour policy, which I can enforce, but I don't need a target on my son's back, so I don't enforce it. If I do, they'll be like, 'Oh, well let's knock him for everything.'

Due to the actions of teachers and school administrators, Talay felt discouraged about intervening into school decisions regarding her son's education, and she expressed fear about exercising her parental rights as stated in the school policy. While at the onset of the meeting Talay described feeling empowered to engage as an equal partner in a conversation about her son, school personnel's actions made her feel powerless and unable to affect change. She later commented, "I mean I can't really change anything about the school nowadays, so we're just getting through it. Yeah, five more years."

Mutual respect between family members and school personnel is imperative for parental engagement to be effective and for families to truly advocate for their children's education. Without mutual respect, families' attempts to communicate, to negotiate power, and challenge expertise, and be collaborative partners in their children's education in authentic ways, are diminished. A common assumption in educational research and in school policy is that if families operate within schools' sanctioned structures for parental engagement, they will be successful in advocating for their children. However, in the case of FACE members, these ways of engaging with schools did not ensure that families' needs and desires for their children were met or that staff members would adhere to school policies regarding parent engagement.

School Choice

School choice was a strategy that some FACE members used to ensure positive educational and social outcomes for their children. As a part of a large metropolitan region, there were many school options in Regal County including

public schools, specialty, magnet, charter, and private schools. FACE members often expressed unhappiness with a school placement by “voting with their feet” and choosing another school in which to enroll their child. As noted earlier, Ruby, used the threat of transferring child to another school as a bargaining chip to have the crucial decision of offering an Algebra I course go her way. As reflected in Chapter 6, FACE participants made decisions about school placements based on concerns for their children’s academic, social, psychological, and emotional well-being. FACE families used school choice as definitive strategy for negotiating the existing system to enact agency in the decision making process. School choice allowed the families to have a direct impact on their children’s courses, curricula, and learning experiences.

While, technically, school choice was available to every family residing in Regal County, multiple factors influenced the feasibility of school different options, which families had to consider when choosing a school. This included transportation, school start and end time, cost (private school), admissions requirements, availability, the quality of the neighborhood school, and curricular focus. For instance, Krystal and Kyle’s children were attending a private school in a prestigious area of the city that was a considerable distance from their home. As a result, they were consistently late to school and school administrators had a problem with the children’s tardiness. Krystal and Kyle were targeted as “problem parents” by school administrators. After removing their children from the private school, and a brief stint in public school, Krystal and Kyle began again researching private schools. Two of the main factors influencing their decision were location and cost of the

school. FACE members who considered private or schools outside of their neighborhoods schools also had to take into account transportation, the start and end time of the school, and the school the siblings attended.

Some FACE families opted not to send their children to the neighborhood school for several reasons. Some had had poor experiences with the school. Others families made decisions based on the school's reputation or the desire for the status associated with attending a specialty or private school. For example, Koron shared,

I think I bought into the fear factor of you've got to get your kid into a specialty program. The core curriculum at the neighborhood school is not going to challenge them enough or is not going to be enough, or all of that, and our neighborhood school is actually a Blue Banner school. It's a great school and I think one of my kids would have been better served in the neighborhood school but the other one, she captured that program, she's doing great in that program [at the specialty school]. She likes it. So I wish I had a little bit more information but at the time I was taking them out of a private setting and not really doing my diligence to look at the public setting, and once we applied and got in-But now looking at high school, I would put them at different schools because -They have different needs, they have different aspirations. I think they can both become very, very successful students in the environment that fits their needs and not making one shoe fit everybody.

As she reiterated several times, Koron did not decide to enroll her child in a specialty school based on school's achievement data but, rather, on its reputation within her peer group. In another example, Tamara wanted one of her granddaughters to attend a

specialty school mainly because, “The prestige associated with attending a specialty school is important for getting into college.” She reflected,

Karen earned an opportunity to go to a different specialty program through the Academy School Systems and she tried one, but she didn't want to do it. And I coaxed her into doing it with the agreement that if it didn't work out right, we could easily transfer her back to our neighborhood school. And it didn't work out. And she's at our neighborhood school and she's thriving and she's still in a type of specialty program.

Koron and Tamara's reflections capture a key idea for which proponents of choice public schools argue: families should be allowed to choose schools that fit their children's unique needs. Koron admitted that she did not closely investigate the neighborhood school and accepted popular sentiment that specialty schools were fundamentally better than mainstream public schools. Tamara wanted her granddaughter to attend a specialty high school, even though it was not what her granddaughter wanted. Consequently, Tamara allowed her granddaughter to leave the specialty school and attend her neighborhood school, but required her to enter a specialty program at the neighborhood school. This was a compromise that allowed Tamara to capitalize on the status of specialty programs while sending her granddaughter to a mainstream school, which appeared to be a better fit. Lastly, Koron describes capitalizing on her children's experiences at a specialty school to inform her decisions about where they will attend high school.

FACE families sometimes removed their children from schools due to dissatisfaction with the schools' services. For example, Talay said she removed her

son from a public school because she felt he had fallen behind in school and needed to be retained; however, due to his size, the Principal would not allow him to be retained. Therefore, Talay decided to take him out of public school and send him to Texas to be homeschooled by her aunt for two years. She recounted,

Well, by that time Isabella [her newborn] is school aged, hopefully, we're moving to Texas and my aunt home schools, so we will put her in home school. I pulled him out for two years and put him in home school with her as well, and he learned four years of school in two years. I was worried about him. I was before, and they won't hold my child back. They say he's too big because I tried. I tried when I put him back into school. I wanted him to be in fifth grade and they said no because he would hate me and he was too big.

That's what the principal told me.

Sending her son sent to Texas, rather than keeping him in a school where she felt he was not progressing, may seem like an extreme response; however, she felt desperate. Looking forward, Talay is already anticipating that her aunt will also homeschool her daughter, Isabella, with whom she was pregnant at the time of the interview. While school records documented that Bryan was no longer a part of the school system, the experiences that caused Talay to make that choice, and the processes in which she engaged to do what she felt was best for her child are undocumented and, thus, invisible to the school system.

Finally, some FACE members changed their children's schools because they were uncomfortable with the school setting. For example, Ruby took her children out of public school and enrolled them in a specialty school because she troubled by the

school's shifting demographics which included a sizeable increase in Hispanic students. Whatever the reasons, it is extremely empowering for FACE families to be able to exercise autonomy and choose the schools, among the available options, that were best for their children.

School-Based Parent Organizations

In addition to the visible advocacy that FACE participants undertook, individually, some also collaborated with other families at the school and district levels to influence decision-making that would have a “real” effect on their children's schools. About half of the FACE members mentioned participating in a school based organization (PTA, PTO, PTSO, etc.) at some point, and about a quarter noted that they were currently actively engaged in such an organization. This was consistent with national data showing that participation in PTA type meetings is the most common collaborative school-related activity reported by parents (Noel, Stark, and Redford, 2015).

The families' satisfaction with these groups ranged from complete dissatisfaction to extreme satisfaction. A number of FACE members were extremely proud of what their organizations were able to accomplish which benefitted the school and the students' families. One was Nikki who described the PTA at her daughters' school.

Okay, so our PTA was very active. They were trying to remove the attachment to our school. We stopped that. We got a new building, we got a new Principal. We did some real moves, they were real active politically. Some of the things that I like that they did just from the school, they brought

summer programs, they brought after school programs that were reasonably priced.

Similarly, Lalah noted the work her PTA was quite productive, especially under the direction and with the help of the principal:

The truth is I've been involved with the PTA both at the elementary level and the middle school level and we have accomplished what I think is a lot.

Especially when she was in elementary school, parent involvement was very, very low. But they had a new principal come in and he was very community oriented and he went out around to the churches and different organizations and he got organizations in there to donate time as well as food.

Participants also talked about relationships with other families they were able to forge and enculturation into the school culture through their PTA participation. For example, Kyle reflected, "It gives me a chance to immerse myself in the culture and talk to some of the other parents to see what their kids had gone through so I could figure out what I needed to avoid, and what pitfalls the kids might fall into." Another parent, Chimeda, suggested, "I like to go to the PTA parents because you get a chance to learn all of the school's secrets from the parents in the know." Particularly interesting is how Chimeda's described the PTA as a sort of secret society: a group of select individuals with knowledge or power that eludes others. Ironically, this idea of the PTAs as insular groups with distinct cultures was a reason why other families were disinterested in joining or continuing participation in PTAs. Ruby, who said that she left the PTA, shared, "we got a new group in there and I think that's what they needed. They needed some of us older people to let it go and some new energy

coming in." She mentioned being happy with what her PTA group had accomplished, but also said the group dynamics shifted when new group members joined, which she offered as a reason why she has rescinded membership from the group. She stated,

I'm not as involved in PTA because I have personal clashes with some of the board members, so I keep abreast as to what they're doing, because we have different ideology. I stay away from it, but a lot of it has to be my interest level and who is involved.

