

PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL RECEPTIVITY AS A PREDICTOR OF AFRICAN
AMERICAN PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GRADES

By

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To my parents, Lon Sanders Jr. and Yvonne Sanders, grandparents, family members, and those who have come before me to pave the way.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	4
LIST OF TABLES	8
LIST OF FIGURES	9
ABSTRACT	10
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW	11
Parent Involvement Legislation	12
Parent Involvement Definitions	14
Parent Roles	18
African American Parents	24
Parent Involvement for Low-income Families	27
Summary of Parent Involvement Literature	29
School Receptivity	31
School Climate	36
Cultural Sensitivity	39
Quality of Communication	41
Rationale for Study	44
Research Question	45
Hypotheses	46
2 METHOD	49
Pilot Study	49
Participants	50
Instrument Development	50
Scale description	52
Procedure	52
Data Analyses	53
Modification of Original Questionnaire	56
Procedure	58
3 RESULTS	66
Research Study	66
Analysis of Instrument	66
Hypotheses Tests	68
4 DISCUSSION	78

Race	79
Income	80
Race and Income Interaction	81
Parent Involvement and Satisfaction Link.....	82
School Climate.....	83
Cultural Sensitivity	85
Quality of Communication	86
Predictors of Parent Involvement and Satisfaction.....	88
School Receptivity.....	89
Limitations.....	92
Future Research	94

APPENDIX

A STUDY COVER LETTER.....	97
B QUESTIONNAIRE	98
C TEACHER REMINDER LETTER.....	101
LIST OF REFERENCES	102
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	110

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>page</u>
2-1 Demographic characteristics of responding parents	60
2-2 Descriptive statistics for scale.....	61
2-3 Internal consistency for the climate scale if an item is deleted.....	62
2-4 Internal consistency for the cultural sensitivity scale if an item is deleted.....	62
2-5 Internal consistency for the communication scale if an item is deleted	62
2-6 Internal consistency for the communication scale if an item is deleted	62
2-7 Internal consistency for the satisfaction scale if an item is deleted	63
2-8 Internal consistency for the involvement scale if an item is deleted	63
2-9 Internal consistency for the quantity scale if an item is deleted	63
2-10 Internal consistency for the quantity scale if an item is deleted	63
2-11 Demographics of schools.....	64
2-12 Demographic characteristics of responding parents	65
3-1 Fit indices for the school receptivity scale.....	73
3-2 Factor loadings for subscales	74
3-3 Intercorrelation factors.....	75
3-4 Alpha coefficients for scales.....	75
3-5 Summary of individual items for each scale.....	76
3-6 Pearson Product Correlations for African American Parents	77
3-7 Regression analysis for school receptivity variables predicting parent involvement.....	77
3-8 Regression analysis for school receptivity variables predicting parent satisfaction.....	77

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>page</u>
2-1 Relationships among predictors and dependent variables	59

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By

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Despite an emphasis on the benefits of parental involvement and implementing strategies to promote increased involvement among diverse ethnic groups, educators remain perplexed by low levels of African American parent involvement. The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which school receptivity, as characterized by school climate, cultural sensitivity, and quality of communication, predicts African American parent involvement and parent satisfaction related to their child's education. A total of 339 parents of elementary school students completed the School Receptivity Questionnaire that was developed and empirically validated using confirmatory factor analyses. Findings from the present study did not indicate significant differences in reported parent involvement base on race. The lack of significant finding based on race may be related to a long history of African American parents' active involvement in their child's education. Results demonstrated there were significant differences in parent involvement in relation to income; low income parents reported lower levels of parental involvement when compared with middle income parents. School climate, cultural sensitivity, and quality of communication separately predicted African American parent involvement and satisfaction in their child's education. Notably, among the school receptivity variables, quality of communication was the strongest predictor of parent involvement and parent satisfaction.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

During the past two decades, parent involvement has been a highly researched topic and its benefits to parents, teachers, and students have been well established (Christenson, 1995; Hill & Craft, 2003; Hill & Taylor, 2004). Research findings indicate a positive relationship between parent involvement and students' academic success (Fehrman, Keith, & Raimers, 1987; McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001; Swap, 1990), as well as specific improvements in students' academic skills such as reading comprehension (Anderson, 2000; Lee & Croninger, 1994) and math performance (Hill & Craft, 2003). Further, findings indicate that parent involvement positively affects student's academic achievement and these effects are sustained across a student's academic career (Swap, 1990).

Conversely, reasons for children's academic and behavioral failure in school often are attributed to minimal parental involvement. Parents may be viewed as undermining a child's academic performance by being unresponsive to school requests to monitor homework completion, minimally communicating with teachers and school officials about a child's academic progress, little to no involvement in meetings with teachers, and by not providing an environment conducive for their children to study. For culturally diverse families, dysfunctional parenting practices such as harsh or authoritarian punishment practices or minimal family problem solving, are believed to increase students' school behavioral problems, suspensions, and expulsions (Darch, Miao & Shippen, 2004).

The presumption that culturally diverse families are generally dysfunctional and unsupportive both at home and school is largely based on inaccurate cultural views regarding minority parent involvement (Webster, 2004). Fields-Smith (2005) discredits those who marginalize minority families to explain why African American families, in particular, are

perceived as uninvolved and apathetic towards their child's education. Fields-Smith (2005) implores school administrators and teachers to be "mindful of a cultural heritage that includes sacrificial pursuit of education...and to consider ways to develop trusting relationships with African American parents and parents of all other races and ethnicities as well" (p. 134). Additionally, Feuerstein (2001) advocates for more research to identify school-level characteristics that impact parent involvement.

The purpose of this study was to examine school receptivity as a conceptual framework and to understand its impact on African American parent involvement and satisfaction related to their child's education. The following literature review will include legislative mandates that encourage parent involvement; various definitions of parent involvement that have been used to research its relationship to parents, teachers, and students, examination of how contextual, institutional, and individual characteristics may affect African American parents and their engagement in a child's educational process; and specific school characteristics that impact African American parent involvement. This information will serve as a foundation for the definition of school receptivity and its use to examine African-American parent perceptions.

Parent Involvement Legislation

The topic of parent involvement has received considerable legislative attention (Spann, Kohler, & Soenksen, 2003) based on consistent literature documenting its benefits. Under federal legislation, such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), schools are mandated to develop strategies to increase parent involvement in a child's education and to provide opportunities for parents to make suggestions that could improve the school (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). More specifically, under NCLB's Reading First Initiative, school agencies are urged to provide parents with up to date information about their child's school, including ways to be involved (e.g., parent-teacher meetings), involve parents in the trainings of teachers and

educators, and develop district wide parent advisory councils that provide school administrators with advice about programs developed by a school (U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

The No Child Left Behind Act, Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act 2004 (P.L. 108-446), and Goals 2000: Educate America Act (P.L. 103-227) have provided an impetus to enact state laws and policies that encourage schools to develop programs and partnerships that promote meaningful participation and institutionalize parent involvement in schools (Trotman, 2001). For example, the Florida Family and School Partnership for Student Achievement Act requires districts to provide parents with detailed information about their child's academic progress and their school choices and opportunities to be involved in school. This legislation also requires school districts to develop positive strategies to build and strengthen partnerships amongst parents, teachers, and school administrators. More specifically, school districts must adopt school board rules that encourage parent and family involvement, develop family friendly booklets and handouts that delineate ways to become involved, and train teachers to partner with families in an attempt to improve a child's academic and behavioral performance.

Recent federal legislation, such as amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (P.L. 108-446), has explicitly mandated that parents have a more influential role in their child's educational process (US Department of Education, 2004). Under the previous IDEA legislation, school districts were required to invite parents to participate in their child's educational planning (US Department of Education, 2004). However, some parents reportedly never received invitations to be involved (Darch, Miao, & Shippen, 2004) or invitations sent to parents were either received late or the day of the initial planning meeting (Harry, Allen & McLaughlin, 1995). Additionally, previous IDEA legislation also stipulated that

school administrators obtain parental consent to evaluate a child for special education services as well as approval of a child's Individualized Education Plans (IEP), and to provide opportunities for parents to obtain an impartial due process hearing, if they disagree or have complaints related to the identification, evaluation, or educational placement of a child. However, parents were not required to be included in the policy or decision making processes between parents, teachers, and school administrators.

Even though IDEA 1997 had strong amendments that authorized the greater encouragement of parent participation, through the reauthorization of IDEA, parents' roles in education have become more specifically defined. Under the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 (P.L. 108-446), schools must document reasonable attempts to contact a parent to obtain consent for an evaluation, and to attend IEP meetings. School districts are not permitted to have a final copy of an IEP completed before a meeting commences because it does not allow parents to review or engage in full discussions of the IEP team's recommendations. Under the IDEIA (2004), parents can access their children's records, openly agree or disagree with professional findings and recommendations, and collaborate with professionals to design and develop their child's IEP (Hamner & Turner, 2001). Parents also have two years to request a due process hearing if they suspect a school violates IDEIA regulations or there is a dispute between the agency and parent.

Parent Involvement Definitions

Although research suggests positive implications for parent involvement, there are a variety of parent involvement definitions that are used in the professional literature likely contributing to ambiguous and inconsistent findings (Fan & Chen, 2001; McWayne et al., 2004). Fan and Chen (2001) conducted a meta-analysis of studies examining relationships between parent involvement and students' academic achievement. According to them, some studies have

defined parent involvement as parenting practices (e.g., parents' aspirations or expectations for their children's future, and parents' communication with children and to teachers about school) others as participation in or attendance at school activities, helping children complete their homework, or exposing children to cognitively stimulating activities (Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997; Grolnick and Slowiaczek, 1994; Overstreet, Devine, Bevans & Efreom, 2005). Results demonstrate a meaningful relationship between parent involvement and student academic achievement. Nevertheless, Fan and Chen recommend future research on the effects of parent involvement should attend closely to and carefully document the operational definition and measurement of this construct. Similarly, Feuerstein (2001) suggests parent involvement be defined in ways that permit suitable measurement to identify more specifically which factors influence the construct.

Parent involvement has been defined as a unitary construct (Fan & Chen, 2001). Generally, parent involvement has been described as beliefs, attitudes, and a broad range of activities exhibited by parents and family members who work to encourage and support a child's academic development (Weiss, Kreider, Lopez, & Chatman, 2005). For example, activities may involve helping a child with homework, attending parent-teacher organization meetings, and volunteering in their child's classroom (Feuerstein, 2001). Instead of viewing parent involvement as a unitary construct, it should be viewed as a multidimensional construct (Fehrman, Keith, Reimers, 1987) which refers to different types of experiences and activities located in both the home and school (Christenson, Rounds, & Gorney, 1992).

Recent efforts to define parent involvement have shifted from describing activities of parent involvement and its relationship to student achievement to focusing on identifying variables that influence involvement both at home and school. This shift appears to be the result

of the professional literature being saturated with inconsistent definitions, dimensions, and descriptions of parent involvement and their relationships with student achievement and other student outcomes. Despite a multitude of studies, little research delineates which variables outside of individual level variables (i.e., socio-economic status, marriage status, or ethnicity) impact parent involvement in education at home and school. Feuerstein (2001) and Griffith (1998) highlight this shift by concentrating less on describing parent involvement activities and focusing more on understanding how school variables, instead of family-individual level variables, may influence parents' participation in a child's schooling. A review of the various definitions is necessary to understand the transformation of this concept.

Several leading theories are widely cited on the typology of parent involvement (Epstein, 1995; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994). Epstein's (1995) typology of parent involvement laid the initial groundwork on the varying dimensions of involvement. Epstein's typology often is utilized to investigate relationships of parent involvement to different student outcomes (Desimone, 2001; McWayne, et al., 2004). Epstein suggests six activities that connect families, schools, and communities. These include 1) obligations of basic parenting, 2) communicating with schools about their child's progress, 3) volunteering at school and community related functions, 4) parent involvement in learning activities at home, 5) parent involvement in school decision making and advocacy, and 6) collaborating and creating linkages between family and community. Although Epstein defined parent involvement from the perspective of what schools can do to promote and encourage involvement (Fan & Chen, 2001), the typology largely is based on anecdotal versus empirical evidence.

Grolnick and Slowiaczek's (1994) framework of parent involvement integrates developmental and educational constructs in children's schooling. Specifically, they posit parent

involvement should be divided into three dimensions: behavior, cognitive, and personal activities. The behavioral dimension involves parents' participation in school activities (e.g., attending parent-teacher conferences and volunteering in their child's class). Parents' active participation in school activities emphasizes to the child and teacher that school is valued, and deemed important, while helping parents remain up to date on their child's progress. Cognitive parental activities involve parents exposing their child to intellectually stimulating material at bookstores, museums, libraries, or through reading newspapers. Personal activities are regarded as parents conveying concern about their children's progress and school. Behavioral, cognitive, and personal involvement are moderately correlated (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994), thus supporting the belief that parents can express involvement across different dimensions.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) explored reasons parents may choose to become involved in their children's education and the effects of their involvement on student's educational outcomes. This investigation hypothesized that parents are involved because of an inherent role, a desire for their children's academic success, and because situations (i.e., field trips, parent visits) may offer opportunities for their involvement. This theoretical framework explains that parent's participation in activities depends on their skill level and knowledge, family, and other contextual variables (e.g., child care, employment and income), and also opportunities or invitations to be involved. Similar to its predecessors, this framework is not empirically based and may prove difficult to operationally define and thus study the construct of parent involvement (Fan & Chen, 2001).

Recently, Walker and colleagues (2005) expanded Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) theoretical orientation as to reasons why parents become involved in their child's schooling. This new model places a greater emphasis on parents' motivational beliefs,

perceptions of school characteristics (i.e., school and teacher invitations), and perceived life contexts (e.g., availability of time and energy) as predictors of involvement. Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to predict parents' home-based or school-based involvement. Results demonstrated those parents' motivational beliefs, perceptions of invitations for involvement, and perceived life contexts explained 33% of the home-based school variance and 19% of the school-based variance.

The research literature is replete with studies examining parents' beliefs and perceptions about involvement in their child's schooling (Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Ritblatt, Beatty, Cronan, & Ochoa, 2002), characteristics that influence their involvement (Feuerstein, 2001), and predictions of parent involvement based on economic factors (Overstreet et al., 2005). While studies have utilized diverse theoretical frameworks' and definitions for parent involvement, the definitions of parent involvement are not always clearly presented or operationally defined. Additionally, the variables included in the studies to predict involvement are not adequately defined to allow measurement in a meaningful and psychometrically sound manner.

Parent Roles

Recent studies have shifted from examining relationships between parent involvement and student academic achievement (Anderson, 2000; Fehrman et al., 1987; Lee & Croninger, 1994; McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001; Swap, 1990) to understanding parent beliefs about their role in children's academic achievement (Walker et al., 2005). Additionally, research is placing greater emphasis on understanding low-income parents' beliefs about their roles in their child's academic learning (Drummond & Stipek, 2004). This change was stimulated, in part, due to findings that indicate lower income, less educated, and single parents are less likely to be involved compared to their counterparts from higher income, better educated, two-parent homes (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey,

Bassler & Brissie, 1987; Ritblatt et. al., 2002). Moreover, children from lower income homes have lower achievement levels (Drummond & Stipek, 2004). Grolnick and colleagues hypothesize “stressful events might take time from [single] parents; usurp energy and attention, or both, making parents less psychologically available for or aware of involvement activities” (p. 539). Lower income parents may resist involvement because they have less time and flexibility to be involved.

Drummond and Stipek (2004) assessed the value lower income parents place on participating in their child’s academics and qualities that affect their perceptions and involvement. Unlike other studies reviewed above, this study did not use a theoretical framework to guide their work. Thus, it is difficult to ascertain how the construct of involvement was operationally defined. Despite the lack of an operational definition, parent involvement activities were described as parents helping their child with homework and being knowledgeable about their child’s academic learning. Parents were assessed about their beliefs regarding involvement through open-ended questions in a semi-structured telephone interview. Responses were placed into various categories: providing their child with help and support, engaging in supplementary activities (i.e., flashcards), explaining homework, consulting with teachers, checking homework, and encouraging their child to do better. Results indicate that lower income parents believed they had an inherent role in facilitating their child’s academic success and rated involvement as very important. More specifically, parents whose children’s achievement ratings were low expressed a greater importance for helping their children perform better.

Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, and Apostoleris (1997) suggest that an ecological cross-disciplinary perspective aids in understanding the affects of parent involvement. The authors assert that a three level model of factors influences three types of parent involvement. The three

levels include individual, contextual, and institutional characteristics. At the individual level, parent characteristics (e.g., parents' ideas about their role in their child's schooling and feelings of efficacy) and child characteristics (e.g., children who display different temperaments) may affect parents' decision to be involved in school. At the contextual level, stressful life events may usurp parents' time, attention and energy, thus making parents less available to be involved in a child's schooling. At the institutional level, teacher practices (e.g., encouraging parents to be involved) may affect parent involvement. The three types of parent involvement include behavioral, cognitive, and personal (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994). Behavioral types of parent involvement include volunteering at school and attending parent-teacher conference. Cognitive involvement involves taking their child to the museum or library. Personal involvement involves staying abreast of what happens with their child.

Factors from each of the three levels were found to predict different types of parent involvement. More specifically, mothers who rated their child as more difficult, which is a factor contained within the individual level of involvement, reported less personal and cognitive involvement. Thus, parents who perceive their child as difficult to parent may minimize or withdraw their commitment of personal or cognitive involvement in their child's education. It was also found that mothers in higher income families, which is a factor contained within the individual level of involvement, were more involved at the cognitive and school level because they may have more time and financial resources available to visit or volunteer at their child's school or to take their child to a museum, aquarium, or other cognitively stimulating activities. Also, mothers with higher levels of self-efficacy were more involved in their child's cognitive learning activities. That is, mothers who regarded themselves as their child's first teacher were more likely to construct or engage their child in cognitively stimulating activities. Teacher

attitudes and behaviors, which are factors at the institutional level, were positively associated with parent involvement for married couples and not associated with parent involvement for single parents. That is, teachers are more likely to display positive attitudes and behaviors towards parents from two-parent versus single parent headed households. This is unfortunate because some single mothers often have less time and financial resources available to be involved in their children's schooling. Overall, the results of this study provide evidence of the complexity of parent involvement, thus supporting the argument of parent involvement as a multidimensional construct.

Another study has focused on the relationship between parent involvement and school characteristics that facilitate or hinder parent involvement. Ritblatt, Beatty, Cronan, and Ochoa (2002) assessed 506 parents' perceptions of whether individual, contextual, and institutional factors affected their attitudes and values towards participating in their child's academic schooling. Another goal of this study was to develop and evaluate a questionnaire that examined parents' beliefs about their role in a child's schooling. This study utilized the framework of an ecological cross-disciplinary perspective (Grolnick et. al., 1997) to advance the belief that parent involvement is affected by individual, contextual, and institutional factors. This framework and Epstein's typology (1995), and other sources guided the focus of this study and contributed to the construction of a parent involvement questionnaire.

The first part of the instrument consisted of three subscales (i.e., why parents should be involved in their child's education, why parents should not be involved, and parents' perceptions about what influences their decisions to be involved) using a Likert style scale. Each subscale demonstrated adequate reliability with alpha coefficients of .93, .93, and .78, respectively. Data from factor analytic studies were used to remove test items that did not correspond well with the

factor structure. Four factors were determined to have adequate reliability: communication (.90), sensitivity (.93), familiarity (.80), and support (.80). Results suggest the use of a hierarchical model to assess the complex and multidimensional nature of parent involvement. Similar to the Grolnick et al. (1997) findings, results from this study demonstrated that institutional factors affected parent's attitudes and decisions to participate at school. Educators who were receptive (e.g., sensitive and supportive), trained to deal with parents, and reinforced parents' participation in their child's education process had increased parent participation on school related issues. Contextual factors (e.g., stressful economic environment) affected the amount of time parents invested in their child's learning. That is, parents preferred to be involved more at home than at school when they led busy lives and were economically strapped.

Individual factors such as ethnicity also predicted the amount of time parents were involved in a child's education. That is, African American parents spent more time addressing issues or concerns with the school and did not view the school as supportive when compared to their White and Latino counterparts. African American parents also reported less mutual familiarity with the school. Lower income parents spent less time engaged in extracurricular activities compared to their higher income counterparts. Moreover, compared to higher income parents, lower income parents experienced less familiarity and were more mystified with the school system (Ritblatt et al., 2002).

Ritblatt and colleagues conclude that more research is needed to assess how schools can implement culturally sensitive approaches and be more receptive to engage parents in their child's academic learning. The implementation of culturally sensitive approaches may help parents feel more comfortable with the school and thus demystify the notion that schools are not receptive to lower income or minority parents. Additionally, they suggest more research is

needed to facilitate, encourage, and institutionalize parent involvement. Before institutionalizing parent involvement, educators must understand which institutional factors specifically facilitate or hinder parent involvement. Lastly, Ritblatt and colleagues conclude that future research needs to focus on relationships among schools within the greater community they serve, with hopes of promoting better home-school collaboration.

According to Feuerstein (2001), more research is needed to examine institutional or school level variables that have a major influence on parent involvement. Likewise, Ritblatt and colleagues support the belief that institutional factors affect parent's attitudes and decisions to participate at school. Feuerstein sought to define parent involvement and the institutional factors that affect the degree to which parents are involved both theoretically and empirically. A variety of school-related variables were identified (e.g., student-teacher ratio, teacher morale, and frequency of parent contact). By conducting principal components analysis of the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) dataset, Feuerstein identified nine factors of parent involvement: children talking with their parents about school, parent contact with their child's school, parent visits at school, parent expectations or aspirations for their children, parent participation in parent teacher organizations, parents talking with children about school, a structured home environment, and involvement in grade-placement decisions.

A regression analysis was conducted to provide information about how parent involvement differs based on individual and school level factors. Results illustrated that parent participation was influenced largely by variables that were beyond the ability of the school administrators to change. For example, similar to the Grolnick et al. (1997) findings, higher income in contrast to lower income parents, spent more time volunteering at the school and were more involved in grade placement decisions.

Despite findings that show many characteristics influencing parent involvement were hard to change (e.g., such as race/ethnicity, SES, and family size), the amount of contact initiated by the school to inform parents about their child's behavior, grades, and to provide parents with general school information were the most important school variables in influencing parent involvement. Thus, the frequency of contact initiated by school officials, an easily alterable variable influenced subsequent parent contact and involvement. In particular, parents who were contacted about their child's grades and behavior positively increased their volunteerism and boosted parent participation in parent teacher organization meetings. Thus, school administrator and teacher behaviors can have a positive impact on some aspects of parent involvement.

African American Parents

The empirical literature on African American families is full of inconsistencies and misconceptions about education and African American parents (Mandara, 2006). One misconception about African American parents is that that African American parents are primarily harsh, lacking in warmth and control. Another misconception is that African American parents are apathetic or unconcerned about their child's schooling despite a history demonstrating that Blacks have been involved even during the segregation and civil rights era (Fields-Smith, 2005). Researchers agree that misconceptions (Harry, 1992; Mandara, 2006; Rao, 2000; Trotman, 2001) are partly related to a "discourse on parental involvement [that] tends to favor the perspectives of white, middle-class families" (Fields-Smith, 2005). Some scholars (Harry, Klinger, & Hart, 2005; Koonce & Harper, 2005; West-Olatunji, Sanders, Mehta, in press) have used a strength-based approach to counteract the negative perceptions of African American families in the parent involvement literature. Using a strength-based approach to describe African American parents is essential to portraying these families as persistent and resilient despite institutional barriers. For instance, Koonce and Harper (2005) proposed two

tenets to foster a greater understanding of African American families. The first tenet is that African American parents are supportive and try to maintain a positive quality of life by ensuring their families' educational, financial, and spiritual needs are met (Poston, Turnbull, Park, Mannan, Marquis, & Wang, 2003). Secondly, African American families want and actively try to establish a strong relationship with the school administrators at their child's school. Although many African American parents desire to be involved and make a lasting difference in their child's lives, some may feel uncomfortable, alienated, and discouraged from participating in the educational process (Rao, 2000; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). Consequently, Black parents may decide to withdraw from being actively involved in their child's schooling leaving researchers and educators to assume African American parents are passive or apathetic.

Given that parents are a child's first and primary educator and considered instrumental in facilitating academic success (Reynolds & Gill, 1994), researchers have focused on understanding strength-based qualities of African American family functioning and parent involvement in education. More specifically, attention has been directed toward understanding parenting practices and characteristics that promote academically successful African American students. This attention is particularly important in light of the achievement gap between African American students and White counterparts. For example, the National Center for Education Statistics (2005) report of data aggregated from each state shows Black fourth grade and eighth grade students lag behind their White and Asian peers in reading. Additionally, NCES notes that 10% of white students and 1% of African American students can solve mathematical word problems and compute elementary algebra. Furthermore, the high school dropout rate for Black students is disproportionately higher than for White students. Among 16 through 24-year olds,

11.8 percent of Blacks versus 6.8 percent of Whites were not enrolled in high school, lacked a high school diploma, and did not obtain a General Educational Development (GED) certificate.

West-Olatunji, Sanders, and Mehta (in press) also have studied strength-based parenting practices among African American parents to address misconceptions about family functioning. The study highlighted positive, yet effective parenting practices of academically successful fifth grade African American children living in high poverty communities. Utilizing a qualitative approach, the authors interviewed five low-income African American mothers about strategies they used to foster academically successful children despite the odds. Of importance and consistent to the parent involvement literature were five themes of successful parenting strategies. First, parents emphasized the importance of staying in constant communication with their child's teacher to help raise teacher's expectations for their child and demonstrate to their child's teacher that parents value being involved in all aspects of their child's education. Parents also reported using an authoritative parenting style that involved setting boundaries, open communication, and warmth. This finding is particularly interesting since previous research has repeatedly characterized African American parents as authoritarian, which is low on warmth and demandingness and high on control (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Steinberg, Mounds, Lamborn, & Dornbusch, 1991; Steinberg, Lamborn Darling, Mounds, Dornbusch, 1994). Notably, spirituality and one's religious faith emerged as a resiliency factor for one of the parents who encountered negative comments from educators about the academic capabilities of their child. Spirituality and religion are important factors "in the life of the African American community and provides a valuable source of social connection as well as self-esteem and succor in times of stress" (Diller, 1999, p. 84).

The parents in this study were insightful as to why some African American parents have unsuccessful children. They discussed how lack of maturity and confidence on the part of these parents could negatively impact their ability to effectively parent and raise academically successful children. Their suggestion to promote African American parent involvement was to avoid being judgmental, and instead to offer one's own testimony to inspire other parents. Having parents share their testimonies as to how they navigated the educational system and overcame barriers surrounding their child's schooling is another strength-based, resiliency factor often not highlighted in the empirical literature. Hearing the testimony of other successful parents evoked feelings of comfort and support for parents who felt they were the only people facing these troubles. These parents also provided less familiar parents with suggestions for dealing with their own situation.

Spirituality, giving testimonies, and collectivism are common characteristics present in the African American culture and African centered pedagogy. That is, African American families have commonly relied on members in their extended family or "in the village" for spiritual help, support, and guidance when facing uncertain situations. "The results of this study suggest that African American parents have coping mechanisms and demonstrate resilience, despite systemic and personal stressors..." (West-Olatunji, Sanders, Mehta, in press). Additionally, this alternative perception helps to transform the empirical literature from negative misconceptions about African American family to functioning as apathetic and authoritarian to a more positive framework for engagement.

Parent Involvement for Low-income Families

In today's society, approximately 18 percent of our students live in poverty (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2007). The poverty rate for African American children is even higher at 35 percent. A study of the impact of race, socioeconomic status, and

educational expectations on parent involvement, found parent race to be the strongest individual predictor of parent involvement (Griffith, 1998). More specifically, White parents reported more parent involvement in school activities compared to their African American counterparts. Schools with higher percentages of African American students had lower levels of parent involvement. Parents with high educational expectations and aspirations for their child reported higher parent involvement in school activities.

Additionally, lower socioeconomic status was associated with lower parent participation in school level activities. Similar to previous studies (Feuerstein, 2001; Grolnick et. al., 1997), minimal parent participation may be due to single parents not having enough time or financial resources available to be involved. Griffith (1998) also asserted that parents from low income brackets may not be involved because schools tend to replicate the culture, values, and mores from higher and middle income classes. Consequently, parents from low-income households may feel a sense of inadequacy due to a lack of familiarity with the nuances of the middle class and thus may choose to limit their involvement in school related activities.

The interplay of race and social class, as well as the historic legacy of racial discrimination can negatively affect African American parents' conformity to institutional standards of desired parent involvement in education (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Due to the historical legacy of racism, Blacks may approach the educational process with hesitation or may be suspicious that their children are receiving unfair treatment. Blacks from a lower socioeconomic status may not have the cultural resources or finances necessary to participate in predominantly white, middle class schools. As a result, they may be unaware of the specific cultural rules that govern institutions and their policies, thus complicating the education process for blacks. A qualitative study of one African American family's compliance with school

standards for participation found that educators perceived the parents as hostile and destructive when the Black family criticized the school (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). As a result, school officials resisted interactions with the parents, thus excluded them from opportunities to be involved.

The extent to which race and social class mediate parent perceptions of schools was studied by Diamond and Gomez (2004). Working class African American parents expressed concern about the educational treatment of their children and consistently expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of their child's school, often describing them as mediocre. They felt that teachers and administrators resisted their involvement, thus making attempts to navigate the educational process more challenging. In contrast, middle class African American parents reported more ease when interacting with school administrators and teachers and reported greater satisfaction with the quality of their child's schooling. They were both critical of and complimentary toward their child's schooling and were pleased with teacher efforts to encourage their involvement. These differences exemplify the need to understand how social class affects parent involvement and parent-school relationships.

Summary of Parent Involvement Literature

Parent involvement research can be divided into three categories: at-risk, descriptive, and outcome-based studies (Griffith, 1998). The research on parent involvement has evolved from its traditional focus on risk studies that examine populations (i.e., lower income, single parents, and less educational attainment) with lower than preferred levels of parent involvement (Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Grolnick et al., 1997; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Although parents from a lower-income backgrounds rated parent involvement as very important and believed they had an inherent role to facilitate their children's academic success (Drummond & Stipek, 2004), over the past decade key research findings have demonstrated that social class has

a significant impact on parent involvement. Parents from lower-income backgrounds were more skeptical of school policies and were more likely to be suspicious that their children were receiving unfair treatment (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Hill and Taylor (2004) report that parents from lower income backgrounds are faced with more barriers (e.g., lack of resources and increased stress from living in disadvantaged neighborhoods) to be involved. Grolnick and colleagues (1997) also found that lower-income parents' time was often usurped because of economic hardships, thus forcing some parents to work two jobs limiting involvement at school. Conversely, parents from higher income backgrounds were more likely to have financial resources and time available to volunteer at their children's school, participate in grade placement decisions (Drummond & Stipek, 2004) or to take their children to cognitively stimulating places (Grolnick et al., 1997). Additional key findings suggest that lower income parents felt less familiar and more mystified with the school system (Ritblatt et al. 2002) compared to higher-income counterparts. As a result, lower income parents compared to higher-income parents do not feel at ease with communicating with school administrators and were less likely to feel satisfied with their child's education (Diamond & Gomez, 2004).

Additionally, research has focused on descriptive studies that examine why and how parents are involved (i.e., volunteerism, parent contact with teachers, monitoring children's homework, and school governance) in their child's schooling (Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Epstein, 1995; Fields-Smith, 2005; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Research suggests that regardless of income, parents believe they have an inherent role to facilitate their child's learning, a desire for academic success for their children, and children, teachers, and opportunities insist on their involvement (Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). As stated earlier, Epstein's (1995) typology is often cited to describe

different activities or ways parents are involved. Parents are involved by communicating with schools about their children's academic or behavioral progress, volunteering at school and community functions, and involvement in school decision making or grade placement decisions. Additionally, Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) described parent involvement at the behavioral level by participating in school activities, cognitive-intellectual level by exposing their child to stimulating places and events, and at the personal level by conveying concern about their child's progress. Fields-Smith (2005) stated that African-American parent involvement is analogous to the African proverb "It takes a village to raise a child" (p.132). That is, the family, community, and church often take responsibility for being involved in the schooling of African American children.

