

THE PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE: DECONSTRUCTING THE
OVERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES IN SPECIAL
EDUCATION

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A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctorate in Education

Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership for Social Justice

California State University, East Bay

October, 2014

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Abstract

Nationwide, there has been an overrepresentation of students of color in the special education programs in public schools. There were multiple factors researchers theorized that contributed to such overrepresentation. Despite the vast amount of research analyzing the overrepresentation of African American males in special education, there was a lack of research that focused on the African American parents' involvement in the special education process. With the overrepresentation of African American males in special education, parents are a vital part of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) referral process. The purpose of this study was to examine the parents' experiences and perspectives of the IEP process and to understand what extent the parents were involved in the decision making process for their male children. By using a mixed methods study through the lens of critical race theory, the researcher examined to what extent practices within a school district can help to redress the overrepresentation of African American male students in special education programs.


Keywords: African American, parent involvement, special education

California State University, East Bay
Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership for Social Justice

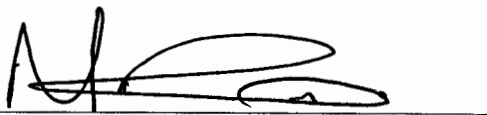
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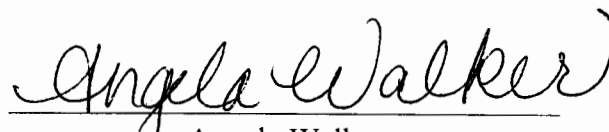
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With humility and great appreciation, I would like to acknowledge those who helped me to complete this dissertation.

First and foremost, many thanks to my loving husband, Ja'Son, who selflessly spent several days and nights taking care of our children and household, so I could focus on my studies. He encouraged and inspired me to do my personal best. Words cannot express how blessed I am to have such a wonderful partner who was just as proud as me to partake in this journey. I felt like we completed the dissertation together! I cannot thank him enough.

Thank you to my two beautiful daughters, Jada and Jocelyn, who would bring their crayons and activity books, so they could "study" with mommy. I appreciate the hugs, kisses and admiration. Jada and Jocelyn were my inspiration who reminded me that this process was bigger than me and that I had two little ones watching and counting on me.

My parents and in-laws were very supportive during this journey. Mom and Dad, thank you for helping out when I needed you and even when I did not. To my extended family and friends of the family, thank you for helping to watch my girls so I could study and/or sending me special messages to encourage me when I may have been a little discouraged. Special thanks to Melody. You are a lifesaver!

I want to give a warm thank you to my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Greg Jennings, who pushed my thinking and provided continuous support. In addition, I want to thank my committee members Dr. Matais Pouncil and Dr. Angela Walker who reached out just

at the right time, offering words of encouragement and offering great advice. Words cannot express my gratitude for Dr. Margaret Harris, who spent countless hours reading my dissertation, meeting with me and sharing her personal journey in completing her dissertation which not only told me, but showed me what perseverance and resilience means during this process. I was blessed to meet Dr. Arlando Smith who I thought would only be a professor for a class that I needed to pass to get through my course requirements. What I didn't know was that he would make a positive impact on me both personally and professionally about what it means to truly be a Social Justice Leader. Through his presence and wisdom, he has demonstrated what it means to "live" humbly, always making himself available and creating a safe place to take risks with the mindset that we learn from our failures.

Thank you to the professors and staff of the Educational Leadership for Social Justice at Cal State East Bay and my colleagues in Cohort 4 (C-4). I will never forget our deep discussions, tears and laughter. I have grown from my experience in so many ways that I will always hold dear to my heart.

Overall, the dissertation process has taught me with support, prayer, passion, drive, and determination, anything is possible! I look forward to the next journey...