While the PTA is a public organization, there can be some exclusivity involved which can either be inviting to some families or a silent mechanism of exclusion.

Other parents mentioned topics covered by the PTA as influencing how they participated. A popular sentiment among participants was that the operation and the focus of the PTA was different at individual schools and at different school levels.

For example, Tamara shared,

You know, it's strange because at the middle school level, and I don't embrace this at all, the only thing they're trying to do is fund things for the principal whereas I believe that any parent teacher organization needs to come up with its own objectives and partnership with the principal, and do things that benefit the entire student body, not just the principal. So I've stepped back a lot with the fund raising because I don't believe that we should be there just to be the pocket change provider for the principal, and that's very much what they do at the middle school.

Tamara expressed disappointment by the limited focus of the PTA at her grandson's school, and Aaliyah was discouraged by the amount of fundraising the PTA did. She noted,

I'm not as active as the president, VP, secretary. I'm just an active member. I volunteer, like, with their book clubs or fundraisers. But it's a lot of fundraising, but you don't see anything happening with the money. Maybe, they're not raising funds. I don't know but I can't keep doing this.

Aaliyah was an active member of the PTA; however, she was reconsidering her participation because she did not see that her labor was leading observable differences in her children's schooling experiences. Finally, Ruby said that the activity of schools' PTAs influenced her decision about where to place her son. She stated,

What concerns me with the oldest one going to high school how involved, or how open and receptive they are to parents being involved. One high school I went to, they had a very active PTA and were looking for parents to come in and volunteer and everything else. I'm like, "Ok, maybe I need to put you [her son] there, because they seem receptive to it," but I don't know how receptive all the other schools are in terms of that.

FACE members also mentioned organizing with other families for parental engagement and advocacy activities at the district level, usually via the Board of Education. Aaliyah mentioned going to the state capital and rallying on the steps of the State Building in order to dissuade the state from cutting funding to the county's transportation system, which would have cut transportation to specialty schools. Koron said she participated in Board of Education meetings. She remarked, "I have

been to board meetings. I have spoken on occasion at board meetings. I'm probably as involved as I wanna be. I see when stuff specifically concerns my kids' school." Lalah said she attended some Board of Education meetings earlier in the year, but she felt her presence was largely ineffective. Despairingly she noted, "It became really clear to me it was all just a show. They already had their minds made up about what they were going to do, they just have parents speak at those meetings as a courtesy to say they did it." Finally, Ruby talked about a personal relationship with the School Board representative from her son's school district on whom she could rely to advocate for the interests and needs of the parents.

Although parent based organizations like the PTA are a part of the school system as a clear way for families to have an influence on decision making at the school and district levels, not all FACE parents felt this was an effective strategy to have their voices heard. Some members felt the PTAs were not as welcoming, and some PTAs did not address issues in which the families were interested. Also, some members felt the PTA was more of a formality and had little influence on school decision making.

Conclusion

The activities FACE members identified as parental engagement were consistent with existing parent engagement frameworks. However, school-staff centered parent engagement frameworks note these strategies as passive forms of engagement. The FACE members were very intentional and specific about the activities and the strategies they used in order to attempt to affect change at the school level. They often had very clear purposes and agendas when participating in the

school's existing parental engagement structure. Very often, FACE members attempted to influence decision making at the school level and to initiate and actively participate in meetings with school staff as respected partners.

Generally, the FACE members believed that ensuring a positive educational experience for their children required active participation, commitment, respect, and communication from parents, teachers, and school administrators. The FACE members expected these relationships to be mutually beneficial and expected to have an immediate and definitive impact on their children's schooling experiences. FACE members used multiple strategies to negotiate the existing power structures within the school sanctioned parental engagement system. FACE members encountered different responses to these strategies based on the school's leadership, particular teachers, the family's perceived value or capital, and the issue at hand. Women were much more present in the visible advocacy strategies; however, as discussed in Chapter 5, the underrepresentation of the men can be attributed, in part, to barriers and challenges presented by school personnel. For FACE families, visible advocacy parent engagement strategies were anything but passive forms of engagement. Rather, they were decisively active demonstrations of advocacy that did not appear to be fully recognized by school personnel. FACE members' parental advocacy outside of the institutional gaze of the school system is even more elusive.

Chapter 8: Discussion and Reflection on Findings

in•ter•face

/'in(t)ər, fās/

noun

a point where two systems, subjects, organizations, etc., meet and interact.

verb

interact with (another system, person, organization, etc.)

Parent behavior has long been recognized as a critical indicator of a child's success in school. Children whose parents are described as “weak” (Reeves & Howard, 2013, p.6), are considered “at risk,” and school personnel often employ specific parent engagement initiatives to support them with developing the necessary skills and dispositions to positively affect their children's school experiences. Black families, regardless of class, are overrepresented among parents who are deemed deficient by educational researchers and practitioners, and they are often pathologized due to perceptions about their cultural values, beliefs, and parenting norms. Most parent engagement frameworks and resulting programs and activities are specifically designed to address the perceived deficiencies of Black families and children.

However, as demonstrated in chapters 5-7, both the terms *parent engagement* and *parent involvement* are much too narrow to capture the ways Black families in FACE understood and participated in parent engagement. Both terms center the parent and school relationship, while ignoring and consequently invalidating social connections and labor outside of that relationship, which help families have a positive impact on the children's lives. While school attendance takes up a significant portion of students' days and academic success is a critical component of students' overall well-being, it is not the sole contributing factor. Viewing students only through a

school-based lens and restricting families' engagement to that which the school personnel have authority over, does not include a focus on the whole child. Any parent engagement framework not focused on families' attention to the children's whole selves is incomplete. Additionally, the limited focus of parent engagement frameworks and school programming is structured around perceived deficits in the parents or their children. Parent engagement work designed and developed by the school, in the absence of parent input, is ineffective and discounts the myriad ways Black families are interested in and able to support their children's academic, social, and physical development.

The term *interface*, as both a noun and a verb, aptly captures the essence of FACE as a collective group and the FACE members individually. In terms of the verb, the interface among FACE families and also with other families, friends, and school personnel was a major impetus of the parent engagement work. FACE families' definitions of parent engagement, participation in parent engagement, and development of their conceptualization of parent engagement were all related to these interactions. As a noun, interface, describes the intersection where FACE participants directly met and confronted stereotypes about the perceived deficiencies of Black families' cultures, interests, and competence to engage efficaciously in parent engagement strategies.

This study sought to understand how a group of Black families organized themselves to define, conceptualize, and implement parent engagement, and their expressed concerns and advocacy for their children's education in ways that may be unacknowledged by schools and educational researchers. This study provides a

counter-narrative to the deficit views of Black families propagated by educational researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. Furthermore, it aims to provide insight into how school personnel can work more effectively, collaboratively, and equitably with Black parents. The discussion of the study findings are organized around the research questions and includes implications for policy and practice, theory, and research.

How do participants describe and understand their parent engagement work during and outside of workgroup meetings?

As I categorized and re-categorized relationships and themes found in the data, it reaffirmed the importance of centering the voices and experiences of the participants in the description of the FACE group. Specifically, conveying the FACE members' determination to define their parent engagement work and themselves as engaged parents emerged as especially salient. Hill Collins (2008) suggests that self-definition is one of the core themes of Black Feminist Thought. Specifically, she notes,

Black women's lives are a series of negotiations that aim to reconcile the contradictions separating our own internally defined images of self as African-American women with our objectification as the Other. The struggle of living two lives, one for "them and one for ourselves" (Gwaltney, 1980, p. 240) creates a peculiar tension to construct independent self-definitions within a context where Black womanhood remains routinely derogated. (Hill Collins, 2008, p. 99-100).

FACE members, both women and men, were deeply committed to controlling their own lives and defining their parent engagement work for themselves, on their own terms. Their definitions were inclusive of the multiple and diverse strategies they used to raise their children, all of which they viewed as having an immediate and long term impact on their children's cognitive development and school success. Three ideas capture the FACE families' approaches to parent engagement: (1) parent engagement as a revolutionary act of advocacy, (2) parent engagement strategies as intentional and purposeful, and (3) the utilization of extended networks to support the daily rearing and development of children. FACE families' descriptions and understanding of their parent engagement work were encapsulated within these essential concepts and materialized into a definition and approach to parent engagement that was more reminiscent of parental advocacy than *parent engagement* or *parent involvement*.