Lastly, research has focused on outcome based studies that document the link between parent involvement and student achievement (i.e., better test performance, decreased student behavior problems, decreased drop out rates, and higher student grades) (Anguiano, 2004; Fan & Chen, 2001; Griffith, 1998; Jeynes, 2003). For example, Anguiano (2004) concluded that parent participation has an impact on whether adolescents finish high school or drop out of high school. Jeynes (2003) conducted a meta-analysis on the effects of parent involvement on minority children. Results suggested that parent involvement has a significant impact on academic achievement (e.g., GPA, test scores) for all minority children. More recently, research on parent involvement has shifted to examine mechanisms outside of individual level characteristics that influence parent involvement (Feuerstein, 2001; Overstreet et. al., 2005).

School Receptivity

According to Feuerstein (2001), the parent involvement literature should move from examining individual characteristics (i.e., race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status) that influence parent involvement and instead focus on school characteristics. Feuerstein posits that research

has already established that individual characteristics are good predictors of parent involvement so future research should focus on school characteristics because they are more readily altered by teachers and administrators. Additionally, he suggests that individual characteristics “do not acknowledge the dynamic aspects of the parent-school relationship and are not easily influenced by educational or social policy” (Feuerstein, 2001, p. 29). Harry and Klingner (2006) also found that efforts made by school personnel were more predictive of parent involvement than individual variables such as socio-economic status. Similarly, Sheldon (2005) found that parent involvement at schools is based on school characteristics such as outreach to increase parent and community involvement. Thus, based on these findings it is important for researchers to focus on examining school level characteristics as predictors of parent involvement.

Overstreet, Devine, Bevans and Efreom (2005) similarly state that researchers should examine the extent to which schools play a role in fostering a collaborative parent-school partnership. Nonetheless, research has not fully assessed this area likely due to the assumption and historical belief that schools actively try to elicit and desire parent support, rather than act as a barrier to parent involvement. Additionally, research has not thoroughly assessed whether parents are satisfied with the opportunities that schools provide for them to become involved. Early research in this area has demonstrated that schools can increase parent satisfaction with their child’s school and produce more parental support of school related activities, if schools are receptive to parent engagement (Karther & Lowden, 1997).

Investigating school characteristics which affect parents’ participation in their child’s education may provide information and insight about the mechanisms that specifically influence involvement. Efforts to investigate school characteristics may also provide suggestions for developing effective parent-school partnerships to enhance involvement. In the studies that have

examined school characteristics (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Harry, Allen, McLaughlin, 1995; Rao, 2000; Zions, Zions, Harrison, & Bellinger, 2003), communication patterns, cultural sensitivity, and teacher attitudes and practices have been assessed. More recently, school climate has been viewed as part of the conglomerate that influences parent involvement, with evidence documenting its predictive ability (Griffith, 1998; Seefeldt, Denton, Galper, Younoszai, 1998).

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) comprehensively explored reasons parents choose to become involved in their child's education. Their framework theorized that parents are involved because they perceive their child's school as receptive to their involvement. For example, parents may choose to become involved if they encounter signs that welcome them to the school or are greeted by teachers. Although their framework provides an initial exploration into factors that affect parent involvement, it does not indicate which factors precipitate minority parent involvement. This is an important aspect to assess since educators continue to search for ideas and strategies to increase African American parent involvement.

Utilizing extant literature and Hoover-Dempsey's original framework, Walker and colleagues (2005) created a questionnaire to assess why parents become involved in their child's schooling. The questionnaire assessed individual and school characteristics that impact parent involvement in education. More specifically, the questionnaire assessed parental role construction for involvement in the child's education, parental self-efficacy for helping the child succeed in school, parents' perceptions of general invitations for involvement from the school, parents' perceptions of specific invitations for involvement from the child and from the teacher, parents' perceived life context, and parents' involvement in home-based and school-based activities. Two sections of this questionnaire are particularly relevant to the examination of the construct of school receptivity.

One section of the questionnaire measured parents' perceptions of general invitations for involvement from the school (Walker et al., 2005). Invitations are important because to a certain extent schools can predict whether parents will be involved based on the type of activities they sponsor for parents (Dauber & Epstein, 1993) and whether the school implicitly or explicitly is receptive to parental engagement (Benson & Martin, 2003). Schools that implicitly encourage parent involvement do not directly recruit parent involvement because there is an unwritten understanding between parents and teachers that their participation is valuable to helping improve the academic progress of the child. Implicit ways schools are receptive to parent participation include creating an atmosphere that is inviting to parents by either greeting parents in a courteous manner upon entering the school or displaying projects that required parent participation to complete. Schools that explicitly encourage parent participation may have a section in the code of conduct handbook that outlines ways for parents to be involved, they may host award ceremonies that use encouragement, accomplishments, and rewards to recognize and reinforce parent involvement, or have coffee with the principal day where parents can schedule informal opportunities to talk with the principals or other school administrators (Benson & Martin, 2003). This scale contained three subscales: parent perceptions of school climate, school empowerment of parents, and school-parent communication. Overall, this scale demonstrated adequate reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .88. The reliability for the subscales was also acceptable with Cronbach's alpha coefficients above .73.

A second section of the scale used by Walker et al. (2005) measured parent perceptions of specific invitations for parent involvement from teachers. Examples of specific invitations include inviting parents to visit their child's classroom, participate in school sponsored trips, and creating homework assignments that need parents' participation for successful completion. The

scale consisted of 6-items and achieved adequate Cronbach's alpha of .81. A section of the scales also measured parents perceived life context which was created to measure factors influencing parents decision (i.e., parents' time and energy) to be involved, as well as their knowledge and skills about how to be involved. Both the time and energy subscale and knowledge and skills subscale demonstrated adequate reliability with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .84 and .83, respectively.

As mentioned earlier, traditionally, school characteristics have not received meaningful attention to consider the effect on parent involvement. A few studies have focused on teacher attitudes (Harry, 1992) and general school practices (Feuerstein, 2001). Even though findings from Dauber and Epstein (1993) noted school receptivity to be the most important predictor of parent involvement at school, it has not led to meaningful, rigorous research into its construct (Overstreet et al., 2005).

Overstreet et al. (2005) sought to examine the extent to which school receptivity predicted parent involvement with a low-income, single parent population. They hypothesized that when parents feel welcomed to be involved or included in school activities, a higher level of parent involvement would result. Parents completed a questionnaire that measured parent involvement with items that included how often they visited their child's classroom and school, attended school-related events, and attended Parent Teacher Organization or Parent Teacher Association meetings. Parents also answered items that evaluated school receptivity including whether the school listened to parents and had activities for them to participate in. Parents also answered demographic questions and two educational aspirations questions about their self and child. While an exploration of the construct of school receptivity is an important contribution to the professional literature, there were significant limitations to this study. First, reliability and

validity analyses were not reported for the survey used in the research study. Also, the authors did not clearly delineate the literature used to operationally define the construct of school receptivity. Therefore, additional research is needed to operationally define school receptivity as a measurable construct to allow future researchers an opportunity to measure it as a predictor of parent involvement in education.

In the following section implicit and explicit school characteristics will be identified which impact parent involvement. More specifically, school receptivity will be conceptually described as a measurable construct to determine its predictive ability of African American parent involvement. More specifically, it will delineate school climate, cultural sensitivity, and communication patterns as separate but distinct entities of school receptivity. Each will be delineated in operational terms to measure its predictive ability for African American parent involvement in schools.

School Climate

School climate has been studied in a variety of contexts from examining its relationship to school connectedness (Loukas, Suzuki, & Horton, 2006) to examining its predictive ability for school disorder (Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne, & Gottfredson, 2005). According to Griffith (1998), school climate is another important dimension to consider when examining institutional characteristics that influence parent involvement. Seefeldt, Denton, Galper, and Younoszai (1998) hypothesized that increased levels of parent involvement may be difficult to achieve due to an unwelcoming school climate. That is, schools may discourage parent involvement with excessive rules and procedures for visiting their child's classroom and school personnel who possess negative beliefs about the perceived worth of parents. Yet, there are few studies that attempt to link parent involvement with school climate.

In one study, Griffith (1998) examined the relationship of a school's social climate to parent involvement in elementary schools. A survey was created to assess the following scales: school climate, the extent parents felt informed of ways to be involved in school activities and felt informed of their child's progress, and overall satisfaction with their child's schooling. With the creation of a new survey, reliability and validity analyses were conducted and overall the scale demonstrated moderate reliability. Individual parents' responses to demographic questions (i.e., race and socioeconomic status) were used to determine predictors of parent involvement. Race was the strongest individual predictor of parent involvement, with White parents more involved in school activities than African American parents. Additionally, parents from lower socioeconomic status reported lower involvement in school activities.

These findings are similar to studies by Grolnick et al. (1997) and Rao (2000) which suggest that parents from a lower socioeconomic status have greater demands (i.e., working two full-time or less than desirable jobs and no childcare) that may usurp time and energy needed to participate in school related activities. Griffith (1998) concluded that since many schools represent the dominant or middle class culture, parents from a lower socioeconomic status may have less familiarity with the higher class values and mores, jargon used by administrators and teachers, and the curriculum. As a result of their perceived inability, they may avoid school activities that require this familiarity to navigate the school system.

To encourage involvement of parents from lower economic status, Griffith (1998) suggests including the activities and values of their culture in the school to promote more familiarity and ease while participating in school activities. Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to determine the predictive ability of each scale (school climate, empowered parent, informed parent, and overall satisfaction) with scores from the involved parent scale.

Parents who perceived the school as empowering and as having a positive school climate reported higher parent involvement in school sponsored activities. That is, parents who felt welcomed and who thought the school was courteous and cooperative had higher levels of parent involvement. To maximize parent involvement, it's essential for schools to assess their social environment to determine whether it makes parents feel welcome or discourages their attendance in school activities. Notably, parents who perceived the school as providing minimal information about their children's progress, and held concerns about the quality of the academic instruction their child was receiving tended to have parents who reported more involvement. One speculation for the increased parent involvement is that parents could obtain more information about their child's academic progress and the type of academic instruction their. However, a significant relationship was not found between parent involvement and overall satisfaction.

When controlling for parent race/ethnicity, Seefeldt and colleagues (1998) examined parents' personal characteristics, perceptions of school climate, and their relationship to Head Start parents' involvement. A diverse sample of African American, Asian, Hispanic, and White parents completed a modified version of the 46-item School Climate Survey (Kelly et al. 1986). The survey demonstrated adequate reliability with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .82. A four item parent involvement questionnaire originally developed by Ramey and Ramey (1992) was also used to measure parent behaviors (i.e., frequency of involvement in child's classroom, and frequency one keeps in touch with your child's teacher) both at home and at school. Parents reported high levels of parent involvement at home by talking with their child about their school day. A moderate number of parents reported school participation either by volunteerism or by monitoring their child's academic progress with the classroom teacher. Linear regression analyses were conducted and results indicated that parents' perceptions of school climate

predicted their involvement in school related activities. More specifically, parents who perceived the school more negatively reported higher levels of school involvement. These findings are similar to Griffith's (1998) conclusions that parents who perceived the school as providing minimal information about their child's progress were more likely to be involved. These similar findings suggest that parents may believe that their involvement ensures updates about their children's academic and behavioral progress, their children are treated well and are receiving the best education and training.

Cultural Sensitivity

“Multicultural education is defined as a process of educational reform that ensures that students from all groups (racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, ability, gender, etc.) experience educational equality, success, and social mobility” (Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 2006, p. 20). According to Cross, Bazron, Dennis and Isaacs (1989), cultural sensitivity or cultural competency is a goal that education professionals should strive for and does not occur in one day of training. Thus, teacher education programs across the country have adopted multicultural perspectives to help pre-service teachers become more aware of the differences amongst cultures and ethnic groups (Cushner et al., 2006). Pre-service teachers enrolled in these programs are expected to appreciate “the cultural dimensions of communication, respond appropriate, and seek to foster culturally sensitive communication...” with students and parents (Gollnick & Chinn, 2006, p. 14) and to graduate from these programs sensitive to community and cultural norms (Gollnick & Chinn, 2006). According to Cushner, McClelland, and Safford (2006), educators who are culturally sensitive are less likely to avoid or tolerate differences and more apt to respect and appreciate differences amongst students and their parents. They are also more apt to solve problems in culturally sensitive ways and “institutionalize an intercultural perspective in their personal and professional practice” (p. 134).

Educators who are culturally insensitive may be more apt to ascribe to the deficit view – that minority parents must be trained to participate in school activities because they are unaware of the values and customary practices of the dominant, middle class culture (Harry, 1992). Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity argues that educators who are culturally insensitive may also be defensive and possess negative beliefs about parents from cultures different than their own (Bennett, 1993). They may at times make denigrating or derogatory statements because they don’t have experience dealing with difference (Cushner et al., 2006). As a result, parents may not feel welcomed to participate in school activities and may avoid interactions with their child’s teacher. Deficiencies in cultural sensitivity have the potential of decreasing parent involvement in school activities, weakening parent resolve to interact with teachers and administrators, and challenging their worth and value as parents. Cultural insensitivity may also affect students by robbing students of their self-confidence and self-esteem, weakening their motivation to learn, and challenging their academic and social abilities (Plata & Robertson, 1998).

The attitudes and practices of educators may leave African American parents feeling dissatisfied with school based services. Epstein and Dauber (1991) argued that the attitudes and behavioral practices of teachers can impact “whether and how parents become knowledgeable and successful partners with schools in their children’s education” (p. 290). Similarly, Harry (1992) suggested the attitudes and behavior of professionals could discourage future African American parents’ participation in their child’s learning processes. Moreover, she argued that professionals who possess a deficit and pathological view of African American families can be disempowering to parents and ultimately reduce their level of involvement. That is, educators who ascribe to the deficit view believe that “minority parents must be ‘trained’ and ‘educated’ in

appropriate parenting before their participation can be valued” (Harry, 1992, p. 127). Similarly, Karther and Lowden (1997) posit that stereotypes about low-income parents, particularly African American parents, may skew teachers’ perceptions concerning parental attitudes about education. As a result, teachers’ may view parents in terms of possessing a deficit and may expect minimal contribution to the child’s education (Karther & Lowden, 1997). Educators who maintain this view and insist on a provider-receiver model may foster adversarial interactions with parents (Harry, 1992). As a result, parents may withdraw their participation to avoid the negative interactions.

Zionts, Zionts, Harrison, and Bellinger (2003) assessed 24 urban African American parents’ beliefs, values and perceptions about the level of cultural sensitivity demonstrated by their school district. Results indicated that African-American parents felt frustrated with the lack of cultural understanding displayed by Caucasian teachers. Further, parents did not feel respected by teachers and school staff members even though research shows that parental perception of respect or disrespect is critical in determining whether parents decide to withdraw from the educational system (Rao, 2000). Despite research demonstrating that cultural sensitivity is critical for parents to feel respected by school personnel and satisfied with school services, research has not explicitly identified this construct as a facet of school receptivity.

Quality of Communication

Parents may not be satisfied with the quality of their child’s school because of ineffective communication patterns between schools administrators and parents. Griffith (1998) concludes “that good communication between the school and parents and increased empowerment of parents should lead to increased parent participation or involvement in school activities, and satisfaction with school” (p. 55). Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001) explored low-income minority parents’ interaction patterns with schools to identify how school communication can

demonstrate positive school receptivity or function as a barrier to parent involvement. Findings suggest the provider-receiver model, characterized by schools providing parents with information about their child, fosters ineffective parent-school interactions. This provider-receiver model consists of “structured interactions that delimit communication between families and schools to formal, abrupt, and incomplete exchanges” (p. 75). For example, parents reported that their interactions with teachers were usually negative in nature and focused primarily on their child’s misbehavior. Oftentimes, these interaction patterns placed schools with an expert status and parents with a lack of knowledge and proficiency, thus, fostering feelings of distrust, alienation, and disillusionment amongst parents. Moreover, parents were deemed as unwelcome intruders and made to announce their visits in advance to the school because unannounced visits were disruptive to the educational process. These interaction exchanges did not communicate that the schools were receptive to low-income parents, thus discouraging future parent involvement.

