

CONCEPTUALIZING VALUE: AFRICAN AMERICAN MOTHERS'
PERSPECTIVES ON SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP, PARENTAL
INVOLVEMENT AND FAITH

by

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ABSTRACT

SHANITRIA NICHOLE CUTHBERTSON. Conceptualizing value: African American mothers' perspectives on school-community partnerships, parental involvement, and faith. (Under the direction of DR. CHANCE W. LEWIS)

Over 30 years of research on parental and community engagement in schools highlight the positive impact of school-family-community partnerships on academic achievement, social and cultural enrichment, and overall school climate (Blank, Jacobson, & Melaville, 2012; Brown & Swick, 1981, Bryan, 2005; Davies, 1993; Epstein et al., 2002; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Palanki, 1992; Sanders, 1998; Wang & Boyd, 2000). Scholars, educators, and policymakers recommend strategic development of school-community partnerships to support low-income families and communities served by urban Title I schools (Epstein & Hollifield, 1996; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). African American parental involvement, chiefly mother involvement, has been noted as a critical component to the success of predominantly African American urban Title I schools. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of African American mothers who volunteer as school-community partners at an urban Title I middle school. The study also examined the mothers' conceptualization of the value added by a school-community partnership to an urban Title I middle school. The study was guided by three research questions: 1) What are the perceptions and experiences of African American mothers who partner as volunteers with a school-community partnership serving an urban Title I middle school? 2) How do African American mother volunteers perceive the overall contribution of a school-community partnership serving students, families and faculty at an urban Title I middle school? 3) How do African

American mother volunteers conceptualize the value of a school-community partnership serving an urban Title I middle school? The study used a qualitative case study design to explore the perceptions and experiences of six African American mothers. Themes of family and community building, othermothering, access and opportunity, promoting family stabilization, connections to faith based community, and reciprocity emerged from the data. The six emergent themes collectively reflected the mothers' experiences and construction of value. Findings suggest that African American mother volunteers together with school-community partnerships add perceived and tangible value to urban Title I schools.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother, Mary Louise Cuthbertson. I am your lineage. The lessons you have taught me in sacrifice, selflessness, perseverance, sharing, nurture, and awareness are more valuable than all of my degrees put together. It is because of these lessons that I am a community scholar and not just a scholar.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Longitudinal research on parental involvement suggest that parental engagement in education is central to the academic success of all students ((Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Hong & Ho, 2005; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002; SuiChu & Willms, 1996). However, scholars disagree on which form of parental involvement is most beneficial to students' academic success. This disagreement is rooted in the difficulty scholars, schools, and policymakers face defining parental involvement for diverse groups. Definitions of parental involvement vary across class, culture, and school level (elementary, middle, and high school). Parental involvement has been alternatively defined from study to study. Baker and Soden (1997) conducted a metaanalysis on the topic of parental involvement in education. In their review of 145 articles on parental involvement, the researchers found inconsistent definitions of parental involvement. The construct of parental involvement was operationalized in each study according to specific foci. Researchers operationalized the construct broadly based on attitude and expectations, parental behavior, and general parenting style.

Baker and Soden (1997) noted further inconsistencies within studies with similar foci. For example, homebased parental involvement has been defined by parental provision of access to educational materials in the home, socioemotional support, at home work stations, and parental academic expectations. The difficulty identifying a

concrete understanding of parental involvement is not exclusive to scholarly research; parental involvement discrepancies are echoed in the development of education policy and programming at the national, state, and local levels. The lack of consensus on parental involvement directly impacts the measurements and perceptions of parental engagement for students, schools, and families. Families that do not align with specific operationalized definitions of involvement may be negatively affected.

Educational legislation such as Title I, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandate parent involvement despite the lack of consensus and clarity on which forms of parental involvement are most beneficial to student success. Education legislation typically mandates what is termed school-based parental (SBPI), school-based parental involvement is characterized by in person parental engagement in general school meetings, communication with teachers and administrators, attendance at school events, and participation in volunteer opportunities at the school (Herrold & O'Donnell, 2008). School-based parental involvement in education policy is unofficially regarded as the "ideal" form of parental involvement. Operationalizing parental involvement primarily based on SBPI excludes forms of parental involvement that are largely influenced by minority cultures, class, and parental educational experience. School Based Parental Involvement is complicated by the influence of culture, class, and parental educational experience.

Auerbach (2007) noted that the tenets of White middle class norms tend to undergird many definitions of SBPI. Cooper (2009) posits that school-based parental involvement assumes availability during traditional school hours and shared power in academic decision making. The construct of parental involvement also does not account for the barriers, exclusion, and discrimination often faced by low-income parents and

parents of color (Lewis & Forman, 2007). Studies suggest that there is an intrinsic bias within the construct of parental involvement used in education policy that privileges middle class white behavioral norms (Auerbach, 2007; Cooper, 2009). Research on educator perceptions of SBPI and deficit framing of urban education indicate that bias within the construct of parental involvement directly impact educator perceptions of lowincome and minority parental involvement (Delpit, 1995; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Noguera, 2011). When parental involvement is measured primarily by school-based involvement, a significant gap in parental participation emerges between the following groups: urban and suburban, low income and high income, and minority and majority (Lee & Bowen, 2006).

Urban schools across the country report smaller numbers of school based parental involvement for parents of color (Auerbach, 2007). Literature anchored in the perspective of urban school personnel (i.e., teachers, social workers, and administrators), report lower numbers of African American parental involvement in school meetings, teacher conferences, and after-school programming (Auerbach, 2007).

Research particularly identifies African American parental involvement as a critical issue in many urban school settings (Anyon 2005, Darling-Hammond, 2010; Moore & Lewis, 2012; Payne, 2008). African American students comprise close to one third of the population in many large urban school districts across America (CGCS, 2012). Statistics reveal that urban African American students are more likely to attend segregated, high poverty schools. Over 40% of African American students in the United States attend a high need, high poverty school and 29% of African American students attend a high poverty school that is 90% minority (Jordan, 2014; U.S. Department of

Education, 2012). Therefore, African American parental involvement is central to urban, high need, high poverty schools, namely urban Title I schools.

The interplay of race and class in many urban schools, particularly Title I schools, reveal the contextual barriers to SBPI. These barriers include: inflexible work schedules, negative school climate, financial limitations, childcare and other caretaker responsibilities, culturally misaligned school activities, and negative parent to teacher and teacher to parent perceptions (Kim, 2009). The barriers and challenges many urban lowincome parents face in SBPI are in constant tension with research that suggest that parental involvement directly contributes to academic achievement, positive self-concept of students, student motivation, student future aspiration, school climate, and a unified parent-school message on the importance of school (Comer, 1997; Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al., 1997; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Henderson and Mapp, 2002). The findings from parental engagement research suggest that student success and parental involvement are organically interactive. The positive influence of parental involvement has inspired education policy mandates that promote parental engagement initiatives in schools; however, varying ideas on which type of parental involvement contributes most to student success remains unclear and complicates parental engagement initiatives hosted by Title I schools. School led parental engagement initiatives in many urban schools are further challenged by the distrust and cultural dissonance many parents of urban Title I students wrestle with when seeking to physically engage the school.

Despite these challenges many urban parents, particularly African American parents engage in their child's educational process indirectly through home and community based educational involvement (Jeynes, 2005). African American mothers have been shown to lead much of the community and home-based parental involvement

in education. Understanding the perspectives of African American mothers on parental involvement in urban Title I schools is critical to holistically addressing African American student performance and success in urban settings.

African American Parental Involvement

Studies on parental involvement intentionally apply gender-neutral language to describe parental engagement, although women, specifically mothers, primarily undertake the work of parental engagement in schools (Kazura, 2000; Nihat & Gurbuzturk, 2013; Prins & Toso, 2008; Reay, 1998). Cooper (2007) examined African American mother's engagement in school selection and educational advocacy and identified the act of cultural resistance and empowerment in their children's education as "motherwork". Findings from the study uncovered forms of parental involvement alternative to SPBI and counternarrative to prevalent stereotypes that portray African American parents as uninvolved, inattentive, and unconcerned (Cooper, 2007).

Counter to the broader narrative of school-based parental involvement of African American parents, Cooper (2007) highlights the African American mother's educational advocacy and fight for equity in educational opportunity she offers a counter narrative of parental involvement. Other studies indicate that for many African American parents' educational success is perceived to be directly tied to social and economic liberation (Anderson, 1998; Jeynes, 2003). Further research is needed to continue to unearth the counternarrative of African American parental involvement in urban Title I schools.

Urban Title I Schools and Parental Involvement

Schools with higher concentrations of low-income students are classified as Title I. Schools classified as Title I are provided federally funded financial and administrative support to enhance the learning environment and mediate the effects of poverty (Elementary and Secondary Education Act [ESEA], 1965; Evans & Radina, 2014; Isernhagen, 2012). Studies have shown that optimal academic performance necessitates the provision of basic needs (Anyon, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Noguera, 2014). Many urban Title I schools often struggle to address the multifaceted and often basic needs of low-income students. Organizing, staffing, and funding school-based provisions for mental health, housing, nutrition, after-school enrichment, and other external academic support to meet basic students' needs would be extremely difficult for any school to carry out alone. This task is especially difficult for schools serving economically struggling communities.

Education scholars and policy makers have yet to pinpoint a full-proof, catchall solution to successfully addressing the academic, economic, and social needs of urban Title I schools across the United States. Urban education reform initiatives over the last two decades have struggled to identify concrete, sustainable programs and practices that promote student learning and development in urban high poverty schools (Michie, 2012; Payne, 2008). Several large scale state and federal education initiatives, such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top, have promised great academic gains and success for poor and minority children. However, these initiatives are based primarily on outcomes of standardized testing and accountability measures and not holistic success and wellbeing. No Child Left Behind

(the largest governmental education reform initiative in U.S. history) and the Race to The Top Program are two examples of combined state and federal efforts to increase students learning and performance through policy. No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top were especially focused on the academic improvement of underperforming, high poverty schools (Hursh, 2007; McGuinn & Manna, 2013). Both promised great gains in literacy and on grade level academic performance for all children, but neither program has been able to drastically improve the student outcomes for urban low income students (Dee & Jacob, 2010; Ravitch, 2016). Both of these initiatives have failed to adequately address the social context in which students live and learn.

Noguera (2003) noted that any reform effort that does not address the social context and physical/emotional needs of students being served will always fail to improve student outcomes. Understanding and responding to the context of urban poverty is essential for any urban education reform initiative aimed at improving high poverty, majority minority schools. Contextual knowledge of urban low-income communities and the academic challenges of students in urban Title I schools can be ascertained by schoolcommunity engagement. School-community interaction can provide schools, families, and community partners with a full understanding of what should be done, and who should do it within the context of urban Title I schools. Research suggest that large percentages of Title I students are categorized as being economically disadvantaged and therefore at-risk (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2014). Students that are considered economically, socially, and physically vulnerable experience a myriad of risk factors that make them susceptible to school failure. The Congressional Research Service (2014) names multiple risk factors that influence whether youth will experience school failure. These factors include: poverty, family instability, family dysfunction, child

maltreatment, and exposure to violence in the community, negative school environments, limited school and community resources, residential instability, and minority status (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2014). The risk factors experienced by low-income students permeate all contexts in which students learn and grow. Students whom simultaneously experience two or more of these risk factors are especially at risk for school failure (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Fernandes-Alcantara, 2014; Irvine, 1990; Kozol, 2005; Payne, 2008).

Potential solutions to the challenges of academic performance and parental involvement in urban Title I schools are being introduced with each new reform initiative; however, profound impact on academic achievement and parental involvement has been slow (Manna & McGuinn, 2013). This reality increases the importance of thorough investigation of models and strategies that have increased the parental involvement and academic performance of low-income students in urban Title I schools. One strategy for social and academic improvement in urban education that stakeholders have agreed on is community engagement. Scholars agree that parental involvement and community partnerships are an untapped resource for many urban Title I schools (Lawson & van Veen, 2016). School-community partnerships enable schools to engage parents and meet student needs that are beyond the classroom, providing students with direct and indirect support to improve academic achievement (Epstein, 2001; Sheldon, 2005).

Support for environmental context outside of school is a vital component to increasing the academic achievement of low-income students. Research indicates that family and community environments have more influence on academic performance outcomes on standardized test than the teacher and the school environment combined.

(Epstein, Sanders, & Sheldon, 2007; Haertel, 2013; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Hofert et al., 1998; Israel, Beaulieu, & Hartless, 2001). Education scholars, policymakers, and practitioners have identified school-community partnerships as a promising method of addressing students' academic, social, and emotional needs, while increasing parental involvement (Anderson-Butcher, Stetler, & Midle, 2006; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Melaville & Blank, 1998). School-community partnerships support schools, students, and families by providing the additional services, resources, programming, and human capital necessary to meet all facets of student need within and outside of the school and community environments. While reforms such as NCLB, place emphasis on the importance of community involvement, little has been done to highlight schoolcommunity collaborations as an essential element to sustainable reform. Over 30 years of research on parental and community school engagement attests to the significant impact of school-family-community partnerships on student achievement and parental involvement (Brown & Swick, 1981; Palanki, 1992; Davies, 1993; Sanders, 1998; Wang & Boyd, 2000; Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Bryan, 2005; Blank, Jacobson, & Melaville, 2012).

School-Community Partnerships

The National Network Partnership Schools (NNPS) defines a school-community partnership as any formal arrangement a school can make with an individual, association, private sector organization or public institution to provide a program, service, or resource that will help support student achievement and social well-being. The literature suggests that the presence of school-community partnerships positively impacts student outcomes incrementally over time (Bryan, 2005; Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Sheldon, 2007). The contributions of school-community partnerships are primarily

measured through standardized test and behavioral outcome data, few studies have provided a holistic understanding of school-community partnerships and their contribution to parental involvement in urban Title I schools (Bauch, 2001; Wright & Smith, 1998). The perspectives of African American mothers who volunteer as schoolcommunity partners supporting an urban Title I school is critical to understanding the complexities, contributions, and overall impact of school-community partnerships on parental engagement in urban title I schools. Studies show that the development of school-community partnerships increase school-family support networks, academic achievement, attendance, and student social skills (Anderson-Butcher, Stetler, & Midle, 2006; Melaville & Blank, 1998).

The establishment of school-community partnerships in urban Title I schools could potentially provide the necessary resources, programming, support, and parental engagement to improve student learning and development in struggling schools. While school-community partnerships have been shown to contribute to academic improvement, few studies have investigated the voice of African American mothers. Even fewer studies have conducted qualitative analysis of the perceptions and experiences of African American mothers who participate as volunteers within a school-community partnership at an urban Title I school. A case study of an urban Title school with an established school-community partnership with African American mother volunteers was needed to provide foundational understandings of the contributions, experiences and value urban Title I school-community partnerships offer students and parents; and how these offerings impact parental involvement. This study sought to ascertain these understandings through a case study design. Six African American mother volunteers at an urban Title I middle school participated in the case study guided by

Epstein's (2001)'s Overlapping Spheres of Influence framework for examining school-community partnerships.

Theoretical Framework

Epstein (2001)'s theory of overlapping spheres of influence is a framework utilized by both social scientist and education practitioners to examine the interactive relationships between schools, families, and communities. The overlapping spheres of influence theory centers itself on the collaboration of schools, families, and communities to promote student success (Epstein, 2001). Epstein (2010) posits that interactions among parents, educators, and community partners are the crux to establishing caring communities in schools. The theory was central to the study in that it postulates that the responsibility of educating children is shared by families, schools, and communities. The overlapping spheres of influence theory provided the lens through which schoolcommunity partnership and the engagement of African American mothers was examined. The collective efforts of the school, students, and community partners to promote student and family success undergirded the exploration of the value added by school-community partnership.

Components of Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence Model

The Overlapping Spheres of Influence model consist of two main components: the spheres and the partnership model (Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al., 2002). The spheres in Epstein's model represent the physical, psychological, and biological spheres of influence that interact and contribute to a child's developmental and educational outcomes. Epstein (2001) names three specific spheres, which influence student success: the school, the home, and the community. The model recognizes the home, school, and

community as the three major context in which children learn and grow (Epstein, 2001; Epstein et al., 2002).

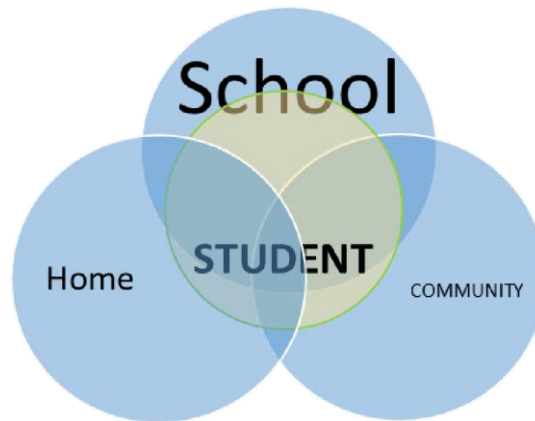


Figure 1: Epstein's (2001, 2010) Overlapping spheres of influence

A caring community system, as conceptualized in Epstein's model utilizes partnerships as a means to provide students with a continuum of care in and outside of the school environment. (Epstein, 2001, 2010; Epstein et al., 2002). Epstein (2010) notes that students continuously move in and out of the context of home, school, and community necessitating an interagency partnership among the entities.

Partnership is the second component of the model. Educational partnership within the model is depicted as the basis for which separate agencies collaborate over shared interests and responsibility for children in order to support academic achievement, student enrichment, school programming, community initiatives, and family support services (Epstein, 2001). Research on school-family-community partnerships show an increase in positive student outcomes as result of partnerships and collaboration among schools and communities (Epstein, 2001, 2010; Epstein & Sanders, 2006). Epstein (2001) examines interactions between school-family-community partners based on two forms of

interaction: within organizations and between organizations. Six major types of parental involvement are identified in this model, each classification of involvement demonstrates the different practices of partnerships and the degree to which partners are involved in the learning and development of the students (Epstein, 2001). The six types of involvement include: Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, learning at Home, Decision Making, and Collaborating with Community. Together these forms of involvement are focused on engagement, support, and communication between the spheres in order to strengthen schools, family practices, and student learning and development (Epstein, 2001). This study specifically explored the sixth type of involvement, collaborating with the community through the exploration of African American mothers (who are also community partners) perspectives on the partnership between an urban Title I middle school and a network of community partners.

Statement of the Problem

Over half of the nation's low-income students attend urban schools (Council of the Great City, 2015). An overwhelming majority of those students are African American. Studies have shown the negative impact of poverty on child development and learning (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; McLoyd, 1998; Milner, 2013). The combination of the dire conditions of both poverty and urban school systems require a unique and complex approach to address the internal and external challenges to student learning and development in urban Title I schools. Both scholars and policymakers have identified school-community partnerships as a leading approach to addressing both the challenges of poverty and other critical issues in urban education such as parental involvement. School-community partnerships that engage parents and guardians add value and depth to the out-of-school initiatives of school-community partnerships.

School-community partnerships have been shown to positively impact student attendance, school discipline, and academic achievement. Research suggests that schoolcommunity partnerships have an ability to address unique and complex economic and social needs (Epstein, 2001; Hursh, 2007). This exploration is important to understanding the potential benefit of school-community partnerships to low income middle school students and parents in urban settings.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives, experiences, and constructions of value of African American mothers who participate as volunteers with a school-community partnership serving an urban Title I middle school. Darcy Middle School (pseudonym) is an urban Title I middle school with an educational outreach initiative partnership (Excellence at Darcy) that engages a great number of African American parent volunteers through a network of school-community partners. The partnership over 30 school-community partnerships on behalf of the school. Excellence at Darcy acts as a broker between Darcy Middle School and the community partners participating in the academic and enrichment programming provided to students and families. Darcy Middle School and Excellence at Darcy community partnerships include: local businesses, corporations, faith-based organizations, nonprofit mental health agencies, community recreation programs, and parents of current and former students of Darcy Middle School. Each individual partnership supports Darcy Middle School in one or more of the following areas: academic support, cultural enrichment, family support, counseling, and recreation. Mother-volunteer partners with Darcy Middle School serve Darcy students in both school and home settings. This study explored parental partner

perceptions, experiences, and constructions of value in their participation in the partnership with Excellence at Darcy and Darcy Middle School.

Significance of the Study

The critical issues in urban education have persisted despite revolving reform initiatives (Anyon, 2005; Manna & McGuinn, 2013; Payne, 2008). School improvement initiatives are critical to eradicating academic underperformance, discipline disproportionality, and high school dropout rates. Research studies on parental and community engagement have shown a positive relationship between parental involvement and educational outcomes in urban schools (Jeynes, 2007). This study specifically sought to examine perspectives of the African American mothers who volunteer and support school-community partnerships.