Simply “Being” as Revolutionary Activism

FACE families were well aware of the magnitude of their role in their children's development, particularly, their education. The phrase, “parents are their children's first teachers” was not lost on FACE families. They saw themselves as not only their children's main guardians, but their advocates as well. FACE families were aware of the multitude daily challenges to raising Black children who were self-aware, confident, healthy, intelligent, and happy. Therefore, the FACE families saw their roles in their children's lives, at its most fundamental level, as revolutionary. Simply being what they would describe as “good parents,” was considered an

intentional, revolutionary act, especially when considering the stereotypes of Black families and the unique challenges they faced as parents of Black children.

The concept of *Double-Consciousness* can be applied to Black families generally, and to the FACE families in particular (Reynolds, et.al, 2015). The families were aware of how they, as parents, and their parenting practices were viewed by mainstream media, educational research, and school personnel. Therefore, FACE families, attempted to directly contradict and challenge popular beliefs and stereotypes about Black families, in their daily practices. FACE families' "acute awareness of how they were perceived by school officials who were [or were not] members of the dominant culture" (Reynolds, et.al, 2015, p. 95), consistently informed their presence in schools, decision making, and strategies for parent engagement.

In addition to the deficit based beliefs about Black parents' engagement, FACE families faced real day to day challenges as persons raising Black children. For example, not only did FACE families actively work to dispel harmful stereotypes about their values and engagement as parents, they also shielded their children from similar negative stereotypes about Black youth and attempted to ensure their children were not examples of these stereotypes. One of the major ways FACE families understood their parent engagement as the, *Responsibilities of Being a Parent*, dealt specifically with the way they addressed their children's physical and mental health and social and academic development, to keep them alive and thriving. Due to negative stereotypes about Black youth, as described in Chapter 6, FACE families took extra precaution and utilized specific strategies to address racism and preempt

and respond to racially discriminatory acts committed against the children. These strategies, which are necessary to support Black children, are not reflected in the vast majority of parent engagement literature.

Finally, raising children is laborious. A lot of time, effort, financial and other resources, go into taking care of children, and this is especially true when children are school aged. Even though children spend a significant portion of their day at school, they still occupy a considerable amount of their families' thoughts and energies. Even when children were not physically present, the FACE families still engaged in work that directly related to their care giving. For these families, it was revolutionary to acknowledge, as parent engagement work, all of the time and labor that went into ensuring their children were positioned for success in school and able to take advantage of beneficial opportunities. Researching online programs to provide their children with additional academic support, talking to the coaches to determine if their children could benefit from various athletic programs, and researching healthy and convenient after-school snacks, were all strategies FACE families used to raise their children. Coming to understand this work as valid forms of parent engagement was paramount to FACE members' process of developing confidence and perceiving themselves as fully engaged parents.

Intentional and Purposeful

FACE families' care work, particularly related to the achievement and well-being of their children, was intentional and purposeful. Because their time was limited, families rarely made decisions without regard for the ultimate impact their labor would have on their own goals and desires. FACE members intentionally and

purposefully chose to act or not to act in order to affect an outcome that was important to them. Very rarely did FACE participants simply go with the flow or have an attitude of passivity when it came to participating in activities or employing care work that directly affected their children's well-being.

Aspects of both Schickedanz's (1977) and Epstein et al.'s (2009) parent engagement frameworks describe passive engagement. Specifically, both frameworks characterize communication with school personnel, volunteering on school grounds, and attending meetings facilitated by school personnel as passive acts of parental engagement. However, as described in Chapter 7, FACE families' engagement in these and similar types of activities were anything but passive. In fact, whether FACE families had initiated or responded to queries from school personnel, they always engaged with an immediate intended outcome or longer termed goal in mind. For example, home visits were believed to be intended for school personnel to monitor the students' home environments; however, FACE members used home visits to provide evidence of the suitability of their homes and to communicate that their child's home life was not the cause for any challenges he or she experienced at school. Although FACE members did not initiate home visits, they had a specific messages they wanted to convey. Additionally, when FACE families received communication from the school, their responses were calculated. The sacrifices the families made and the time they took to respond to communication from the school were not demonstrative of passive engagement. Essentially, for FACE families, passive engagement was not applicable. Every action by FACE families was intentional and purposeful, regardless of its success.

Even when FACE families chose not to engage in certain activities or utilize certain parent engagement strategies, these were intentional decisions. They often weighed the pros and cons of participating in different activities and strategies, the sacrifices they would have to make, and the projected outcome and made intentional decisions not to engage. Moreover, if FACE members did not find a specific parental engagement activity useful or they disagreed with the facilitator of the activity, they resisted by withholding their participation. This resistance, even if it can be considered passive resistance, was an intentional act of rebellion. Hill Collins (2008) states, "Behind the mask of behavioral conformity imposed on African-American women, acts of resistance, both organized and anonymous, have long existed" (p.97). FACE members' lack of engagement in certain activities did not stem from disinterest in their children's education or ignorance about the topic at hand or the importance of parent involvement. Consequently, FACE families were able to discern between engagement activities that were and were not in their and their children's best interests and those activities that were aligned and misaligned with their beliefs, values, or perceptions of best practices for parent engagement. Thus, purposefully withholding their participation was just as significant as engagement to their perception of themselves as engaged parents.

The Extended Network

Finally, a major component of the FACE families' conceptualizations of parent engagement was the idea that it was a collective effort: a village. FACE participants consistently referenced other family members and social networks when describing their parent engagement. As demonstrated in chapters 5-7, FACE families

recognized that parenting and supporting children in developing all the faculties they need to be successful was a momentous task; and they needed the assistance and support of other people whom they trusted.

FACE families described a collaborative approach to parent engagement that consisted of supporting and assisting others in rearing their children seeking and accepting help. For a number of FACE families, the idea of an extended network or collaborative approach to parent engagement was new. While FACE members had rich and extensive networks for supporting them with their basic parenting responsibilities, they had not thought to tap into these networks to assist with parent engagement, until joining the FACE group. FACE participants' recognition that there were other families who had similar experiences and challenges, and the willingness of friends and family members to take on additional responsibilities related to their children's education, were significant to shifting their perceptions about valid forms of parent engagement.

FACE families' descriptions of their parent engagement challenge the narrow perspective of existing parent engagement frameworks, which rarely include the roles and responsibilities of extended family and friends in parent engagement activities. In this way, parent engagement can be better categorized and described as family engagement or parental advocacy, with an acknowledgement of the multiple persons that contribute to the development and have an immediate influence on the child.

How does the group, as a whole, organize itself and function in support of families' engagement in enhancing their children's educational and social well-being?

Radford-Hill (2000) defines community as “a specific space, location, or grouping of individuals whose sharing in common is claimed by and valued as a significant aspect of an individual's identity” (p. 18). The FACE group formed a community whose members acted as equitable partners in the creation and maintenance of the group's norms and values at the heart of which was an effort to engage in collective activism in the form of parental engagement. The organization, functioning, and purpose of the FACE group had a direct impact on the FACE families' engagement and their impact on the children's education and social well-being. Shared leadership and power and a parent-centered approach to parent engagement, both contributed to the FACE members' development or acquisition of additional parent engagement strategies.

Shared Leadership and Power

For example, as detailed in chapter 5, the FACE meetings and the group culture was one of shared leadership and power. All FACE members, by virtue of their group membership, played a crucial role not only in the group's formation but its identity and sustainability. FACE members' ability to define the work they did individually and collaboratively for themselves and to share in the facilitation of the FACE meetings, were both critical components to their own empowerment. FACE members were able to construct their own learning experiences and determine for themselves what their parent engagement curriculum looked like. These aspects of FACE gave the families ownership of the group, and they felt empowered to have a voice in the formation of the group's culture and identity. Additionally, shared

leadership empowered families to develop and engage in more diverse engagement strategies to positively impact their children's academic and social well-being.

The consistency of the FACE meetings was another aspect of the organization and functioning of FACE that positively contributed to members' parent engagement. As described in chapter 5, not only did the meetings follow a specific format, but the expectations for utilizing engagement strategies outside of the meeting, the structures for member communication, and the demands made on FACE members, were all clear and transparent. Specifically, because FACE meetings and FACE membership were constant and consistent, FACE members did not have to commit a lot of time to learning new meetings structures, protocols, or communication strategies. This empowered FACE members to focus on learning and implementing specific parent engagement strategies.