Harry, Allen, and McLaughlin (1995) assessed the communication process of the special education system and how it affects African American parents’ participation. The researchers conducted semi-structured and unstructured interviews and observations of special education conferences to assess the views of parents. Results indeed showed that parents were supportive and involved in their children’s learning. More specifically, parents monitored homework, conducted informal conversations with the teacher about their child’s progress, and attended important meetings such as IEP conferences. However, over time parents became less involved and advocated less for their child when they perceived the welcoming and open attitude of the classroom had diminished. Findings demonstrated several aspects of professional behavior that acted as deterrents to parental participation or advocacy.

Ineffective communication that affected parent involvement included parents receiving late notices about attending conferences and the schools' inflexible nature in scheduling conferences. In many cases letters that informed parents about an impending meeting were sent home late and oftentimes did not provide parents with enough time to alter their schedules to attend the meetings. School officials were not flexible in rescheduling these meetings for parents to attend. Further, limited time was allotted for conferences; thus, causing time constraints for parents to act as advocates in complex cases. Another professional behavior that hampered parent participation included the use of professional jargon. Harry and colleagues concluded that parents were often confused by the coding systems and use of technical information in reports and presentations. As a result, most parents tended to ignore details of the reports and presentation, which placed them at a substantial disadvantage in terms of advocacy for their child. Lastly, the structure of the meetings placed parents at a disadvantage. Parents were inclined to function as passive recipients while the professionals possessed the sole authority. Oftentimes, this provider-receiver model was intimidating and made parents uncomfortable to assert themselves. "When parents did attempt to have [an influential role], the dynamics of the power structure usually mitigated against their success" (Harry et al., 1995, p. 372). In general, parents were confused and distressed by the absence of meaningful communication and the lack of openness to participate in their child's learning process.

Assessing quality of communication by educational professionals, particularly in low-income schools, is essential since schools in low-income neighborhoods have been found to be controlled in a more regimented manner by school administration (Harry, 1992). These schools may possess hidden biases towards low-income parents that place them at a disadvantage. Additionally, they are likely to communicate in a manner that parents may perceive as

unfriendly. Rao (2002) examined a low income, African American mother's perceptions of the aspects of professional behavior that contributed to a growing dissatisfaction with the special education system. This case study examined the process through which parents feel alienated and dissatisfied with the education system which ultimately leads them to withdraw their participation. Findings indicated the mother's decision to withdraw participation was largely based on a string of negative encounters with school officials that extended over a period of time. Specific negative encounters included inflexibility in scheduling meetings, being treated as an uneducated person, and reporting the mother to a child abuse agency. Similarly, Harry, Allen, & McLaughlin (1995) demonstrated how the lack of logistical support and inflexible nature in scheduling parent-teacher conferences, back to school nights, child study team or IEP meetings hindered parents' ability to become involved. In general, these experiences left parents feeling unappreciated, disrespected, judged, and undermined, which ultimately lead to a lack of parent involvement.

Rationale for Study

Research has demonstrated parent involvement can benefit parents, teachers, and students (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). More specifically, it is positively associated with academic achievement across a student's academic career (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2004; Swap, 1990; Viramontez Anguiano, 2004) and higher level of social skills in children (McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004). Since the benefits of parent involvement are well known by educators and parents, research has shifted to understand what factors predict parent involvement. Findings from Grolnick et al. (1997) and Rao (2000) suggest that parents from a lower socioeconomic status have greater demands that may usurp time and energy needed to participate in school related activities. Griffith (1998) demonstrated that the race of the parent was the strongest individual predictor of parent involvement. More

specifically, White parents reported more parent involvement in school activities compared to their African American counterparts. Researchers and educators are perplexed by ostensibly low levels of African American parent involvement. Accordingly, significant attention has been devoted to understanding factors at the school level that affect African American parent involvement.

A call has been made to move the parent involvement literature from examining individual characteristics (i.e., race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status) that influence parent involvement to an examination of school characteristics (Feuerstein, 2001) such as school receptivity. Examining African American parent perceptions of school characteristics is necessary because “how parents perceive their role in their child’s schooling may be a function of how the school organization treats them” (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001, p.76). Additionally, investigating African American parents’ perceptions could prove fruitful for several reasons. First, this study can provide educators with information about certain mechanisms under their control that could promote or undermine parent involvement. Secondly, efforts to investigate school-level characteristics may also provide implications for developing effective parent-school partnerships to enhance parent involvement. This study was designed to enhance previous research by creating a valid and reliable survey to measure and compare the predictive ability of literature-based constructs that are known to have a link to parent involvement.

Research Question

This study examined the extent to which African American parents’ perceptions of school receptivity (i.e., school climate, cultural sensitivity, and quality of communication) influence their attitudes toward becoming and remaining involved in school related activities as well as their satisfaction with their child’s education. Group differences were assumed to exist with $p <$

.01. Significant correlational relationships were assumed to exist with $p < .01$ since specific hypotheses were made about direction and strength of the relationship. This study addressed the following question:

- 1) Do African American parents' perceptions of school receptivity predict parent involvement and satisfaction related to their child's education?

Hypotheses

Based on the research literature, the following eleven hypotheses were created. Specific analyses used with each hypothesis are described below.

1. Research findings point to race as one of the strongest individual predictors of parent involvement (Griffith, 1998). Research findings also demonstrate that income mediates the extent to which parents are involved and satisfied with their child's education. Accordingly, significant and positive differences in means for reported parental involvement and satisfaction are expected due to parental race and/or income.
 - a. White parents often are more involved in school activities than African American parents (Griffith, 1998). Thus, compared to White parents, African American parents are expected to report lower levels of parent involvement related to their child's education.
 - b. Compared to White parents, African American parents will report lower levels of parent satisfaction related to their child's education.
 - c. Lower income parents report less involvement at the school level compared to their higher income counterparts (Grolnick et al., 1997; Ritblatt et al., 2002). Thus, compared to middle income parents lower income parents are expected to report lower levels of parent involvement.
 - d. Lower income parents often feel less familiar and more mystified with the school system compared to higher income parents (Ritblatt et al., 2002). Thus, lower income parents are expected to report lower levels of parent satisfaction compared to higher income parents.
2. The interplay of race and social class can mediate parents' perceptions of schools as well as their desire to become and remain involved in parent activities at the school level (Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Thus, race and income are expected to interact on parental involvement and satisfaction.
 - a. Compared to lower income White parents, lower income African American parents are expected to report lower levels of parent involvement.

- b. Compared to middle income African American parents, lower income White parents are expected to report lower levels of parent involvement.
 - c. Compared to middle income white parents, middle income African American parents are expected to report lower levels of involvement.
 - d. Working class African American parents express concern about the educational treatment of their children and often express dissatisfaction with the quality of their child's school, often describing them as mediocre (Diamond & Gomez, 2004). Thus, compared to lower income White parents, lower income African American parents are expected to report lower levels of parent satisfaction.
 - e. Compared to middle income African American parents, lower income White parents are expected report lower levels of parent satisfaction.
 - f. Middle income African American parents will report lower levels of satisfaction compared to middle income white parents.
3. Parent involvement is associated with parent satisfaction (Grizzle, 1993). However, these findings have not been replicated with an African American sample. Thus, among African American parents, reported parent involvement and parent satisfaction are expected to correlate positively.
 4. Among African American parents, reported parent involvement and perceptions of school climate are expected to correlate positively.
 5. African American parents spend more time addressing issues or concerns with the school and do not view schools as supportive compared to their White and Latino counterparts (Ritblatt et al., 2002). African American parents also report less mutual familiarity with the school. Thus, among African American parents, reported parent satisfaction and perceptions of school climate are expected to correlate positively.
 6. Parents' perceptions of sensitivity are associated with the number of hours parents are involved at school (Ritblatt et al., 2002). Thus, among African American parents, reported parent involvement and perceptions of cultural sensitivity are expected to correlate positively.
 7. African American parents suggested that their level of satisfaction is directly related to their perceptions of the degree school personnel demonstrate respect for their cultural beliefs and values (Zionts et al., 2003). Thus among African American parents, reported parent satisfaction and perceptions of cultural sensitivity are expected to correlate positively.
 8. Among African American parents, reported parent involvement and perception of the quality of communication are expected to correlate positively.
 9. Among African American parents, reported parent satisfaction and perception of the quality of communication are expected to correlate positively.

10. Perceptions of school climate, cultural sensitivity, and communication patterns are expected to individually and jointly predict parent involvement related to their child's education.
11. Perceptions of school climate, cultural sensitivity, and communication patterns are expected to individually and jointly predict parent satisfaction related to their child's education.

CHAPTER 2 METHOD

This study investigated the degree to which school receptivity predicts African American parent involvement and parent satisfaction related to their child's education. In addition, this study examined the extent to which race, income, and an interaction of both influence parent involvement and parent satisfaction related to their child's education.

A pilot study was conducted for the purpose of developing the School Receptivity Questionnaire (SRQ) and to examine the technical adequacy of the instrument. Information collected in the pilot study was then used to modify the original questionnaire for use in the described research study. The focus of the research study was to answer the following question: Do African American parents' perceptions of school receptivity predict parent involvement and parent satisfaction related to their child's education? Additionally, the research study also further examined the instrument's factor structure, reliability, and validity.

Pilot Study

The primary purpose of the pilot study was to determine the reliability and validity of a questionnaire designed to measure school receptivity, to identify items that were ambiguous or confusing, to assess the format of the questionnaire (e.g., its appearance and arrangement of the questions), and to assess the length of administration (DeVellis, 2003). Items that were unclear, ambiguous, and demonstrated low reliability were removed or revised. The pilot study addressed the following topics: a) description of the sample's demographics, b) instrument development, c) analyses performed to determine the instrument's technical adequacy, and d) modifications made to the preliminary questionnaire.

Participants

A pilot study should be between 20 and 40 participants Rea & Parker (2005). A convenience sample, including African American parents of elementary school children in kindergarten through fifth grade ranging in age from 5 to 12 were recruited from two churches located in Gainesville and Williston, Florida. Gainesville is a small city with a population of 122,761 residents. It is located in the North Central Florida Region and it is home to the University of Florida, a major research university (City of Gainesville, 2008). Williston is a small city on the outskirts of Gainesville with a population of 6,746 residents (City of Williston, 2008). A total of 37 parents participated in the pilot study. Parents of elementary school children were recruited because parent involvement tends to wane after elementary school (Catsambis & Garland, 1997). Respondents were asked to complete the School Receptivity Questionnaire (SRQ). Prior to data collection, the instrument, cover letter, and parent consent forms were approved by the University of Florida's Institutional Review Board.

Demographic characteristics for the 37 parents are presented in Table 1. Eighty-six percent were mothers, 11% were fathers, and 3% were guardians. Of the sample, 89% were African American, 8% were Caucasian, and 3% were unknown. Eleven percent reported receiving a high school diploma, 43% some college or technical school training, 16% a college degree, and 21% a post college degree. Sixteen percent reported an income up to \$29,999, 49% within \$30,000-\$74,999, and 24% at \$75,000 or above; 11% did not report their income levels. Also shown in Table 1 is the number of parents responding per grade level, which reflects percentages ranging from 11% to 19%.

Instrument Development

A measure of parents' perceptions of school receptivity was designed based on guidelines outlined in Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (American Educational

Research Association [AERA], the American Psychological Association [APA], & National Council on Measurement in Education [NCME], 1999). The Standards recommend that scales be rooted in theory and research to aid in their development (AERA, APA, NCME, 1999). The exact number of items that need to be included in the final scale is difficult to estimate (DeVellis, 2003). As a result, researchers often develop a larger pool of items than needed for possible inclusion. Good questionnaire items should not be vague or place respondents in a quandary in terms of selecting a response. Questionnaire items should be brief and their reading level low, not to exceed a fifth grade level for use with the general population (AERA, APA, NCME, 1999; DeVellis, 2003).

The SRQ was designed for this research study to measure parents' perceptions of school receptivity. The SRQ was developed by modifying items from existing and well-developed scales that assess parent involvement (Ritblatt et al., 2002; Walker et al., 2005), and school climate (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001), as well as from constructs evident in the parent involvement literature (Griffith, 1998; Harry, Allen, & McLaughlin, 1995). The theoretical base for the SRQ rests on Epstein's (1995) typology of parent involvement previously outlined in the literature review. The SRQ includes items organized into 6 sections: parent demographics, school climate, cultural sensitivity, quality of communication, parent satisfaction with their child's education, and the extent and frequency to which parents are involved in their child's education. The demographic section obtained information on parents' highest level of educational attainment, socioeconomic status, marital status, relationship to the child, and the child's grade and age.

Relationships of the four predictor variables (demographic qualities, perceptions of school climate, cultural sensitivity, and quality of communication) to African American satisfaction and

parent involvement are presented below (Figure 1). The framework illustrates that parents' demographic qualities are predicted to be associated with parent involvement and satisfaction. Further, school receptivity is defined as parents' perceptions of school climate, cultural sensitivity, and quality of communication. School receptivity is expected to be associated and correlated with African American parents' reported involvement and satisfaction in their child's school.

Scale description

The SRQ was developed to assess the relationships between school receptivity (i.e., school climate, cultural sensitivity, and quality of communication) and parent involvement and parent satisfaction. The scale included 36 items for the pilot study. Likert scales commonly are used when assessing a continuum of opinions, attitudes, or perceptions (Rea & Parker, 2005). Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with each item on a four point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) through 4 (*strongly agree*). This scale was used for items that ask parents to assess their perception of their child's current school climate, perceptions of cultural sensitivity exhibited by their child's current teacher, perceptions of the quality of communication demonstrated by their child's teacher, satisfaction with their child's schooling during this academic year, and the extent to which they agreed with participating in their child's education. Additionally, parents were asked to assess the amount of contact they had with their child's teacher using a four point Likert scale from 1 (*never*) through 4 (*very often*).

Procedure

Recruitment of participants for the study was made through contact with pastors of two churches located in northern Florida. Upon receiving the pastors' approval, an announcement was made during services, classes, and meetings to inform interested participants about the study. Once participants were identified, the researcher disseminated research packets that

included a cover letter explaining the study, confidentiality of data collected, and the questionnaire (SRQ). Depending upon participant availability, the SRQ was administered individually or in small-groups to parents.

Data Analyses

The purpose of the pilot study was to determine content validity for the SRQ. Data were collected over a two week period in April 2007. Parents generally took 10 minutes to complete the survey. They were encouraged to ask questions about items if clarification was needed. At the end of the administration, parents provided feedback on the wording of the questions, appropriateness of items to the stated constructs, and response formats. Experts familiar with scale develop and parent involvement also reviewed the scale to assess the appropriateness of the items for the questions posed in this study.

Item Analysis of Instrument

An item analysis was performed to examine the internal consistency of the questionnaire's items, to determine whether an item was consistent with the remainder of the scale, and to improve the existing scale. The Cronbach's alpha for the total scale was .79. A total of 36 items were included in the original scale. Table 2 shows the descriptive results of the item analysis for school climate, cultural sensitivity, quality of communication, satisfaction, involvement, and quantity scales.

Table 3 presents a summary of item analysis results per construct when a scale item has been deleted. Items that demonstrated low reliability were removed or revised. By deleting items that demonstrated low reliability, an improvement in the overall scale's reliability resulted. Items that were poorly worded, vague, or misleading also were modified or deleted.

For the Climate scale, the obtained Cronbach's alpha was .74. This scale demonstrated adequate reliability, but further analysis demonstrated that deletion of the first item of the scale

(“When I visit my child’s school, the principal greets me”) improved the scale’s reliability. The first item was removed from the climate scale because a principal often is not available to greet parents when they enter a child’s school. Thus, when removed, the climate scale’s internal consistency improved to a Cronbach’s alpha of .79.