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| Problem Statement..... | 2 |
| Significance of the Study..... | 3 |
| Research Questions..... | 5 |
| Definition of Terms..... | 6 |
| Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW..... | 9 |
| Historical Background..... | 9 |
| Disproportionality..... | 12 |
| Explanation of Overrepresentation..... | 15 |
| Poverty..... | 16 |
| Financial Incentive..... | 19 |
| Discipline..... | 20 |
| Teachers’ Misperceptions..... | 21 |
| Special Education Referral..... | 22 |
| Parental Participation..... | 23 |
| Critical Theory (Cultural Reproduction/Critical Race Theory)..... | 26 |
| Summary..... | 30 |
| Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY..... | 33 |
| Purpose of the Study..... | 33 |
| Research Design..... | 33 |
| Research Rationale..... | 35 |

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| Theoretical Framework..... | 36 |
| Phenomenology..... | 36 |
| Counter-storytelling..... | 36 |
| Participants..... | 38 |
| Setting..... | 39 |
| Pilot Study..... | 41 |
| Instrumentation..... | 42 |
| Phase One..... | 43 |
| Phase Two..... | 48 |
| Data Collection..... | 49 |
| Data Analysis..... | 52 |
| Phase One..... | 52 |
| Phase Two..... | 54 |
| Limitations of the Study..... | 57 |
| Subject Position..... | 58 |
| Assumption..... | 59 |
| Chapter 4: MIXED METHODS RESULTS..... | 60 |
| Phase One: Quantitative Results..... | 61 |
| Descriptive Statistics..... | 62 |
| Research Question 1..... | 64 |
| Research Question 2..... | 65 |
| Research Question 3..... | 66 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Research Question 4..... | 67 |
| Quantitative Summary..... | 69 |
| Phase Two: Qualitative Results..... | 71 |
| Research Question 1..... | 72 |
| Parental Involvement..... | 72 |
| Homework..... | 72 |
| Communication..... | 73 |
| Volunteer..... | 74 |
| Learning at Home..... | 75 |
| Partnership..... | 76 |
| Teacher Plays a Key Role..... | 76 |
| Dissemination of Information..... | 78 |
| Lack of Communication..... | 78 |
| Decision Making..... | 80 |
| Previous Experience..... | 85 |
| Early Identification..... | 86 |
| Identification Using an Outside Resource..... | 88 |
| Identification Creates Internal Dissonance..... | 89 |
| Second Opinion..... | 92 |
| Advocate..... | 94 |
| Satisfaction with Services..... | 95 |
| Lack of Services..... | 95 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Impact on Students' Success..... | 97 |
| Satisfaction..... | 102 |
| Suggestions..... | 107 |
| Be an Active Participant..... | 107 |
| Seek Another Opinion..... | 109 |
| Improve Communication..... | 109 |
| Value Parent's Input and Home Environment..... | 111 |
| Encourage Parents to Volunteer..... | 111 |
| Provide Training..... | 112 |
| Provide Additional Resources..... | 113 |
| Summary..... | 113 |
| Chapter 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS..... | 116 |
| Purpose of the Study..... | 116 |
| Methodology..... | 117 |
| Discussion of the Findings..... | 118 |
| Research Question 1..... | 118 |
| Parent Involvement..... | 118 |
| Research Question 2..... | 121 |
| Dissemination of Information..... | 121 |
| Teachers' Communication..... | 123 |
| Lack of Communication..... | 123 |
| Teacher's Special Education Background Knowledge..... | 124 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Research Question 3..... | 125 |
| Decision Making Process..... | 125 |
| Early Identification..... | 127 |
| Previous Experience..... | 128 |
| Research Question 4..... | 131 |
| Satisfaction with Provision of Services..... | 131 |
| Implications and Recommendations for Practice..... | 133 |
| Teacher Training..... | 134 |
| Professional Development..... | 134 |
| Leadership Training..... | 135 |
| Parent-School Collaboration..... | 135 |
| Parent Liaison..... | 136 |
| Use Layman’s Terms..... | 136 |
| Increase Communication..... | 137 |
| Collaborate with Community Organizations..... | 137 |
| Survey..... | 138 |
| Equity of Voice..... | 138 |
| Future Research and Limitations..... | 139 |
| Conclusion..... | 140 |
| References..... | 142 |
| Appendix A. Special Education Evaluation..... | 159 |
| Appendix B. Parent and Student Profile from Survey Responses..... | 160 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Appendix C. District Enrollment for 2012-2013 – Male Gender, Grade, & Ethnic Designation..... | 162 |
| Appendix D. Special Education Enrollment by Ethnicity and Disability for 2012-2013..... | 163 |
| Appendix E. Parent Involvement Survey – Special Education and Permission Letter..... | 164 |
| Appendix F. Interview Protocol..... | 172 |
| Appendix G. Survey Open-Ended Questions and Responses..... | 174 |
| Appendix H. Data Tables..... | 177 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | |
|---|----|
| Figure 1. Definition of terms..... | 6 |
| Figure 2. Epstein’s parent involvement framework..... | 26 |
| Figure 3. Research questions aligned to the literature, survey, and interview instruments..... | 47 |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It has been over 60 years since the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision to desegregate schools was implemented; yet public schools remain segregated. As a result, the social stratification in American society today reinforces the inequities in public schools for students of color and directly influences their educational experience. One of the most alarming manifestations of these inequities is the overrepresentation of African American males in special education programs across the country.