The degree to which school-community partnerships are perceived to be beneficial to low-income students, families, and communities is key to understanding the true value of school-community partnerships to urban Title I middle schools. In the case of the partnership between Darcy Middle School and Excellence at Darcy exploring the parental perceptions of the holistic impact and value of academic and enrichment programming on the school, family, and community cannot be gathered by school composite data or state assessments of overall school quality. Qualitative inquiry into the perspectives and experiences of African American mothers who are school-community partners provided a picture of the impact and value of the school-community partnership and parental engagement from a parental lens. The findings of this study provide an in-depth look at parents as school partners and their perception of the overall value of a school-community partnership serving an urban Title I middle school. The study also

provides implications and recommendations for school-community partners, urban Title I school leaders and administrators, and future research.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the investigation of African American mothers who participate as volunteers in the school-community partnership between Darcy Middle School and Excellence at Darcy.

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of African American mothers who partner as volunteers with a school-community partnership serving an urban Title I middle school?
2. How do African American mother volunteers perceive the overall contribution of a school-community partnership serving students, families and faculty of an urban Title I middle school?
3. How do African American mother volunteers conceptualize the value of a school-community partnership serving an urban Title I middle school?

Definition of Terms

The following terms are relevant to the case study.

Parental Involvement

Any parental, attitude, behavior, or style that occur within or outside of the school setting to support children's academic or behavior success in their currently in enrolled school.

School-Community Partnership

In this study the term school-community partnership refers to any formal or informal arrangement a school can make with an individual, association, private sector

organization or public institution to provide a program, service, or resource purposed to improve academic achievement and social well-being.

Urban Title I Middle School

The term “Urban Title I Middle School” used in the study refers to a middle school located in an urban school district serving predominantly low-income students and communities. These schools are provided federally funded support to enhance the learning environment and mediate the effects of poverty on student learning and development (Elementary and Secondary Education Act [ESEA], 1965; Evans & Radina, 2014; Isernhagen, 2012).

Subjectivity Statement

My experience as an African American graduate of an urban Title I school and my current role as a Community Liaison for an urban Title I school, closely situated me to the population of students and families served at Darcy Middle School. My professional role as a Community Liaison sets me in the midst of the school-community partnerships at Darcy Middle school. My close proximity to Darcy Middle undergirded my analysis of the data on African American mother perceptions and experiences. I position myself as an advocate researcher incorporating my personal experience as former student of an urban Title I school and my professional training as a social worker and educator to support low-income students and struggling schools. The inspiration for this study was drawn directly from my work as a Community Liaison. My experience working with families and students in both the school and home has been foundational to my investigation of school-community partnerships in high poverty, high need schools.

Excellence at Darcy and Darcy Middle School

Darcy Middle School is Title I school in a large urban school district in the southeast. Darcy serves 924 middle school students. Darcy is a Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) magnet school. Darcy has a high concentration of both minorities and low-income students. The Darcy student population is 52% African American, 11% American Indian, 6% Asian, 7% multiracial, and 21% white. Eighty-two percent (82%) of Darcy students are classified as economically disadvantaged. Darcy has one of the strongest networks of school-community partnerships of the 170 schools in its district. Darcy Middle School and Excellence at Darcy have been highly publicized as a progressive communal educational initiative. Darcy is highly regarded in the local media; Darcy Middle School is viewed as a progressing success throughout community. However, the overall grade of student performance at Darcy Middle School is a “D”. The strength of the 30+ school-community partnerships and the overall school performance of “D” at Darcy suggest that there is a discrepancy in the performance and perception of Darcy Middle School. Further understanding is needed to capture parental perceptions of the non-measurable contributions and benefits of the school-community partnership at Darcy. Darcy Middle School was chosen to explore the parental perceptions and value of a school-community partnership serving an urban Title I school. Excellence at Darcy develops and manages school community partnerships at Darcy to increase resources and enrichment opportunities for students and families. Excellence at Darcy is primarily staffed and sponsored by Christ Center Church.

Summary

In order to reduce barriers to student learning in urban Title I schools; schools, government and community agencies are partnering to provide academic, social, and financial support to improve academic achievement. Research indicates that school-community partnerships positively impacts academic achievement (Epstein, 2001). The full impact of non-measurable benefits of school-community partnerships specifically on parental engagement of an urban Title I middle school has not been thoroughly explored in the literature. This study explored the perspectives, experiences, and constructions of value of African American mothers who participate as volunteers with a school-community partnership serving an urban Title I middle school. Excellence at Darcy (EAD) is an educational nonprofit that serves Darcy Middle School and the surrounding community. Excellence at Darcy provides Darcy students with academic programming, support, enrichment and educational advocacy. The study builds on the existing literature on school-community partnerships, urban education and parental involvement by employing a case study research method to analyze the African American mother volunteer experience with a school-community partnership serving and urban Title I Middle school.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of the literature pertinent to understanding the relationships between urban education, parental involvement, poverty, and school-community partnerships. This review is organized into four sections. The first section provides a review of the critical issues in urban education. The second section provides a review of urban education and poverty. The third section focuses on the construct of parental involvement and African American parental involvement in urban schools. The final section of the review defines school-community partnerships and examines academic and social outcomes of school-community partnerships in urban and high need schools. These four bodies of literature informed the study and support the case for understanding the experiences and perceptions of African American mothers participating in school-community partnerships in urban Title I schools.

Critical Issues in Urban Education

Longitudinal research on the achievement gap between both urban and suburban schools closely resemble statistical research findings on the achievement gap between African American and White students.(Darling-Hammond, 2010; Delpit, 1995; Irvine, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Moore & Lewis, 2012) National trends of re-segregation are blatantly apparent in urban school settings; in addition to highly segregated schools, urban schools across the nation face common challenges such as teacher quality and

turnover, lower academic performance, larger class sizes, discipline disproportionality, cultural dissonance, and parental involvement (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Moore & Lewis, 2012).

These challenges are compounded by higher concentrations of students from economically challenged environments. Research shows that urban schools with higher concentrations of both minority and economically disadvantaged students face a special set of administrative, instructional, economic and environmental difficulties (DarlingHammond, 2010; Moore & Lewis, 2012; Payne, 2008; Irvine, 1990, Kozol, 2005). Of the critical issues common to urban school environments, cultural dissonance and weakened social infrastructures directly impact parental perceptions of and experience with urban schools.

Cultural Dissonance

Cultural Dissonance occurs when there is a misalignment or lack of understanding between two cultures (Teel & Obidah, 2008). The high percentage of white female teachers in urban settings potentially adds another layer of complexity to instruction in the urban classroom (Landsman & Lewis, 2011). Cultural competence is regarded as a catalyst for teacher effectiveness and parental engagement in urban settings. Educators and administrators necessitate a working knowledge of the culture, values, and trends of the student population they are serving in order to develop appropriate instructional strategies and school policies. Cultural dissonance is often alluded to through the concept of cultural relevancy. Both concepts refer to the cultural distance between urban and/or students of color and white middle class cultural norms and expectations. White middle class cultural norms are embedded in the curriculum,

instruction, and school policy of many American public schools (Delpit, 1995; Ogbu, 1992).

Recognizing cultural dissonance helps educators and policy makers understand more clearly how and why students and schools are disconnected. The misalignment of social and cultural norms is an everyday reality in many urban schools. Over 80% of the teaching force in public education is white, while two-thirds of the students attending urban schools are of color (DeArmond, 2014; Landsman & Lewis, 2011). Researchers suggest that the solution to overcoming cultural dissonance in urban schools is to gain an understanding of the family and surrounding community context and by providing a curriculum and instructional method that is rigorous, inclusive and relevant to the social issues and realities students face (Irvine, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Landsman and Lewis (2011) posit that cultural literacy and navigation are critical to making positive connections with urban students. Shallow connections and cultural divides between teachers and urban students have been a major contributor to non-academic barriers to achievement such as discipline. Studies show that school disciplinary policies impact low income students of color at higher rate than their white peers (Fenning et al., 2013; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Losen et al., 2015; McIntosh, Girvan, Horner, & Smolkowski, 2014; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Dissonance and discipline often results in a loss of instructional time. The dissonance experienced by many urban students is also experienced by parents.

Social Infrastructure and School Climate

Payne (2008) offers a critical analysis of the social, academic, racial, and political contexts within urban schools that undermine the implementation of school reform and community engagement. Payne notes that the social, academic, racial and political

practices within school are built upon trust, effective communication, and school-community collaboration. He also notes that without adequately addressing the deeper issues of trust, communication, and collaboration no reform or community engagement effort will succeed in improving academic performance, school climate, and parental involvement. The literature on urban education reform and school-family-community initiatives suggest that the social infrastructure of urban schools could be strengthened through the establishment of strong school-family-community partnerships (Bryan, 2005; Green, 2015; Payne, 2008; Valli, Stefanski, & Jacobson, 2014). Henderson and Mapp (2002) reviewed two decades of school-community partnerships and found that community organizing for school improvement directly contributed to upgraded facilities, improved school leadership and staffing, high quality learning programs, collection of resources, and funding for after school programs and family support. Strengthening the social infrastructure of schools serving predominantly low-income and minority students is vital to improving student academic achievement, school climate, and parental interactions with schools.

Poverty and Urban Education

For low-income urban students, quality schooling and upward mobility are in direct relationship (Chetty, Hendren, Kline, & Saez, 2014; Chetty, Hendren, Kline, Saez, & Turner, 2013; Schutz, 2006). Research indicates that low-income and at-risk students attend low performing schools at a higher percentage than any other socioeconomic status (Anyon, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2010; DeArmond, Jochim, & Lake, 2014).

The Council of the Great City Schools analyzed the demographics and academic performance data of the 68 largest city school districts in America. The Council found that large urban school districts in the United States serve over seven million students in

12,095 schools (Council of Greater City, 2015). Of the 7.1 million students enrolled in America's largest urban school districts, 68% are classified as low-income. (Council of Greater City, 2015).

The Center on Reinventing Public Education conducted an analysis of state and federal data on 50 cities that reflect the complexity of urban public schools today (DeArmond et al., 2014). The center found that free and reduced lunch (also known as National School Lunch Program) eligible students performed at lower levels in all 50 cities. The research project also found that students from low income families are less likely to enroll in high performing elementary and middle schools. Less than a third of the 50 urban cities examined made significant overall gains on standardized test in reading and math from 2010-2012. Students receiving free and reduced lunch on average performed 14% below their peers on all tested subjects (DeArmond et al., 2014). The report indicated that academic performance in many urban schools remains stagnate. Research suggest that economic barriers to academic achievement are at the heart of this income achievement gap (Anyon, 2005; Coleman, 1966; Noguera, 2011; Reardon, 2013). Walker and Smith (2009) posited that student lives and school performance are inextricably intertwined. When external challenges are joined with issues of teacher and administrative turnover, academic failure, larger class sizes, limited resources, discipline disproportionality, cultural dissonance, and limited community engagement students in high poverty urban schools are subjected to multiple risk factors for school failure. (Payne, 2008; Irvine, 1990; Bennett & LeCompte, 1990; Ingersoll, 2004; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002).

Noguera (2011) posits that high concentrations of poverty and adverse social conditions in some urban communities affects the academic performance of urban

students in three ways: (1) limited external academic and social support outside of school, (2) environmental obstacles that influence health, safety, and well-being, and (3) negative social capital. Limited external support hinders students from accessing afterschool tutors, afterschool and summer enrichment, and community advocates. Environmental challenges of nutrition, crime, and violence are fixtures in many urban impoverished communities struggling with high rates of unemployment, high school drop-outs, and limit access to social institutions such as college (Noguera, 2011). Social capital is derived from the value and reciprocity found in social networks. For many students and families in economically struggling urban communities, social networks are often limited. Personal access to doctors, professors, lawyers, police, accountants, business executives, and other social institutions are not always readily available. The ability to leverage the relationships in one's social networks are key to accessing opportunities and information necessary for social navigation. Negative social capital muffles the voice of self-advocating students and parents in poor urban communities.

Fifty-years ago, the Coleman report provided the United States government with an analysis of equality, opportunity, and outcomes in education. The report surveyed 650,000 students and teachers and more than 3000 schools (Coleman, 1966). The Coleman report highlighted the challenges poverty poses to education. Put simply, poverty is a high risk factor for academic failure. This fact has held true for low-income students a half a century later. School success for any student is undergirded by the external academic support and enrichment opportunities that students experience outside of school (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). Research suggests that access to enrichment opportunities and external academic support are key indicators of future academic performance (Berliner, 2013; Haertel, 2013). While teachers have the greatest influence

on student learning within the walls of the classroom, 60% of the overall variance in student performance has been shown to be associated with factors outside of the school environment (Haertel, 2013; Sharkey & Elwert, 2011). These factors include socioeconomic status, parental educational level, and access to technology, cultural enrichment opportunities, stable housing, adequate rest and nutrition (Berliner, 2013; Haertel, 2013).

When out of school factors such as poverty negatively impact student learning and performance, they become barriers as opposed to bridges to academic success. Nonacademic barriers to student learning and development indirectly hinder student success in ways that are often beyond the direct control of the student (Rothstein, 2004). The external sources of difficulty deter from students' ability to pay attention and engage in the learning environment (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Fernandes-Alcantara, 2014; Walker & Smith, 2009). Urban education scholars have consistently identified low socioeconomic status, socioemotional stressors, and limited parental and communal engagement as barriers to academic improvement and school climate improvement in many urban school settings. Family income has been shown to broadly influence and impact all areas of students' educational experience (Anyon, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Moore & Lewis, 2012; Munoz & Dossett, 2014; Payne, 2008). This influence is clearly revealed in Reardon's (2011) analysis of the income achievement gap.

Income Achievement Gap

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2013 and 2015 academic achievement data indicates that 12 of 21 large city school (urban) districts (including the district of Darcy and Eastside Middle School) have not increased or decreased significantly in overall academic performance. The stagnation in urban student academic

performance has persisted over time, but the adoption of the Common Core curriculum and other achievement standards have revealed alarming percentages of students below proficient levels in math and reading. Thirty-three percent of the eighth grade students in American public schools performed at or above proficient in mathematics and 34% of students performed at or above proficient in reading. Eighteen percent of students participating in the National School Lunch Program (which is a measure of poverty) performed at or above proficient in math and 20% of students performed at or above proficient in reading. Data for students participating in the NSLP showed a decline in both mathematics and reading performance from 2013-2015 according to NAEP (National Assessment of Education Progress, 2015).

The performance of eighth grade students provides a picture of the culmination of the knowledge and abilities developed in middle school. The performance of eighth grade students participating the NSLP in large city school districts provides a glimpse of the academic conditions of low-income middle school students in urban schools. A NAEP analysis of the achievement level of eighth grade students by location revealed that 8th grade students attending urban or city schools demonstrated the lowest level of academic performance of all assessed locations (suburban, town, and rural). National Assessment of Educational Progress data indicates not only the lowest performance levels by location, but also a decline in academic performance of low income students. This data suggest greater urgency is needed in addressing the academic performance and school conditions of urban low-income middle schools. This study centered on understanding the contributions of school-community partnerships to urban low-income middle school students. The gap in academic performance of low-income students and their highincome peers is officially referred to as the Income Achievement Gap (Reardon, 2011; Sirin,

2005). The Income Achievement Gap is defined as the difference in the average academic achievement between students from families at the 90th percentile and the 10th of the household income distribution (Reardon, 2011).

According to Reardon (2011), the academic achievement gap between low-income and high-income students has widened over the past 50 years. The researcher conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis on the relationship between academic achievement and family income using 12 nationally representative studies on student performance on standardized test and family income. Reardon standardized all scores from the studies (due to different scales). The researcher expressed the income achievement gap in standard deviation. The study found that a prevalent gap between low-income and high-income students in almost all measurable educational outcomes (Reardon, 2011, 2013). Elias, White, and Stepney (2014) also examined socioeconomic status and education outcomes. The study specifically investigated the influence of socioeconomic status and race on standardized test scores of at-risk middle school students. The study evaluated over 140 middle schools in New Jersey. The researchers found that socioeconomic status and race accounted for most of the variance in student performance level on standardized test across all the urban middle schools (Stepney, White, Far, & Elias, 2014).

Research suggests that there is a gap between low-income and high-income students in all measures of academic achievement including: standardized test, course grades, high school graduation rates, college enrollment and college completion (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011; Caro, McDonald, & Willms, 2009; Greene & Anyon, 2010; Lee & Burkam, 2002; Lipman, 2004; Reardon, 2011, 2013; Sirin, 2005). The need for supplemental resources, social capital, cultural competence, economic and social awareness in low-income urban schools is great. Many urban education scholars have

echoed the impossibility of urban schools addressing all of the economic, social, psychological, and academic needs of students on their own (Anyon, 2005; Greene & Anyon, 2010; Kober, McMurrer, & Silva, 2011; Noguera, 2011; Reardon, 2013).

Education reform, specifically urban education reform has failed to drastically increase the academic achievement levels of urban lowincome students. The continued need for means of addressing the economic challenges in urban schools, particularly urban Title I schools whom serve the large percentages of low income students and families is critical.

Title I Schools

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), the legislation sought to improve teaching and learning through financial and administrative support, and school-family-community collaboration. In response to the high need and low academic performance of schools serving a majority of economically disadvantaged students, the federal government designates high poverty schools as Title I. Title I schools receive financial funds and administrative support to enhance the learning environment and mediate the effects of poverty for schools with more than 40% economically disadvantaged student populations (Elementary and Secondary Education Act [ESEA], 1965; Evans & Radina, 2014;

Isernhagen, 2012). The Title I program places great value on parental involvement.

Research on parental and community engagement has informed Title I prescriptions for school and family communication and collaborations. Title I program schools are required to communicate the following information in understandable and uniform formats:

- A description and explanation of the school's curriculum

- Information on the forms of academic assessment used to measure students' progress
- Information on the proficiency levels students are expected to meet

Title I schools are also required to involve parents in an organized, ongoing, and timely way in the planning, review, and improvement of the Title I program (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The Title I program requires that each school receiving Title I assistance seek to increase parents' capacity for involvement through school-family-community partnerships (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Despite increased financial support and extensive accountability measures, many urban Title I schools persist in academic failure, lower graduation rates, and chronic absenteeism. Studies show that urban high performing Title I schools have strong family and community partnerships (Johnson & Asera, 1999; Picucci, Brownson, Kahlert, & Sobel, 2002; Alsdjemma et al., 2010; Bryan, 2005). The benefit of school-community and parental involvement to urban Title I schools is clear, however, engaging parents in both school based and home based parental involvement has been challenging. Research is needed to amplify the voice of African American parents actively involved in both school based and home based parental involvement at Title I schools. The Title I demographics and academic achievement performance levels suggest a great need for effective school-community partnerships. Understanding the "how" and "what" minority parents at Title I schools value is critical to increasing parental engagement and improving academic outcomes.

Parental Involvement

Over 30 years of research on parental and community engagement attests to the significant impact of school-family-community partnerships on student achievement

(Brown & Swick, 1981; Palanki, 1992; Davies, 1993; Sanders, 1998; Wang & Boyd, 2000; Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Bryan, 2005; Blank, Jacobson, & Melaville, 2012) Widespread research on parental involvement note a positive relationship between parental involvement and student success (Hill & Craft, 2003). Studies suggest that student self-concept, behavior, academic engagement, and academic performance are all directly influenced by parental involvement ((Fan & Chen, 2001; Desimone, 1999; Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Hong & Ho, 2005; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996). Parental involvement is also regarded as a key strategy to narrowing the achievement gap (Jeynes, 2011).