For the Cultural sensitivity scale, the obtained Cronbach’s alpha was .63. This scale initially demonstrated low reliability, however further analysis indicated deleting item four (“My child’s teacher needs sensitivity training”) improved reliability. This item was negatively worded, and respondents may have been confused about consistently expressing their strength for a statement (DeVellis, 2003) and their reluctance to switch to expressing a statement. As such, this scale item was removed from the final instrument with a resulting change in the scale’s internal consistency to a Cronbach’s alpha of .82.

For the Communication scale, the obtained Cronbach’s alpha was .45. This scale initially demonstrated low reliability, however further analysis indicated deleting item five (“My child’s teachers are usually negative and focus mainly on my child’s misbehavior”) improved reliability. This item was negatively worded, and respondents may have become confused with consistently expressing their strength for a statement (DeVellis, 2003) and their reluctance to switch to expressing a statement. Thus, this item was removed, resulting in internal consistency of .69.

Further analysis of the Communication scale indicated deleting item six (“Letters from my child’s school are confusing and filled with jargon that I don’t understand”) improved reliability. This item was negatively worded and respondents may have become confused with consistently expressing their strength for a statement (DeVellis, 2003) and their reluctance to switch to expressing a statement. As such, this scale item was removed from the instrument and the resulting internal consistency improved to a Cronbach’s alpha of .90.

For the Satisfaction scale, a Cronbach's alpha of .65 initially was obtained. This scale demonstrated low reliability, however further analysis indicated that deleting item four ("I am not pleased with my child's teacher and I do not enjoy visiting my child's class") improved reliability. This item may be assessing two different aspects of satisfaction and may have been confusing to parents. More specifically, the first part of the item assessed satisfaction with a child's teacher (i.e., "I am not pleased with my child's teacher") and the latter assessed satisfaction with a child's classroom (i.e., "I do not enjoy visiting my child's class"). As such, this item was removed from the final instrument and its internal consistency improved to .94.

For the Involvement scale, a Cronbach's alpha of .70 initially was obtained. This scale demonstrated adequate reliability. Further analysis indicated that removing item six ("At times I solicit the help of family members and friends to help my child complete homework") lead to a slight improvement in the reliability. Although this item appeared to assess an aspect of parent involvement identified in the literature, the item was removed to improve the scale's reliability. As such, the internal consistency improved to a Cronbach's alpha of .74.

For the Quantity scale, a Cronbach's alpha of .67 initially was obtained. This scale demonstrated low reliability. Further analysis indicated that removing item three ("Met with the principal to discuss my child's behavior) lead a slight improvement in the reliability. Although this item appeared to assess a type of parent involvement identified in the literature, the item was removed to improve the scale's reliability. As such, the internal consistency improved to a Cronbach's alpha of .69.

Further analysis of the Quantity scale indicated that deleting item four ("Received late notices about meetings with my child's teacher) improved reliability. This item was negatively worded and respondents may have become confused with consistently expressing their strength

for a statement (DeVellis, 2003) and their reluctance to switch to expressing a statement. As such, this item was removed and the resulting internal consistency improved to a Cronbach's alpha of .73.

Modification of Original Questionnaire

Based on the feedback received in the pilot study, modifications were made to the questionnaire. A total of 36 items were included in the original questionnaire. Seven items were removed due to low reliability and one item was modified resulting in 29 remaining items. Reliability analyses were performed again after the poorly worded items were deleted. By removing items, the Cronbach's alpha for the SRQ improved from .79 to .82. Thus, adequate reliability was demonstrated, and the SRQ was determined suitable to gather data in the final study. Additional modifications were made before the final version of the questionnaire was administered. More specifically, another section was added to the questionnaire to assess the importance of being involved in a child's education. It was theorized that parents who believed that parental involvement is important are more likely to be satisfied with and involved in their child's education. Thus, additional items were written. Parents rated their level of agreement on a four point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) through 4 (*strongly agree*). For example, parents indicated the extent they viewed specific parenting involvement activities (i.e., purchasing or providing classroom supplies) as important. After making all the modifications, the revised questionnaire was resubmitted and approved by the UF IRB.

Research Study

Participants

Research packets were distributed to 1,415 African American and White parents of elementary school children in kindergarten through fifth grades attending four schools in Alachua County Florida: the University of Florida's P.K. Yonge Developmental Research

School, and the School Board of Alachua County's Wiles Elementary, Prairie View Academy and Terwilliger Elementary. Table 11 provides the descriptive statistics for each school that participated in the study. Although the primary focus of this study was to examine African American parents' perceptions, White parents were recruited to provide data needed to make meaningful racial/ethnic comparisons about parents' perceptions of school receptivity. Only parents of elementary school students were recruited because there is a higher level of involvement in an elementary child's schooling than in middle and secondary schools (Catsambis & Garland, 1997).

Of the 1,415 research packets that were distributed, 339 completed questionnaires were returned within one month. The response rate was 24%. Although parents were encouraged to answer all questionnaire items, some of the respondents did not and they were not penalized for doing so. All data collected were coded and entered into SPSS for analyses. Table 12 provides descriptive statistics for the sample. The majority of the respondents (85%) were mothers, 9% were fathers, and 3% were guardians, 2% were other (aunts, uncles, siblings), and 1% did not specify. Of the sample, 52% were Caucasian, 35% were African American, 7% were Latino/Hispanic, 5% were Asian American, and 1% were American Indian or Alaskan Native.

Among the African American sample that reported their education level, 40% have a high school diploma or less, and 60% have some college, or had obtained a college or advanced degree. Among the Caucasian sample that reported their education level, 7% have a high school diploma or less, and 93% have some college, or had obtained a college or advanced degree. Among the African American sample that reported their income, 63% reported an income up to \$29,999, 32% within \$30,000-\$89,999, and 5% at \$90,000 or above. Of the Caucasian sample

that reported their income, 12% reported an income up to \$29,999, 62% within \$30,000-\$89,999, and 26% at \$90,000 or above.

Procedure

Permission to recruit participants from PK Yonge and the Alachua County Public Schools was obtained by submitting study materials and the University of Florida IRB approval letter (see Appendix A), cover letter (see Appendix B), SRQ (see Appendix C), and proposal to school personnel for approval. After receiving school approval, the researcher contacted each school principals to inform them of the study and obtain permission to recruit parents to participate in the study.

To recruit parents, a letter was sent home with children in kindergarten through fifth grade with information about the study and a request for their participation. Included in the letter were details about the purpose of the study indicating that information collected in the study would remain confidential and that teachers and administrators would not have access to the completed questionnaire. Students took the questionnaire and envelop home to be completed by their parents or guardians. Parents completed one questionnaire for each child attending the elementary school. Completion of the questionnaire indicated the parents gave consent to participate in the study. Students returned the completed questionnaire to their teachers in the sealed envelop. The researcher collected completed questionnaires from teachers and some parents returned completed questionnaires by mail. Parents did not receive compensation for their participation. However, students who returned a completed survey were given a small piece of candy.

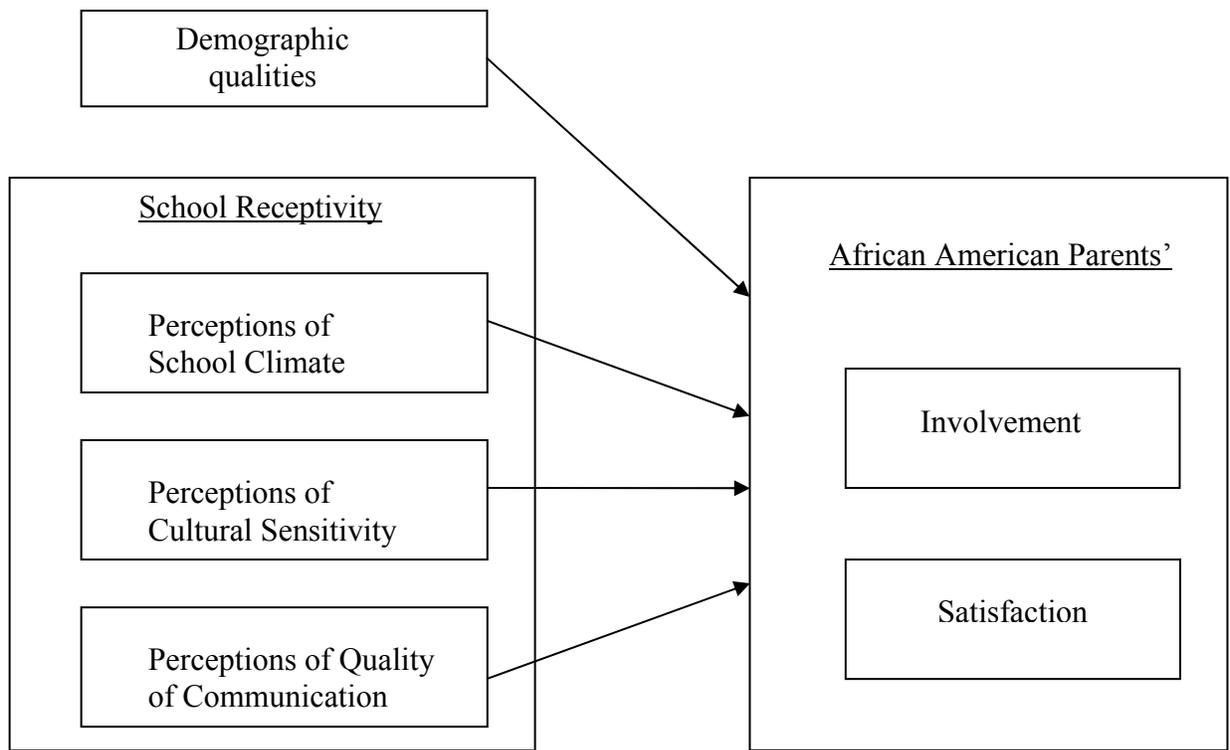


Figure 2-1. Relationships among predictors and dependent variables.

Table 2-1. Demographic characteristics of responding parents

Demographic characteristic	Percent sample
Relationship to Child	
Mother	86%
Father	11%
Guardian	3%
Education Status	
High school diploma	11%
College or technical training	43%
College degree	16%
Post college degree	22%
Missing	8%
Income	
Up to \$29,999	16%
\$30,000-\$74,999	57%
\$75,000 or above	16%
Missing	11%
Parents per grade level	
Kindergarten	19%
1 st grade	16%
3 rd grade	11%
4 th grade	16%
5 th grade	11%
6 th grade	16%
Missing	11%

Table 2-2. Descriptive statistics for scale (N = 30)

Item	M	SD
Climate 1	2.80	.99
Climate 2	3.30	.79
Climate 3	3.36	.80
Climate 4	3.56	.62
Climate 5	3.60	.62
Climate 6	3.33	.66
Culture 1	2.83	.79
Culture 2	2.63	.71
Culture 3	2.73	.78
Culture 4	2.46	.89
Culture 5	2.46	.97
Communication 1	3.43	.56
Communication 2	3.36	.71
Communication 3	3.10	.75
Communication 4	3.50	.57
Communication 5	1.83	.83
Communication 6	1.53	.73
Satisfaction 1	3.50	.57
Satisfaction 2	3.56	.50
Satisfaction 3	3.40	.67
Satisfaction 4	1.66	.88
Satisfaction 5	3.50	.50
Satisfaction 6	3.46	.50
Involvement 1	3.13	.89
Involvement 2	3.83	.37
Involvement 3	3.30	.74
Involvement 4	3.50	.68
Involvement 5	3.70	.53
Involvement 6	2.96	.88
Quantity 1	2.93	.98
Quantity 2	3.06	.94
Quantity 3	1.46	.73
Quantity 4	1.13	.34
Quantity 5	2.93	1.11
Quantity 6	2.73	1.08
Quantity 7	2.66	1.15

Table 2-3. Internal consistency for the climate scale if an item is deleted (N = 36)

Item	Internal Consistency
Climate 1	.799**
Climate 2	.708
Climate 3	.650
Climate 4	.753
Climate 5	.711
Climate 6	.621

Note: ** Deleted item

Table 2-4. Internal consistency for the cultural sensitivity scale if an item is deleted (N= 36)

Item	Internal Consistency
Culture 1	.519
Culture 2	.509
Culture 3	.427
Culture 4	.820**
Culture 5	.466

Note: ** Deleted item

Table 2-5. Internal consistency for the communication scale if an item is deleted (N = 37)

Item	Internal Consistency
Communication 1	.190
Communication 2	.137
Communication 3	.208
Communication 4	.177
Communication 5	.695**
Communication 6	.642

Note: ** Deleted item

Table 2-6. Internal consistency for the communication scale if an item is deleted (N = 37)

Item	Internal Consistency
Communication 1	.564
Communication 2	.458
Communication 3	.495
Communication 4	.525
Communication 6	.908**

Note: ** Deleted item

Table 2-7. Internal consistency for the satisfaction scale if an item is deleted (N = 36)

Item	Internal Consistency
Satisfaction 1	.453
Satisfaction 2	.441
Satisfaction 3	.496
Satisfaction 4	.943**
Satisfaction 5	.469
Satisfaction 6	.491

Note: ** Deleted item

Table 2-8. Internal consistency for the involvement scale if an item is deleted (N = 33)

Item	Internal Consistency
Involvement 1	.594
Involvement 2	.693
Involvement 3	.579
Involvement 4	.692
Involvement 5	.654
Involvement 6	.743**

Note: ** Deleted item

Table 2-9. Internal consistency for the quantity scale if an item is deleted (N = 34)

Item	Internal Consistency
Quantity 1	.653
Quantity 2	.623
Quantity 3	.694**
Quantity 4	.698
Quantity 5	.628
Quantity 6	.558
Quantity 7	.586

Note: ** Deleted item

Table 2-10. Internal consistency for the quantity scale if an item is deleted (N = 34)

Item	Internal Consistency
Quantity 1	.681
Quantity 2	.656
Quantity 4	.738**
Quantity 5	.639
Quantity 6	.553
Quantity 7	.595

Note: ** Deleted item

Table 2-11. Demographics of schools

School District School Name	Total Student Enrollment	% Population	% Free and Reduced Lunch
University of Florida PK. Yonge Elementary	340**	57% White 24% Black	18%
Alachua County Wiles Elementary	647	60% White 18% Black	37%
Prairie View Academy	359	3% White 92% Black	89%
Terwilliger Elementary	662	33% White 52% Black	73%

Note: Data obtained from the NCLB report for the 2005-2006 academic year. ** Data obtained from PK Yonge's School Improvement Plan for the 2006-2007 academic year.

Table 2-12. Demographic characteristics of responding parents

Demographic characteristic	Percent sample
Relationship to Child	
Mother	85%
Father	9%
Guardian	3%
Other	2%
Missing	1%
Education Status	
High school diploma	11%
College or technical training	43%
College degree	16%
Post college degree	21%
Parents per grade level	
Kindergarten	19%
1 st grade	16%
3 rd grade	11%
4 th grade	16%
5 th grade	11%
6 th grade	16%
Income	
up to \$29,999	16%
\$30,000-\$74,999	49%
\$75,000 or above	24%

CHAPTER 3 RESULTS

This study was examined school receptivity as a predictor of African American parent involvement in elementary school grades and parent satisfaction in their child's education. In this chapter, the results of the study are presented in the following sections: a) analyses of the technical adequacy of the SRQ, and b) results for each research hypothesis.

Research Study

Analysis of Instrument

To address the research questions posited for this study, a survey instrument was developed to assess parent perceptions of school receptivity. The first step in the analyses was to determine the reliability and validity of the subscales and the overall SRQ instrument. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to evaluate the factor models and determine which measurement model best fit the pilot data with the SRQ. It was hypothesized that a six factor model, including School Climate, Cultural Sensitivity, Quality of Communication, Importance, Involvement, and Satisfaction scales would provide the best model to fit the data. Although the Quantity scale demonstrated adequate reliability and was included on the final scale, it was excluded from the CFA because this scale was not used to predict parent involvement and satisfaction. The Importance scale was not included on the original scale. The researcher added this subscale to assess whether importance mediated parent involvement or satisfaction with their child's schooling. The MPLUS version 4.21 (2007) program was used to examine the overall measurement model.