Undeniably, students of color in special education have been, as Blanchett (2009) noted, “miseducated, undereducated, and treated inequitably by the American educational system...” (p. 370). According to the Blanchett (2009) the disproportionate representation of African American students in special education resulted in limited access to general education curriculum, failure to provide services that met their academic needs, and misclassification that led to mistrust of the school system by both the families and the community.

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences and perspectives of parents who have African American male children who have been affected by the special education referral process. This chapter is organized as follows (a) problem statement, (b) significance of study, (c) research questions, and (d) definition of terms.

Problem Statement

Historically, special education began as a service rather than a place or location. However, for many African American students, “placement in special education had, too often, been a vehicle for segregating minority students” (Losen, 2002, p. 270).

African American students have one of the highest risk indexes for being labeled in the high incidence disability categories of mild mental retardation, specific learning disabilities, and emotional/behavioral disabilities categories (Blanchett, 2010). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2006), African American students made up 15% of the total United States student population ages 6-21. However, the same ethnic group represented 28% of students in special education programs with emotional disturbance, 32% of students identified with mental retardation, and 18% of students labeled with a specific learning disability. More recently, the Twenty-ninth Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2007) showed African American students ages 6-21 were 2.86 times more likely to receive special education services for mental retardation, 2.28 times more likely to receive services for emotional disturbance, and 1.5 times more likely to receive special education services than the same-age students in all other racial/ethnic groups combined. These patterns certainly hold true for the state of California. For example, Green (2005) stated that African American students made up 8% of the student population, but were slightly over 12% of the special education population. Despite the alarming rates of overrepresentation and sanctions the California Department of Education has placed on school districts that exhibit disproportionate representation of

African American students, there have been minimal changes in public schools to eradicate such inequity.

Significance of the Study

Out of the body of research (Blanchett, 2010; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Harry, 1992b; Hosp & Reschly, 2003) regarding disproportionality in special education, the following outcomes have emerged as negative outcomes for African American male students' education (Blanchett, 2010; Hosp & Reschly, 2003) (a) placement in more restrictive environments with limited exposure to the general education population (Skiba et al., 2006; Watkins & Kurtz, 2001); (b) environmental factors as a result of poverty (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Losen & Orfield, 2002); (c) increased discipline referrals (Cartledge & Dukes, 2009); (d) teachers' misperceptions regarding behavior and academic ability (Artiles, 1998); (e) financial incentives (Cohen, 2007); and (f) lack of parental participation in school activities (Kalyanpur & Rao, 1991).