Scholars, schools, and legislation all agree on the importance of parental involvement. Many federal education initiatives such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top mandate that schools invest in and develop parental and community engagement. The Title I, special education, and Headstart programs also mandate parental and community engagement. These mandates often come with preset prescriptions for increasing parental involvement and establishing parental involvement goals (Field & Smith, 2005; Payne, 2008). Findings from empirical research on parental involvement offer simplistic understandings of parental involvement and students success; thus, increase parental involvement, increase student success. Cooper (2009) suggest that such simplistic assumptions about parental involvement and student success do not take into consideration the cultural, economic, political, and historical factors that are at play when parents, particularly when low income parents of color engage schools. The very definition of parent involvement itself can be alternatively defined based on one's culture, class, and educational experience (Baker & Soden, 1997). Baker and Soden

(1997) found that parental involvement to have varying definitions across 145 empirical studies on parents; involvement. The researchers found four categories in which the varying definitions could be grouped into: parental attitude, parental behavior/actions, parenting style, and incomplete operationalization (Baker & Soden, 1997). The researchers ultimately determined that across the literature parental involvement could be defined as:

Any parental, attitude, behavior, or style that occur within or outside of the school setting to support children's academic or behavior success in their currently in enrolled school.' (Baker & Soden, 1997, p.14)

Additionally, parental involvement scholar Joyce Epstein has led much of the scholarship on parental involvement using an ecological lens to explain school-familycommunity interactions. She posits strategies for developing strong school-familycommunity relationships. With her overlapping spheres of influence theory, Epstein outlines six types of parental involvement: parenting, communicating, learning at home, volunteering, decision making, and collaborating with community (Epstein, 2001). Epstein's work has provided scholars and educators with a framework to understand, analyze, and organize parental involvement initiatives and partnerships. Epstein notes that the communication and collaboration of the home, school, and community congruently influence student outcomes (Epstein, 2001). Even within the clarity and framework provided by Epstein (2001) issues of race, class, and culture still underlay these understandings of parental involvement. Auerbach (2007) revealed the middle class White norms found within widely held definitions of involvement. School-based parental

involvement for instance assumes availability during school hours and shared power in determining student centered decisions (Cooper, 2009). Under further examination research of parental involvement studies indicate that parental involvement itself is a social construct that privileges White middle class behavioral norms (Auerbach, 2007; Cooper, 2009). The literature suggests that intrinsic bias within the social construct of parental involvement has created a blind spot for acknowledging and understanding the value and impact of indirect or home based educational parental involvement of African American parents in urban schools.

Few studies on school-home-community partnerships have been able to capture the voice of African American mother volunteers. The critical issues faced by urban schools nationally necessitate that the voice and experience of African American parents be heard and considered when assessing parental involvement. Jeynes (2007) conducted a metaanalysis of 52 studies on the influence of parental involvement on academic outcomes of students in urban schools. In her research she found parental involvement directly impacts the academic outcome of all students. Marschall (2006) noted the need for schools to increase efforts to engage parents in outreach activities to gain authentic community perspectives and mutually supportive relationships between teachers, parents, and students. Abdul-adil & Farmer (2006) similarly noted outreach as a key strategy for increasing parental involvement among urban African American parents in addition to outreach the scholars recommend parental empowerment programs and culturally indigenous research to inform parental engagement.

African American Parental Involvement

Jackson and Remillard (2005)'s research on parental involvement found that the educational involvement of African American mothers living in low-income

neighborhoods actively engage their child's educational process in ways that often do not align with SBPI. The researchers show that while African American mothers in low income communities do not show high levels of SBPI, they are actively involved as educational advocates, homework helpers, links between students and community support, progress monitors, and in-home accountability. Despite high levels of indirect or homebased parental involvement, urban schools across the country report smaller numbers of school based parental involvement for parents of color (Auerbach, 2007; Desimone, 1999; Ford, 1995). This fact is often juxtaposed to research that has indicated that parental involvement increases positive academic and behavioral outcomes in schools (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Epstein and Dunbar, 1991; & Halle et al., 1997).

Many of these studies do not take a full account of the various forms of parental involvement that are alternative to SBPI. DeMoss and Vaughn (2000) investigated the phenomena of African American parental involvement with 26 actively involved African American parents. The researchers found that the African American parents in the study engaged the educational process and experience of not only their child, but other children in the school in a myriad of ways that were school, home, and community based. The study suggested that urban African American parents are frequently engaged in education and participate in activities supporting student success that are not measured or captured by school based parental involvement. Ingram et al. (2007) found similar outcomes in their investigation of the critical elements of parental involvement related to academic achievement. In their investigation of 220 parents of a large urban school district in the Midwest. The study found that parents of schools with largely minority, low income populations indicated higher rates of home-based parental involvement.

Lower rates of school based parental involvement in urban schools is often attributed to what has been deemed the “urban legend of apathy”, that is, urban students of color and their parents have an inherent apathy towards education (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Moore & Lewis, 2012). The acceptance of the concept of urban apathy has infected broader professional ideologies and evaluations of urban students and their parents. Urban educators’ and administrators’ perspectives on apathetic urban parents and students has been captured throughout the literature (Lightfoot, 2004; Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2002; Moore & Lewis, 2012; Cooper, 2009; Delgado-Gaitan, 2001). Tveit (2009) notes a need for greater parental perspective on parental involvement due to the varying scholarly and regulatory perspectives and definitions on what exactly parental involvement is. The ambiguity within parental involvement understandings complicate school and parent perceptions, expectations, and engagement. Tveit (2009) additionally posits that teacher dominance and institutional power could potentially muffle the authentic voice of parents and impede school based parental involvement efforts.

Koonce and Harper (2005) noted that African American families encounter numerous challenges engaging schools that inhibit ongoing engagement. The misalignment of expectations and reduced voice between urban schools and parents restricts the students’ opportunities to benefit from the full value of both school and home based parental engagement working harmoniously. Together the negative impact of the legend of urban apathy, misaligned parental and school expectations, and limited parental voice have all inspired a deep mutual distrust between urban schools and urban communities. Pena (2000) found that increasing parental involvement in schools is predicated on the school’s ability to gain the trust of parents. In many urban schools’ suspicion and reason for parental distrust of the education systems are validated by

special education overrepresentation, discipline disproportionality, teacher and administrative turnover, cultural dissonance, and the subpar facilities that characterize many urban predominantly minority schools in America (Payne, 2008).

School-Community Partnerships

School-community partnerships are far too diverse in function and frequency to assign a one size fits all description. School-community partnership has been used as a catch all term to describe both formal and informal collaboration between K-12 schools and various community organizations with a common goal of improving student achievement through enhancement of the learning experience both in the school and community. Valli et al. (2014) provided a general typology of four of the most common functions and examples of school-community partnerships according to school based, place based, and the level of comprehensiveness (services and support) in the purpose and design. The four categories within the typology are: Family/Interagency Collaboration, Full Service Schools, Full Service Community Schools, and the Community Development model (Valli et al., 2014). The partnership between Darcy Middle School and Excellence at Darcy classifies as a Family/Interagency Collaboration model. In this model the primary purpose of the school-community partnership is to increase family and community involvement in promoting student learning and development (Valli et al., 2014). The Family/Interagency collaboration model centers on the belief that coordinating the delivery of resources and services that address educational, health, and social needs of students and families contributes to learning and development. These partnerships are made up of K-12 schools and various community agencies that are school-based.

The Ohio Community Collaboration Model for School Improvement (OCCMSI) defines school-community partnerships as “...every formal arrangement a school can make with an individual, association, private sector organization or public institution to provide a program, service, or resource that will help support student achievement.” (Ohio Community Collaboration Model, 2011, p.2). The Center for Mental Health in Schools (CMHS) at The University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) echoes the central goal of school-community partnerships in their 2011 guide to school community partnerships. The CMHS’ posits that “the central focus of school-community partnerships is improvement of student academic outcomes and enrichment of the learning environment and experience” (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2011, p.6). The Center for Mental Health in Schools (2011) specifically identifies poverty as a key factor in the multilayered and interrelated issues faced by schools, families, and communities. The CMHS proposes interagency collaboration as the cornerstone for promoting wellbeing, resilience, and school-community empowerment. The CMHS (2011) posits that schools are more effective centers when the relationship between the school and the community is strong and collaborative. The literature on school-community partnerships identifies academic programming, financial sponsorship, professional development/training, renovation/upgrade of facilities and equipment, school supplies and materials, social services for families, volunteerism, mentoring, and recreation as common services offered by Family/Interagency Collaboration school-community partnerships (Center for Mental Health, 2011; Sanders, 2005; Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; NNPS, 2010).

In 1995 Joyce Epstein, leading scholar in school-community partnership research developed the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at John Hopkins

University to provide schools, school districts, communities and policymakers with scholarship and technical assistance to formulate and sustain school-community partnerships. Epstein, Sanders, and Sheldon (2007) conducted a five year, multi-cohort, longitudinal study of the effects of the Nation Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) intervention model to increase and improve family and community involvement to support student achievement in reading, math, and science. The study included a total of 50 school districts and 400 schools and found increases in academic achievement linked to school-community partnerships. The National Network of Partnership Schools identified 10 types of community partners in their research on school-community partnerships (NNPS, 2010). The 10 partnerships that were identified by the NNPS are: business and corporations, universities and educational institutions, healthcare organizations, government and military agencies, community service and volunteer organizations, faith-based organizations, senior citizen organizations, cultural and recreational institutions, and community individuals (NNPS, 2010). Nine out of 10 of the partnership types are active in Excellence at Darcy and Darcy Middle School partnership.

School-Community Partnerships and Educational Outcomes

Urban education literature shows that teacher and administrative turnover, discipline disproportionality, special education overrepresentation, the academic achievement gap, and lower graduation rates have historically been traits of urban school settings (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Payne, 2008; Irvine, 1990; Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010). Significant portions of urban student populations are categorized as vulnerable, at-risk, and struggling as a result of the critical issues in urban education. Some scholars suggest the challenges within urban schools are rooted in the vast amount of student need external to the school environment (Anyon, 2005; Payne, 2008; Dahl &

Lochner, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2010). The positive impact of school-family partnerships has been covered in the literature, however the nature and specific contribution of parents to school-community partnerships, particularly mothers has not been thoroughly explored. This section of the literature review examined the impact of school community partnerships on attendance, discipline, and achievement

The comprehensive support of school-community partnerships enables schools to meet an array of student needs external to the classroom environment. Wrap around student support and services provided by school-community partnerships have been shown to positively impact school attendance rates, academic achievement and reduce the number of disciplinary infractions (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Epstein et al., 1997; Johnston, 2000; Roby, 2003). Studies on school-community partnerships indicate that school-community partnerships are crucial to integrating students, teachers and families in student centered educational reform initiatives (Epstein & Sanders, 2002, Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Evans & Redina, 2014).

School-Community Partnerships and Attendance

Epstein and Sanders (2002) examined how school-community partnerships contributed to increasing student attendance. The longitudinal study collected data on the rates of daily attendance of 12 schools and over 5,000 students. Sixty percent of the students were identified as being economically disadvantaged. The study examined school-community partnership practices aimed at increasing or sustaining student attendance. The researchers found that when school-community partnerships practices, such as, incentive programs, after-school programs, and consistent parental engagement are implemented schools can predict a decrease in chronic absenteeism (Epstein & Sanders, 2002). Epstein et al. (1997) examined the quality and impact of school-

community partnerships on 39 elementary schools. The study found an association with the quality of school-community partnerships in a school and the attendance rate of that school. The researchers found that school-community partnerships contribute to the sense of community in schools. School-community partnerships provide schools with additional human resources in the form of mentors, tutors, coaches, club leaders, and general volunteers. This addition of human capital offers students a wide network of school support beyond the classroom. Students who participate in school-community partnerships establish accountability networks that promote and monitor school attendance and achievement. Research on attendance and achievement indicate a direct relationship between student attendance and achievement (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Johnston, 2000; DeKalb, 1999; Lamdin, 1998).

Roby (2003) conducted a study on academic achievement and attendance. The researcher specifically examined the loss of instructional time associated with academic achievement on state proficiency test of six large urban school districts in Ohio. The study found that as the loss of student learning time increased, academic achievement decreased. Examination of school attendance averages indicated that schools with lower attendance averages also had lower levels of proficiency on standardized test. The study also found that the impact of absenteeism on academic achievement increased with grade level. Chronic absenteeism in middle and high school has been shown to be a risk factor for dropping out of high school (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Chronic absenteeism has also been linked to disciplinary infractions and juvenile delinquency (Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001; Teasley, 2004) School-community partnerships provide schools with tailored interventions and support in promoting student attendance.

School-Community Partnerships and Discipline

In their 2015 report, *Instead of Suspension: Alternative Strategies for Effective School Discipline* Owen, Wettach, and Hoffman identified 11 approaches to school discipline that minimize exclusionary discipline. School-community partnership was identified as one of the 11 alternative approaches to improving school discipline. Jones et al. (2008) conducted an analysis of the economic cost and benefits of community and school investment into intervention programs for at-risk youth. The researchers found that communities could save millions of dollars by investment in community intervention programs. This study served as the basis of the Youth Prison Reduction through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support, and Education ACT (Youth PROMISE Act). This bill specifically suggested that school-community partnerships be developed to intervene in school discipline and juvenile delinquency. Suggesting school-community partnerships use after-school, mentoring, and intervention programs to mitigate the factors of under resourced, low performing schools that contribute to delinquency. School- community support initiatives like the Youth PROMISE Act specifically focus on the development of social skills and adjustment (Scott, 2009).

Communities in Schools (CIS) is another example of a school-community partnership that provides disciplinary intervention in addition to academic support. Communities in Schools is a national drop-out prevention program housed in 25 states with 2400 sites. The program has 164 affiliates and collaborates with over 10,000 other community partners. The program impacts over one million students in high need schools. Communities in Schools is built on five principles that guide their student support efforts. These principles include: one-on-one relationships with caring adult,

provision of a safe place to learn and grow, healthcare, development of marketable skills, and community service (CIS, 2015). The program individually develops and monitors attendance, academic, and behavior goals (CIS, 2015; Owen, Wettach, & Hoffman, 2015).

Elev8 is another school-community partnership that brings middle schools, families, and other community partners together to promote student success in low-income areas in Albuquerque, Baltimore, Chicago, and Oakland (McClanahan, Gao, & Sanders, 2013). Elev8 provides middle school students and families with learning, health, and family support services. Elev8 offers direct behavioral intervention. In 2009-2010 school year, the Chicago site reduced school suspensions by 80%. The Albuquerque Elev8 site reduced student arrests in school and around the community from 50 to four the following year after implementation (Owen, Wettach, & Hoffman, 2015; McClanahan, Gao, & Sanders, 2013). These school-community partnerships enhance the learning environment through discipline intervention. School-community partnerships reform the social and physical space of schools, thus creating more favorable conditions for academic achievement.

School-Community Partnerships and Academic Achievement

Sanders and Harvey (2002) conducted a study of an urban elementary school that developed strong relationships with multiple community agencies to improve academic outcomes. The school established partnerships with local businesses, universities, health organizations, faith-based organizations, senior citizen organization and community volunteers. Measures of student performance on standardized test in math and reading were used in six studies evaluating school-family-community partnerships, these studies generally found that student and family involvement in partnership programs improved

student achievement (Blank et al., 2003; CIS, 2010; O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2008; Krenichyn et al., 2008; Walker & Hackmann, 1999). The most frequent programmatic outcome of school-community partnerships in the literature is increased academic achievement. (Epstein et al., 2007; Sanders, 1998; Sheldon, 2003; Valli, Stefanski, & Jacobson, 2014). Blank et al. (2003) conducted a review of 20 multi-site school community partnership evaluations. The researchers found several positive outcomes as a result of school-community partnerships including: student attendance, graduation rates, higher education aspirations, coursework completion, and parent-teacher satisfaction.

The literature on parental involvement in urban Title I schools reveals a need for both school-based and home based parental involvement to improve academic achievement and community engagement. The strategies for increasing parental involvement are typically developed by scholars, policy makers, and educators. Research on the benefit of school-community partnerships that engage parents of students attending predominantly minority Title I schools is needed to cultivate parent informed strategies for increasing both school based and home based parental involvement.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of African American mothers who volunteer as school-community partners at an urban Title I middle school. In addition to the exploration of the mothers' perceptions and experiences, the study examined the mothers' conceptualization of the value added by a school-community partnership to an urban Title I middle school. The six mothers in the study are all active participants in the school-community partnership between the urban Title I school, Darcy Middle School(pseudonym) and the educational outreach initiative, Excellence at Darcy(pseudonym). Darcy Middle School regularly collaborates with Excellence at Darcy to provide students and families with afterschool and summer enrichment, financial support, tutors, teacher sponsors, family crisis assistance, volunteer opportunities and parenting enrichment programming. Excellence at Darcy is an outreach initiative largely staffed and sponsored by Christ Center Church (pseudonym). Excellence at Darcy purposes itself on building a strong community around Darcy Middle School. The central goal of the organization is to create lasting improvement and opportunities for the students, families, and surrounding community through community, enrichment, and financial support.

This qualitative case study specifically investigated the experiences and perceived value of the partnership between Darcy Middle School and Excellence at Darcy from the

vantage point of six African American mother volunteers. An overview of Darcy Middle School and an in-depth description of the partnership between Darcy Middle School and Excellence at Darcy are provided below. The following chapter reviews the specific methodology of the study including: research design, participant selection, data collection methods, data analysis, and ethical considerations. The chapter is organized into the following sections: (a) Darcy Middle School (b) The Darcy Middle School and Excellence at Darcy partnership (c) Christ Center Church (d) research questions and design, (e) participant selection, (f) data collection, (g) data analysis, and (h) ethical considerations.

Darcy Middle School

Darcy Middle School is Title I school in a large urban school district in the southeast. Darcy serves 924 middle school students. Darcy is a Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) magnet school. Darcy has a high concentration of both minorities and low-income students. The Darcy student population is 52% African American, 24% Hispanic, 21% White, 6% Asian, and 7% multiracial. Eighty-two percent (82%) of Darcy students are classified as economically disadvantaged.

The state evaluation of Darcy Middle School determined that the overall school performance was below average. The school received a grade of D on the state report card for the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school year. The state report card rating is comprised of school, student, and teacher data. This data includes: school size (cohort sizes, course sizes, and attendance), student performance data (standardized test achievement levels), school safety (number of offenses, suspensions, and expulsions), access to technology (students per number of digital learning devices/books per student),

and teacher quality data (number of teachers, license status of teachers, years of teaching experience, and teacher turnover rates). Darcy Middle School faces many of the challenges noted in the urban education literature, these challenges greatly affect the specific evaluation areas for the state report card. While Darcy Middle School is currently faced with the challenges of student performance, teacher turnover, teacher experience, and disciplinary incidents, the grade of D is an improvement from the grade of F from previous years. Prior to becoming a STEAM magnet school, the urban school district selected Darcy Middle School as a site for school closure due to low academic performance. Excellence at Darcy fervently advocated for Darcy Middle School with the local school district and eventually succeed in having the school removed from the closure list. Since that time the school community has grown by over 30% and the student population has diversified.

The public presentation of challenges presently impacting the school do not fully reflect the overall growth in academic performance, transformation of school climate, and the growing community of parent and community volunteers actively supporting the school. The work between the school and the community for the benefit of Darcy Middle School students and families is not measured by the state as an indicator of the quality. The parental perception of the school incorporates parental involvement and community support as a very important indicator of overall school quality. However, the sustained indicators of below average performance and parents limited choice of alternative schools reveal larger structural issues within the urban school district. This study explored the perspectives of African American mothers on the overall quality of the school and indicators of community that contribute to the students and family; particularly the

indicators of community that cannot be measured, but are critical to student self-concept, school climate, and parental involvement at an urban Title I school.

The Darcy Middle School and Excellence at Darcy Partnership

Darcy Middle School has one of the strongest networks of school-community partnerships of the 170 schools in its urban district. Darcy Middle School and Excellence at Darcy have been highly publicized as a progressive communal educational initiative. Darcy Middle School is highly regarded in the local media; reports from Time-Warner Cable News, the local newspaper, and local magazines laude the partnership between Darcy Middle School and Excellence at Darcy as the gold standard of community engagement with a high-poverty school. The initiative was recently recognized by the mayor and city council for its leadership in the community. Excellence at Darcy received the Neighborhood Exchange and Leadership Award for the impact the initiative is having on Darcy Middle School and the larger community of the city. Excellence at Darcy is an educational outreach initiative that focuses solely on the students, families, teachers, and administrators of Darcy Middle School. Excellence at Darcy acts as broker for over 30 separate partnerships between the school and community agencies, educational nonprofits, corporations, foundations, local colleges and universities, local police department, and community service groups.

Excellence at Darcy hosts weekly meetings called Welcome Wednesday's on which the organization offers over 16 afterschool enrichment clubs to students every Wednesday from 5:30pm-7:40pm. These clubs include: basketball, rugby, medical explorers, outdoor leadership, boy scouts, battle of the books, chess, arts and crafts, robotics, computer building, culinary arts, martial arts, quadcopters, website and app development, woodworking and group counseling. Excellence at Darcy offers both

academic and non-academic programming to students at Darcy Middle School through the in-kind and direct contributions of community partnerships. In addition to afterschool clubs for students the organization offers parental programming to support parents. These courses include: financial literacy, group therapy, Bridges Out of Poverty, Parent University, and personal self-help studies. Elementary school age siblings of Darcy Middle School students are offered cub scouts and enriching play activities on Welcome Wednesday's.