The full sample of 339 respondents which included African-American, White, Asian and Latino parents was used for the CFA. A separate CFA was performed using only the African American and White parents in the sample. The results of the separate CFA reflected minimal

difference from the total sample's CFA. Therefore the decision was made to report the total sample's CFA.

Results of the CFA indicated that the proposed six factor model did not fit the sample data. More specifically, the Importance scale, which was added to the instrument after the pilot study, cross-loaded on the other scales and it was deemed not distinct and invalid. Thus, the Importance scale was removed from the final School Receptivity Scale and eliminated during further data analyses. Table 3-1 illustrates the fit indices produced by both the initial six factor and final five factor models. To evaluate the adequacy of the factor model, the fit index should exceed the recommended value of .90 (Bentler & Bonnett, 1980), and the root mean square error of approximation should be below .10 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). Table 3-2 illustrates the factor loadings for the resulting 5 factors included in the analyses. According to Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black (2002), factor loadings above .707 indicate the items fit well onto each subscale. Although a few of the factor loadings fell slightly below .707, it was decided to keep these items because the reliabilities for these items were acceptable (above .70).

Results of the intercorrelation factors are shown in Table 3-3. All of the scales correlated positively with the other scales. Notably, some scales demonstrated a strong positive correlation $r > .80$, which is problematic because it suggests that the scales are measuring the same construct (Licht, 1995).

Cronbach alphas, computed for all scales, are presented in Table 3-4. The means and standard deviations for all scale items are presented in Table 3-5. All alpha coefficients were above .80 to indicate an acceptable level of reliability, except the Involvement scale. Based on the results of the CFA and Cronbach alpha, which demonstrated acceptable levels of reliability,

conditions were met for estimating validity, the instrument was found to measure separate dimensions of school receptivity.

Hypotheses Tests

This study addressed the following general question: Do African American parents' perceptions of school receptivity predict parent involvement and satisfaction related to their child's education? Eleven hypotheses were proposed. Each hypothesis is analyzed separately, and the results are presented below.

Hypothesis 1: There will be significant and positive differences in means for reported parental involvement and satisfaction due to parental race or income. To address this hypothesis, MANOVAs were used to determine if there were significant differences on the two dependent variables, parent involvement and satisfaction due to parental race or income. Before these analyses were conducted, it was necessary to assess whether the assumptions of performing MANOVAs were violated: a) independence of observations b) multivariate normal distribution of dependent variables, and c) homogeneity of covariance (Stevens, 2002). It is reasonable to conclude that independence of observations assumption was not violated because parents' responses on the SRQ were not dependent upon other parents' responses to the questionnaire. Since MANOVA is a robust procedure, it is also unlikely the multivariate normality and homogeneity of covariance assumptions (Weinfurt, 1995) were violated.

Traditional and popular Wilks' lambda (λ), a portion of the variance not explained by the independent variables and the F statistic, was used to determine whether the findings were significant (Weinfurt, 1995). Findings were not significant for race, Wilks' $\lambda = 9.95$, $F(2, 225) = .607$, $p = .546$. A significant finding was noted for income, Wilks' $\lambda = 9.62$, $F(2, 225) = 4.46$, $p = .012$. Univariate F tests were conducted to determine the effect of income on parent involvement and satisfaction. Lower income parents were expected to report lower levels of

parent involvement compared to middle income parents. Significant differences in parent involvement scores were observed for income Wilks' $\Lambda = 9.95$, $F(1, 226) = 8.39$, $p < 0.04$. Low income parents ($M = -.218$, $SD = .52$) scored lower than middle income parents ($M = .14$, $SD = .41$) on parent involvement. Lower income parents were expected to report lower levels of parent satisfaction compared to middle income parents. Differences in parent satisfaction scores were not significant based on income $F(1, 226) = 2.29$, $p = .131$.

Hypothesis 2: Race and income will interact in relation to parental involvement and satisfaction. To address the second hypothesis, a MANOVA was performed to determine if there was a significant difference on the two dependent variables, parent involvement and satisfaction, due to an interaction between parental race and income. The results indicated a significant interaction between parent race and income, Wilks' $\Lambda = .912$, $F(6, 448) = 3.51$, $p = .002$. Univariate F tests were conducted to determine the effect of the interaction. Significant differences in parent involvement scores were observed for an interaction between race and income $F(3, 225) = 4.71$, $p = .003$. Lower income African American parents ($M = -.228$, $SD = .51$) reported lower levels of parent involvement than lower income White parents ($M = -.184$, $SD = .55$). Lower income White parents ($M = -.184$, $SD = .55$) reported lower levels of parent involvement compared to middle income African American parents ($M = -.015$, $SD = .43$). Middle income African American parents ($M = -.015$, $SD = .43$) reported lower levels of involvement compared to middle income white parents ($M = .024$, $SD = .41$).

Hypothesis 3: African American parents reported parent involvement and parent satisfaction will correlate positively. To address this hypothesis, a Pearson product-moment correlation was calculated to assess the relationship between African American perceptions of

parent involvement and parent satisfaction. As shown in Table 3-6, there was a strong positive correlation between parent involvement and satisfaction ($r = .838, p < .01$).

Hypothesis 4: African American parents reported parent involvement and perceptions of school climate will correlate positively. To address this hypothesis, a Pearson product-moment correlation was calculated to assess the relationship between African American perceptions of parent involvement and perceptions of school climate. As shown in Table 3-6, there was a strong positive correlation between parent involvement and perceptions of school climate ($r = .832, p < .01$).

Hypothesis 5: African American parents reported parent involvement and perceptions of cultural sensitivity will correlate positively. To address this hypothesis, a Pearson product-moment correlation was calculated to assess the relationship between African American perceptions of parent involvement and perceptions of cultural sensitivity. As shown in Table 3-6, there was a strong positive correlation between parent involvement and perceptions of cultural sensitivity ($r = .769, p < .01$).

Hypothesis 6: African American parents reported parent involvement and perception of the quality of communication will correlate positively. To address this hypothesis, a Pearson product-moment correlation was calculated to assess the relationship between African American perceptions of parent involvement and perceptions of quality of communication. As shown in Table 3-6, there was a strong positive correlation between parent involvement and perceptions of quality of communication ($r = .867, p < .01$).

Hypothesis 7: African American parents reported parent satisfaction and perceptions of school climate will correlate positively. To address this hypothesis, a Pearson product-moment correlation was calculated to assess the relationship between African American parents'

perceptions of parent satisfaction and perceptions of school climate. As shown in Table 3-6, there was a strong positive correlation between parent satisfaction and perceptions of school climate ($r = .941, p < .01$).

Hypothesis 8: Among African American parents reported parent satisfaction and perceptions of cultural sensitivity will correlate positively. To address this hypothesis, a Pearson product-moment correlation was calculated to assess the relationship between African American parents' perceptions of parent satisfaction and perceptions of cultural sensitivity. As shown in Table 3-6, there was a strong positive correlation between parent satisfaction and perceptions of cultural sensitivity ($r = .848, p < .01$).

Hypothesis 9: Among African American parents reported parent satisfaction and perception of the quality of communication will correlate positively. To address this hypothesis, a Pearson product-moment correlation was calculated to assess the relationship between African American parents' perceptions of parent satisfaction and perceptions of quality of communication. As shown in Table 3-6, there was a strong positive correlation between parent satisfaction and perceptions of quality of communication ($r = .942, p < .01$).

Hypothesis 10: Perceptions of school climate, cultural sensitivity, and quality of communication will individually and jointly predict African American parent involvement related to their child's education. To address whether parents' perceptions of school climate, cultural sensitivity, and quality of communication individually predicted African American parent involvement, linear regression analyses were conducted. School climate $R^2 = .689, F(1, 115) = 258.31, p = .000$, cultural sensitivity $R^2 = .587, F(1, 115) = 165.94, p = .000$, and quality of communication $R^2 = .749, F(1, 115) = 347.42, p = .000$ individually predicted African American parent involvement.

A Stepwise regression analysis was conducted to examine whether all predictors jointly produced a change in R^2 for parent involvement. Variables that failed to produce a change in R^2 were deleted from the regression model. Before conclusions could be drawn about an independent variable's predictive power, it was important to assess whether multicollinearity (a strong correlation of independent variables) was violated (Stevens, 2002). If multicollinearity was violated, attempts to ascertain which independent variable is actually predicting the dependent variable are difficult. According to Stevens (2002), to determine whether there were no such violations, Variation Inflation Factor (VIF) values should be < 10 . However, VIF values exceed the recommended range, but the variables are significant, then multicollinearity is not a problem (J. Algina, personal communication, December 5, 2007).

The VIF values ranged from 10.1 to 44.2. Although the VIF values were of concern, all of the independent variables were significant, suggesting that multicollinearity was not a problem. The first model included parent involvement as the dependent variable and perceptions of school climate, cultural sensitivity, and quality of communication as independent variables. As shown in Table 3-7, three models were found to be significant using stepwise regression. For the first model, quality of communication was the only predictor of parent involvement. This model accounted for 74% of the variance in parent involvement. The second model included quality of communication and cultural sensitivity $R^2 = .76$, $F(2, 114) = 185.95$, $p = .000$ as significant predictors of parent involvement. The third model included quality of communication, cultural sensitivity, and school climate $R^2 = .77$, $F(3, 113) = 131.95$, $p = .000$ as significant predictors of parent involvement.

Hypothesis 11: Perceptions of school climate, cultural sensitivity, and quality of communication will individually and jointly predict African American parent satisfaction related

to their child’s education. To address whether perceptions of school climate, cultural sensitivity, and quality of communication individually predicted African American parent satisfaction, linear regression analyses were conducted. School climate $R^2 = .885$, $F(1, 115) = 881.26$, $p = .000$, cultural sensitivity $R^2 = .717$, $F(1, 115) = 294.74$, $p = .000$, and quality of communication $R^2 = .886$, $F(1, 115) = 898.74$, $p = .000$ individually predicted African American parent satisfaction.

Stepwise regression analysis was used to examine whether all predictors jointly produced a change in R^2 for parent satisfaction. Variables that failed to produce a change in R^2 were deleted from the regression model. Before conclusions could be drawn about an independent variable’s predictive power, it was important to assess whether multicollinearity (a strong correlation of independent variables) was violated (Stevens, 2002). VIF values should be below 10 to conclude that multicollinearity was not violated. The VIF value was 17.9. Although the VIF value was a concern, all of the independent variables were significant, suggesting that multicollinearity was not a problem.

The first model included parent satisfaction as the dependent variable and perceptions of school climate, cultural sensitivity, and quality of communication as the independent variables. As shown in Table 3-8, two models were found to be significant using stepwise regression. For the first model, quality of communication accounted for 88% of the parent satisfaction variance. The second model included quality of communication and school climate $R^2 = .896$, $F(2, 114) = 503.20$, $p = .000$ as significant predictors of parent satisfaction.

Table 3-1. Fit indices for the school receptivity scale

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	Fit Index		
				CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Five Factor	71703.629	253	283.413	.993	.992	.082
Six Factor	81677.130	378	216.077	.984	.982	.107

Note: CFI = Normed Comparative Fit, TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index, RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation.

Table 3-2. Factor loadings for subscales

	Factor ^a				
	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
When I visit my child's classroom, the teacher greets me to make me feel welcome.	.876				
If I have questions or comments, the office staff are helpful and courteous.	.838				
My child's school has rules and procedures that I must abide by in order to visit my child's class.	.697				
My child's teacher is willing and cooperative to discuss my child's academic progress and behavior.	.886				
My child's school is an enjoyable place to visit.	.908				
My child's teacher is well trained to deal with parents and students from different ethnic and racial backgrounds.		.941			
My child's teacher is familiar with the surrounding neighborhoods.		.910			
My child's teacher considers my cultural beliefs when planning for my child's educational program.		.907			
My child's teacher makes culturally sensitive statements.		.684			
My child's teacher schedules parent-teacher conferences at times when I am available to meet.			.904		
My child's teacher is respectful and does not undermine my authority and judgment as a parent.			.965		
My child's teacher presents a no blaming, no fault problem-solving position in interactions with families.			.944		
Personal letters about school activities are often sent home on-time.			.769		
I would recommend my child's school to other parents.				.927	
My child is getting a good education and enjoys learning activities.				.972	

Table 3-2. Continued

	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
I am satisfied with the type of activities in which I am involved at my child's school.				.927	
My child's school is a good place for my child.				.959	
School is preparing my child for the future				.915	
I volunteer at my child's school.					.578
I talk with my child about the school day.					.911
I make sure my child's school has what it needs.					.734
I communicate with my child's teacher regularly.					.854
I monitor, discuss, and help my child complete their homework.					.828

Note: ^a F1 = School Climate, F2 = Cultural Sensitivity, F3 = Quality of Communication, F4 = Satisfaction, F5 = Involvement.

Table 3-3. Intercorrelation factors

	Factors			
	Clim	Cult	Comm	Sat
Cult	.761			
Comm	.921	.861		
Sat	.814	.703	.826	
Inv	.668	.595	.728	.606

Note: Clim = School Climate, Cult = Cultural Sensitivity, Comm = Quality of Communication, Sat = Satisfaction, Inv = Involvement.

Table 3-4. Alpha coefficients for scales

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
School Climate	.860	5
Cultural Sensitivity	.836	4
Quality of Communication	.878	4
Satisfaction	.940	5
Involvement	.772	5

Table 3-5. Summary of individual items for each scale

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Climate 1	3.58	.61	336
Climate 2	3.60	.57	338
Climate 3	3.50	.57	336
Climate 4	3.70	.53	337
Climate 5	3.56	.59	335
Cultural Sensitivity 1	3.41	.68	307
Cultural Sensitivity 2	3.21	.67	267
Cultural Sensitivity 3	3.30	.68	276
Cultural Sensitivity 4	3.09	.92	266
Communication 1	3.57	.59	332
Communication 2	3.63	.58	334
Communication 3	3.47	.67	310
Communication 4	3.56	.66	335
Satisfaction 1	3.54	.70	333
Satisfaction 2	3.60	.63	336
Satisfaction 3	3.52	.68	333
Satisfaction 4	3.58	.63	334
Satisfaction 5	3.59	.62	333
Involvement 1	2.88	.88	318
Involvement 2	3.72	.49	337
Involvement 3	3.32	.64	329
Involvement 4	3.40	.64	332
Involvement 5	3.73	.49	335

Table 3-6. Pearson Product Correlations for African American Parents (all significant at .01)

	Factors				
	Involve	Sat	Clim	Cult	Comm
Involve	1.00	.838	.832	.769	.867
Sat		1.00	.941	.848	.942
Clim			1.00	.870	.972
Cult				1.00	.935
Comm					1.00

Table 3-7. Regression analysis for school receptivity variables predicting parent involvement

Model	B	SEB	β	R ²	ΔR^2
1. Comm	.49	.02	.86*	.74	
2. Comm, Cult	-.18	.07	-.33*	.76	.02
3. Comm, Cult, Climate	-.32	.12	-.53*	.77	.01

Note: (N = 117, p < .05; R² = Adjusted R square; ΔR^2 = Change in adjusted R square)

Table 3-8. Regression analysis for school receptivity variables predicting parent satisfaction

Model	B	SEB	β	R ²	ΔR^2
1. Comm	.87	.02	.94*	.88*	
2. Comm, Climate	.45	.12	.45*	.89*	.01*

Note: (N = 117, p < .05; R² = Adjusted R square; ΔR^2 = Change in adjusted R square)

CHAPTER 4 DISCUSSION

A plethora of research examines individual and school level variables that influence parent involvement in education (Griffith, 1998; Grolnick et al. 1997; Rao, 2000). However, few studies have examined the extent to which school level variables impact minority parent involvement (Feuerstein, 2001). With continued concern over low levels of African American parent involvement in their child's schooling, it was important to consider various levels, including school level variables, which could operate to encourage or discourage parent involvement. Given that many studies often use teacher reports as sources to identify influences of parent involvement in education (Reynolds & Gill, 1994), it seemed reasonable to examine parents directly as to what variables they report as influencing their involvement and satisfaction. This information may prove valuable to school administrators and policy makers as they continue to seek ways to increase minority parent involvement in education. Further, it was important to examine school variables because parent involvement in education may be mediated by their perceptions of how the school organization treats them (Smrekar, & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). This research study examined the extent to which parents' perceptions of school receptivity predicts African American parent involvement related to their child's education in elementary school grades.