While the complexity of this social inequity deepens, the cyclical approach towards addressing the disproportionality of African American males in special education, both politically and socially, only makes the breadth and depth of knowledge towards solutions limited. Researchers discern that teachers have a major role in the identification and placement of African American males in special education, especially when social norms are used as criteria for more subjective disabilities such as Specific Learning Disability (SLD) and Emotional Disturbance (ED) (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Harry & Klingner, 2006; Hibel, Farkas, & Morgan, 2010). Although research (Hibel et al., 2010) showed alarming rates of African American males placed in special education,

the detrimental outcomes that such placement had on these students' ability to compete successfully in society, and the dismal effects it had on both the African American community and the entire nation, the disproportionate placement of African American males in special education by educators continues to exist. Instead of changing the systemic segregation of marginalized students into special education, the special education referral process is used to justify and perpetuate such inequity (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Harry & Klingner, 2006; Sattler, 2001). Therefore, it must be understood that the overrepresentation in special education is a social epidemic that cannot continue to be ignored or justified.

Although the existing research (Blanchett, 2010; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Harry, 1992b; Hosp & Reschly, 2003) examined multiple causal factors that may have led to overrepresentation in special education placement for African American males, there was a gap in understanding why the overrepresentation continues to exist from the parents' viewpoint. A studies by Epstein et al. (2009) contended that increased parental involvement can have a major influence on a student's achievement in schools. However, educators often assume that African American parents' lack of presence at school sites or participation in school activities was due to cultural values and norms that did not support the school culture (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Reynolds, 2010). As a result, educators question whether African American parents promote learning at home and question the extent to which Black families care about their children's educational achievement (Harry, 1992b; Reynolds, 2010). Reynolds (2010) contended that Critical Race Theory (CRT) "can help us understand the complexity of the confluence of race,

class, and sex in relation to African American males in schools” (p. 148). Through the lens of CRT, the researcher will document the “voice” or perspective of African American parents who have been involved and have had their male children directly influenced by the special education referral process. By examining the experience for African American families during the special education referral process, the researcher seeks to better understand why the overrepresentation of African American males continues to exist. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of parents who have African American male children that have been affected by the special education referral process.

Research Questions

In order to understand factors associated with the overrepresentation in the special education referral process, the following questions will help guide this study.

1. What are the parents’ experiences and perspectives regarding the special education referral process for their African American male children?
2. How does the parents’ involvement compare to the parents’ evaluation of information disseminated to the parents during the referral process?
3. How does the parents’ involvement compare to the parents’ perception of their involvement in the decision making process during the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) meeting?
4. To what extent does the parents’ involvement compare with the parents’ satisfaction with the educational services for African American male students?

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions from multiple sources (see Figure 1) are provided to assist the reader in comprehending the text.

| TERM | DEFINITION |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Disproportionate Representation | “Variation in ethnic representation in special education that indicates a particular group is over or underrepresented” (Coutinho & Oswald, 2002, p. 40). |
| Emotional Disturbance (ED) | “As defined by the IDEA [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act], emotional disturbance includes schizophrenia but does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance” (Code of Federal Regulation, Title 34, Section 300.7(c) (4) (ii)). Emotional disturbance is also referred to as emotional/behavioral disorders or behavioral disorders: “A condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance (a) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; (b) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; (c) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; (d) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression, or; (e) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems” (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34, Section 300.7(c) (4) (i)). |
| Intellectual Disability | “Significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior manifested during the developmental period, that adversely affects a child’s educational performance” (Code of Federal Regulation, Title 34, Section 300.8(c)(6)). Problems with adaptive behavior |