Excellence at Darcy develops and manages school community partnerships at Darcy to increase resources and enrichment opportunities for students and families. Excellence at Darcy is primarily staffed and sponsored by Christ Center Church. The Excellence at Darcy staff consists of five paid positions: Outreach Director, Outreach Associate, Program Assistant, Community Liaison, and Transportation Coordinator. In addition to paid staff the initiative receives in-kind services for grant writing, fundraising, meal preparation and service, social work and crisis assistance, community donations, Darcy Middle beautification and school garden, weekend enrichment field trips chaperones, community drivers, Darcy Middle school supply coordination, middle school club coordination, childcare coordination, and community club leaders. The community club leaders consist of additional community partners that lead student clubs. Club leaders are leaders or employees in the perspective field of the middle school club they support. For example, the computer building club leader is the owner of a local computer technology company and the leader of the outdoor leadership club is an employee of the local department of Parks and Recreation. Of the staff and in-kind partners who are not parents of Darcy Middle School students at least 85% are white. Much of partnership's leadership of color has grown from parental participation. The African American mothers

in this study serve as employees, leaders and in-kind service providers of the partnership. Five of the six mothers were connected to the partnership through indirect and direct parental involvement. The five mothers learnt of the partnership while engaging their children in conversation and researching opportunities for enrichment.

Demographically, the partnership serves a larger percentage of the African American students at Darcy Middle School. Of the 924 students attending Darcy Middle School, the partnership directly serves approximately 308 students. Over two-thirds of the students participating in the partnership are African American. The African American students who are also considered low-income make up the largest demographic served by the partnership. The parental engagement of the partnership is also predominantly African American mothers.

Christ Center Church

Christ Center Church is the central partner in the Excellence at Darcy and Darcy Middle School partnership. The educational outreach initiative of Excellence at Darcy was founded by the outreach department of Christ Center Church after a plea from the urban district's former superintendent for the faith-based community to support the local school district's struggling schools through community engagement. Christ Center Church noted the need and identified Darcy Middle School as a Title I school within three miles of the church. Christ Center Church can be described as a predominantly white, affluent evangelical church located in an affluent community that neighbors the community of Darcy Middle School. The church has over 3,000 members with 1,200 in weekly attendance. The southern Christian context of Christ Center Church that promotes a culture of service and giving that encourages church members and affiliates to participate in community partnership.

Approximately 100 of the Excellence at Darcy volunteers for Welcome Wednesdays are members of Christ Center Church. The members volunteer as van drivers, meal servers, set-up and break down teams, club leaders, hallway monitors, elementary age club leaders, attendance takers, general student and family support. Every Welcome Wednesday meeting offers students and families a free meal and free transportation. Christ Center is also open to students and families of Darcy participating in the church's weekly family programming on Thursday evenings from 5:30pm-7:00pm on which families disperse into varying age appropriate small groups such as yoga, bible study, quilting, chorus, and book clubs. For many Darcy families Thursday's Together acts as an extension of family programming. Thursday's Together also provides participating Darcy families with a free meal before small group meetings.

Lastly Christ Center plays a vital role in the housing, funding, and staffing of the summer enrichment opportunities offered through the partnership. The summer science camp is supported by a \$174,000 grant written by part-time Excellence at Darcy leader who is a life-long member of Christ Center Church, the camp is housed at the school. The summer enrichment literacy camp serves over 55 Darcy Middle School students and over 40 of their younger siblings, and 10 high school age former Darcy students. The camp is housed at Christ Center Church. Christ Center fundraises \$120,000 each year to support the camp curriculum, breakfast/lunch, camp leaders, and transportation. Through volunteer presence and ongoing support of Darcy Middle School, Christ Center has been able to develop strong relationships with many of the parents of Darcy Middle School, particularly African American mothers. The parental perspectives of African American mothers who participate as volunteers in the partnership is especially important to

exploring the perceived value and contributions to Darcy Middle School Three research questions were used to guide the inquiry in the experiences and perceptions of the African American mother volunteers.

Research Questions and Research Design

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the investigation of perceptions and experiences of African American mother volunteers of a school-community partnership serving an urban Title I middle school.

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of African American Mothers who partner as volunteers with a school-community partnership serving an urban Title I middle school?
2. How do African American Mother Volunteers perceive the overall contribution of a school-community partnership serving students, families and faculty of an urban Title I middle school?
3. How do African American Mother Volunteers conceptualize the value of a school-community partnership serving an urban Title I middle school?

Research Design

The exploratory and descriptive nature of the inquiry into the perceptions of the African American mother volunteers led to the selection of a case study design.

Qualitative case studies purposefully describe, analyze, and represent the complexities within single or multiple cases (Stake, 1995). Merriam (1998) noted that case study research enables the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of a situation and constructions of meaning for a person, institution, program or social unit. Merriam

(1998) also notes three defining characteristics of a case study approach which include: (1) particularistic, (2) descriptive, and (3) heuristics. Particularistic focus on a situation, event, program, or phenomenon. Descriptive, rich thick description of the phenomenon under study. Heuristic, illumination of the researchers' understanding of the phenomenon under study. Merriam (1998) defined a case as "a thing, single entry, a unit around which there are boundaries". The case in the study was the African American mother volunteer bounded within the Excellence at Darcy and Darcy Middle School partnership

Creswell (2012) posited that qualitative research utilizes narrative, ethnographic, phenomenological, grounded theory and case study designs to answer "how" and "what" concerning a phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Textual and contextual analysis was used to gain a rich thick description and an in-depth understanding of "how" African American mothers perceive their experiences within the Excellence at Darcy partnership; and "what" value and contribution the mothers feel the partnership adds to Darcy Middle School, an urban Title I middle school (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 1998). This study qualitatively collected, analyzed, and interpreted in-depth interviews, archival data, and observations to gain insight into parental perceptions and involvement in a schoolcommunity partnership at an urban Title I middle school (Yin, 2009).

Participant Selection

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants. The purposeful sample of this case study consisted of six African American mother volunteers of the Excellence at Darcy and Darcy Middle School partnership. Purposeful samples in qualitative research are utilized to extract specific in-depth knowledge about a phenomenon (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). The participants in this study were purposefully sampled to include African American mother volunteers with 2-9 years of volunteer experience within the

partnership. The sample of mothers also consisted of mothers with two or more volunteer roles in the partnership. This purposeful sample was select to provide a range in years of experience with the partnership as well as varying volunteer roles within the organization. Three criteria were used for the selection of the six African American mother volunteers in this study. Inclusion criteria included: (1) African American mother and volunteer in Excellence at Darcy and Darcy Middle School partnership (2) at least two years' experience with the school-community partnership (3) experience in multiple volunteer roles in the school-community partnerships.

Data Collection

After obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board in the Office of Research at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, data collection began. After the researcher identified African American mothers within the Excellence at Darcy and Darcy Middle School partnership that align with selection criteria and discussed participation in the study, the researcher scheduled an initial interview. Follow-up interviews were conducted to give participants an opportunity to elaborate on themes and subjectivities that emerged from the initial interview. Data was collected using openended semi-structured interviews from six African American mother volunteers. All participants were provided with an informed consent form to review and sign. The initial semi-structured interviews gathered demographic data, and narratives on their introduction to the partnership, and the level of involvement at Darcy Middle School. The secondary interview questions gathered information on the mother's assessment of the Title I middle school and their experiences as volunteers. Lastly, the mothers explored the value of the partnership between Excellence at Darcy and Darcy Middle School. The interview protocol was divided to explore the mothers experience as

volunteer, evaluation of the school, conception of the value of the partnership (Appendix D). The follow-up interview questions gathered additional anecdotes and elaboration of emergent themes.

Each interview lasted for approximately 30-70 minutes.

Semi-structured interviews were the primary source of data in the study. Bodgen & Biklen (1998) describes the qualitative interview as a purposeful conversation between two people in order to gather important information from one another. In-depth understanding of the African American mothers' volunteer context and perceptions of value were engaged to gather information. Creswell et al. (2007) and Merriam (1998) organize qualitative case study data collection into three core methods including interviews, observations, and archival documentation. Data collection took place from June to September. Interview data was recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Field notes were recorded by the researcher after each interview. All of the interviews were transcribed by the researchers with the exception of one; this interview was transcribed by a professional transcription company. The transcription was reviewed by the researcher for accuracy. In addition to in-depth interviews that researcher explored archival school performance, school improvement plan, partnership data, program reports, and grant applications on Darcy Middle school, Excellence at Darcy records and participation data, and Annual reports of Excellence at Darcy. As the community liaison at Excellence at Darcy the researcher organically interacted with and observed the African American mothers and larger community of volunteers partnering with Darcy Middle school during Welcome Wednesday's, board meetings, crisis assistance meetings, and club meetings.

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed and interpreted findings using Creswell's Six Step process (Creswell, 2003). Creswell's Six Step Process organizes, reads, analyzes, and describes all data in order to create a narrative to be used for interpretation of the research findings (Creswell, 2003). The researcher followed up Creswell's process with a thematic analysis of the data, narratives, and observations. The researcher initially analyzed and interpreted findings using Creswell's Six Step process (Creswell, 2003). Following initial analysis, a deeper analysis of qualitative data was analyzed thematically on a case by case basis. Close reading and open coding were used across the qualitative case data. Thematic analysis by case was followed by a cross-case analysis (Stake & Savolainen, 1995). Themes across cases were read, analyzed and coded by the researcher. Initial codes were generated based on the initial review of interview data. The researcher used open coding to identify themes, concepts, and categories in the data that guided later analysis of data. Relationships between codes and categories were noted by the researcher. All concepts and categories were compiled, compared, and contrasted across all data.

Ethical Considerations

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is used to establish credibility. Trustworthiness is a process in which qualitative researchers ensure transferability, credibility, dependability, and confirmation are evident in their research (Given & Saumure, 2008). Member checking and triangulation of qualitative data was utilized to establish credibility within the study. Member checking gathers participant feedback on interview data and interpretation. Codes and categories were shared with participants in

order to confirm accurate representation of data shared during interviews. Triangulations is the process of substantiating findings from different individuals and data types (Creswell, 2002). The perceptions African American mothers, archival documentation, observation, and field notes were triangulated to contribute to the trustworthiness of the study.

Risks and Benefits

This study posed minimal risk to participants. All research participants were provided with information on the design and purpose of the research study. Each participant was given information on confidentiality and their rights and responsibilities as a research participant. As a benefit to participating in the study each participant was provided a copy of the case study, if desired. The researcher also provided consultation for any questions or concerns regarding school-community partnerships and parental involvement.

The study attempted to minimize the potential for harm by using pseudonyms and securing study data to ensure the privacy of the participants and confidentiality of the data. A list that matches the participant's information to the pseudonym was kept in a separate locked filing cabinet. Data was stored in the researcher's password secure laptop and locked in a file cabinet in the researcher's office. Signed consent statements were locked in a filing cabinet in the researcher's office. Digital audio recordings were only used by the researcher for the purposes of transcription. Only the researcher had access to the data. The researcher destroyed all digital audio data upon transcription.

Ethical/Political Considerations

In serving current school-community partners, the researcher considered all participant perceptions and any potential negative political ramifications. Participants

were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any given time. All findings from the study were shared with the researcher's dissertation committee for cross examination of interpretation of researcher findings.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

The case study of African American mother volunteers at Darcy Middle School limits the findings and generalizations to one urban Title I middle school. Case study research is limited to suggestive implications for similar cases. The qualitative methods in this case study explored the perceptions and experiences of six African American Mother volunteers, this small sample size of African American mothers cannot be representative of the experiences and perceptions of all African American mothers serving as volunteers at urban Title I middle schools. This study is limited to the perceptions and experiences reported by the mothers participating in the study; therefore, the perceptions and experiences of teachers, school administrators, school counselors, and support staff were not examined. Alternative factors that could influence parental involvement were not examined such as: teacher tenure, discipline challenges, and quality of school facilities.

Delimitations

The study of urban title I school-community partnerships was limited to Darcy Middle School. The exploration of African American mothers' experiences and the value of school-community partnerships at one school greatly narrows the scope of the study.

Role of Researcher

The researcher in this study is organically connected to the Excellence at Darcy volunteer community. The researcher is employed by Excellence at Darcy as the Community Liaison. The researcher interacts with the African American mother volunteers on a weekly basis at the Welcome Wednesday's meetings and around the Excellence at Darcy offices. The work of the researcher enables the researcher to observe and interact with the mothers while they are actively participating in the enrichment programming. The mothers of the study informally continued to share anecdotes and experiences after the completion of the interviews based on comrade built through the researcher's work as the Community Liaison and as a result of trust and built during the data collection process. The researcher is a participant in the administrative functions of the educational initiative and specifically contributes to the evaluation, assistance, and data tracking of crisis assistance to the Darcy Middle School community. The researcher has vested interest in the success of urban Title I students in the urban district of Darcy Middle School. The researcher acts as a formal and informal advocate to the families of Darcy Middle School.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Overview

This chapter reports the findings from the in-depth interviews focusing on six African American mother volunteers' perceptions and experiences partnering with a school-community partnership and the how they conceptualize the value of a schoolcommunity partnership serving an urban Title I middle school. The chapter is organized into the following three sections: (1) African American mother descriptions and volunteer roles, (2) a thematic analysis of the African American mother interviews, and (3) Thematic alignment with the guiding research questions. The study specifically explores the topics of parental involvement, school-community partnerships, Darcy Middle School, value, faith, and academic achievement with reference to their volunteer experience within the partnership between Excellence at Darcy and Darcy Middle School. The following questions guided the inquiry into the perceptions and experiences of the African American mothers in the study.

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of African American mothers who partner as volunteers with a school-community partnership serving an urban Title I middle school?

2. How do African American mother volunteers perceive the overall contribution of a school-community partnership serving students, families and faculty of an urban Title I middle school?
3. How do African American mother volunteers conceptualize the value of a school-community partnership serving an urban Title I middle school?

In-depth interviews with study participants produced textual data used to examine the perspectives, experiences, and anecdotes of the African American mothers. Each participant was interviewed one to three times to capture the mother's experience, perceptions of value, and feedback regarding the emergent themes from the data. The initial and follow-up interview questions were from protocol A (Appendix D) and additional questions for the second and third interviews arose from themes and inquiries elicited from the first interview and participant feedback on thematic analysis.

African American Mother Volunteers: Descriptions and Volunteer Roles

This section of chapter four will describe the mothers in the study and their roles in the school-community partnership between Excellence at Darcy and Darcy Middle School. All of the names presented for study participants are pseudonyms utilized to conceal participants' identities. The initial questions in the first interview explored the length of participation in the partnership, volunteer roles, and experiences with Darcy Middle School.

Michelle Moore

Michelle Moore is a middle aged African American, divorced single mother of five. Ms. Moore is a transportation coordinator and freelance graphic designer. She describes herself as a well-rounded person with a motivation to do good. Ms. Moore is

currently enrolled in a graphic design associate's degree program at the local community college. Michelle is the parent of two Darcy Middle School students and the aunt of two more Darcy students. When asked about her overall perception and performance of the Darcy Middle School, Michelle revealed that she perceived Darcy Middle School to be an above average school. When asked to assign a letter grade to the school, Michelle assigned the school a grade of B+. She noted that the above average grade assigned to the school was partly attributed to the support, enrichment, and opportunities provided by Excellence at Darcy. She says, "...the people have to take advantage of it to see the B+." All five of her children and her two nieces have participated in the partnership between Excellence at Darcy and Darcy Middle School over past five years.

As an already involved parent, Michelle developed a deeper connection to the school through the Excellence at Darcy partnership. Michelle was introduced to the program by the school counselor at Darcy Middle School. She refers to the counselor as an administrator based on her visible leadership in the school and community. She says, "I would say that the involvement of that administrator actually made me respect and actually take a good liking to the program." Michelle notes the school counselor would frequently go above and beyond her job description and that it was the counselor's rapport with her children that drew her into the partnership between Excellence at Darcy and Darcy Middle School. Michelle began to participate in the Excellence at Darcy's Welcome Wednesday's programming on the evenings she was not working. Michelle connects her participation and commitment to the partnership to her Caribbean roots. While Michelle identifies as African American, she attributes her values to her Caribbean heritage; values such as respect for all people, unbridled generosity, community, and a high regard for education.

Michelle attributes the instillation of her community values to her Caribbean grandmother, who taught her the importance of family and community. “I feel it takes a community...at my house...my grandmother said you should always have a plate for someone” [in the event that a stranger or unexpected guest arrived at your home in need of a meal]. Michelle says, “I am that type of person” and “I feel if more people are...willing to do something for the next person, this world would be a whole better place.” Michelle titles herself as the “enforcer” of her family because of her assertive, no-nonsense approach to education, work, and discipline. She says, “I don’t play when it comes to education.” Michelle also expressed a personal appreciation for diversity and multicultural communities.

Michelle initially participated in Excellence at Darcy’s parental programming. Through her participation in the adult programming offered through Excellence at Darcy, Michelle was connected to Christ Center Church and later employed as the Transportation Coordinator. She coordinates transportation for over 150 students and parents weekly. She also drives an Excellence at Darcy van herself to pick up drop odd Darcy students in the program. Michelle holds various volunteer roles in the organization and provides a variety of in-kind services such as website development and student advocacy. Michelle has also served an enrichment opportunities scout, identifying and securing enrichment opportunities for students participating in the Excellence at Darcy partnership. Michelle was instrumental in creating opportunities for students to participate in a local professional athletes’ summer sports camp. In addition to her administrative assistance to the program, Michelle is known by many of the Excellence at Darcy students as a loving disciplinarian. She also volunteers as a mediator between

students, volunteers, parents, and Excellence at Darcy staff, often supporting students, staff, and volunteers in addressing disciplinary concerns.

Tonya Spears

Tonya Spears is an African American single mother of two children ages six and 14. Tonya is in her late twenties. She is a Customer Service associate at a national retailer. Tonya describes herself as a committed parent, handworker, and good person. Tonya's son recently completed the 8th grade at Darcy. Tonya anchors all of her work with Darcy Middle and Excellence at Darcy in her purpose of supporting her son's academic and social success. When asked about her overall perception and performance of the Darcy Middle School, Tonya revealed that she perceived Darcy Middle School to be an average school. When asked to assign a letter grade to the school, Tonya assigned the school a grade of C. She noted that the average grade assigned to the school suggest that there is room for growth in teacher communication. Tonya was connected to the partnership between Darcy Middle School and Excellence at Darcy by her son. Upon entering Darcy Middle School, Tonya's son learned of the partnership between the school and Excellence at Darcy and informed his mother that the school was having a special event every Wednesday. To which Tonya said,

“I just said well we can do it; this can be something for the family. Wednesday night was convenient, my daughter had daycare, there were activities she could do, I had something I could do and it was something that he was excited about doing. So it was just convenient for everybody to spend time together as a family.”

Tonya has been involved as a parent volunteer for the past three years. Tonya initially participated in the parenting course offer by the Excellence at Darcy. Tonya says through the partnership she has been able to meet and support other Darcy Middle students. “I met a lot of kids throughout Wednesday nights, just by speaking to them and being present at the school.” Tonya also described increased opportunities to meet other parents and community partners on Wednesday night. Tonya described the partnership as a “safe place” for students socially and academically. She says, “I think that Excellence at Darcy sets a good example...it gives them a place of comfort.” She notes that Excellence at Darcy gives student positive energy and provides the comfort of an extended family. She says, “You know for me, it’s an outreach...”

Tonya initially participated as volunteer for Excellence at Darcy parental programing. She later volunteered with Excellence at Darcy’s computer building club offered to Darcy Middle students. Tonya participated as a parent volunteer and assisted in the facilitation of digital literacy lessons and computer hardware building. She also volunteers as a Holiday Helper during the holiday sponsorship programs; wrapping and delivering Christmas gifts to low-income and economically strained families at Darcy Middle School. She describes her volunteer experience as “heart touching” and a “Blessing.” She attributes her volunteer efforts to a high regard for education, family building, and outreach to families experiencing economic challenges she too faces.