Finally, a critical component the FACE group was its collaborative approach to parent engagement. A core function of FACE was the shared responsibility that members assumed for the well-being of one another's children. As described in chapters 5-7, the FACE group's approach to learning together and from one another increased not only the families' capacities to provide for their own children, but for others as well. As a function of group membership, FACE participants felt empowered to collaborate with one another to share the labor and responsibility of specific parent engagement strategies. Additionally they enlisted other persons who were not a part of FACE, such as friends and family members. As reported by the FACE members throughout the study, the collaborative nature of the FACE group and the impetus to share the responsibilities of implementing various parent

engagement strategies with others, increased the efficacy of the families' engagement and had a positive effect on the children's academic and social well-being.

Family-centered

I believe the most important feature of the FACE group was that it was family-centered. By organizing itself around the needs and voices of the FACE families, the group's core function was to meet the identified needs of the participating families. The FACE group's family-centered approach was a clear strategy for supporting families' parent engagement.

Unlike most parent engagement frameworks which are school-centered; FACE was owned and operated by the families. This meant the meeting agendas, the curriculum for the group learning that occurred during FACE meetings, and the focus of participants' parent engagement strategies were all based on the identified needs of the FACE members. For example, FACE meeting topics were aligned to the parents' immediate needs. FACE families decided what topic they would learn about at each meeting and what parent engagement strategy they would practice between meetings. This created a grassroots, organic approach to parental advocacy. FACE families were able to identify real concerns that may or may not have had a direct connection to the school site, and were able to engage in further study of the topics at their own pace.

The FACE group's accessibility was another significant strength. FACE meetings were held at a time convenient for families, working around their children's extra-curricular activities. Even if the children did not have activities scheduled during FACE time, part of the group's organization included childcare. Meetings

were held at a local school which was in close proximity to many of the FACE members' homes. The communication structures of the FACE meetings also increased the group's accessibility. For example, the routine of emailing the group members' pictures of the charts completed during FACE meetings containing the parent engagement strategies members would practice before the next meeting, allowed members who missed the meeting to still learn about the focus strategies. Also, the use of text messaging and communication via social media, meant families were able to access information in a multitude of ways, choosing the medium that was most convenient for them.

Finally, because the FACE group and meetings were led by parents and group members, FACE members bought into and trusted the information shared at the meetings. As parents, FACE members really trusted the perspectives, experiences, and suggestions of other parents who they believed had similar challenges and experiences. Unlike other parent engagement meetings or trainings led by parenting experts or school personnel, FACE families trusted their peers to share accurate and useful information related to the given topic. Likewise, they appreciated having the opportunity to share knowledge themselves. This openness and validation of all the FACE members as knowing, informed, participants able to contribute meaningfully to their own learning and the learning of others, was a significant aspect of the FACE group's organization and functioning which had a direct impact on members' parent engagement.

The FACE group was a successful strategy for effective parent engagement for participating families. The organization and functioning of the group, empowered

participants to ensure their parent engagement reflected their goals, beliefs, needs, and values as related to parental advocacy.

What benefits, if any, does participation in the workgroup have for participants' personal development and/or for the children's educational and social well-being?

As reported by the families, participation in FACE had significant benefits which they may not have otherwise accessed. While FACE families' tangentially described how group membership benefitted their children, they communicated a number of advantages to their own development and well-being. Three noteworthy benefits emerged from the data as described in chapters 5-7: (1) increased knowledge, (2) evolution of members' perception of their parent engagement, and (3) an improvement in members' critical consciousness.

Knowledgeable, Informed Parents

FACE families routinely communicated that one of the major benefits of participating in FACE was access to information shared by group members. FACE families reported being more knowledgeable about issues affecting their children's education and being better able to make informed decisions about their children's welfare. Additionally, they expressed increased confidence in supporting other families and family members using information they gained via FACE. For example, this is one way the FACE group grew exponentially: FACE members took information they gained from the group and shared it with others which encouraged those persons to join FACE. The "each one, teach one" approach of FACE families resulted directly from the organization and purpose of FACE. The combination of

access to critical information and the collaborative approach of the FACE group resulted in families feeling comfortable sharing information with one another.

Finally, access to more information contributed to the FACE members gaining confidence in their own understandings, and this empowered FACE participants to challenge beliefs and assertions they disagreed with and to claim authority over their own understandings, particularly as related to parent engagement. For example, access to information allowed the FACE families to form a well-articulated and evidenced opinions about a multitude of topics regarding their children's education and development.

Members' Evolved Perception and Engagement

In chapters 5-7, the data show how FACE members' conceptualizations of parent engagement and perceptions of themselves as engaged parents evolved as a result of FACE participation. Specifically, it is important to point out two major shifts. First, all FACE members learned about and tried different parent engagement strategies that had not previously been a part of their parenting repertoire. Relatedly, a significant finding of the study, is the way FACE membership led to participants, especially the men, implementing parent engagement strategies they had not previously utilized. The data suggests the distribution of labor around parent engagement became more equitable between the men and women.

Furthermore, the FACE families' identification of strategies that were considered legitimate parent engagement evolved. Therefore, a number of the strategies captured in the data chapters were not necessarily new parent engagement strategies, but rather, newly recognized as parent engagement strategies. The

members' evolved conceptualizations had immediate benefits not only for themselves but for the group as a whole. The broadening of the parent engagement category to allow more of the strategies the families utilized on a regular basis, directly contributed to the group's understanding of their engagement work as parental advocacy.

Improved Critical Consciousness

Finally, participants' responses to questions in the individual and focus group interviews, demonstrate an improved critical consciousness among FACE members. For example, FACE families' parent engagement strategies reflected a shift in their approach to questioning their children. They were tuned into a broader range of issues in their children's lives so they were able to identify and address challenges more quickly. Additionally, FACE members reported that participating in the group helped them to challenge defeatist attitudes they sometimes held based on deficit theories about themselves as parents, their children, and their children's schools. For example, regardless of how engaged families were, their children sometimes experienced problems inside and outside of school. As a result of the relationships they formed in FACE and the knowledge they gained and developed, rather than feeling powerless and defeated, they were able to identify effective strategies for addressing challenges while avoiding unsubstantiated guilt or blame of themselves or their children.

Participating in FACE resulted in a number of benefits for participants. Most importantly, FACE contributed to members' perceptions of themselves as actively engaged in their children's lives and increased their confidence in their capacity to positively affect their children's academic, socio-emotional, and physical well-being.

How can understanding the processes of the FACE group deepen understandings about parental engagement and contribute to the reconceptualization of parental engagement both theoretically and practically?

In order to answer this question, I will outline the implications of this research for theory, policy and practice, and research. Because the vast majority of extant research on parent engagement is school-centered, and there is a dearth of literature that centers the voices and experiences of Black families, this study offers the opportunity to make a significant contribution to the field of parent engagement. Additionally, my study findings provide a strong argument for the need to reconceptualize the way parent engagement is traditionally defined, conceptualized, and practiced.

Theoretical Implications

One significant theoretical implication is the need to reconceptualize parent engagement by moving away from school-centered and deficit oriented models. A family-centered engagement model is advantageous for a number of reasons. First, by only focusing on parents interactions with schools, the existing parent engagement models renders a large portion of the families' parent engagement labor invisible. Therefore, these models are not culturally relevant or sensitive to a many families, and Black families in particular. The assumption that families consist of two cohabiting parents and restricting parent engagement to interactions between those persons and school personnel, ignores families with different structures including, extended families and families with co-parents living in different homes. Additionally, as discussed in chapter 5, school personnel can construct barriers

limiting the full engagement of all relevant persons responsible for providing care for the child.

Furthermore, a parent-centered engagement model offers a way to formalize the perspectives of more families and include their voices in the design of school-based parent engagement models. In this way, school personnel can get a broader view of the needs and desires of the families and children and create opportunities for families to empower themselves to maintain ownership over their parent engagement work.

A parent-centered framework shifts the singular focus from the parents--i.e., “What are the parents doing or not doing” and “How can the schools get the parents to do more or less of X”--to a more multifaceted approach that identifies existing challenges and assets, that exist both inside and outside of the school. Any authentic parent engagement model must account for the roles of schools in creating obstacles to effective parent engagement. By limiting parent engagement models to the responsibilities of parents, we have no effective way of explaining why some families are actively engaged according to standards set by school personnel and, still, their children continue to face challenges and barriers to school success. In the absence of other possible explanations, we blame the families.

This study also suggests a continued need to center the experiences and experiences of Black women in the conceptualization of mothering and “motherwork”. Hill Collins states:

Varying placement in systems of privilege, whether race, class, sexuality, or age, generates divergent experiences with motherhood; therefore, examination

of motherhood and mother-as-subject from multiple perspectives should uncover rich textures of difference. (Hill Collins, 1994, p.62).