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| | in the areas of communication, personal needs (dressing, feeding, bathing, etc.), health and safety, living (cooking, cleaning, etc.), social, learning (reading, writing, and basic math), and employment are a part of this disability (Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1401(3); 1401(30)). |
| Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) | To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities (including children in public or nonpublic institutions or other care facilities) are educated with children who are nondisabled. Removal of children with disabilities from the general educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in general classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. U.S. Department of Education, 1997a. 20 U. S. C. 1412(a) (5) (b)). |
| Parent Involvement (Engagement) | “Behaviors that connect with and support children or others in their environment in ways that are interactive, purposeful, and directed toward meaningful learning and affective outcomes” (Sheridan, Knoche, Kupzyk, Edwards, & Marvin, 2011, p.362). |
| Poverty | “Deprivation of common necessities that determine the quality of life, including food, clothing, shelter. An economic idea related to power and the uses of it; it is ingrained in our total culture and involves all our institutions” (Chamberlin, 2001, p. 198). |
| Race | “The self, as well as societal, imposed definition of a person or group” (Levi-Strauss, 1966, p. 6). “Usually refers to the concept of dividing humans into populations or groups on the basis of various sets of characteristics. The most widely used human racial category is based on visible traits (especially skin color, and self-identification” (Tatum, 1997, p. 90). |
| Racism | “A system of privilege based upon race and upon the maintenance of White supremacy,” and unequal allocation of resources (Murrell, 1999, p. 7). |

| | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Special Education | “Specially designed instruction and related services provided to students with disabilities, ages birth to 21. These services are provided in an environment as near to an average classroom as possible” (Harry & Anderson, 1994. p. 23). |
| Special Education Services | When a child is declared exceptional, there are often 'related services' that are essential to meet the needs of the child. These related services refer to supports such as: transportation (for severe behavior or wheelchair access etc.), audio services, speech and language pathologist’s referral and support, psychological/counseling services, occupational and or physiological services, social emotional services, interpreter, rehabilitation counseling, etc. |
| Specific Learning Disability (SLD) | “A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using spoken or written language, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. According to the law, learning disabilities do not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities; mental retardation; or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage” (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34, Section 300.8(c)(10)). One of the thirteen (13) qualifying categories in special education. |

Figure 1. Definition of terms.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

First, to provide a deeper understanding of the over identification in special education, the review of the literature will provide an examination of the history of racial disparities in special education and then place it, more broadly, in the context of segregation. Next, an analysis of the major explanations given for the persistent pattern of African American males in special education programs will underscore the urgency to confront the assumptions that continue to justify the placement of African American males in special education programs. One major theme in previous literature was the connection between poverty and learning disabilities. Another theme traces the problems of cultural distance and teacher misperceptions at the heart of systematic over-referrals of African American male students.

Historical Background

The *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) Supreme Court decision was designed to address the “separate but equal” conditions of public education as it pertained to racial segregation. This decision was also instrumental in addressing the separation of special education in public schooling. Prior to the decision, African American and special education students were often ostracized by either being denied free and appropriate education through public schools or forced to attend segregated, run-down or “ghetto-like” facilities (Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005, p. 73). However, as a result of

the litigation, Thurgood Marshall and the Supreme Court established that forcing African American students to attend segregated schools contradicted the Fourteenth Amendment that guaranteed the equal protection under the law for all United States citizens. Moreover, the Supreme Court interpreted that the amendment prohibited any state to implement laws based upon race such as segregation of public schools. As a result, advocates for special education were able to use the same argument of equal rights and protection when they fought against segregation of students with disabilities (Blanchett et al., 2005).

After the Brown decision, there were several cases such as the *PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1972) and *Mills v. the District of Columbia* (1973) that challenged the existing segregated educational system (Losen & Orfield, 2002). As part of the “disability rights movement” these cases determined that separate schools for students with disabilities were unconstitutional. In addition, legislation influenced the ways that Americans viewed and responded to those with disabilities (Blanchett & Shealey, 2005). The legislation included Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which states

No otherwise qualified individual with handicaps shall solely by reason of her or his handicap, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance. (29 U.S.C. Sec. 706)

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 known as Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was written to assure children “a free, appropriate public education and provided states with federal funding to assist them in providing that

education” (Bateman & Bateman, 2001, p. 8). This act was amended to include the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

The landmark legal case, *Larry P. v. Riles* (1979), was instrumental in identifying that “the overrepresentation of minority children in Educable Mental Retardation (EMR) classes throughout San Francisco was determined to be due to unfair educational practices, including teacher bias” and “illuminated the role of school personnel, tests, and testing practices in erroneously labeling students of racial and linguistic minorities with a disability and placing them in restrictive special education classes” (Ferri & Connor, 2005, p. 94). As a result of the *Larry P. v. Riles* (1979) case, school districts have restricted the use of IQ testing to place African American students in special education.