Minimal empirical evidence and research examines school level variables that influence parent satisfaction of their child's education. Studies that examined parent satisfaction have focused on satisfaction with educational experiences in early childhood education programs (Fantuzzo, Perry & Childs, 2006) or special education services (Grizzle, 1993), leaving room to explore the extent to which parents are satisfied with their child's educational experiences in elementary school grades. Thus, another objective of this study was to determine whether

African American parent satisfaction with their child's education was mediated by their perceptions of school receptivity.

This chapter includes a discussion of the research findings and is divided into the following sections: an overview of the significant research findings, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

Race

Results demonstrated that there were no reported significant differences in parent involvement based on parental race. Therefore, whether parents identified themselves as African American or White their reported levels of parent involvement with their child's school was comparable. These findings are contrary to results from Griffith (1998) who found that African American parents reported less school involvement than White parents. One reason for the lack of consistency in findings could be based on the scale Griffith used to measure involved parents. The scale demonstrated low reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .59. The low reliability raises concern as to whether the scale was an accurate and valid tool to measure parent involvement and the results should be interpreted with caution.

The findings of the present study are also inconsistent with findings reported by Kohl, Lengua, and McMahon (2000) who found African American parents had lower levels of parent involvement according to teacher reports. The inconsistency in these findings and the present study's findings could be based on the sample used in both studies. More specifically, the present study had parents complete questionnaires of their perceptions of reported involvement. Conversely, Kohl et al. (2002) assessed teacher's perception of parent involvement in the child's school. This unique difference is particularly interesting since discourse tends to favor the perspective of White parents (Lareau & Horvat, 1999) as more involved and concerned about their child's education and regard African American parent involvement as less involved and

concerned about their child's schooling (Fields-Smith, 2005). In fact, Black and ethnically diverse parents may be perceived as apathetic, irresponsible, and unsupportive (Nakagawa, 2000; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). Notably, in Kohl et al. study, African American and White parents did not self-report differences in parent involvement. The lack of significance in these findings lends credence to the fact that African American parents, similar to other parents, have a history of active involvement in their child's education and advocating for their children to receive a quality, and equitable education (Fields-Smith, 2000).

According to Nakagawa (2000), the discourse surrounding ideal parent involvement, which favors majority, middle class parents, "creates particular representations of parents, ones that ultimately limit the possibilities for productive family-school relationships" (p.468). To increase parent involvement, teachers and school officials' attitudes and beliefs as to ideal parent involvement should change. To improve attitudes, it is important that educators challenge their stereotypic beliefs toward African American parents (Yan, 2000). Additionally, Yan suggests that educators increase their awareness of cultural differences in parent involvement because there are a variety of ways for parents to be involved in their child's education and parents ought not to be judged if they are not involved in traditional ways.

Income

There were significant differences in parent involvement based on income levels. That is, low income parents reported lower levels of parent involvement than middle income parents. This finding is consistent with results from Ritblatt, Beatty, Cronan, and Ochoa (2002) who found that parents with lower income levels were less involved in the extracurricular activities of their children. Similarly, Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski & Apostoleris (1997) found that lower income mothers reported less school involvement than higher income mothers. Further, the empirical literature suggests that lower income parents may be less involved in their child's

schooling due to a lack of financial resources and daycare obligations (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). Therefore, their time may be limited by working multiple jobs or because they may feel unfamiliar with their child's school that may tend to replicate the culture, values, and mores of higher and middle income classes (Griffith, 1998). Additionally, financial problems may have a negative impact on parents' emotional state, family members and functioning (Meyers, Varkey, & Aguirre, 2002), thus impairing their ability to monitor their child's schooling or participate in school sanctioned activities (Taylor, 1997).

Since low-income parents may perceive they are criticized for their parenting skills and parent involvement (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001), considered as problems (Nakagawa, 2000), and deemed incompetent by school administrators, they may choose to limit their participation to avoid such criticism. Although they may choose to limit their participation, low income parents believe they have a role in facilitating their children's academic success (Drummond & Stipek, 2004), possess high expectations for their children to be successful academically (Reynolds & Gill, 1994), volunteer in their child's classroom, and try to keep in contact with their child's teacher as often as they could (Reynolds & Gill, 1994; Seefeldt, Denton, Galper, & Younoszai, 1998).

Race and Income Interaction

The literature is inconsistent with regard to race as a predictor of parent involvement. The findings of the present study underscore the importance of examining income and race jointly as predictors of parent involvement in education. This study found significant differences in parent involvement scores based on an interaction between race and income. African American parents with lower income reported lower levels of parent involvement than lower income White parents and middle income African American and White parents. These findings support work from Diamond and Gomez (2004) and Rao (2000) who found that race and social class intertwine to

influence parents' perceptions of schools and parent involvement. More specifically, previous research indicates that lower income African American parents may find it challenging to navigate school systems due to a lack of financial, social, and cultural capital (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). As a result of these challenges, lower income African American parents may develop contentious relationships with school administrators that may leave these parents feeling unmotivated to be involved in their child's school and schooling.

Although middle-class black families benefit from their class position by having access to more cultural and social capital to navigate their child's school systems (Lareau & Horvat, 1999), findings from this present study demonstrated that middle income parents, African American parents reported lower parent involvement than middle income white parents. It may be surprising that African American middle income parents reported less involvement. According to Lareau and Horvat (1999), White parents initially may construct their relationships with school officials with more comfort and trust while African American parents may begin their relationships with school administrators or their child's teacher with more hesitancy and suspicion. These feelings may inadvertently reduce the African American parents' willingness to be involved at the school level. Despite a sense of hesitancy or suspicion to develop parent-school partnerships and less involvement than their White middle class counterparts, black middle class parents are impressed with efforts and commitments by their child's teacher to increase their involvement (Diamond & Gomez, 2004).

Parent Involvement and Satisfaction Link

Compared to parent involvement, there are fewer empirical studies of parent satisfaction. Consequently less is known about what influences parent satisfaction with their child's schooling. More importantly, the few studies that examined a link between parent involvement and parent satisfaction in their child's educational experiences (Griffith, 2000; Grizzle, 1993;

Reynolds & Gill, 1994) have yielded inconsistent results. Findings from the present study were similar to those reported by Grizzle (1993) in that parents were more involved in their child's education given an increase in their satisfaction with their child's schooling and opportunities to be involved in their child's education. In addition to the relationship between satisfaction with their child's education and increases in parent involvement, satisfied parents are more likely to have positive interactions with their school officials (Reynolds & Gill, 1994), thus increasing the likelihood parents would be involved in their child's education.

School Climate

This study also investigated relationships among parent involvement, parent satisfaction, and school receptivity. To date, parent perceptions of school climate and parent involvement have been investigated widely with inconsistent findings (Griffith, 2000; Seefeldt, Denton, Galper, & Younoszai, 1998). However, no empirical studies examined whether African American parents' perceptions of school climate are positively and directly linked to their level of involvement.

Results of the present study indicate that African American parents who are more involved in their child's education report higher, positive perceptions of school climate. The results of the present study's finding also are in contrast to Seefeldt et al. (1998) results of an inverse relationship between school climate and parent involvement. That is, parents who had more negative perceptions of their child's school climate reported greater levels of school-based parent involvement.

One possible explanation for the possible difference in the present study and Seefeldt et al. findings could be based on how both studies operationally defined and measured school climate in their studies. School climate is a multidimensional construct that encompasses a variety of definitions (i.e., interpersonal contact, organizational structure) (Loukas, Suzuki, &

Horton, 2006). In the present study, school climate was investigated from an interpersonal context. That is, parents primarily responded to five questionnaire items that involved assessing value to their relationship with their child's classroom teacher (i.e., My child's teacher is willing and cooperative to discuss my child's academic progress and behavior) or school staff (i.e., If I have questions or comments, the office staff are helpful and courteous). In contrast, Seefeldt's study investigated school climate from a broader organizational, environmental context. Parents primarily responded to 46 questionnaire items that assessed a variety of components (i.e., teacher-student relationships, security and maintenance, administration, student-peer relationships, student academic orientation, student behavioral values parent community relationships, instructional management, and student activities). Since Seefeldt's study broadly examined the different dimensions of school climate, they may have captured a more clear understanding of how parents' perceptions of school climate influence their school-based parent involvement.

Another possible explanation for the possible difference in the present study and Seefeldt et al. findings could be based on the population sampled in both studies. In the Seefeldt et al. study, 253 parents of children enrolled in Head Start completed surveys. As a result, the parents of Head Start children may have been inexperienced in navigating bureaucratic school environments that have a list of policies and procedures that must be followed before becoming involved. Additionally, the parents of Head Start may be inexperienced communicating with their child's school teacher. This lack of experience could have produced negative judgments about their child's school experience. Parent involvement may have increased to offset these negative feelings and to possibly gain more experience navigating their child's school.

Parents of elementary school children in grades K-5 in the present study may have more experience dealing with school environments and are less likely to have concerns regarding the policies and procedures of their child school. As a result, these parents may have more positive perceptions of their child's school climate and schooling experiences, thus increasing the likelihood of parent participation in school activities or volunteerism at their child's school. Findings of the present study demonstrate that African American parents' satisfaction is positively related with their perceptions of school climate. These findings are similar to those reported by Griffith (2000) who found that parents who view their child's school climate as positive reported higher perceptions of parent satisfaction.

These findings suggest school officials may be able to build effective parent-school partnerships by making adjustments when needed to their school climate. One adjustment includes creating an inviting and warm atmosphere for parents when they enter the school. Instead of establishing rules that limit when parents are allowed to visit their child's school, create an open-door policy that allows parents opportunities to visit at times that are convenient for them. Additionally, provide a parent friendly handbook that outlines guidelines for visiting a child's classroom.

Cultural Sensitivity

Cultural sensitivity implies an awareness and appreciation of the mores, values, and influences that shape the priorities of families and individuals (Dennis & Giangreco, 1996). Thus, an assessment of whether parents' perceptions of cultural sensitivity on the part of school administrators and teachers were related to parent involvement was important. Findings from the Ritblatt et al. (2002) study demonstrated a significant relationship between parents' perceptions of sensitivity by school officials and the amount of time parents were involved in school activities. The present study replicated Ritblatt et al. findings. The results are similar to Ritblatt's

in that a strong and positive relationship was found for African American parent involvement and their perceptions of their child's teacher exhibiting cultural sensitivity. That is, African American parents who perceive their child's teacher demonstrates higher levels of cultural sensitivity are more likely to report higher levels of parent involvement.

Further, the results of the present study demonstrated that African American parents reported parent satisfaction was positively related to their perceptions of cultural sensitivity. This finding is consistent with findings from Zions, Zions, Harrison, and Bellinger (2003) who found that African American parents were sensitive to the behaviors and sentiments expressed by school personnel, and that their reported satisfaction was tied to their perception of how well they believe their child's school respected their cultural beliefs and values. African American parent involvement and satisfaction may be increased by helping educators or service providers learn about and value the ethnic and religious background present in African American families. Taking the time to learn about a family's culture, religious beliefs, social behavior, view on time, and preferred language (Dennis & Giangreco, 1996) could help to build a trusting relationship and improve communication between both parties (Flett & Conderman, 2001; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999). Additionally, knowledge of these different values and beliefs may help educators reflect upon individual biases that may inhibit them from developing collaborative relationships with parents (Dennis & Giangreco, 1996), thus increasing the likelihood African American parents may want to become involved and also demonstrate increased satisfaction with their child's schooling.

Quality of Communication

The present investigation found African American parents' perceptions of the quality of communication expressed by their child's school personnel was strongly and positively related to both their reported parent involvement and satisfaction. This finding suggests that African

American parents who are satisfied with the amount of communication regarding their child's progress and school program are more likely to be involved. Surprisingly, findings from this study are inconsistent with Griffith (1998) who found an inverse relationship between parent involvement and minimal communication about their child's education. That is, parents who felt the school were not providing sufficient information resulted in parents feeling unaware and uncertain of the quality of their child's schooling. As a result of their lack of awareness, these parents became more involved to increase the amount of communication between home and school. Lack of consistency in data from Griffith's and the present study could be due to differences in the number of parents who participated in both studies. For the present study, 339 parents completed surveys compared to Griffith's study where over 33,000 parents completed surveys. As a result of Griffith's large sample size, there was a higher likelihood that the outcome in this case, increased parent involvement despite minimal communication about their child's education, would occur. Differences in the scales used to measure involved parents also may account for the lack of consistency in findings. Griffith's scale demonstrated low reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .59. Reliability is fundamental in psychological measurement (DeVellis, 2003) and necessary for establishing validity. Therefore, the low reliability raises concern as to whether the scale provided a reliable and valid measure of parent involvement. Thus, Griffith's findings should be examined with caution. However, the findings of the present study concur with Epstein's typology which posits that as communication with parents about their child's progress and school programs one of the basic obligations of a school (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Schools that uphold this belief are more likely to find African American parents willing to be involved in their child's education.

Predictors of Parent Involvement and Satisfaction

Each of the variables that reflect school receptivity (i.e., school climate, cultural sensitivity, and quality of communication) was significantly and positively related to parent involvement and satisfaction. Although correlation analyses may not reflect cause and effect relationships, an objective of this study was to determine whether school receptivity separately and jointly predicts African American parent involvement and satisfaction in their child's education. School climate, cultural sensitivity, and quality of communication separately predicted African American parent involvement and satisfaction in their child's education.

Quality of communication was the strongest individual predictor of African parent involvement and parent satisfaction. Additionally, this finding is consistent with the idea that effective parent-school partnerships with involved parents depend on whether parents feel that their child's school informs them with current information about their child's progress and school programs or whether the school work seemingly to limit parent-school interactions (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). Schools that use a provider-receiver model of communication exchanges, where the school has all the knowledge and feeds the knowledge to parents who are passive recipients, are more apt to have interactions with parents that restrict communication to topics school officials want to discuss, thus resulting in formal, abrupt, and incomplete exchanges (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). Provider-receiver models of parent-school interactions also may produce more miscommunication (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). Parents may be more apt to view these exchanges as unproductive and negative, thus consequently reducing the likelihood that parents want to visit or volunteer at their child's school.

Educators who are inflexible with scheduling parent meetings and typically send home late notices of meetings are less likely to have parents involved (Harry, Allen, & McLaughlin,

1995). School officials and educators could be more flexible in scheduling phone conferences or in-person meetings during less traditional times (e.g., before or directly after school ends) to encourage parent involvement. Further, if parents still are unable to attend meetings, educators could send materials that give parents instructions to improve their child's academic achievement home with the child (Drummond & Stipek, 2004). Along these lines, educators who are judgmental and communicate feelings of disrespect towards parents also are more likely to have less parent involvement (Rao, 2000). Conversely, schools that recognize these communication and other barriers (e.g., communicating during crises) (Christenson, 2004) or rarely send home positive reports about children's behavior tend to exhibit lower levels of African American parent involvement because they actively work to combat these blockages by viewing the family as essential to the educational success of the children.

School Receptivity

The extent to which all three school receptivity variables jointly predicted African American parent involvement in their children's education was determined. Demographic variables (e.g., income and ethnic background) that are difficult to change were excluded from the analyses (Feuerstein, 2001). The three variables (i.e., school climate, cultural sensitivity, and quality of communication) individually predicted African American parent involvement in their child's education.

Notably, quality of communication accounted for most of the variance in predicting parent involvement. These results seemingly suggest school officials who want to increase parent involvement levels in elementary school grades may need to place more emphasis on variables that can be readily altered such as communication. More specifically, school administrators who desire to increase parent involvement may want to evaluate how often and what types of

information they and their teachers are communicating to parents about their child's progress and school programs.