Amy Harris

Amy Harris is an African American mother of three. She is married to Alando Harris. Amy is in her late thirties. She is employed by the local school district as an elementary special education teacher assistant. She is currently a graduate student in a

special education program at a local university. Amy describes herself an attentive parent and as a surrogate parent to the other students she serves in her employment and volunteer roles. She vocally advocates for students in the Excellence at Darcy partnership who are experiencing academic and social difficulty. Amy has participated in the partnership between Excellence at Darcy and Darcy Middle School for the past three years. Two of her three children attend Darcy Middle School. Her son and daughter recently completed the 7th and 8th grade. Amy has been active in the partnership since her daughter's 6th grade year. Amy was introduced to the partnership when her daughter brought a flyer home and she wanted to participate. She stated,

“I feel like if your kids are there and they are involved, I feel like as a parent you need to be involved I feel like you need to see what your kids are doing...and I feel like if you (as a parent) can be a part of it too, you (as a parent) need to be apart too.”

Amy also describes herself as a support to Darcy Middle School parents. Amy reports having a strong relationship with teachers, administrators, Excellence at Darcy staff, parents, students and other community partners. When asked about her overall perception and performance of the Darcy Middle School, Amy shared that she perceived Darcy Middle School to be an average school. When asked to assign a letter grade to the school, Amy assigned the school a grade of C. She noted that the average grade assigned to the school was based on a mixed experience as a parent of both an honor student and a student with learning difficulties. Her experience with her honor student has been very positive and inspiring, while her experience with her child with learning challenges has

been colored by less support and limited positivity. Amy expressed that she has experienced the opportunities and academic rigor in both a negative and positive way at Darcy Middle School.

Amy initially participated and supported the parental programming. After participating in the parental programming, Amy built a relationship with the director of Excellence at Darcy and learned that the organization was in need of a commercially licensed driver to operate the mini bus provided by Christ Center Church. She decided to become a driver for the Welcome Wednesday programming and Excellence at Darcy's Be Relevant summer literacy program. Amy became a part-time (paid) driver for Excellence at Darcy. In addition to driving, Amy participated as a crisis support volunteer. She has provided Excellence at Darcy parents in crisis with transportation, emotional support, and food assistance. Amy also supports the Christmas sponsorship program as a Holiday Helper.

Diamond Carter

Diamond Carter is a middle aged, married mother of two. Diamond relocated to the southeast just prior to enrolling her son at Darcy Middle School in 2014. Diamond is sonographer at a local hospital. Diamond has been married for 20 years. She describes herself as a spiritual person who intentionally seeks to live out the gospel of Jesus Christ in the earth. She notes that her faith is a central motivator of her work with Christ Center Church and Excellence at Darcy. Community building and educational equity are important to Diamond. Diamond also noted "...being present" as a core value in regards to the educational journey of her children. She uses her lived experience as a low-income African American student attending a low performing urban school as a reference point for her work with Darcy Middle School.

When asked about her overall perception of the Darcy Middle School, Diamond shared that she perceived Darcy Middle School to be an average school. When asked to assign a letter grade to the school, Diamond assigned the school a grade of C+. She noted that the average grade assigned to the school took in to account the challenges faced by the school. She stated, "...given the situation and the circumstances...the community challenges...so we have like poverty, transition, blended families, probably strong families...all blended together. So it's kind of like the weak and strong coming together." She was connected with Excellence at Darcy through the recruitment process for Excellence at Darcy's summer science camp. Diamond's son was invited to participate in the six-week science camp. Diamond stated that she was appreciative of the opportunity for her son to experience "something new and different". Diamond shared that her parents were not as involved as she would have desired them to be and therefore makes a concerted effort to be present at every parent conference, Welcome Wednesday's and any other extracurricular event. After her son's participation in a science camp valued at \$1000 for free, Diamond said,

"I was more or less expecting that there would be some significant cost to the camp and was very amazed to find out that he could attend science camp for free. So it really encouraged me highly to just check it out and see what part I could play in the educational experience of the community..."

Diamond initially participated in the parental programming offered by Excellence at Darcy and after participating in two of the parental programs Diamond became a

cofacilitator for parental programming at Welcome Wednesdays. She also transports produce donated to Excellence at Darcy from a local farmer's market. Diamond also participates in the Christmas sponsorship program as a Holiday Helper. Diamond recently joined the Excellence at Darcy board as a parent representative to support the program administratively.

Whitney Saks

Whitney Saks is a middle aged African American woman. She is a divorced single parent of four. Whitney participates as mother volunteer; however, her children are now beyond school age. When Whitney initially started with the partnership, her children were in middle school. Whitney and her children participate as Excellence at Darcy volunteers. Whitney has been a social worker in the southeastern urban community of Excellence at Darcy for over 15 years. She has served as a social worker for social services, urban housing development programs, and other educational nonprofit initiatives. Whitney is currently pursuing a graduate degree in social work from a research one university in the west. She was connected to Excellence at Darcy through a local training on Ruby Payne's Bridges Out of Poverty seminars. Whitney connected with the director of Excellence at Darcy and the two joined to develop programming for the parents of Darcy Middle School using the Bridges Out of Poverty model.

Whitney references her own experience as a low-income child as a point of connection with many of the Darcy Middle School parents. She says,

“The main goal in poverty is just pure survival and survival and achievement are two different things...I mean I grew up in generational poverty...my grandmother could teach me how to survive, she couldn't teach me how to achieve...”

Whitney notes that it is personally important for her as an African American single mother from an impoverished background to model and be an example of transition and overcoming obstacles that can eventually be emulated by the low-income (particularly African American) parents of Darcy Middle School. In reference to her work with Darcy Middle School parents Whitney says, “I get to model a middle class lifestyle...I actually get to be a bridge...that it’s okay to transfer from one lifestyle to another...I got it so I understand both...” She proudly identifies as an African American woman and connects her ethnicity to her motivation of her work with Excellency at Darcy and Darcy Middle School. Whitney prides herself on her ability to connect with the mothers of Darcy Middle School. She suggests that the academic and behavioral issues faced by Darcy Middle School are byproducts of the local housing market and parents working below a livable wage.

She posits that issues of poverty and instability come to school with the students. When asked about her overall perception and performance of the Darcy Middle School, Whitney shared that she perceived Darcy Middle School to be an above average school. When asked to assign a letter grade to the school, Whitney assigned the school a grade of A-. She noted that the above average grade assigned to the school was based on her work with the school over the past nine years. She says, “...well they have come a long way, the reading and math scores have increased dramatically, the parent involvement has increased dramatically...you know Darcy was on the list for closing...they were going to tear down the school.”. She noted however there is still “Plenty, plenty work to do.”

Whitney is a facilitator of the Bridges Out of Poverty programming provided by Excellence at Darcy. She also volunteers as an in-kind social worker connecting families

to local agencies and resources to address crisis situations and food shortages due to low wages. Whitney tracks parent participant data and follows up with former participants whom have moved to another area of the city or have children whom have aged out of the middle school programming. Whitney has provided written reports on the social, educational, and economic needs Darcy Middle School parents participating in Excellence at Darcy parental programming. Lastly, Whitney participates as a social work representative on the Excellence at Darcy board.

Sheila Michaels

Sheila Michaels is an African American single mother of four. Sheila is in her early thirties. She is the newest Transportation Coordinator at Christ Center Church. Sheila attended and graduated from a local high school. Two of Sheila's four children are currently enrolled at Darcy Middle School and the other two children are expected to attend Darcy Middle School. Sheila describes herself as a quiet, caring, peaceful person. Sheila actively participates in her children's educational experience. Sheila learned of the programming and enrichment opportunities provided by Excellence at Darcy through a flyer sent home with students. When Sheila learned that the program was primarily supported by a church she was encouraged as she was already seeking a faith community Darcy.

“They said, will you help Excellence at Darcy? You can come, we'll feed you, transportation is provided...at the time I did not have a car, so I was like, okay that's a good way for me to be at the school, and meet some of the teachers and everything. That's when I heard about Christ Center Church, from one of the (volunteer) drivers.”

After connecting to Excellence at Darcy and Christ Center Church, Sheila joined Christ Center Church. Between the partnership and the church Sheila expressed an appreciation for the programming and enrichment provided to her middle school students. She values her ability to be present at the school and that her children notice her physical presence at the school. She feels her weekly trip to the school (Welcome Wednesday's) encourages her children in their educational progress.

"They know...okay my mom comes to school, she's here all the time. I know if I'm doing something wrong, she going to know. Someone's going to tell, or someone is going to see her...I think it pushes them to do a lot better in school"

When asked about her overall perception of the performance of Darcy Middle School, Sheila shared that she perceived Darcy Middle School to be a slightly above average school. When asked to assign a letter grade to the school, Sheila assigned the school a grade of B-. She noted that the above average grade assigned to the school was based on the familial atmosphere at the school, but she also noted that negative interactions with teachers that eventually had to be handled with an administrator. Sheila expressed an overall positive regard for Darcy Middle School. In addition to educational support, Sheila shared her personal challenges with depression and an autoimmune disease that causes frequently hospital stays and long periods of being homebound. She utilized the opportunity to participate in the partnership with Excellence at Darcy and

Darcy Middle School as an attempted to face the challenges of her depression and illness. She shared,

“I used to sit in my house all the time. I used to try to figure out a way that I can get out and do things with my kids, cause I’m always about my kids...When I heard about Darcy, I was like, Okay that’s my chance.” “Once I got there, I was like, okay this is nice. A school do this?”

Sheila reported forming community friendships, gaining motivation for weight loss, and employment opportunities, all resulting from her participation in the Excellence at Darcy and Darcy Middle School partnership. Sheila initially participated in the parental programming at Excellence at Darcy. After participating in the parental programming Sheila began to volunteer with the Welcome’s Wednesday’s transportation team as a Navigator. The volunteer navigator calls students and families being transported prior to the van’s arrival and provides directions to the driver. Sheila also volunteered as a Holiday Helper in the Christmas sponsorship program. Sheila also distributes the produce donated from the local farmer’s market to the Darcy Middle School families in need of fresh produce and other perishable food items every Tuesday and Thursday. In addition to these reoccurring roles, Sheila provides administrative assistance in the Excellence at Darcy office as needed.

Summary

The African American mothers in the study have participated in the partnership for an average of four years. Four of six of the mothers’ Darcy Middle School student introduced them to partnership, these four mothers then followed up by seeking to learn more about the partnership and its potential value to the educational experience of their child. All six mothers in the study have at least three separate volunteer roles within the Excellence at Darcy partnership. All of the mothers participated in the organization’s

parental programming; including courses in financial literacy, parenting practices, and group therapy. All of the mothers also participated as volunteers of the Christmas sponsorship program, assisting families in shopping, gift-wrapping, and distribution.

In regards to the perception of Darcy Middle School, all of the mothers perceived the school to be average or above average given their experience as a parent and volunteer of the school. All of the mothers indicated that their rating of the school was greatly impacted by the presence and contribution of the partnership between the school and Excellence at Darcy. The mothers expressed high levels of involvement and interest in their child's educational experience. Table 1. provides a summary of the participants in the study and their volunteer roles with Excellence at Darcy and their overall perception of the Darcy Middle School.

Table 1. Participant Profiles

African American Mother	Age	Volunteer Role(s)	Years as a partner	Marital Status	Career	Letter Grade Given to Darcy Middle School
Michelle	41	Parent Course; Driver; Enrichment; Christmas Sponsorship	5	Divorce; Single	Transportation Coordinator; Graphic Design	B+
Tonya	30	Parent Course; Middle School Club Assistant; Christmas Sponsorship	3	Single	Costumer Service Associate (Retail)	C
Amy	37	Summer program driver, Crisis support; Student Advocate	3	Married	Special Education Teacher Assistant	C
Diamond	48	Parent Facilitator; Produce Pick-up; Christmas Sponsorship; Parent Board Member	2	Married	Sonographer	C+
Whitney	47	Course Facilitator; Social Worker; Followup data; Program developer; Board Member	9	Divorce; Single	Social Worker	A-
Sheila	32	Parent Course; Driver; Navigator; Christmas Sponsorship; Produce Distribution	3	Single	Transportation Coordinator	B-

Themes

The second section of chapter four discusses the themes generated from the data. The three research questions were explored through in-depth interviews, researcher observation, and researcher reflection, and archival documentation. From the verbatim transcripts, 42 codes were identified from the text that captured the experiences, anecdotes, and perceptions of the mothers in the study. These codes were analyzed for redundancy and relevance, and then clustered into six themes. The six emergent themes collectively reflect the mother's experiences and perceptions of the value of the partnership between Darcy Middle School and Excellence at Darcy.

Each of the six themes will be discussed, these themes include: family and community building, othermothering and, access and opportunity, promoting family stabilization, connections to faith based community, and reciprocity. All of the themes were revealed in textual data gathered from the six participants.

Figure 2: Six emergent themes



Table 2 Presence of themes in participant interviews

African American Mother	Family/Community Building	Othermothering	Access and Opportunity	Promoting Family Stabilization	Faith-Based Connections	Reciprocity
Michelle	<i>x</i>	X	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>
Tonya	<i>x</i>	X	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>
Amy	<i>x</i>	X	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>
Diamond	<i>x</i>	X	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>
Whitney	<i>x</i>		<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>
Sheila	<i>x</i>	X	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>	<i>x</i>

In theme one, data revealed the mother's perception of the family and community building Excellence at Darcy has inspired within the Darcy Middle School community. In theme two, the data highlights the mothers practice of othermothering when interacting with Darcy Middle School students. In theme three, access and opportunity, data revealed the mother's experiences and appreciation for the access and opportunities granted by the programming provided by Excellence at Darcy. Theme four, promoting family stabilization, revealed how Excellence at Darcy extends its services to housing stability, crisis assistance, and employment opportunities. Theme five, connections to a faith based community was revealed in the data. Lastly, the data revealed the mother's perceptions of reciprocity in a school-community partnership. The mothers discussed the give and take nature of their involvement in partnership. The mothers shared their perceived contribution to the partnership as giving back to the students at Darcy Middle School.

Theme One: Family and Community Building

Family and community building was a theme reiterated in the mothers' experiences partnering with Excellence at Darcy. The mother's reported that the schoolcommunity partnership created a space for the entire family to participate in school related community events. The mothers expressed that their participation in Excellence at Darcy programming as a family unit provided their families and other Darcy Middle School families opportunities for parents and students to strengthen familial bonds. When asked how the partnership was personally beneficial to her, Tonya shared, "...because of the family time we could spend together and we are in the same building with one another being productive..." Tonya noted that having a community event to attend weekly as a family provided the family with something to collectively look forward to each week. Sheila stated,

"Some families might not even get to eat together, but that night, that one night, they can eat together and be able to sit down at the table and discuss what's going on at school. You can (also) be able to get a chance to sit down with a teacher."

The partnership provided the family with a shared experience from which the families were able to bond and discuss topics such as, school events, academic needs, enrichment activities, and community members. Five of the six mothers reported that the shared experience with Excellence at Darcy increased time spent together as a family. All six mother's described and discussed how Excellence at Darcy builds community. All six mothers reported an expansion of their social network as a result of partnering with the

Excellence at Darcy. Diamond noted the diversity within the program's volunteer, student, and community participants. She expresses an appreciation for the access to racial, socioeconomic, and professional diversity the partnership provides students, parents, school staff, and community partnerships.

“Because when we go into the broad picture of the big world, everyone is not from our neighborhood, from our community, experiencing the same things...we (Excellence at Darcy) do bring a nice cross section of ages, cultures, backgrounds...um...advantages and disadvantages and bringing all of this together...it benefits the whole community so I think those are a couple of the things that I can think of right off hand specific, that I can see that the partnership is helping...”

Community Building is a core tenant of the Excellence at Darcy mission statement. The organization uses Welcome Wednesday's to build a network of educational community partners. The volunteers from Christ Center Church, Darcy Middle School, and local businesses and universities make up a racially, economically, professionally diverse network. Mothers in the study shared experiences of connecting with other volunteers, parents, teachers, administrators, and students. Sheila added,

“Instead of being school based (only), it's more like a family. It's like, you walk in and everybody know everybody.” Michelle shared,” ... it's a community period. The families volunteer, the community volunteers, they make up the whole system.

I don't know any other way to describe it is a family, it is a community, it is a family."

Michelle highlights the network of parent, community, and school volunteers built through the partnership. She alludes to the longevity of the program and the development of a community that is familiar enough to be familial. The word family was repetitively used by the mothers as a descriptive of their community experience within the Excellence at Darcy partnership. The mothers report a welcoming familial environment built upon the weekly engagement of the Darcy middle school community. The network of community partnerships developed by the partnership enlarged the community supporting Darcy Middle School.

Theme Two: Othermothering and Community Mothering

With respects to building relationships with students, five of the six mothers expressed practice of the "othermothering"; referring to Darcy Middle School students using possessive pronouns, such as "my kids" and "our young people". The mother's use of language in describing the students and their experience as a volunteer signify a personal connection to, a concern for, and even a responsibility for the overall wellbeing of the students (Trotman, 2002). The responsibility to act on behalf of children within the community is a primary component of "othermothering" (Ruddick, 1995; Trotman 2002). The mothers, shared various examples of mothering students. and providing students with academic, social, and financial support.

Michelle expressed, "They are all my kids...I feel it takes a community" Amy shared that in her experience building relationships with students while driving for the summer program, she felt like a parent to all the students on her bus. She added, "...it's

almost like a mama picking up their kids...yeah, it's like a caretaker, it's like if they're not there or whatever, I am sitting and waiting and wanting to know what happened, I am calling their house." Michelle adds, "Taylor, oh my god, I love that kid...He will come and hug me and he will be like "That is my mom."

When speaking about her experience building relationships with students, Tonya stated,

"Excellence at Darcy offers a family...So, I may not know you personally (speaking of students), before Excellence at Darcy, but before the end of the season I might know your first name, last name, your mama, where you stay, what you want to do when you grow up..."

Tonya and Michelle accentuate the community and familial relationships developed between Darcy Middle School students and parent volunteers. The community built through the school-community partnership is foundational to the community rapport established with Darcy Middle School students. The mothers in the study engage Darcy students and their stories within their work as mother volunteers. The mothers report that students are acknowledged, listened to, academically and emotionally supported, and inspired by the community of Excellence at Darcy.

Diamond and Sheila described experiences of othermothering indirectly through the fresh food collected and distributed to students and families' weekly. Diamond presented a motherly concern for the health and diet of the students at Darcy Middle School. She posits regarding her volunteer role as fresh produce transport, "...with the food pick up...through conversations (with students and families), I definitely love to introduce healthy food options to our young people." Tonya, Michelle, and Amy all

shared experiences providing emotional support to students experiencing social and behavioral challenges at home and/or school. Tonya described the partnership as a safe place, where students are permitted to be themselves and open up to caring adults she added,

“I had this one child in the computer building (club) and he would always just tell me like personal things about his family and what bothered him about his mom and his dad and he would just...it was like... I was like a person that he could confide in...”

Michelle shared one example of her emotional support offered to a student during Thursday night programming at Christ Center Church offered to Excellence at Darcy students as an extension of the weekly programming provided to students' afterschool. She shared,

“Okay for example this one kid that attends and you know her, her name is Mallory...she felt so bad because she didn't understand math. So she says that she asks her teachers for help all the time ...so while they were there [at the church] and practicing their chorus I sat outside with her and taught her, her Algebra and she says to me, “wow I am not that stupid.”

Collectively, the African American mother volunteers of the study presented a shared experience of family and community building as a result of their partnership with Excellence at Darcy. Excellence at Darcy served as a vehicle for the mothers to expand their own social network and community, while providing a motherly form of academic,

emotional, and nutritional support to the students of Darcy Middle School. The mother's also presented a widespread practice parenting in community. The notion of "it takes a village" was layered within the practices and sentiments expressed by the mothers.

Theme Three: Access and Opportunity

Each of the mothers in the study directly and indirectly alluded to the access and opportunities Excellence at Darcy offers Darcy students and families. The monetary value of the weekly programming, summer camp opportunities, and enrichment field trips were noted from all six of the interviewees. The mother's highlighted the breadth of programs and services offered to the students and families of Darcy Middle School free of charge, thus granting access to both the school and enrichment opportunities that may have previously been impeded by social and economic barriers such as transportation, low income, segregated communities. This theme uncovered two subthemes. These subthemes are presented in two subsections that describe the mothers' experience and perceptions of the varying degrees of access provided through the partnership between Excellence at Darcy and Darcy Middle school. The access provided by through the partnership include: (1) access to the school and (2) access to enrichment.

Welcome Wednesday's are held on the grounds of Darcy Middle School each week. The location of the programming provides students, teachers, administrators and parents with something similar to an extended school day or extracurricular activity. Mothers in the study expressed greater access to the school as a result of being a weekly volunteer. At the weekly meetings a variety of administrators, teachers, and support staff are present therefore accessible to parents and community members outside of the traditional school day. The mothers revealed greater access to the school grounds, faculty, and school meetings/programming.