In this study I suggest, not only is it through the centering of Black women that we can truly understand the processes and outcomes related to the shared labor or collaboration of “motherwork,” but also glean a more nuanced understanding on the role of Black men in that space. What does child care or “motherwork” look like when it's performed by Black fathers and other men? In what ways are they denied access or have their child care (labor) or “motherwork” dismissed due to limited views of men’s work and labor in service of the children and family? My study suggests when fathers and other men performed “motherwork,” their labor was either overpraised, as if extraordinary, or not recognized as legitimate care labor or “motherwork” due to the gendering of parenting and care work.

How the performer or the executioner of “motherwork” or caregiving influences how the labor is interpreted and experienced requires further study in order to uncover additional nuances and theories associated with parenting and parent engagement. For example, centering the experiences of Black men and women uncovered important concepts used to inform theories related to parent engagement for this study, particularly the idea of the legitimate representative. Additional theory building needs to include an analysis of the particular families’ demographics in the South division of FACE, in addition to the geographic location, as these key aspects had a direct role in the success of FACE, and also need to be considered when attempting to replicate this study with other communities. Different strategies may need to be more yielding to the targeted populations of those communities.

For example, all of the members of the South division of FACE were of African descent. However, there are a number of White families, either through interracial relationships or transracial adoption, raising children of African descent. What unique challenges affect a White mother raising a Black child and attempting to participate effectively in parent engagement? How might a White gay male form relationships with the other fathers, of Black children? Do White men or women face the same crisis of challenges to their legitimate representations of the caregiver roles of Black children? What happens when two women present themselves as the child's mothers, or two men as the children's fathers? These can be from homosexual relationships or marriages creating extended families. Who is allowed to act on behalf of the child and who is recognized as a legitimate authority? How can these diverse experiences inform our understanding of the culture of parent engagement at the school site and the parenting networks and resulting social capital built by families in their local communities? The relationships and bonding between the FACE members was an integral component to the success of the FACE group. How are these relationships challenged or nurtured when attempting to build them across racial lines? Additionally, what similarities and differences are experienced within communities of families raising Black children, when they themselves are not Black? These investigations into differences related to race and sexual orientation or relationship, are critical towards building strong theory related to family-centered parent engagement.

Secondly, in addition to the shared labor within the families, the FACE members also collaborated with non-family members to engage in a more collective

approach to “motherwork”. FACE members’ collaborative learning and organization was critical for two reasons. First, on an individual level, due to their shared labor approaches, members no longer suffered in silence. The supportive network helped FACE members to be honest about challenges and barriers they faced and when they needed additional support or resources to participate in effective parent engagement. Second, when members saw others with similar experiences, it shifted a number of challenges away from the singular “you” or “your child” lens. Instead, the problems become situated in a larger systemic and organizational context, shifting the narrative of the problem and its possible solutions towards one of, “Black students need access to better, high quality, equitable learning experiences,” versus, “Black students need better or different parents.” This shift in viewpoint was critically important for FACE members’ identity as both parents and advocates. Hill Collins (1994) notes:

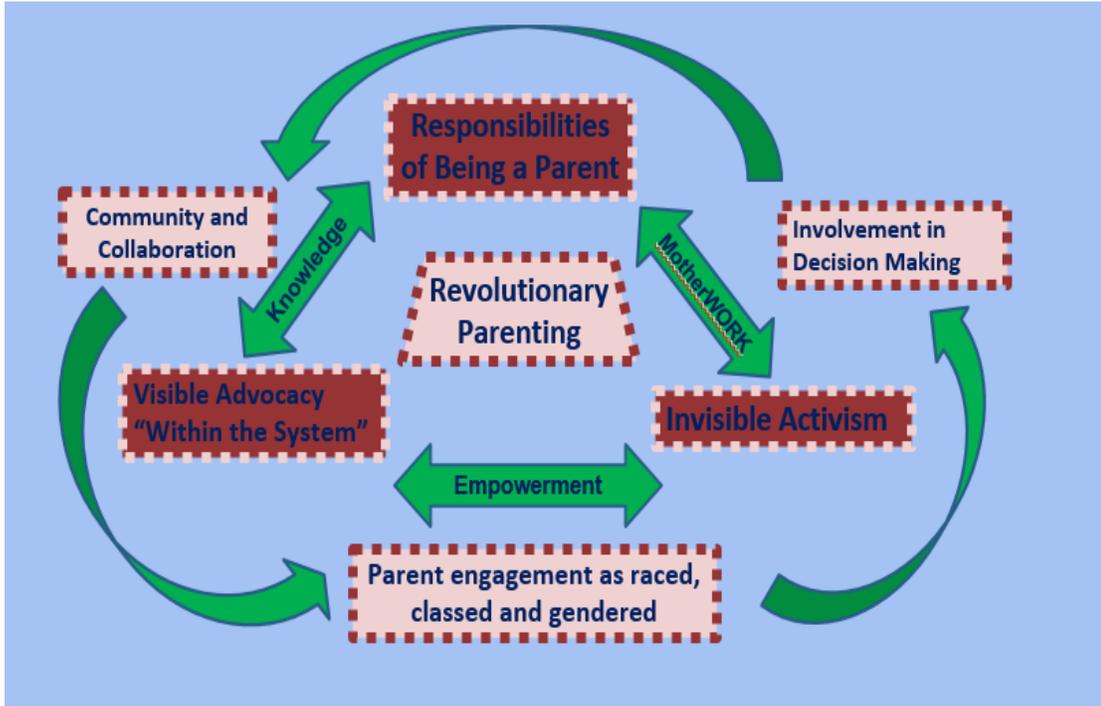
As women and their families engage in collective effort to create and maintains family life in in the face of forces that undermine family integrity... “motherwork” does beyond ensuring the survival of ones’ own biological children or those of one’s family. This type of motherwork recognizes that individual survival, empowerment, and identity require group survival, empowerment and identity (p. 47).

We still need the critical and theoretical tools necessary to further explore the implications of “motherwork” for Black families in both research and practice.

As a result of this study, I propose the FACE group as a potential model for parent-centered family engagement. While any parent-centered model must center the voices of local families and communities, FACE was much more relevant for the

study's participants than Epstein et al.'s (2009) parent engagement model which was used by Regal County. This parent-centered engagement model focuses on three major themes which encompass FACE families' perceptions about effective parent engagement, including: (1) the labor of families related to their parenting responsibilities to ensure the child's academic, social, physical, and mental well-being, (2) the work the families do with school personnel, and (3) families' work with other key stakeholders focused on supporting the children's well-being, including, but not limited to academic and school success. Utilizing the findings of the families' shared perspectives and experiences, their theories can be shaped into a more comprehensive and representative framework for family engagement. I suggest the following conceptual framework informed by Critical Race Theory, Black Feminist Theory, and the theories generated as a result of this research study, as a conceptual model moving forward for the FACE community. Furthermore, I maintain that this conceptual framework can be used by other parenting groups to guide their work together and to determine how they can center their experiences and perspectives in order to create a conceptual framework for parent engagement that is unique to their own needs and desires.

Figure 2. FACE Families' Parent Engagement Conceptual Framework



Policy and Practice Implications

The theoretical implications above have direct meaning for educational policy and school-based practice, both of which are informed by parent engagement models derived from research. Starting with nationally recognized parent involvement policy described in chapter 1, section 1118 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Agencies (ESEA), to which all public schools are held accountable, there must be a constant analysis of the actual implementation of the policy, particularly, as it relates to historically marginalized families.

My research suggests that even though this policy exists it is being implemented inconsistently across schools and to varying degrees of effectiveness. This may be due to the lack of capacity of school leaders and teachers who do not have received adequate preparation for working with diverse groups of families in

their teacher or administrator preparation programs. Without proper training and support, teachers and leaders may not know how to seek, understand, and incorporate the voices of diverse groups, particularly, Black families, in their own professional practices.

This study has immediate implications for teacher and school leader preparation program as well as the professional development of in-service teachers and school leaders. First, it suggests the need to address deficit-based mindsets or viewpoints related to Black families' parent engagement that may be supported based off stereotypes rather than actual experiences and interactions with Black families. Second, school personnel must be trained on how to de-center their personal needs and comfort areas in order to prioritize the needs and experiences of the families. Relatedly, school personnel must avoid planning parent engagement activities and opportunities in a vacuum, without the parents. They must take a collaborative approach with families towards parent engagement. Finally, school personnel must be willing to accept feedback from families, even if that feedback is negative or speaks to possible areas of growth for the school personnel. School personnel must recognize families as equal partners with the same power and respect as their peers, versus another group of students to teach and maintain authority over.