Increases in communication improve parent involvement and increases student academic achievement and behavioral success (Trotman, 2001). Because of these positive relationships, Trotman recommends that educators quickly establish rapport with parents, resist the temptation to contact parents only when problems arise with a student, and to communicate with parents about student successes in school. Also, eliminate family-school interactions that use the provider- receive model as a way to increase African American parent involvement. According to Trotman, a team-oriented approach is more useful when parents are respected for their knowledge and expertise and are invited to participate meaningfully in meetings or on child study teams.

Whether the combined school receptivity variables jointly predicted African American parent satisfaction in their children's education also was determined. The quality of communication, which accounted for most of the variance, and school climate predicted parent satisfaction. Surprisingly, cultural sensitivity did not add to the prediction of parent satisfaction even though bivariate regression analyses demonstrated that it predicted parent satisfaction. The lack of predictor power for cultural sensitivity is notable since the results of Zionts et al. (2003) noted that African American parent reported satisfaction was tied to their perception of how well their child's school respected their cultural beliefs and values.

One explanation for the inconsistency in data from Zionts et al. (2003) and this study's findings is that the former was qualitative and included parents of children in special education. Greater cultural sensitivity and understanding of cultural differences on the part of teachers may resonate more for these parents who have children with varying disabilities and thus may be less

satisfied with different aspects of their child's schooling. Another explanation for the lack of effect in the area of cultural sensitivity and parent satisfaction is the relatively high rate of omitting answers to these items on the survey. One possible hypothesis for the lack of response to the cultural sensitivity questions is that parents responding to this subscale may have felt that those questions did not directly apply toward them and felt no need to respond. Additionally, many of the parents may have been of the same racial and/or ethnic background as their child's teacher, and may not have any concerns with regard to their child's teacher cultural responsiveness. The questions used to measure cultural sensitivity also required parents to have an increased awareness of their teacher's training and knowledge of their child's teacher familiarity with the surrounding neighborhoods and communities. For many parents, this requirement may have been unrealistic because parents are not provided information about the type of training in cultural sensitivity a teacher has received. Additionally, some teachers do not reside in the communities of their students and there is less chance for parents to interact with their child's teacher in the community. As a result, parents may have had little knowledge of their child's teacher training and knowledge of their child's teacher familiarity with the surrounding neighborhoods and communities and thus skipped those questionnaire items.

Parent satisfaction with their child's education is not a highly researched topic and may not be a major consideration for school districts and policy makers (Reynolds & Gill, 1994). However, findings from the present study suggest that school officials and educators can increase parent satisfaction by altering seemingly changeable school receptivity variables. More specifically, enhancing the quality and frequency of communication and fostering a positive school climate where parents feel welcome to visit their child's classroom may increase parent

satisfaction, thus increasing the likelihood that parents will want to be involved in their child's education.

Limitations

Several limitations to the study include the use of parent-report surveys, the technical adequacy of the instrument, data collection techniques, and the generalizability of the results. In the past, research often has omitted parent reports and only collected information from teacher and student reports to gain greater insight into factors that may encourage or discourage parent involvement (Reynolds & Gill, 1994). Although we believe parent report scales to be more reliable assessment measures than student reports, it is reasonable to believe that parents may not always accurately report their feelings, perceptions and behaviors.

This study relied primarily on one parent report to assess parent outcomes (self-reported parent involvement and satisfaction) and predictor variables (school climate, cultural sensitivity, and quality of communication). An independent instrument of parent involvement activities or a log of parent involvement hours may have been a useful supplement (Griffith, 2000). Additionally, an independent instrument should have been utilized to investigate parent satisfaction and its predictor variables. The integration of parent, student, and teacher reports into the study, although adding to the study's complexity, would have provided richer data from which to draw conclusions on school variables that influence African American parent involvement and satisfaction in their children's schooling in elementary school grades.

The School Receptivity Questionnaire (SRQ) was developed for this study. Although the sample size was reasonable and robust procedures were in place to assess its technical adequacy, nonetheless this was a newly created instrument that does not have established criterion validity. Criterion validity is the extent to which "new instruments provide accurate measurements by comparing scores from the new instrument with scores on a relevant criterion variable" (Huck,

2000, p.102). Since the SRQ was the only instrument used for this project, the use of an existing psychometrically validated instrument in conjunction with the SRQ may have further addressed reliability and criterion validity issues.

Whether the independent variables are distinct, measurable constructs capable of predicting parent involvement and satisfaction is another concern. This concern is based on the fact that the independent variables were highly intercorrelated, and multicollinearity appeared to have been violated. Multicollinearity, if violated, produces large standard errors (Stevens, 2002), thus increasing the likelihood that the null hypothesis is not rejected and increasing the difficulty of ascertaining which school receptivity variable actually predict parent involvement and satisfaction. Consequently, the results of school receptivity predictive variables should be interpreted with caution until future research could replicate this study with a larger sample size.

Data were collected from one small county located in Northern Florida. While these findings may be generalizable to other small areas located in the Southeast region of the United States, the researcher is unsure whether these findings can be generalizable to African American parents located in rural areas or urban cities in other geographic regions of the country.

More than 1400 research packets were placed in students' folders for parents to complete and return to their child's teacher. Although the cover letter stated to parents that teachers or school administrators will not have an opportunity to read the parents' responses, it plausible to assume that some parents may not have recorded their thoughts and beliefs accurately because of concern they might offend their child's teacher or school. The more involved parents are likely to be the primary respondents. Since the premise of the study was to examine school variables that influence all levels of parent involvement and satisfaction, parents who limit their school involvement, because they feel alienated or are at odds with school administrators, may have

decided not to complete the survey. This is unfortunate because data from these parents could provide useful insight into school characteristics that are easily alterable to influence parent involvement and satisfaction with this population.

Another limitation is that data were collected near the end of the academic year. Throughout the school year, parents frequently are called upon to complete surveys or sign papers sent home with their children. Given that it was the end of the academic year parents may have reached their limits in participating in research studies and may have decided to opt out of this study, thus affecting the number of respondents and quality of parents' responses.

Future Research

After several decades of research that focused on hard-to-change individual and contextual level variables, research has begun to examine school level characteristics that encourage or discourage African American parent involvement and satisfaction (Feuerstein, 2001). This study provided insight into which school level variables African American parents' perceive influence the extent to which they are involved in their child's elementary schooling. Future research should address some of the concerns outlined in the current study to promote more generalizability of this study's findings and to contribute to this line of research.

Middle income African American parents and their involvement in their child's schooling are often overlooked in research studies. One possible reason is that middle income, black parents are perceived to be more familiar and less mystified with the school system (Ritblatt et al. 2002) and they are thought to have the social, cultural, and financial resources that enable them to navigate their child's school system (Diamond & Gomez, 2004; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Middle income, black parents tend to regard their child's school more favorably (Diamond & Gomez, 2004) and since they are not typically associated with negative outcomes (i.e., minimal parent participation, poverty, and overrepresentation in special education),

researchers have not reviewed them as a critical population to study compared to their low income, black counterparts. Although middle income, black parents view their child's school more favorably, and tend to leverage their social, cultural, and financial resources to ensure their child receives a quality education, black students lag behind their White and Asian counterparts in the achievement gap (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005) and black middle income parents report less involvement in education compared to white parents. Since there is a positive relationship between parent involvement and academic success (McWyane et al. 2004; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001), future research should focus on examining why middle income, African American parents report less involvement than middle income, white parents and finding ways to increase their involvement.

Secondly, future research should actively recruit more respondents to participate including those from rural, suburban, and inner-cities located in the Southeast and other geographic regions of the country. The availability of data from more parents to participate in the study also can provide more data needed to reduce the concern of multicollinearity and large standard errors will occur. Additionally, parents from different racial ethnic groups should also be included (e.g., Hispanic American parents) (Pena, 2001) and other culturally and linguistically diverse parents (Wong & Hughes, 2006). Furthermore, given that this study's results were inconsistent with other studies in terms of predicting parent involvement, a meta-analysis of these studies could be conducted to conclusively determine ethnicity's predictive power.

As mentioned earlier, this study lacked several sources of information on the influence of school receptivity on parent involvement and satisfaction. Since school receptivity is a new concept thus has not been studied extensively, future studies should use both student and teacher reports in tandem with this instrument to explore its dimensions and the extent to which views by

parents, teachers, and students are congruent and whether they predict parent involvement and satisfaction. Efforts are needed to ensure parents who would be least likely to complete the questionnaire are included.

Additionally, there is a need for research that examines whether change occurred in parent involvement and satisfaction after schools attempted to alter school variables. Qualitative methods may provide useful information on how schools proceeded to alter their school climate (e.g., to present a warm, welcoming environment to parents to be involved), increase cultural sensitivity of school educators and administrators, and enhance their quality of communication (e.g., improving parent-teacher exchanges by ridding the provider-receiver model of communication, and providing parents with updates on school events and their child's progress).

APPENDIX A
STUDY COVER LETTER

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Tiffany D. Sanders and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Florida working under the supervision of Dr. Nancy Waldron. As part of my dissertation research, I would like to invite your participation in my study that examines the extent to which parents believe schools are happy with their involvement in their child's education.

Parent involvement is described as a broad range of activities exhibited by parents and family members both in the home and school to encourage and support their child's academic development. Schools have an important role in encouraging parent involvement and providing opportunities for parents to be involved in their child's education. My research study examines parents' beliefs about their child's school environment, the extent to which parents are satisfied with ways their child's teacher tries to establish contact, and the extent to which parents believe their child's teachers are accepting of cultural differences between teachers and students.

Participation in the study would involve completing a survey which will take approximately ten minutes of your time. You are not required to respond to any questions that you do not want to answer. You will not be asked to write your name on the survey. Teachers and administrators will not have access to this information. Your privacy will be given the highest priority and the data will be kept confidential to the maximum extent provided by law. The data from these surveys will be compiled into a group report describing school climate, cultural sensitivity, and quality of communication affect on parent involvement.

Your participation for this research project is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without penalty of any kind. There are no anticipated risks or benefits for participating in the study. Parents will not receive any compensation.

If you have any questions about this research study, you can contact either me at 392-0723, extension 229 or by email at tsanders@ufl.edu. The faculty supervisor, Dr. Nancy Waldron, can be reached at (352) 392-0723, extension 232. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant may be directed to the UFIRB office, University of Florida, Box 112250, Gainesville, FL 32611, (352) 392-0433.

Sincerely,

Tiffany D. Sanders, M.Ed.
Department of Educational Psychology

Nancy Waldron, Ph.D.
Department of Educational Psychology

APPENDIX B
QUESTIONNAIRE

School Receptivity Questionnaire (SRQ)

Instructions: Only one parent should complete this questionnaire for your child attending school. Please answer each question as accurately and as honestly as possible. Thank you for your assistance.

1. Relationship to the Child:

- Mother
- Father
- Guardian
- Other

4. Total Family Income:

- Less than \$14,999
- \$15,000 - \$29,999
- \$30,000 - \$44,999
- \$45,000 - \$59,999
- \$60,000 - \$74,999
- \$75,000 - \$89,999
- over \$90,000

2. My ethnicity is:

- African-American (Non Hispanic)
- Asian American / Pacific Islander
- White (Non Hispanic)
- Latino/Hispanic American
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Other, Specify _____

5. The number of family members in my household: _____

3. The highest level of education that I have achieved is:

- Some High School or less
- High School Graduate
- Some College or Technical School
- College Graduate
- Post Graduate Degree (i.e., Master's, Doctorate)

6. My child's grade:

- Kindergarten
- 1st grade
- 2nd grade
- 3rd grade
- 4th grade
- 5th grade

Sanders -- SRQ

The following questions are designed to gain a better understanding of your child's school climate for this academic year. Please read each statement and indicate the value of your expectations.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. When I visit my child's classroom, the teacher greets me to make me feel welcome.	1	2	3	4
2. If I have questions or comments, the office staff are helpful and courteous.	1	2	3	4
3. My child's school has rules and procedures that I must abide by in order to visit my child's class.	1	2	3	4
4. My child's teacher is willing and cooperative to discuss my child's academic progress and behavior.	1	2	3	4
5. My child's school is an enjoyable place to visit.	1	2	3	4

The following questions are designed to gain a better understanding of how you perceive your child's teacher demonstrate cultural sensitivity for the academic year.

1. My child's teacher is well trained to deal with parents and students from different ethnic and racial backgrounds.	1	2	3	4
2. My child's teacher is familiar with the surrounding neighborhoods.	1	2	3	4
3. My child's teacher considers my cultural beliefs when planning for my child's educational program.	1	2	3	4
4. My child's teacher makes culturally sensitive statements.	1	2	3	4

The following questions are designed to gain a better understanding of how you perceive the quality of communication demonstrated by your child's teacher for this academic year.

1. My child's teacher schedules parent-teacher conferences at times when I am available to meet.	1	2	3	4
2. My child's teacher is respectful and does not undermine my authority and judgment as a parent.	1	2	3	4
3. My child's teacher presents a no blaming, no fault problem-solving position in interactions with families.	1	2	3	4
4. Personal letters about school activities are often sent home on-time.	1	2	3	4

The following questions are designed to gain a better understanding of your satisfaction with your child's education during this current academic year.

1. I would recommend my child's school to other parents.	1	2	3	4
2. My child is getting a good education and enjoys learning activities.	1	2	3	4
3. I am satisfied with the type of activities in which I am involved at my child's school.	1	2	3	4
4. My child's school is a good place for my child.	1	2	3	4
5. School is preparing my child for the future.	1	2	3	4

The following questions are designed to gain a better understanding of your involvement in your child's education during this current academic year.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I volunteer at my child's school.	1	2	3	4
2. I talk with my child about the school day.	1	2	3	4
3. I make sure my child's school has what it needs.	1	2	3	4
4. I communicate with my child's teacher regularly.	1	2	3	4
5. I monitor, discuss, and help my child complete their homework.	1	2	3	4

The following section is designed to gain a better understanding of how important the following activities are to you.

1. Supporting student events by attending carnivals, school plays, science fairs, and musical concerts	1	2	3	4
2. Helping with fundraising activities (i.e., booster clubs, bake sales)	1	2	3	4
3. Purchasing or providing classroom supplies (i.e., tissues, glue, play dough, construction paper).	1	2	3	4
4. Assisting the teacher with homework packets, copying, laminating, or preparing class materials	1	2	3	4
5. Volunteering as a teacher's aide to help students complete their in-class learning activities.	1	2	3	4

The following section is designed to assess the quantity of experiences you had in the last year. Please indicate the rate at which you experienced the following activities or discussed the following subjects with your child, the principal, and your child's teacher.

	Never (0-times)	Seldom (1-2 times)	Often (3-4 times)	Very often (5 times)
1. Informally met with my child's teacher.	1	2	3	4
2. Sent an email or wrote a letter to my child's teacher.	1	2	3	4
3. Attended parent-teacher conference night.	1	2	3	4
4. Chaperoned a class field trip.	1	2	3	4
5. Attended a PTA/PTO meeting.	1	2	3	4

APPENDIX C
TEACHER REMINDER LETTER

May 22, 2007

Dear Teachers,

I have created a letter to remind parents to return the parent involvement surveys that you placed in students' folders two weeks ago. Please send the reminder letter home today with the children. My hope is that the letter will prompt parents to complete and return remaining surveys. When students return the letters, please forward them to the front office or put them in the school psychology office. Thank you for your help and support.

Sincerely,

Tiffany D. Sanders, M.Ed.
Department of Educational Psychology

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Tiffany D. Sanders was born and raised in Maywood, Illinois. After graduating from Proviso West High School, she enrolled in Northern Illinois University (NIU). While completing her studies at NIU, Ms. Sanders's interest in psychology, multicultural families, and children developed. Ms. Sanders graduated from NIU in the spring of 2002 with a Bachelor of Arts with honors in psychology and a minor in family and child studies.

In the summer of 2002, she began her graduate career in the School Psychology Program at the University of Florida in the Department of Educational Psychology. Her specialization areas are diversity and multiculturalism and promoting parent involvement in education with minority and at-risk families. In May of 2008, she was conferred her doctorate in school psychology. She will continue to work in alternative schools and community mental health settings to promote academic and behavioral success with youth who are high-risk and to build healthy families. She intends to sit for the Examination for Professional Practice in Psychology to become a licensed psychologist.