Sheila expressed a deep appreciation for the extension of the school day Excellence at Darcy provides the students. She shared that during her first year participating in the Welcome Wednesday programming she did not have transportation and was unable to get to the school as frequently as she would have liked. She also shared an inability to provide transportation for her son to attend afterschool tutoring. When her family joined the Wednesday night programming, Excellence at Darcy provided transportation to and from the school. This enabled Sheila to overcome the barriers of transportation and access the school and teachers weekly. Her son was also able to stay after school and take advantage of afterschool tutoring knowing he would have transportation back home. Excellence at Darcy provided the family with a means of accessing teacher conferences and tutoring. She stated in reference to access provided by Wednesday programming,

“It actually let me get to know some of the teachers. It actually helped my kids somewhat, because they are able to at least stay after school on Wednesday and still have transportation home, because at the time I didn't have transportation. That gave them more time to get to study and get more help on things they needed help with, so it did help out a lot.”

Michelle noted increased access to the school stating, “...you get to know your administrator...you get know your teachers...because you are there...you get to discuss what is going on in the school in the meeting...” Diamond also expressed greater access to the school and notes the opportunity granted help to develop strong relationships with teachers who also serve as Excellence at Darcy volunteers. She states,

“Yes, I saw them(teachers) on a regular basis because of Wednesday night, and when you see people face to face because of science camp, you can recognize them again and spot them again and then when you see these same teachers who took part in....some of them came out to take part in the Christmas giving program and then you get to connect with them as volunteers because they are giving of their time as a volunteer (too) so then you are connecting with the teachers, the staff and you are actually getting to know them.”

The access to the school described by the mothers seemed to serve as a crux for deepening relationship with teachers and increasing parental involvement at the school. Access to tutoring and afterschool clubs was made possible by the provision of transportation. The mothers pointed out that the contributions and access provided by Excellence at Darcy strengthens the overall operations of the middle school.

Access to Enrichment refers to the plethora of enrichment opportunities Excellence at Darcy offers Darcy Middle School students. All six of the mothers spoke to the enrichment opportunities their children have been able to participate in because of Excellence at Darcy. The Wednesday programming offers students a choice of over 16 enrichment clubs to participate in weekly. The programming also offers parents’ a choice of 3-5 courses to participate in weekly. All Excellence at Darcy programming and enrichment opportunities are free of charge, the mothers highlighted this by consistent referencing of no cost and their personal economic status. Diamond shared in regards to the \$1000 science camp opportunity her son was able to participate in that, “I was more

or less expecting that there would be some significant cost to camp and was very amazed to find out that he could attend science camp for free.”

Michelle described the access to opportunity as an aspect of the value Excellence at Darcy offers to students and families, particularly low-income African American families. She says,” ...giving them access to different programs, letting kids see different things they can do...showing them that they are capable of doing certain things.” She noted that the exposure to enrichment without regard for cost helped students discover talents and likes they would normally shy away from because of limited exposure due to low economic status. She says

,

“You know some kids when they hear HTML formatting or doing an Android app or hiking [they are like] “Black people don’t hike” No black people do hike the reason you think black people don’t hike is because your parents told you black people don’t hike”

Diamond also shared her son’s enrichment experience learning how to play the guitar in his enrichment club at Wednesday programming. She shared,

“So when you bring a broader base together you are connecting people with opportunities and you are opening the eyes of our young people to the world around them....like I honestly dialogue with my oldest son a lot who just received his degree in computer science and engineering...that was just not a part of what I grew up with so I didn’t have a reference point...so there could have been opportunities that I could have benefited from(as a child) had I known engineers and professional

people in that aspect... so they(Excellence at Darcy) bring a great deal of diversity, inclusion, and perspective to every young person who interacts.” “My son specifically at Darcy Middle School has a love for music.... really, really enjoys band and, and he didn’t anticipate learning to play the strings, guitar but because of Excellence at Darcy, he was able to really enhance his music background... and it was money that I couldn’t have afforded. I couldn’t have afforded to send him to additional lessons, but he actually was able to benefit from Wednesday night and learning a whole new instrument and realizing that he has an appreciation for it... so a lot of times it’s, it’s a huge difference, it’s a huge difference, it’s a huge benefit to see how the partnership has played out in giving him...you know um a desire to show up on Wednesday night.”

When speaking to the difference that Excellence at Darcy Makes in the lives of the students Tonya stated,

“...we never know with these kids, what their dreams and ambitions are and with all these programs that Excellence at Darcy offers it really can set a tone for these kids because that same child that was in that computer class might not have known they really like to do something with computers...so that right there, that little bit of time you have with these kids can make a big difference in their future.

So we plant a seed and we hope to water it so that whenever they go on to bigger and better things after the Darcy life...then they can say you know what Darcy middle school showed me this... I really think it’s important that we stay involved with our kids; we want good results with our kids”

Each of the mother's connected the enrichment opportunities to the future endeavors of Darcy Middle School students. The mothers expressed a hope that exposure through enrichment would broaden the dreams and self-perception of students. Whitney and Michelle both added a similar perspectives regarding Excellence at Darcy's ability to provide enrichment to the upper middle class white volunteers whom participate in Welcome Wednesday's. Both mothers pointed out that the enrichment being provided through the program flows in multiple directions. They suggested that the community volunteers (namely middle class white volunteers) without access or proximity to individuals from difference ethnicities and social classes are too provided the benefit of access to greater community through their participation in the partnership. The mothers suggest that community volunteers, parents, students, and faculty are building bridges across line of difference through participation in the partnership.

Whitney says, "Excellence at Darcy gives that (greater access) to students and families and I think that Excellence at Darcy gives access to their volunteers to a world that is foreign to them." When speaking of the enrichment the programming provides to volunteers Michelle notes, "It breaks barriers where people don't even realize they exist."

Overall the mothers perceive the access to a broad, diverse school community network and to the school environment as central to the contribution of Excellence at Darcy.

Theme Four: Promoting Family Stabilization

The fourth theme that emerged from the data centered on Excellence at Darcy's contribution to the stabilization of Darcy Middle School families. All of the mothers in

the study served in a volunteer capacity in two or more of the Excellence at Darcy programs or events designed to provide emotional, economic and/or crisis support to Darcy Middle School families. All of the mother have participated as a volunteer in the Christmas sponsorship program. Three of the mothers reported providing direct crisis support to students and families afterhours.

As a community social worker Whitney experienced, identified, and named the stabilizing work done by Excellence at Darcy. She offers a professional analysis of the challenges Darcy Middle School has faced over the past nine years as a Title I school. Whitney reported that in producing reports for Excellence at Darcy, she noted that in the beginning of the program Darcy middle School was turning over one-third of the student population due to family instability. Issues such as housing, income, and transportation disproportionately impacted the students and families of Darcy Middle School. She says, “Excellence at Darcy did a lot to try to stabilize families” Whitney also highlights the assistance and in-kind services provided by Excellence at Darcy volunteers and sponsors to stabilize families. Excellence at Darcy assists families with rent, gas/bus passes, food, utilities, clothing, toys, furniture, Wal-Mart gift cards, tuition, relocation cost, and referrals to other community agencies all in an effort to promote family stabilization. Whitney adds,

“If you count what everybody did in-kind you know, you would be talking about a million dollars every year...of the in-kind services that people do to help stabilize families...we moved families, I delivered Christmas presents, you know I go shopping with families...”

Sheila discussed the peace she and other families experience as a result of the weekly meal provided by the program. Sheila described feelings of peace because of the dinner at the program relieved her from purchasing, preparing, and serving dinner at least one night every week. She says,

“Peace, cause, I mean, at home - Peace, when they get to Darcy, they can let they guards down. They can say, "Okay well, I'm not at the house, I don't have to think about the bills, I don't have to think about getting ready for work, I don't have to think about the next meal. I got time to get my mind off things by going to this class. With Women's Journey (parental programming), if you have an addiction, or you going through something at home, a spouse or anything, that's a time to able to have someone to talk to.”

Sheila offered that the dinners provided each week eliminates a small task or duty from the plate of parents and can actually help the entire family. The peace experienced by parents supports the stabilization of the family. Michelle shared her personal experience of re-stabilizing with the help of Excellence at Darcy. When a real estate developer bought the apartment complex that Michelle and her children were residing in and gave the residents less than 30 days' notice to vacate the property. At which time, Michelle was left with a serious need for housing and additional income to cover the cost of deposits, first month's rent, and relocation. She shared,

“...basically we were in an apartment like right next to Darcy and East ridge and what the management of that complex decided that they would just shut everything down...they gave us less than a month notice to move out all the families. So that

put a strain on us in every way, now this was around Christmas time. So it was very hard so Mrs. Greene (Darcy Middle counselor) was very helpful, even Mrs. Dawson (Excellence at Darcy Director) was very helpful she even let me borrow the church's van to move my stuff from home...you know so I wouldn't have to rent stuff because it was expensive with the coming up with rent deposits..."

Amy details a time where she provided crisis support to a Darcy Middle School mother experiencing relationship violence. She picked the mother up in the middle of night and sat with her for hours. She reports telling her, "I was just like you are too good for this you have kids to live for and we can't be doing this..." The mothers collectively shared anecdotes of the organization's attempts to establish and sustain stable families.

Theme Five: Connections to Faith Based Community

The faith based community of Christ Center Church acts as a foundation to the Excellence at Darcy organization. The bulk of sponsorship, volunteers, curriculum, vehicles for transportation, and other in-kind services for the organization are provided through Christ Center Church. The extension of adult and child programming provided by the church on Thursday nights offers students and families additional community programming and an additional meal provided free of charge. All of mothers in the study have participated in the Thursday night programming at Christ Center Church at one point or another. The mothers describe their experience with the faith-based community as a valuable addition to their Excellence at Darcy and Darcy Middle School experience. Diamond shared that she initially joined the faith based community through a quilting small group. She says,

“I ended up attending services and started to attend services on Sunday and Sunday School was an option. So in taking advantage of Sunday School I was able to meet with a group of ladies at the church and really built friendships that were able to bridge into a little bit of the quilting ministry, a little bit of the coffee with pastors, and eventually the Thursday Together.”

Diamond joined Christ Center Church and attends weekly. She is a part of a growing population of Excellence at Darcy families joining the faith-based community. Tonya shared that she became inquisitive about the faith-based community of Christ Center after observing the level of support the church provides to Excellence at Darcy. She says,

“Well that’s like on Wednesday when I first go connected to Excellence at Darcy and that’s when Christ Center came in and was like hey come visit our church and we just started visiting and really, really that was something else that showed me that they do a lot of activities with the kids...and so when we realized that Christ Center did a lot of stuff with the kids and that they were a big impact on Excellence at Darcy, it made you want to go and see what can they offer you as a family and not only was it just church and getting to know people through the church, but it was the activities...the youth and the activities they had with the youth ...so it offers a lot of good opportunities for your kids so to me why not be involved with positive things and that’s what Christ Center is.”

Tonya noted that there was no pressure to attend Christ Center and the families at Darcy Middle School are free to participate in all Darcy activities with no expectation of any affiliation to Christ Center, but that the faith based community was so welcoming that she wanted to learn more about the people of Christ Center. Sheila shared a similar experience to Tonya in that she became inquisitive about the strength in numbers behind Excellence at Darcy and learned of the role of Christ Center in the organization. She shared,

“I mean, once I got there (Excellence at Darcy), I was like, okay, this is nice. A school do this. Then, it got me more interested. That's when I found Christ Center, I said, Okay, now I can come to church, and it was just a lot of opportunities. A lot of opportunities...”

The mothers all reported developing relationships with the members of Christ Center Church. Two of the six others felt that the presence of Christ Center Church extends the community of Darcy Middle school beyond the middle school students and families to the larger community in the urban city. The mothers collectively spoke to the faith based presence that undergirds Excellence at Darcy, however only two of the mothers explicitly connected the motivation for their work with Excellence at Darcy to their faith. The other four mothers alluded to their child's success, “being a good person” and a “decent human being” as their personal motivation for their work with Excellence at Darcy.

Theme Six: Reciprocity

The theme of reciprocity is echoed throughout the data. The mothers in the study all expressed a reciprocal relationship with Excellence at Darcy. Within the theme of reciprocity three subthemes emerged (1) Darcy Middle School support, (2) community engagement, and (3) altruistic fulfillment. The parental, financial, and programmatic support Excellence at Darcy provides to Darcy Middle School fulfills of the mission of Excellence at Darcy. The organization's mission to focus on the holistic success of one urban Title I middle and its surrounding community is accomplished through the work of parents, teachers, administrators, and teachers' serving as volunteers on Welcome Wednesday's. The enrichment provided to the school bolsters Darcy Middle School's social and learning opportunities for students and families. Within two separate statements Tonya intentionally references her work with Excellence at Darcy as an "outreach." She refers to her personal contribution to the organization as outreach. She displayed great pride in her involvement with Darcy Middle School. Tonya personally describes her work with Excellence at Darcy as a means of breaking the barriers many Title I schools face. For her it is an outreach that benefits her son along with other families. Three of the six mothers shared a disdain for the judgment and baggage the label "urban Title I school" carries. These mothers also expressed a "shared reality" of a great overall experience as a parent of a student attending the urban Title I middle school. Through their altruistic efforts, the mothers expressed great value in the mutually beneficial relationship they developed with the school, community, and Excellence at Darcy.

The organization, the community, the church, parents, and the school all contribute to and benefit from the partnership. Community engagement emerged as a

mutual benefit to the school, Excellence at Darcy, Christ Center Church, community members, and Darcy Middle School parents. Michelle again highlights enrichment of the diversity and the value added to students, parents, teachers, administrators, Christ Center Church and the larger community. Michelle noted Excellence at Darcy's multicultural, multigenerational, mixed income community's collective effort to strengthen and enrich Darcy Middle School; she alludes to the layers of benefit associated with this collective effort to support a Title I School.

Whitney highlights her community involvement and in-kind social work service when speaking to her contribution to Darcy Middle School and Excellence at Darcy. She says,

“When you're a giver, you just give...thinking about the impact...” For Whitney, her the impact she has as an in-kind social worker is one benefit she receives from her work with the organization. All of the mother's offered altruistic explanations for their love of the school, students, and other parents and community members. Three of the six mother's directly referenced being “a good person”, a decent person”, and a “good human being.” All of the mothers exuded overall positive feelings regarding the service and support they give to the organization as a volunteer. The mothers express altruistic giving and pride in community care as a benefit to the organization and to themselves.

The notion of give and take was also highlighted in the mothers' volunteer roles and their families' reception of in-kind and financial support. Five of the six mothers reported receiving financial and/or in-kind support from Excellence at Darcy. Three of the mothers shared experiences as a Christmas sponsorship volunteer while simultaneously participating in the program. The mothers were recipients of a grocery gift card, family gifts, and household items provided through the Christmas sponsorship

program. Diamond revealed a reciprocal relationship with Excellence at Darcy, she explained that at a time when she was without transportation, Excellence at Darcy and Christ Center Church provided transportation to community programming. While Diamond's family benefited from the musical lessons and financial literacy and parenting courses, she simultaneously volunteered as a co-facilitator. The theme of reciprocity expressed by the mothers' rests on a foundation of mutual respect. The mother's reported a deep respect for Excellence at Darcy and also reported feeling respected as a mother volunteer.

Research Questions and Thematic Alignment

The first two research questions within the study centered on the perceptions and experiences of the African American mother volunteers of a school-community partnership serving an urban Title I middle school. The final research question placed emphasis on the mother's perceptions of the value added by a school-community partnership to an urban Title I middle school. The six emergent themes within the data were organized and specifically aligned with the research questions. In the following section, the research questions are aligned with the theme and subthemes captured within the data that best conveys the experiences, perceptions, and perspectives of the mothers as they relate to each research question.

Research Question One

The first research question explored the following: What are the perceptions and experiences of African American Mothers who partner as volunteers with a schoolcommunity partnership serving an urban Title I middle school? The mothers' perceptions and experiences as volunteers of Excellence at Darcy and Darcy Middle School schoolcommunity partnership were captured by all six of the emergent themes,

however family and community building, othermothering, reciprocity, and connection to the faith-based community were highlighted throughout the data revealing the mothers' perceptions and experiences as a school-community partner. When asked about their experience as mothers and volunteers at an urban Title I school, the mothers revealed a shared disdain for labels and stereotypes. The mothers expressed a general disregard for the label "Title I." Many referenced their personal experience of attending a Title I or high poverty school. Tonya shared her thoughts on the negativity associated with label. She says, "I think it's a negative outlook because you put these (labels) "urban" and "Title I" ...urban Title I school and you already know...that the whole statement says judgement." She goes on to express her decision to disregard labels and support her child's urban Title I school as a parent volunteer. She adds,

"Me as a parent I want my child to go to the best school, but you have these school zones so I am stuck in this school zone, so what I am going to go do? I am going to go get in this zone and as a parent I am going to do what I have to do for my child."

The mothers' offer a personal perception of Darcy Middle School that is not bounded by standardized test scores, discipline reports, and percentages of free and reduced lunch. Michelle suggested that considering the support and programs the school receives from Excellence at Darcy and the larger community, the school does not reflect the stereotypical offering of a Title I school. She says, "They have great programs, there is nothing wrong with the school, it shouldn't be a Title I school and the best way I think to fix it (perception) would be for more parents to be involved." Michelle posits that more parental

involvement could help with the educational issues associated with Title I schools, not merely economic changes.

These four themes best conveyed the shared experience of the African American mothers partnering with Excellence at Darcy and Darcy Middle School.

Research Question Two:

The second research question was: How do African American Mother Volunteers perceive the overall contribution of a school-community partnership serving students, families and faculty to an urban Title I middle school? Interview data revealed the mothers' perception of the overall contribution of the partnership center on access, opportunity, and community. Research question two is captured directly within three of the six emergent themes. These themes include access and opportunity, community building, and promoting family stabilization. Four of the six mothers compared the opportunities offered by Excellence at Darcy to the offerings of school-community partnerships at other schools. The mothers spoke to the distinction added to Darcy Middle School as a result of the ongoing community and enrichment opportunities, highlighting the distinction of Darcy Middle School as an overall contribution of the partnership.

When speaking to school-community partnerships at the school of her younger children Sheila added,

“They do some stuff, but not to the extent as Darcy. This is the first school I've heard that has something on this scale that you can just come, and they provide everything for you, so there's no reason why you shouldn't come.”

The mothers suggested that Darcy Middle School greatly benefits from the partnership in ways that make the school distinct from other local Title I schools. Amy's perceptions of the overall contribution of the school-community partnership to at Darcy unveiled dual perceptions of Darcy Middle School by the community. She shared that because the impact of Excellence at Darcy and its contribution to the Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) curriculum and magnet program adopted by the school inspired middle class parents to send their students to a Title I school. She shared,

“You find a more middle or higher income kid at that school...because they choose to be there, they are in the magnet program...they are there because they choose to go there. They are not there just because it is their home school.”

The school is regarded both as a below average Title I school (based on the state report card) and a program rich STEAM magnet school. Amy suggest that the reform and growing opportunities at Darcy are steadily becoming more attractive to middle class families in the area who would normally elect to send their children to a private or alternative school.

Five of six of the mother expressed that the central point of distinction between Darcy Middle School and other local Title I schools is the access and opportunities afforded to the students and families of Darcy Middle School. The mothers' named the access and opportunities provided through the partnership as a major contribution to Darcy Middle School. Michelle served as the driver and a chaperone for the Excellence at Darcy summer enrichment trip for high school students. Michelle and two other adults led the high school students in a three-day all-expense paid trip to Atlanta, Georgia to learn

about the civil rights movement, visit three Atlanta based colleges and universities, and explore the Georgia Aquarium and World of Coca-Cola.

Michelle noted that the social and geographic exposure provided by the partnership provided students with an academic/vacation experience completely free of charge. The access and opportunities are both school and community based. The mothers noted that through the partnership students are enriched at school and in other geographic locales.

The mothers' secondarily noted the contribution of the community building within and outside of the school as a central contribution of the partnership to the school. The data revealed that the community building efforts of Excellence at Darcy have built relationships between the school, students, families, and community volunteers. The data showed several layers of community building within the partnership. Relationships such as student-to-student, student to teacher, student to parents, parent to parent, parent to teachers, parent to faith-based community, and Excellence at Darcy staff to parents, students, and teachers were at the crux of the community building. The programming and weekly meetings of the partnership provided the space, time, and consistency to build and sustain relationships within the school community.