If we want parent engagement policy to be effective, we must include the voices of families to ensure that the policy is effective with families, and that the policy is being implemented with fidelity. For example, my research findings suggest that parent engagement policies need to be consistent and transparent across the entire school district. As described in chapters 5 and 7, FACE families with children in not

only the same school district, but the same school often had very different experiences when attempting to implement parent engagement strategies depending on the individual school staff member with whom they interacted. Additionally, some FACE members demonstrated a lack of clarity regarding the existing parent engagement policies for their schools and school districts.

One way to address inequities and inconsistencies in the enforcement of school policies is to involve families, community members and outside evaluators, in establishing evidence based criteria for effective parent engagement. Specifically, evidence of the parents actually having meaningful and significant involvement with the schools and contributing to the major decision making at the school levels should be required. Moreover, families need to be involved in evaluating the school's implementation of parent engagement policies and practices. For school personnel not contributing to the development of a positive parent engagement culture at the school level, this increased level of accountability may be necessary to prompt a change in professional practice.

Finally, there must be existing policy and funding, to support a more inclusive, shared power construction of parent engagement. That is, parents must have a role in constructing and designing their own parent engagement strategies including their own learning and development and the support they provide to their children and the school personnel. Parents must also have a voice in critical decisions that have an immediate impact on their children, including recruitment and selection of school personnel, school budgets, and curricula. Either making space for families on the existing school leadership team or providing resources and funding for

grassroots, parent-led community groups, can ensure, families have a meaningful voice at the decision making table.

Research Implications

A major implication of this research study is the need for more research studies that center the voices and experiences of Black families. Since Black families are not a monolithic group, there must be specific attention paid to ensuring research is not solely conducted on Black families with limited financial resources like many current studies on parent engagement. First, should include the entire spectrum of Black families, including differences related to geography, class, ethnicity, gender, school type, and familial structure. Second, research should be conducted with, and by Black families, not solely on them, and especially, not limited to quantitative methods, or surveys, and single, brief interviews. This could include action research either parent led or with parents as equal lead investigators, contributors, and owners of research.

There must be research that includes a sustained, ongoing approach, meant to truly understand rather than affirm prevalent beliefs about Black families' experiences and perspectives. As discussed in chapter 5, had I conducted this research and written this dissertation based solely on the interview data from 2012, I would have confirmed assertions in existing research that Black families are mostly engaged in "passive," "lower level" (Schickedanz 1977; Epstein et al., 2009) engagement strategies and had no desire engage with school personnel in more diverse ways. I would not have discovered that Black families' were already engaging in a multitude of effective, parent engagement strategies. Because those strategies were not a part of

the widely recognized cannon of effective parent engagement strategies, they were unacknowledged by both the FACE families and existing parent engagement research.

Finally, all types of research concerning Black families must be widely accessible to those outside of academia. The FACE families drew on research available by scholars and nonscholars available on Facebook, Twitter, magazines, and open access journals, to inform their learning and decisions of effective parent engagement strategies they could implement. This access to information continues to be the key idea that is communicated by the families as being highly desirable and necessary.

Recommendations

Based on my study findings and implications, I propose the following four recommendations.

1. Educational research, policy, and practice, must begin to intentionally create space and yield to families so they may take a meaningful place at the decision making table and craft more family-centered parent engagement frameworks and models. Simply acknowledging that families need to have a greater voice and have their perspectives included is not enough. Instead, funding for research, practice, and development must be made available to grassroots organizations made up of families advocating for high quality, equitable educational opportunities in their communities.
2. Schools must continually evaluate their parent engagement cultures and policies to ensure families are meaningfully engaged in the ways that are

important to them. This also means that schools have to ensure they are receiving critical feedback from a diverse group of families, not just families identified by school personnel. This may require administering surveys and conducting focus groups and individual interviews on families' perceptions of parent engagement. Additionally, school personnel must include families' perspectives in the evaluation of teachers and school leaders, particularly as it relates to their ability to forge meaningful relationships with families.

3. There must be more accountability at both the state and national level for the effective implementation of the true spirit of section 1118 of the ESEA of NCLB. This accountability must extend beyond self-reporting by schools. If school leaders' are only accountable to themselves in actually enforcing inclusive parent engagement policies there may continue to be groups of alienated families and community members without an opportunities to meaningfully shape and inform their children's schooling experiences.
4. Finally, there is a need for more accessible research and publishing (i.e., nonacademic) of counter narratives and data dispelling stereotypes and gross overgeneralizations of Black families and Black students. There must be an intentional aim to shift deficit based theories and combat the invisibility of the diversity of Black families' perceptions and experiences (i.e., Myth of Absent Black Father CDC study in Chapter 2).

Conclusion

Throughout history, Black families have fought for equitable schooling opportunities for their children. While existing parent engagement strategies are largely school-centered, there are multiple opportunities for school personnel to open the decision making space and deliberately develop a school culture that is more welcoming to families' ideas and perspectives, even if they contradict the perspectives or goals purported by school personnel. The success of Black students depends on a differentiated understanding of what success is, which extends beyond academic measures. Additionally, a multifaceted approach to supporting Black families and their children must be recognized, particularly, an approach that is not solely focused on the relationship between parents and school personnel.

There are a few factors which must be acknowledged when considering the successes and challenges of the FACE group which had a significant impact on the group's identity and their work together. First, the context for the group was very specific. This group was made up of Black families exclusively. While there was one Afro-Latino family included in the study, Latinos had no significant presence in the organization. This is critical as the larger county where the FACE group is located continues to experience an increase in their Hispanic population every year, particularly in the North division. The South division of FACE has not had a significant shift or increase in the Hispanic population in their schools, thus an effort to include Hispanics was not necessarily an impediment to the group's progress. However, in areas where school communities are more racially and ethnically diverse, family members and community organizers would need to think of effective

ways to include all members of the community in the work together, which may require additional work around mindsets and community building.

Second, this school district is one of the largest school districts in the United States, whose population is made up of a majority of racial and ethnic historically marginalized minorities. Implications from this study may be different in school districts where Black families make up a smaller percentage or are not the majority of the represented groups. While research suggests and was confirmed by this study Black families across socio-economic incomes experience similar challenges to effective parent engagement, these challenges may be exacerbated when they are also the racial minority group and persons in positions of power mostly differ from them racially and ethnically. Additionally, the sheer size of the school district afforded the families many different schooling options that are often not available in smaller or more rural school districts. This is particularly pertinent because many of the families exercised school choice as an effective strategy for parent engagement and advocacy.

There are two significant contributions this particular research study contributes to the existing educational research field. One, it provides evidence of the need for a parent-centered family engagement model, and provides an example of what that model can look like and how to use the voices of Black families to develop the model. Two, it provides a counternarrative which directly challenges the deficit based views of Black families which dominate educational research. Particularly, it also makes the case that Black families do not need to have their parenting responsibilities and opportunities for meaningful parent engagement explained to them by experts or school based personnel. By working together, and framing their

work with an intentional focus on parental advocacy and activism, FACE families were able to learn alongside and from one another. They were able to define their own work which aligned with their values, beliefs, and experiences.

This dissertation can inform multiple stakeholders engaged in parent engagement research. First, families can use this study as a model or an example of how to organize themselves. While the conceptual framework (Figure 2.) derived from this study may not entirely be applicable to other parent-led organizations, the process by which the FACE group organized itself to form a group, sustained weekly meetings, and the strategies they utilized for effective parent engagement may be useful as a reference for other parenting groups. I plan to further develop my website www.tamykamorantphd.com and add a section specifically filled with tips and strategies for other parent or community based groups interested in forming their own parental advocacy groups. Additionally, there will be a page specifically for FACE members in an effort to increase our presence and impact on the educational landscape of our local community. As stated earlier, school leaders can use this study to consider ways to engage families in meaningful, collaborative partnerships. Additionally, it can provide insight into the myriad of opportunities that families are interested in pursuing in an effort to be considered full partners in their children's education. As an educational practitioner and teacher educator, my website will include specific tips and strategies, including surveys, possible questions, and outreach strategies for teachers to utilize in order to take a more asset based approach to family engagement. Finally, there are several research articles and possibilities for short educational opinion pieces that can be derived from this larger research study.

These shorter research pieces can have an immediate impact not only on the educational research landscape but on the suggestions or takeaways for policy and practice.

Black families have the potential to make a significant impact on parent engagement policies and practices at the school and district level. In addition, they can impact the quality of their children's schooling experiences, if we would only discover, acknowledge and consider their voices and experiences when defining and planning powerful parent engagement. FACE families' strategies and experiences with labor, organizing, and defining their own parent engagement work can serve as a model for reconceptualizing possibilities for inclusive, impactful, sustainable, parent-led communities of practice.