Three of the six mothers report that through the partnerships they were able to build a community of African American mother volunteers. Sheila, Tonya, and Amy spoke to the formation of deep friendships with other mother volunteers. The mothers establish friendships that served to strengthen the collective effort to support Darcy Middle School through parental comradery and othermothering, but also provided personal support outside of the partnership. All six mothers shared a widening of social networks for everyone involved in the partnership.

Lastly, the mothers highlighted the partnership's promotion of family stabilization as a major contribution of the school-community partnership. Excellence at Darcy promotes family stabilization through crisis assistance, transportation assistance, counseling services, and community events. Each of the mothers noted the organizations contribution to student and family crisis assistance. All of the mothers in the study reiterated the value of having an organization with the ability to provide crisis assistance directly to the school community. The mothers also point to the work of the organization and how the material support realizes the mission of community building. Opportunity, family, and community are the three most repeated words in the data. In the view of the mothers, Darcy Middle School ultimately benefits from the contribution of opportunity, family, and community.

Research Question Three:

The last research question explored within the study was: How do African American Mother volunteers conceptualize the value of a school-community partnership serving an urban Title I middle school? The mother's conceptualization of the value of the partnership between Excellence at Darcy and Darcy Middle School was developed and clarified through exploration of shared experiences, individual anecdotes, and personal perspectives of the value Excellence at Darcy adds to Darcy Middle School. When exploring the value of the partnership the mothers revealed various dimensions of the value added to the school through the partnership. The mother's conceptualization of value encompassed all six of the emergent themes.

The mothers consistently alluded to the value of the connection to the faith-based community of Christ Center Church. Access and opportunity was also noted as a valuable component of the partnership. The mothers made several references to the monetary value

of the programs and services offered through the partnership. No cost for participation was conveyed as a point of value through the theme of access and opportunity. All of the mothers in the study articulated the benefits, opportunities and experiences of reciprocity. According to the mother's in the study the opportunity to give back to a school marred by the stereotypes and labels that accompany Title I schools is invaluable. The mothers found value in each of the six emergent themes.

The ultimate value of the partnership conveyed by the mothers in the study is community service offered to the school, students, and families. The mothers spoke to the work done with students and families through community. When speaking to the overall value of the school-community partnership Tonya stated,

“Yeah, I think it’s very valuable because you can get a lot out of these kids, you can really get to know these kids...so a lot of time when you really have a connection with kids you can get more out of them you can push them harder.”

Tonya suggest that the establishment of relationships on Welcome Wednesdays offers students support emotionally and socially that can be utilized to push and encourage them academically.

Diamond noted that the exposure the organization provides to opportunities that students otherwise might not be exposed to or able to afford. She sees the impact on the outlook and perspective of the Darcy Middle School students as a valuable contribution of the partnership.

She says,

“...what I see is a strength from my vantage point, I think that it (Excellence at Darcy partnership) has added value in outlook and perspective for our young people because in a lower performing school district...even in my own experience...there where opportunities that were available that I didn’t even know existed.”

Sheila expressed the value of the partnership through the academic experience of her two children that attend Darcy Middle School. She shared,

“I mean, my kids, are better at school. My son, he better at school. He actually - when he first started at Darcy, he was horrible at reading, horrible. My daughter was horrible at math. Her favorite subject is math now. My son, he’ll read a book now.”

Sheila accredits the academic improvement in her own children to the value added by the school-community partnership. Through the partnership, her children were able to participate in after-school tutoring, enrichment clubs, and programming at Christ Center Church. She believes the mix of these programs and additional teacher assistance directly contributed to not only the academic improvement, but to their overall interest and engagement in school.

The value added through the school-community partnership of Darcy Middle School and Excellence at Darcy is revealed between and within the six themes found in the data. Together the themes provide a complete understanding of what the mothers in the study perceive to be the value of the partnership, particularly the value added to an urban Title I middle school. Data analysis led to the alignment of the themes and research questions

shown in Table 3. Each research question and thematic alignment will be presented individually by question.

Table 3: Research questions and thematic alignment

Research Question	Theme
<p>1. What are the perceptions and experiences of African American Mothers who partner as volunteers with a school-community partnership serving an urban Title I middle school?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family and Community Building • Othermothering • Reciprocity
<p>2. How do African American Mother Volunteers perceive the overall contribution of a school-community partnership serving students, families and faculty to an urban Title I middle school?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access and Opportunity • Community Building • Family Stabilization
<p>3. How do African American Mother Volunteers conceptualize the value of a school-community partnership serving an urban Title I middle school?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connections to Faith-Based Community • Family and Community Building • Access and Opportunity • Reciprocity • Othermothering • Family Stabilization

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Overview

This case study explored the perceptions and experiences of African American mothers who partner as volunteers in school-community partnership at an urban Title I middle school. This chapter will provide a brief summary of the study, a summarization of the findings and their relation to the broader literature of parental involvement and school-community partnerships. This chapter also concludes the study and provides implications, relation to the Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence and recommendations for educational community partners, school administrators, policy and future research. The chapter is organized by research question.

Review of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how African American mother volunteers perceive their experiences as volunteers of a school-community partnership at an urban Title I middle school. The mothers' conceptualization of the value of the school-community partnership between Darcy Middle School and Excellence at Darcy was the central point of inquiry in the study. The case study was guided by following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of African American mothers who partner as volunteers with a school-community partnership serving an urban Title I middle school?
2. How do African American mother volunteers perceive the overall contribution of a school-community partnership serving students, families and faculty to an urban Title I middle school?
3. How do African American mother volunteers conceptualize the value of a school-community partnership serving an urban Title I middle school?

The analysis of the in-depth interviews revealed six central themes: (1) Family and Community Building, (2) Othermothering, (3) Access and Opportunity, (4) Promoting Family Stabilization, (5) Connection to Faith-based Community, and (6) Reciprocity. These six themes collectively addressed the guiding research questions. The following section specifically summarizes the thematic findings and their alignment with the research questions.

Research Question One

Exploration of the mothers' perceptions and experiences as African American mother volunteers with a school-community partnership serving an urban Title I middle school revealed a shared experience of family and community building, othermothering, reciprocity, and connection to a faith-based community as result of their volunteer roles. The mothers perceived their work at the Title I middle school as a positive extension of their role as African American mother. The general perceptions of the partnership between Darcy Middle School and Excellence at Darcy was also captured in the themes community building and reciprocity.

Theme: Family and Community Building:

All six of the mother's in the study describe their experience and appreciation for the partnership's contribution to strengthening families and building community. The mothers noted the various ways the partnership provides families and community partners with opportunities to engage students, teachers, and administrators. The mothers expressed high regards for the partnership's ability to encourage family bonding through a shared enrichment experience on a weekly basis. The mothers also shared the experience of expanding their social network through the exposure to other community partners. Overall the mothers liken their experience to being a part of a family. The mothers noted both negative and positive experiences, growing in community with individuals with cultural, class, and ethnic differences that strengthened the overall communal experience as a school-community partner.

These findings are broadly in line with those of Comer (1997) and Epstein (2001). Comer (1997) and Epstein (2001) found that building strong relationships between schools, families, and communities is essential to breaking the academic and social barriers that accompany many students attending high poverty or Title I schools. Comer (1997) felt it necessary to include parents in all activities of the school. The deepened relationships with teachers and administrators in conjunction with a weekly presence at the school allowed the mothers in the study to stay abreast to the dynamics and events at the school while providing teachers with greater knowledge of students' home context and creating space for conflict resolution. The community built through the partnership provided the mothers and school with a knowledge of the school environment they may not have been privy to otherwise. Comer (1997) and Epstein (2001) agree with the notion that parent knowledge of the school and teacher knowledge of home strengthens student

support through a shared responsibility and understanding of the various contexts students' experience. Henderson and Mapp (2002) similarly found that effective schoolcommunity partnerships develop a collaborative network of parents, school staff, and community volunteers. The mothers describe this type of network in their experiences with teachers, community volunteers, and Excellence at Darcy on Welcome Wednesdays. The mothers in the study also experienced increased trust of the school community because of their participation in the partnership community; this finding coincides with Pena (2000), which found that increased parental involvement and parental trust are positively related. Epstein et al. (1997) found that school-community partnerships contribute to the sense of community. The sense of community conveyed by the mothers also attested a shared appreciation for the respect for diversity and difference, Sanders and Harvey (2000) similarly found that an urban elementary school succeeded in developing strong partnerships with community organizations based on the respectful recognition and engagement of cultural and class differences.

Theme: Othermothering

Five of six of the mothers reported building community through the practice of othermothering, the mothers developed relationships with the students of Darcy Middle School. The practice of othermothering by African American mothers in the study is consistent with the work of Collins (2000). Patricia Hill Collins defined the term Othermothers as "women who assist blood-mothers by sharing mothering responsibilities" (Collins, 2000, p.178). The mothers offered students emotional, social, and academic support in addition to tough love. Perkins (1989) posits that othermothering historically enabled African American mothers to build and strengthen

the African American community through their participation in the socialization and educational process of African American children.

The mothers in the study refer to the students as “My kids” and “Our young people. The mothers expressed a shared sense of responsibility not only for their biological children, but also for the students participating in the partnership. The theme of othermothering is also consistent with the work of Case (1997) and Ruddick (1989), these authors note that othermothering is an attempt by African American mothers to meet the psycho-social-educational needs of African American students out a sense of responsibility. The mothers in the study were attentive and sensitive to student needs in and outside of the school environment. The mothers expressed a belief in their work’s contribution to the success of Darcy Middle school students. Case (1999) suggest that efforts to promote academic advancement of urban students, particularly African American students, must be accompanied by specific attention to the psychoeducational needs of students. The mothers in the study expressed a similar sentiment. This study supports the research on othermothering and African American women.

Cooper (2009) offered similar findings in her identification of African American mother’s engagement in educational advocacy and student empowerment as “motherwork”. The researcher found a counternarrative to the broader parental involvement literature, which suggest that urban African American parents do not engage school environments often. The counternarrative of African American mothers’ parental involvement was consistent with the findings in this study. All six of the mothers in study demonstrated high levels of commitment, sacrifice, and consistency in their “motherwork” for the students participating in the partnership between Darcy Middle

School and Excellence at Darcy. Cooper (2009) identified stereotypes of African American mothers such as uninvolved, inattentive, and unconcerned that were inconsistent with her findings; these stereotypes were also inconsistent with the practice of othermothering reported by the mothers in the study.

Theme: Reciprocity

Reciprocity, referred to by the mothers in the study as the “give and take” and “outreach” they engage in through their volunteer positions in the school-community partnership. Three subthemes emerged from the theme of reciprocity. One of those subtheme directly addresses research question one. The mothers reported the subtheme of altruistic fulfillment as a key component of their experience as a volunteer with Excellence at Darcy. The mothers shared a positive regard for the work they are doing with Excellence at Darcy and Darcy Middle School. The mothers expressed that their giving or investment as a volunteer was returned through the enrichment and support the partnership provided their whole family. Although the finding of reciprocity is generally compatible with the literature centered on parental involvement, few studies identify opportunities for reciprocity among African American mothers at Title I schools as a strategy to strengthen as sustain school-community partnerships. The volunteer opportunities the mother in the study engaged in provided the mothers with avenues to “give back” and participate in “outreach” that was both personally and communally beneficial. The mothers in the study expressed a sense of purpose and fulfillment through their work with Darcy Middle Schools students. This finding revealed a sense of community respect and honor associated with the volunteer work at Darcy Middle School.

Theme: Connections to Faith-Based Community

The connections to the faith-based community of Christ-Center was reiterated by all six of the mothers. Five of six of the mothers in the study developed an ongoing, separate relationship with the faith-based community of Christ Center. After joining the partnership as a volunteer the mothers all reported being surprised by the amount of time and resources Christ Center Church dedicates to Darcy Middle School without recognition. Three of the six mothers report connecting with the faith-based community of Christ Center Church solely based upon their commitment to Darcy Middle School. Michelle shared experiences participating in Sunday School, Diamond joined a knitting group, Sheila participated in a mother-daughter youth program, Tonya has participated in a church small group, and Whitney attends church every Sunday.

The mothers' perception of value added to the school inspired the mothers to continue in community outside of the boundaries of the partnership. The literature on school-community partnerships with faith-based organizations evidences the academic, attendance, and behavioral findings of the broader school-community partnership (Blank, Jacobson, & Melaville, 2012; Bryan, 2005; Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Henry, 2014; Sanders, 1998; Wang & Boyd, 2000), few studies have examined school-community partnerships from the perspective of African American mother volunteers. Fewer studies have examined African American mother volunteer's perspectives and experiences partnering with both a Title I school and a faith-based community partner.

While the study explored the mothers' perceptions of the value added to Darcy Middle School, the data revealed that the mothers were personally empowered through the breadth of community created by the partnership. The personal empowerment of

African American mothers unintentionally underlies the work of the partnership. African American parental empowerment through community emerged as an unspoken value of the partnership. The partnership does not intentionally seek out only African American mother volunteers, in fact many of the volunteers in the partnership are white. What these findings show is that the African American mother volunteers in this study were personally empowered through the community building, othermothering, opportunities, reciprocity, family stabilization, and connection to the Christ Center faith-based community they experienced.

Research Question 2

The second research question explored the overall contribution of the schoolcommunity partnership between Darcy Middle School and Excellence at Darcy to the students, families, and community. The data revealed the previous theme of community building in addition to the themes of access and opportunity and promoting family stabilization. These two additional themes articulate the mothers' perceptions of what the school-community partnership contributes to the school in addition to the theme of community building.

Theme: Access and Opportunity

The mothers highlight the contributions to the students of Darcy Middle School that are external to the classroom context, but have considerable impact on a students' ability to learn. The mothers highlighted the interaction with the school, teachers, and administrators after hours on a weekly basis as a point of access. The mothers felt that the school-community partnership, particularly Welcome Wednesday granted them greater access to the school. The mothers shared examples of opportunities to address in-school issues after hours. Access to the school after school tutoring and teacher help was also

named as an opportunity granted to students because of the provision of transportation provided by the partnership. The mothers' opinion that the partnerships increased their access to the school is a major contribution of the overall partnership is consistent with the work of Epstein (2001). Epstein (2001) found that the more recurrent the interactions between the school, family, and community, the more unified home and school environment. The access granted to the mothers of the study strengthened school-home-community relations. Gavarkavich, et.al (2015) found that parental engagement at an urban Title I middle school was increased through community building of a strong school-community partnership.

Welcome Wednesdays' provide students with external academic and social support; transportation, produce delivery, and counseling groups all address external obstacles face by struggling families at Darcy. Lastly, the community network built through the educational initiative adds to the social capital of students, families, volunteers, and school staff. Sanders (1998) found that African American students' participation in a schoolcommunity partnership positively impacted the students' academic self-concept and school behaviors. The positive impact on academic self-concept was specifically reported by four of the six mothers. Also, Sheila's notation of the impact of her weekly presence on her son's behavior and accountability while at school directly aligns with Sander (1998)'s findings.

Another point of access granted by the partnership between Darcy Middle school and Excellence at Darcy as reported by the mothers was the enrichment provided as supplement to the academic and home environments. Enrichment such as the robotics, computer building, and martial arts clubs offered to Darcy students and the financial

literacy and counseling programs offered to the mothers opened access to enrichment. These findings are in harmony with the strategies provided by Noguera (2011).

Noguera (2011) posits that communities facing economic challenges such as those encountered by Title I schools can impact urban low-income students through collective provision for external academic support, social support, and means of overcoming environment barriers. The mothers all reported that the contribution of Excellence at Darcy meets students' external needs, needs that their economic means and the school alone are incapable of providing. The mothers pointed out that the organization's provision of transportation and cost-free afterschool enrichment and summer camp facilitated access to learning and experiences typically afforded to families with more economic means than many of the families in the partnership.

In their meta-analysis of school-community partnerships Henderson and Mapp (2002) found that when parent and community involvement is linked to student learning, it has a greater effect on achievement than all other forms of involvement. The researchers recommend parental involvement initiatives focused on improving achievement be designed to engage families and students in developing specific knowledge and skills. The findings of this study suggest that not only are students enriched by parent and community involvement linked to student learning, but parents that serve as volunteers are also enriched by school-community initiatives centered on academic improvement and skill development. Tonya's experience as a volunteer with the computer building club personally enriched Tonya and added a knowledge base and skill set of computer building. Tonya was able to volunteer while simultaneously developing a skill. The access and opportunity provided to Darcy Middle School benefits both students and parents according to the reports of the mothers in the study.

Theme: Promoting Family Stabilization

The mothers noted the promotion of family stabilization as a major contribution of the partnership to the Title I middle school. The mothers suggested that the work of the organization to resolve and prevent destabilizing economic and environment forces is an external support to the school. The impact of family dynamics and environmental instability on the academic performance and behavior of students is well noted in the literature (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Fernandes-Alcantara, 2014; Irvine, 1991; Kozol, 2005; Payne, 2008). Three of the mothers shared accounts of receiving crisis assistance through the partnership. Michelle and Whitney specifically highlighted the organizations assistance with housing stabilization and food assistance. Noguera (2003) posited that any reform or school improvement effort in urban schools that does not address basic physical, social, and emotional needs of students will fail to improve academic outcomes. Noguera underscores the importance of basic needs and student learning. The mothers of this study reported experiences where they were able to stabilize a personal crisis and help stabilize other Darcy families through the financial, nutritional, counseling group, and transportation support for basic needs from the partnership. The findings of Henderson and Mapp (2002) are consistent with the theme of family stabilization, they found that successful school-community programs are welcoming and address specific parent and community needs.

Research Question Three

The final question explored how the mothers conceptualize the partnership's value to a Title I middle school. The mothers spent time articulating the value added to Darcy Middle School, families, and the community through the work of the partnership.

The data revealed that the mothers' construction of value added to the school

mirrors the mission of the school community partnership. The personal mission of expressed by the mothers aligns with the overall mission of Excellence at Darcy. The mothers shared reality as both volunteers and mothers revealed a deep value and interest in the overall health of their children's school community. The mothers' personal values of sacrificial love, education, and family found in the data provided an understanding of the value that mothers felt the partnership adds to the school. The mothers also noted that the partnerships' model would be beneficial to all Title I schools. Collectively, the themes identified from the data reveal the mothers' perception of the value of the partnership between Excellence at Darcy and Darcy Middle School. This finding is consistent with the research of Abdul-adil & Farmer (2006) which found that inner city African American parents positively respond to parental involvement programs that emphasize the theme of empowerment, outreach and indigenous resources. Marschall (2006) also noted schools increasing efforts to engage parents in outreach activities to gain authentic community perspectives and mutually supportive relationships between teachers, parents, and students. The mothers shared an experience volunteering within the partnership developing supportive relationships with other students, school staff, and community volunteers.

The positive experiences of the mothers collectively demonstrate the perceived value of parental involvement. Dauber and Epstein (1993) noted the importance of creating atmospheres in which parents 'experience, of parental involvement creates an atmosphere where the welcoming and value of parents is palpable. Excellence at Darcy succeeded in creating such an atmosphere.

Five of the six mothers in the study reported a high regard for academic achievement and schooling, but also added that their work hours conflicted with

traditional school hours. The mothers noted the partnership with Excellence at Darcy provided them with an opportunity to engage the school outside of the traditional hours. The mothers expressed great appreciation and value for the opportunity to be involved in ways and at times that aligned with their work schedules. Cooper (2009), Abdul-adil & Farmer (2006), and Jeynes (2005) all found high interest of urban African American parents in the educational process of their child, but the challenges of economic and employment barriers often hindered their ability to engage the school during traditional school hours.

Implications

The findings of this study suggest that parental involvement of African American mothers of students attending Title I schools can be bolstered by the value added from a volunteer experience with a multifaceted school-community partnership. The partnership between Darcy Middle School and Excellence at Darcy provides a multifaceted approach to the needs of students and families at Darcy Middle School. The African American mothers in this study found value in the network of human, financial, and community resources they experience as both a volunteer and as a parent. The partnership in this study provided the mothers with a welcoming, social space to engage the school community. The mothers in the study seamlessly move between positions of giving as a volunteer and receiving as a parent and individual. This suggests that creating spaces for parental give and take in school-community partnerships serving Title I school would be beneficial to strengthening parental involvement and the overall school community. All of the mothers in the study willingly took on multiple volunteer roles that were catered to their personal and work schedules. The mothers and the partnership community share a commitment to the school and to their students. This shared commitment developed a

culture of “with parents” at Excellence at Darcy, as oppose to partnership culture of “for parents” or even “despite parents”.

The mother’s perspective of the partnership’s overall contribution was captured by their descriptions of distinction. The mothers felt the presence and ongoing work of Excellence at Darcy added a level of distinction to Darcy Middle School. The addition of the STEAM curriculum, robotics team, enrichment clubs, crisis assistance, and parental programming. The mothers report a clear distinction between Darcy Middle School and other Title I elementary, middle, and high schools in their district. The distinction added through curriculum and enrichment programming inspired a sense of pride in the mothers despite the academic performance narrative which depicts Darcy Middle School and other urban Title I middles school in the district as underperforming with limited parental interest.

The study also shows that mothers’ experience and evaluation of the school versus the state evaluation of the school differ greatly. This finding suggest that urban Title I school evaluations fail to capture community collaboration, parental empowerment, and growth of social capital. The measurement of standardized test, teacher quality, and discipline incidents often define the overall state evaluation of school quality. For many urban Title I parents these markers are outside of their locus of control. Parents are not involved in the hiring process of teachers and therefore cannot control teacher quality. Parents are not generally apart of the development of standardize test and therefore cannot affect the cultural and economic bias that underlay many standardized test. Parents typically are invited into disciplinary incidents after there occurrence and cannot control for cultural dissonance in student-teacher interactions. Much of state assessment of schools strengthens the dominant urban Title I school narrative which

leaves little room for parental impact. The findings of this study counter the narrative of unconcerned, uninvolved African American mothers.

The work of the mothers in the study directly contributed to the external or nonmeasureable factors that influence academic achievement, student self-concept, and school climate. Through the partnership the mothers reported increases in social capital for themselves and their students, deeper relationships with teachers and administrators, and improvement their child's academic performance. The potential impact of the othermothering and reciprocity African American mothers are able to contribute are the apart of the building blocks of Darcy's counternarrative. This study suggests that schoolcommunity partnerships such as Excellence at Darcy could potential play a key role in developing a counternarrative to the deficit centered narrative of many urban Title I schools. Additionally, this research highlights the parental outcomes of a partnership that embraces parents as equal actors, strengthens family, increases involvement at the school; all with the ultimate goal of supporting student academic achievement. The implications drawn from the mothers' perceptions, experiences, and values in relation to Darcy Middle School and the overall well-being of the students at Darcy affirm the tenets of Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence.

Epstein's Overlapping Sphere of Influence provided the theoretical underpinning for the study. As stated in chapter one, Epstein (2001)'s theory of overlapping spheres of influence is a framework utilized by both social scientist and education practitioners to examine the interactive relationships between schools, families, and communities. The overlapping spheres of influence theory centers itself on the collaboration of schools, families, and communities to promote student success (Epstein, 2001). Epstein (2010) posits that interactions among parents, educators, and community partners are the crux to

establishing caring communities in schools. The findings from this study support Epstein's research and theory on the shared responsibility of families, school, and communities in the social and educational process of children. The mothers in the study expressed a genuine interest in and shared responsibility for the students at Darcy Middle School. The context in which the mothers in the study served as volunteers completely overlapped the work of home, school, and community.

The Welcome Wednesday programming that the mothers report participating in is housed at the school, supported by the community, and offered to students and families. Welcome Wednesday's is one example of the collective effort of the partnership between the school, families, and the community at Darcy Middle School to promote academic achievement and enrichment. The mothers' experience as a volunteer is situated within this collective effort.

Their perspective provides a lens through which the overlapping spheres of Darcy Middle School, Darcy families, and community partners influence on student development and achievement can be viewed. While the findings of this study are focused on the perspective of mother-volunteers, the data gathered from the mothers aligns with the Overlapping Spheres of Influence's notion that the student is continually impacted by the interaction between the contexts of home, school, and community. The mothers in the study share anecdotes of their child's experience between the contexts of the partnership.

In addition to discussing their child's experience across contexts, the mothers shared their own experience on the impact of the interaction between school, home, and community. The mothers in the study experienced the overlapping spheres of influence in a way that contributed not only to the academic achievement and enrichment of their child, but also to their personal empowerment as a mother volunteer. This study indicates

that school-community partnerships at an urban Title I school could potential create a context that is mutually beneficial to the students and parents.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based upon the findings and implications of this study conducted with six African American mothers partnering as volunteers with a school-community partnership serving an urban Title I middle school in the southeast. Recommendations for school-community partners, urban Title I middle school administrators, policymakers, and future research were drawn from the findings of this study and are presented below.

Recommendations for School-Community Partners

The impact of parental engagement on academic outcomes is replete throughout the literature; studies attest to the positive influence both school-based and home-based parental involvement has on school outcomes (Cooper, 2009; Epstein, 1994; Jeynes, 2005; & Marcon, 1999). Excellence at Darcy serves as a community supported point of access through which parents of students at an urban Title I middle school consistently engaged the school environment and staff. It is recommended that faith-based organizations, corporations, local businesses, educational nonprofits, and community service groups that seek to support urban Title I schools create community points of access to the school environment after hours through school-based enrichment programs. This enrichment should be centered on student achievement and exposure, but also open to the family and community.

The findings of this study revealed that school access afterhours, collaborative volunteering between parents and school staff, and wider community strengthened parental involvement and positively impacted parental perception of the school. Three

key components for developing a school-community partnership that will serve as a community point of access to the school environment, cultural and social enrichment, and a network of community partners were generated from the data. The school in this study emerged as a center point for access to a myriad of opportunities and services for students, families, and the wider community. The three components include: (1) network of community partners; (2) Access to enrichment in the school environment; (3) collaborative volunteering between parents, school staff, and the community.

The first recommended component to creating a community point of access for urban Title I schools is the establishment of a network of community partners committed to serving one school. The network of community partners is defined in this study as a unified group of various types of school-community partners (i.e., faith-based organizations, corporations, retired educators, parents and teachers) who are committed to collaboratively serving one school. Through this commitment school-community partners can focus exclusively on the issues facing students, parents, and staff in one context. This study implies that this centralized approach to community partnering will cultivate deep community and positively impact student achievement and behavior through increases in parental involvement and positive school climate. This approach enables community partners to benefit from strength in numbers and holistically address the needs of students and families at Title I schools.

The second component to creating a school-community partnership that serves as a point of access is access to enrichment in the school environment. It is recommended that school-community partnerships serving urban Title I schools focus on the development of school-based community-teacher-parent led academic, social, cultural and enrichment. This study suggests that weekly enrichment meetings at the school will

enrich the school climate through the addition of extracurricular activities and school staff engagement after hours. This study also suggests that free of cost after school and summer enrichment opportunities housed at the school will positively influence parental perception of the overall quality of the school.

The final component to transforming school-community partnerships in to a community access point is collaborative volunteering. It is recommended that the schoolcommunity partner network identify and promote opportunities for collaborative volunteering. The mothers in this study reported opportunities to build deeper relationships with teachers, administrators, community members and other parents as a result of volunteering side by side. The service of students' afterhours at the school provided the mothers with an opportunity to address in school issues and receive weekly updates on their child. The weekly interaction of parents and the school enabled the mothers to increase their knowledge of their child's progress, the school environment, and community partners. The collaborative work of parents, school staff, and the community cultivates relationships and strengthens the communal responsibility for students' academic and social well-being.

Recommendations for Urban Title I Middle School Administrators

Comer (1997) provided a school development model in which parents would be invited to participate in all school decision making and activity. Comer found relationship building to be crux to the improvement of academic and behavioral outcomes in underperforming schools. Comer suggest that the joint effort of schools and communities is able to break the barriers that accompany poverty and impede student learning. Therefore, it is imperative that school leaders in urban Title I schools work fervently to establish and sustain strong school-community partnerships. Epstein (2001)

and Henderson and Mapp (2002) posit that strong and effective school-community partnerships in low-income or Title I schools all possess an outreach component. It is recommended that school administrators conduct an assessment of school, student, and general family needs and identify school-community partners and potential partners who align with and could meet those needs. It is then recommended that school administrators work with community partners to develop a network of partners committed to serving the school. School administrators in the partnership of this study engaged the network of community partners to provide supplemental support of school equipment, supplies, and enrichment, but also engaged the partnership for support for families in crisis. One of the mothers in this study specifically called the partnership an outreach and describe her outreach as her purpose for involvement.

Research suggest that not only will an outreach component to the school help sustain partnerships with parents and the wider community. The collaborative work of parents, school staff, and the community has also been shown to energize and motivate students (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Collectively the research and present study suggest that the potential impact of school-community partnerships on school climate, student achievement, and parental involvement could provide challenged urban Title I schools with the relationships and resources necessary to break the barriers of poverty and low academic achievement.

Recommendations for Policy

The findings from this study support the claims that parental involvement, school-community partnership, and urban education literature collectively put forward; that is, parents, students, and communities together make schools great. Particularly, high need, high poverty schools. This study contributes the voice and perspective of African

American mother volunteers at Title I middle schools to the conversation. The personalized and selfless contributions of the African American mothers in this study highlight the special work and practices African American mothers are empowered to offer through the work of school-community partnerships. Therefore, it is recommended that developers of Title I and urban school policy specifically design policy in which schools are provided with the necessary funding, resources, and space to create ‘Othermothering’ leadership positions within afterschool enrichment programming. Leadership positions in which African American mothers can expressly practice ‘Othermothering’ in an educational setting. These positions in the school could potentially assist urban Title I schools in addressing social, emotional, and accountability needs of students. It is recommended that the powerful practice of ‘Othermothering’ be incorporated into the policy understanding of African American parental involvement in urban schools.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study focused on African American mother volunteers at one urban Title I middle school. Expanding the limitations of this study with further study into the five specific areas would be beneficial in capturing a holistic perspective of the parental experience volunteering with school-community partnerships in urban Title I schools. The following section will highlight five areas for future research these areas include: (1) African American father volunteers; (2) African American school-community partners without children; (3) White mother and father volunteers (4) school-community partnership networks serving one school; and (5) collaborative volunteering.

1. Future research into the perceptions, experiences, and contributions of African American fathers who volunteer with school-community partnerships serving

an urban Title I middle school is recommended to provide a comparative analysis of the experiences and perceptions of African American mothers and fathers who volunteer at their child's Title I school.

2. Othermothering was a key finding within the experiences of the mothers in this study, within the discussion of othermothering the mothers identified several childless African American school-community volunteers, whom provide students with parental guidance and accountability. Future research on the perceptions, experiences, and contributions of African American school-community partners without children of their own, but who provide parental support to students in an urban Title I middle school would be useful in understanding the practice and impact of community parenting. Further investigation into why African American community members without kids participate in school-community partnerships and community parenting at a Title I school would also contribute to research on African American volunteers at Title I schools.
3. Future exploration into the perception and experiences of white parents who participate in a school-community partnership at their child's urban Title I school would be useful for comparative analysis by race. Further study into the parental experience of African American and white parents who share similar volunteer roles in a school-community partnership at an urban Title I school would provide even deeper comparative analysis into the experience of volunteers by race.

4. The exploration of the perspective of parents who elect not to participate in school-community partnerships at their child's urban Title I school would also be critical to understanding urban Title I parental involvement.
5. The development of a network of school-community partners serving one school community was identified in this study. Further investigation is needed to evaluate the benefits and challenges of establishing a single network of community partners committed to one school. The unification of various types of school-community partners is ideal, but may require additional research into interagency collaboration and title I school-community partnerships. Strategies for identifying, organizing, meeting, and collaborating with multiple community partners also requires further investigation.
6. The benefits of collaborative volunteering between the mothers, school staff, and community partners is echoed throughout the data. The mothers reported that collaborative volunteering deepened relationships with school staff and community members. However, further research is needed to fully understand the benefits and challenges of collaborative volunteering in school settings. Perspectives from school staff, community members, and students are pertinent to assessing a broad school-community experience of collaborative volunteering at a Title I school.

Conclusion

Research on African American parental involvement in urban schools has been complicated by varying definitions of parental involvement and contradictory findings on the level to which African American parents are interested and involved in their child's education (Abdul-adil & Farmer, 2006; Baker& Soden, 1997; Cooper, 2009; Ford, 1994;

Jeynes, 2005). Despite conflicting findings in the literature African American parents in urban areas are largely depicted as apathetic in the dominant narrative of parental involvement (Abdul-adil & Farmer, 2006). Research on the positive relationship between parental involvement and students' academic self-perception and achievement coupled with conflicting research findings, and a narrative of African American parental apathy has led to the notion that parental involvement in urban areas is limited to none and is therefore a critical issue in urban education (Comer, 1997; Epstein et al., 1997; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2005). Several scholars have posited strategies and methods for increasing urban African American parental involvement (Abdul-adil & Farmer, 2006; Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Payne, 2008). School-community partnerships are amongst the most promising methods of engaging urban African American parents, often engaging parents at greater rates than school alone. Abdul-adil & Farmer (2006) suggest that school-community partnerships offer students and families means of outreach, empowerment, and indigenous resources that inspire parents to engage and sustain relationships with the school community. Therefore, this study sought to explore African American mothers' experiences as volunteers of a school-community partnership serving an urban Title I school through the topics of parental involvement, school-community partnership, and faith. In addition to the African American mothers' experiences, the study explored the mothers' motivation to volunteer and perceptions of the overall value of a school-community partnership serving an urban Title I school.

Findings from the study revealed six themes (family and community building, othermothering, reciprocity, access and opportunity, promoting family stabilization, and connections to a faith-based community) that captured the mothers' experience and perceptions of the value of the school-community partnership between Excellence at

Darcy and Darcy Middle School. The themes identified in the study suggest that the African American mothers in the study are not only actively involved in their child's education, but assume a communal responsibility for all the children under their care as a volunteer. The mothers' reported a reciprocal relationship with school and the partnership based on the alternating position of giving and receiving as volunteer and parent. Findings from the study suggest that African American parental involvement in urban Title I schools can be greatly enhanced by school-community partnerships.

In closing, the exploration of African American mothers' experiences and their conceptions of the value of a school-community partnership serving an urban Title I middle School sought to contribute to the literature on parental involvement, schoolcommunity partnership, and urban education. The common barriers facing parental involvement in urban schools such as work schedules, transportation, and child care were all removed by the school-community partnership between Excellence at Darcy and Darcy Middle School and thus granted the mothers' greater access to the school environment. The mothers in this study engaged the school environment weekly and developed strong relationships with teachers, students, parents, and other community members. The communal care and consistent educational involvement the mothers' report support a counter narrative of African American parental involvement in urban Title I schools.

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APPENDIX A: PHONE RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Phone Recruitment Script:

“Hello, my name is [REDACTED] and I am a doctoral candidate and researcher at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. I am conducting a research study on African American mothers who are school-community partners. You have been invited to participate in the “Conceptualizing Value: African American Mother's Perspectives on School-Community Partnerships, Parental Involvement, and Faith” research study. The purpose of this study is to explore your perspective, experience, and values as community partner and as an African American mother of a student at an urban Title I middle school. You have been invited to participate in two 30-60 minutes’ interviews at a location most convenient for your or at [REDACTED]

“If you agree to participate, we can set up a time now or you can let me know when a good time would be to schedule it.” (Investigator will set up date, time, and location of interview)

“Your participation is completely voluntary and all interview responses will be filed under a factitious (fake) name. I look forward to the opportunity to hear your thoughts and experiences as an African American Mother and school-community partner. Further consent information and forms will be provided upon our initial interview.”

(If interested) “Thank for your participation.”

“I have you scheduled for an initial interview on ____.” If you have any questions, I can be reached [REDACTED]

(If not interest investigator will end call) “Thank you for your time”

APPENDIX B: EMAIL RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Email Recruitment Script:

Greetings,

My name is [REDACTED] and I am a doctoral candidate and researcher at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. I am conducting a research study on African American mothers who are school-community partners. You have been invited to participate in the “Conceptualizing Value: African American Mother's Perspectives on School-Community Partnerships, Parental Involvement, and Faith” research study. The purpose of this study is to explore your perspective, experience, and values as community partner with Excellence at Darcy and as an African American mother of a student at an urban Title I middle school. You have been invited to participate in two 3060 minutes interviews at a location most convenient for your or at [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

If you are interested in participating in this research study please respond to this email with a date, time, and location most convenient for you to meet for an initial interview. Your participation is completely voluntary and all interview responses will be filed under a factitious (fake) name. I look forward to the opportunity to hear your thoughts and experiences as an African American Mother and school-community partner. If you have any questions or concerns please contact [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. Further consent information and forms will be provided upon our initial interview.

Thank you [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
Doctoral Candidate
University of North Carolina at Charlotte

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSEN



Conceptualizing Value: African American Mother's Perspectives on School-Community Partnerships, Parental Involvement, and Faith

Welcome to the “Conceptualizing Value: African American Mother’s Perspectives on School-Community Partnerships, Parental Involvement, and Faith” study. The purpose of this study is to explore the perspectives, experiences, and constructions of value of school-community partners who are African American Mothers of students at an urban Title I middle school. African American Mothers that serve as school-community partners in urban Title I schools provide both home and school-based support to students to promote academic achievement and enrichment. Few studies have attempted to capture the perspectives of African American Mothers that engage their child’s education through both school-based and home involvement. This study seeks to interview African American Mothers who participate in school-community partnerships at an urban Title I school.

The “Conceptualizing Value: African American Mother’s Perspectives on School-Community Partnerships, Parental Involvement, and Faith” study will be conducted by Shanitria Cuthbertson and Dr. Chance Lewis from the Middle, Secondary, and K-12 Education at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Approximately four to seven African American Mothers who partner with urban Title I school will be interviewed 1-3 times for 30-60 minutes. You will be asked to participate in an initial interview and 1-2 follow up interviews for 30-60 minutes.

All responses to interview questions will be kept confidential. Interview responses will be linked to a fictitious name (pseudonym) and a master list will be kept by the researcher and destroyed after the completion of the study.

All digital audio recordings will be stored on the researcher’s password protected computer. The risk to your physical, emotional, social, professional, and financial well-being are considered to be minimal. There are no direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. The research may result in a deeper awareness of African American mother school-community partners in urban Title I middle school. Participation is voluntary,

refusal to take part in the study involves no penalty. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

UNC Charlotte wants to ensure you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. If you have further questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, contact the Compliance Office at [REDACTED]. If you have questions concerning the study, contact the principal investigators, [REDACTED].

I have read the information in this consent form. I have had the chance to ask questions about this study, and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am at least 18 years of age, and I agree to participate in this research project. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form after it has been signed by me and a Principal Investigator.

Participant Name
(PRINT)

DATE

Participant Signature

DATE

Investigator's Signature

DATE

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Conceptualizing Value: African American Mother's Perspectives on School Community Partnerships, Parental Involvement, and Faith

Interview Questions

Initial Interview Questions for Demographic Data

1. How long have you been participating in the partnership with Darcy Middle School and Excellence at Darcy?
2. What inspired you or your organization to partner with Darcy Middle School?
3. What is your role in the school-community partnership between Darcy Middle School and Excellence at Darcy?
4. Tell me about your most memorable experiences as a volunteer?
- 5.

Assessment of Darcy Middle School

6. If you had to describe Darcy Middle School in three words, what words would you select to describe Darcy Middle School?
7. Based on your experience as a school-community partner at Darcy Middle School, if you were to assign a letter grade to Darcy, what would that letter grade be? Why?
8. Are you aware of the most recent school report card for Darcy Middle School? If so, what are your thoughts on the overall grade of 'D' assigned to Darcy?
9. In your opinion, is there a relationship between economic status and academic achievement? If so, what impact does economic status have on Darcy Middle School?
10. What do you think Darcy Middle School and Excellence at Darcy could do to further impact the academic achievement of students participating in academic programming?
11. Darcy Middle School is classified as an urban Title I middle school, in your opinion what does it mean to be an urban school? A Title I School? What does it mean to be an urban and Title I School?

Conceptualizing Value of School-Community Partnerships

12. In your opinion, can school-community partnerships make a difference in struggling schools? If so, how?
13. What is the value of an organization like Excellence at Darcy?
14. Over the past three years, how would you describe the overall contribution of Excellence at Darcy and other school-community partnerships to Darcy Middle School?
15. What value do you feel the partnership adds the school?
16. What does it mean to be an African American Mother volunteer?
17. Is there any connect to your ethnicity and your purpose for serving as a volunteer?
18. What value do you feel your participation in the partnership adds to your family?
19. Has your participation at your child's school given you greater access to teachers, administrators, and other community partners?
20. In your opinion, are there any areas where the Darcy Middle School and Excellence at Darcy partnership has fallen short in improving academic and social outcomes of Darcy Students?
21. What do you think Darcy Middle School and Excellence at Darcy could do to further impact the academic achievement of students participating in academic programming?
22. Is there anything else you would like to share about the participation in the Excellence at Darcy programming?