Appendices

Appendix A: Individual Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol Project: Rendering the Invisible Visible: A Study of Black Families Participating in FACE (Families Advocating for their Children's Education)

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: Tamyka Morant

Interviewee:

Date consent form signed:

Script: Thank you again for agreeing to meet with me for this interview. I really appreciate your time. I just have a few questions for you. Please let me know if you need me to repeat or clarify any of the questions I ask you. If you do not feel comfortable answering the question that I ask, please say **PASS** and I will move on to the next question. If you need to take a break at any time please let me know. Also, we can absolutely end the interview at any time at your request and you will not be penalized. As a reminder, I will be audiotaping this interview.

Questions⁷:

How would you describe your engagement in your child(ren)'s school? [*Individually? Collectively?*]

How would you describe your satisfaction with your family engagement in your child's school? [*Why or why not*]

What have been your experiences with the workgroup? [What are

⁷ Notes in the brackets represent follow-up or clarifying questions.

some roles you have taken on? how have you participated?]

Have you had any memorable moments or actions that have occurred during workgroup that have had an effect on you? [*Please tell me more about that*]

Have you faced any obstacles or barriers to being actively engaged in your child(ren)'s school? If so please tell me about them. [*Is there anything you want to do that you feel you aren't able to?*]

Have you shared anything you did with the workgroup with anyone who was not a member of the workgroup or have you invited anyone to our workgroup that was not initially a member? [*Please tell me more about that*]

Conclusion: Is there anything else you would like to share? Thank you very much for your time. I want to assure you that I will keep your responses to my questions confidential. I will be analyzing the information you and others gave to me and submitting a draft report to the workgroup prior to our first meeting so that members can give additional feedback. I will be in contact with you in the near future to discuss our workgroup and the date, time and location of the second interview. Thank you again.

Appendix B: Focus Group Interview Protocol

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: Tamyka Morant

Interviewee:

Date consent form signed:

Script: Thank you again for agreeing to meet with me for this interview. I really appreciate your time. I just have a few questions for you. Please let me know if you need me to repeat or clarify any of the questions I ask you. If you do not feel comfortable answering the question that I ask, please say **PASS** and I will move on to the next question. If you need to take a break at any time please let me know. Also, we can absolutely end the interview at any time at your request and you will not be penalized. As a reminder, I will be audiotaping this interview.

Interview Protocol

Focus Group -All questions may not be necessary based on how families respond to preceding questions.

Why does your family continue to participate in the working group?

(Additional prompts: What do you hope to accomplish)?

How do you define parental/family engagement as it relates to your children's educational experiences?

Tell me about how you are engaged in your child(ren)'s educational experiences.

Tell me about your family's participation in the parent workgroup.

(Additional prompts: How often do you participate in workgroup meetings?)

How often do you complete the application assignments?)

What are the roles and responsibilities for each of you (family members) as it pertains to engagement with your children's education?
(Additional prompt: describe the things each of you do to support your child's education)

What value (or affect), if any, do you believe participating in the working group has had on your child's educational experiences? (Prompts: how has participating in the working group changed your child's educational experiences?)

What strategies or actions that you have done do you think have had a positive impact on your child's educational experiences?

Have you had any experiences with your child's educators or educational programs that you felt were racist, sexist, biased or unfair in anyway?

Individuals

First interviewees will be asked questions for elaboration based on their responses during the family unit interviews. Then participants will be asked the following questions; however, all questions may not be necessary based on how families respond to preceding questions.

What are your goals for participating in the working group? What are you hoping to accomplish?

How has participating in the workgroup affected your definition or understanding of parental engagement in your child's education?

How would you describe yourself (or your role) in relationship to your child's education?

What value, if any, do you think you have brought to the workgroup?

What value, if any, has the workgroup had on you as a parent (aunt, Grandmother, Grandfather, etc.)?

What have been some of your experiences as a workgroup member as you implemented the principles and strategies from the workgroup?

What is your perception of the reception and reaction of the schools and school personnel when you were implementing strategies you agreed to try from the workgroup?

What strategies have you found particularly successful when attempting to form partnerships with your child(ren)'s school?

What successes would you describe or identify that came as a result of your participation in the workgroup?

Have you faced any challenges or barriers have you experienced while attempting to engage in your child's educational experiences? If so, please describe. Were you able to manage or overcome those challenges? If so, how?

Have you had any experiences with your child's educators or educational programs that you felt were racist, sexist, biased or unfair in anyway?

Appendix C: Initial Deductive Coding List

Coding Criteria	Code
Defines or gives specific examples of parental engagement or activities	DEF
Participant notes personal benefits for participating in FACE	FBS
Participant notes benefit for their children for participating in FACE	FBC
Participant notes feeling being in FACE is inclusive community	FI
Notes challenges to participation or from specific incidents	FC
Participants note strategies or assets to approaching or dealing with challenges	FA
Opportunities or activities for parental engagement organized or sanctioned by school district or school	RCPE
Participants note collaboration with other individuals within FACE or outside of FACE	CF
Notes interaction between FACE members and school personnel	FSP
Participant notes feelings of bias or discrimination	Highlight green
Notes issues of power or negotiation for power	Highlight yellow
Notes issues of self-reliance or ownership of the parental engagement work	Highlight blue

Appendix D: University of Maryland Consent Form (Pilot Study)

Project Title	<p align="center">A Grounded Theory Explanation of the Experiences of African-American Families in a Participatory Action Research Process Advocating Active Parental Engagement in their Children’s Urban Schools</p>	
Statement of Consent	<p align="center">Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.</p> <p align="center"> <input type="checkbox"/> I agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study. <input type="checkbox"/> I do not agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study. </p> <p align="center">If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.</p>	
Signature and Date	<p align="center">PARTICIPANT NAME [Please Print]</p>	
	<p align="center">PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE</p>	
	<p align="center">DATE</p>	

Appendix E: University of Maryland Information Sheet⁸

Project Title	A Grounded Theory Explanation of the Experiences of African-American Families in a Participatory Action Research Process Advocating Active Parental Engagement in their Children’s Urban Schools
Purpose of the Study	This research is being conducted by Tamyka Morant and Tara Brown, Ph.D., at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are an African-American or Black adult and you have a familial relationship with at least one child in a public, private, or charter school in XXXXXXXX or XXXXXXXX. This research is being conducted to discover a theory about the ways families collectively and collaboratively initiate and advocate active parent engagement in their children’s schools.
Procedures	<p>The procedures involve two interviews that will last about an hour each. The interviews will take place in a quiet location of your choice. The initial interviews will be held February 20th- March 2nd, 2012 and the second interviews will be held April 9th – April 20th, 2012. You will be asked questions about your engagement in your child’s schools and your participation in the process for collective and collaborative engagement in your children’s schools. You will also be asked to answer a few demographic questions on a brief questionnaire. These interviews will be audiotaped so they may be transcribed and analyzed later.</p> <p>You will also be asked to participate in a workgroup on Thursdays 8:00 pm- 9:00 pm, beginning March 8, 2012, and resuming each consecutive Thursday until April 19, 2012; however, we may conclude the meetings earlier. The workgroup will take place at⁹ ----- . As a group we will plan the direction of our workgroup sessions but generally they will focus on planning and sharing strategies for the individual and collective parental engagement in their children’s schools, sharing obstacles and successes, and determining next steps. Childcare and dinner will be offered for all participating members at each workgroup session. These workgroup sessions will be streamed and shared with other members in our workgroup via a private webinar hosted on .anymeeting.com/Parent Workgroup. You will also be asked to complete a short personal reflection form at the end of each workgroup session.</p> <p>Finally you will be asked to share any documents you feel comfortable sharing related to your active engagement with your child’s school. This may include correspondence between you and the school, report cards, notes, etc.</p>

⁸ Form was updated with current dates and PI when administered to participants

⁹ Redacted to maintain confidentiality

	Documents that you share will be kept confidential by replacing real names with pseudonyms and aliases. The total time for your participation will be ten hours at most.
Potential Risks and Discomforts	<p>There are some potential risks from participating in this research study. These risks will be avoided whenever possible. Member checks are being utilized to reduce anxiety and discomfort of the participants. Possible risks may include:</p> <p>Participants may have feelings of embarrassment, anxiety, or insecurity that may result from making their learning, knowledge, and practices public.</p> <p>Participants may feel apprehensive about sharing their work, especially if they feel it is incorrect or if they feel they are being negatively judged. Thus participants may experience emotional discomfort or psychological distress.</p> <p>Participants who are shy may be nervous or uncomfortable about sharing their experiences with the researcher and may experience emotional discomfort or psychological distress.</p> <p>Potential for the loss/breach of confidentiality.</p>
Potential Benefits	<p>The benefits to you include having an opportunity to share and construct strategies that empower you to be actively engaged in their children’s schools. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through an improved understanding of Black family pedagogy and theory related to Black families’ collective engagement and advocacy in their children’s schools.</p>
Confidentiality	<p>We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. Confidentiality will be maintained during data collection and data storage. To help protect your confidentiality: (1) only your first name or a pseudonym will be listed on the interview. (2) If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible.</p> <p>This research project involves making audiotapes of you. The audiotapes are being made to assist with analyzing the information you share. Only the researchers and a transcriptionist who has pledge confidentiality will have access to these tapes.</p> <p>All data will be placed in a locked file cabinet in the student researcher’s locked office at her residence. Data collected on a USB memory stick will be password protected and also placed in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s locked office at a her residence. Videotapes and digital recordings will be downloaded to a RW-DVD and RW-CD, password protected, and also placed in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s locked office at her residence. The webinars will be hosted on a secure server, anymeeting.com and will be protected with a password available only to the study’s participants. The only persons with access to the data include the principal investigator, a professor at the University of Maryland, College Park, and the student researcher, full time</p>

	<p>doctoral candidate at the University of Maryland, College Park.</p> <p>___ I agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study. ___ I do not agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study.</p> <p>If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</p>
<p>Right to Withdraw and Questions</p>	<p>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. You will be encouraged to ask the researcher questions throughout the duration of the study.</p> <p>If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator, Tara Brown, at: 2311 Benjamin Building, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742, (301)405-3324. OR the student investigator, Tamyka Morant at: P.O. Box 904 O-----</p>
<p>Participant Rights</p>	<p>If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:</p> <p>University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 1204 Marie Mount College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail: irb@umd.edu Telephone: 301-405-0678</p> <p>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</p>

Appendix F: Description of FACE Meetings

The FACE meetings were the most consistent component of the FACE group. The process for the meetings followed a consistent protocol. Three major dynamics occurred each meeting, (a) sharing of the parental advocacy experiences participants worked on or learned since the last meeting; (b) discussion and defining of the new parental advocacy topic of the week; (c) identification of the parental advocacy strategy participants would attempt to implement until the next meeting. Each meeting logistically followed a similar format. A few participants began arriving with food and drinks, and paper goods at about 6:15pm and placed the food on the back table of the cafeteria while a Girl Scout meeting was still in session. After the conclusion of the Girl Scouts meeting at 6:30pm, the Scouts fixed their plates, and the oldest Teen Scouts took the Scouts whose parents were staying for the FACE meeting to the library which was on the opposite end of the hallway from the cafeteria. By this time other participants had begun to arrive and FACE members engaged in commune around the food tables. Most of the conversations were dyads or triads discussing the meeting's "task". There was a clear pencil box filled with four folded slips of paper at a table closest to the door. During this time a few people also took a slip of paper out of the box. There were only four slips which did not allow for each person in attendance to have one. The four slips: *charts*, *email*, *kids*, and *time*, were actually jobs or responsibilities that were critical for the facilitation of the meeting.

The person holding the *timer* slip announced it was time to begin. The person with the *chart* slip went to the chart paper and stated, "Last time we met, we decided we would try X, how did it go?" Participants then shared their different experiences and the person with the *chart* slip would write notes on the chart paper. During this

time as participants shared their responses, other participants chimed in to ask clarifying questions, provide verbal or nonverbal praise, co-sign their experience, or offer advice. By interjecting comments in this circular fashion every meeting participant was able to share. The seating chart created by the researcher tracked the number of instances each participant spoke, noting each participant spoke at least once, the average number of speaking instances per speaker was three, and the outlier was eleven instances (Appendix J). Once there was a natural lull in the conversation, the chart person said, “This week’s topic is X. Does anyone have any ideas?” At that point, in a popcorn style fashion, participants shared information on the topic. Several participants shared resources they printed from the internet; but, others shared information including websites, emails, Facebook posts, and Tweets. While ideas were shared, the *chart* person wrote them on the chart paper. Again, after a natural lull in the conversation, the *chart* person said, “Now it is time to choose the strategy you are going to try next week. Write it down so you can remember and bring it back for next time”. That signaled the end of the meeting.

Then the person who had the *email* slip either took pictures of the charts from their mobile device, or typed up the strategies charts with all of the notes on their mobile device (cell phone, iPod, etc.) and emailed them to the group. During the meeting the person with the *kids* slip left the room for about 2 minutes to check on the Scouts and the children in the library. The person with the *timer* slip consistently signaled the start time of the meeting, and if the time was past 8pm. Other timing incidences were dependent on the person. Some meetings there was an announcement of time made on the half. Another time there was only an announcement when there

were five minutes left in the meeting. During two meetings there was an announcement that it was time to check on the children. Due to the variations in timing at all the meetings, it was clear there was not a set amount of time for each segment. Additionally, it was difficult to ascertain exactly how much time was spent on each activity; however, on average a ratio was apparent. Once the official meeting started the majority of the time, about $3/5^{\text{th}}$ of the time, was spent reviewing the week's topic and task from the previous week. About $1/4^{\text{th}}$ of the time was spent discussing the new topic and offering suggestions for FACE members to try over the next few weeks. Finally, the last amount of time, approximately $1/8^{\text{th}}$, participants spent writing down their commitments and conversing with members about their chosen strategies. All of the meetings went past 8pm and on average, most of the meetings ended about 8:30pm.

Appendix G: Table 1 FACE Group Members (South)

Participants and Relationships to One Another ¹⁰	School-Aged Children They Support	Age	Gender	Household ¹¹ Income	Highest education obtained
Kyle (husband) Krystal (wife)	Son, 9 th grade Daughter, 7 th grade	45 43	M F	More than \$100,000	HS diploma Bachelors
Lalah (daughter) Tamara (mother)	Son/Grandson, 10 th grade Son/Grandson, Kindergarten Niece/Granddaughter, 7 th grade Nephew/Grandson, 9 th grade Niece/Granddaughter, 10 th grade	32 58	F	\$60,000-\$75,000	HS diploma HS diploma
Nate (unmarried)	Daughter, Kindergarten Son, 4 th grade	34	M	\$15,000-\$45,000	Bachelors
LaLani (siblings) Marshawn (siblings)	Daughter/Niece 2 nd grade; Daughter/Niece 5 th grade	28 31	F M	\$45,000-\$60,000 \$15,000-\$45,000	Some college G.E.D.
Karen (married)	Nieces and Great Nieces, grades PS3-10 th grade	54	F	\$45,000-\$60,000	HS diploma
Nikki (unmarried)	Daughter, 6 th grade Daughter, 8 th grade	37	F	\$60,000-\$75,000	Some College
Angela (mother) Kia (daughter)	Son/Brother, 11 th grade Granddaughter/Daughter, 1 st grade	58 22	F F	\$45,000-\$60,000 Less than \$15,000	HS diploma Some College
Renée (separated)	Daughter, 5 th grade Daughter, 8 th grade	33	F	\$75,000- \$100,000	Masters
Ruby (married)	Son, 7 th grade Son, 9 th grade	42	F	More than \$100,000	Doctorate
Koron (wife) Mike (husband)	Daughter, 4 th grade Daughter, 8 th grade	35 35	F M	\$75,000- \$100,000	Bachelors Bachelors
Aaliyah (wife) Greg (husband)	Son, 7 th grade Daughter, 8 th grade Son, 12 th grade	40 46	F M	\$15,000-\$45,000	Bachelors HS diploma
Daveon (unmarried)	Son, 2 nd grade Son, 3 rd grade Son, 6 th grade	28	M	\$15,000-\$45,000	HS diploma
Lorraine (co-parents) JaQuan (co-parents)	Son, 5 th grade Son, 6 th grade Son, 8 th grade Daughter, 2 nd grade	28 33	F M	\$45,000-\$60,000 Less than \$15,000	HS diploma Some College
Talay (daughter) Mariabelle (mother)	Son/Grandson, 8 th grade	29 52	F F	\$15,000-\$45,000	HS diploma G.E.D.
Chimeda (daughter/sibling) Oleywai (mother) Malayshia (daughter/sibling/ married)	Son/Nephew/Grandson, 3 th grade Daughter/Niece/Granddaughter, 5 th grade Daughter/Niece/Granddaughter, 4 th grade	33 54 30	F F F	\$60,000-\$75,000 More than \$100,000	Some College Unknown Masters

¹⁰ Participants are unmarried unless stated otherwise

¹¹ Participants were asked to choose gender, highest education obtained, and household income from a multiple choice list

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