These actions were instrumental in protecting the rights of those with disabilities, prohibiting discrimination in the public sector, and providing educational services for students with disabilities (Blanchett, 2010). IDEA was recognized as one of the most important acts because it guaranteed students with disabilities the right to a free and appropriate public education, the least restrictive environment, individualized education, appropriate and nondiscriminatory evaluations, participation of parent and student in the decision making process, and safeguards embedded in the special education procedures as specified in Part B of IDEA (Smith, 2004).

Over the years, the goals of special education shifted from providing a separate but equal education to providing students with the least restrictive environment or fully inclusive educational environment. At the same time, the primary intent of the law was to provide students with disabilities an appropriate education that would specifically

enhance the students' learning outcomes and academic achievement. Once the students' needs were met and modification provided, the students would return to the general education setting. However, studies found that many disabled students were segregated in self-contained settings with limited or no exposure to the general education population (Blanchett & Shealey, 2005). Thus, many of the students faced exiting high school with low academic skills, poor social skills, and lack of preparation to successfully participate in the workforce. In response, many reform efforts were implemented during the 1980s to address such shortcomings. For example, "full inclusion" was implemented to reduce exclusion by providing the students with special education services while the students attended general education courses. Research suggested that the benefit of full inclusion was two-fold since the students with disabilities benefited from access to the core curriculum and social interaction, while the general education population had more positive interactions with their disabled peers (Russo & Talbert-Johnson, 1997). Nevertheless, tracking patterns of disproportionality persists and requires clarity about how best to define the term full inclusion.

Disproportionality

Disproportionality is defined as the "overrepresentation" and "underrepresentation" of a particular population or demographic group in special or gifted education programs relative to the presence of this group in the overall student population (National Association for Bilingual Education, 2002). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2006), overrepresentation or disproportionality exists in various forms and at different levels.

For example, overrepresentation can be present in any or all of the following ways

- National, state, and district level overrepresentation of a certain population as disabled or under-identification as gifted and/or talented;
- Higher incidence rates for certain populations in specific special education categories, such as mental retardation or emotional disturbance;
- Significant differences in the proportion of minority students who are receiving special education services in more restrictive or segregated programs; and
- Excessive incidence, duration, and types of disciplinary actions, including suspensions and expulsions, experienced by minority students.

Lloyd Dunn (1968) was one of the first researchers to determine that there was overrepresentation of minority students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds in special education when he noted that in 60-80% of the students in special day classes for mild mental retardation (MMR) were from these particular ethnic and economic backgrounds. Many initiatives have been implemented to address such inequity as recent as the IDEA Amendment of 2004 that mandates all states implement systems and policies to eliminate or decrease the disproportionality of any particular ethnic group in special education.

This federal legislation provides funding and guidelines on what disability categories qualify for special education services and require that students be provided with services in the “least restrictive environment” (Ferri & Connor, 2006, p. 97). Moreover, the IDEA Amendment of 2004 mandates that states report progress on a series of indicators as established by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special

Education Programs (OSEP). Two indicators are associated with disproportionality. One indicator refers to whether the percentage of students from certain ethnic or racial groups who qualify for special education services is disproportionate and the other indicator refers to whether the percentage of students from certain ethnic or racial groups are disproportionately represented within specific disability categories (Marks, Lemley, & Wood, 2010). Despite the federal legislation and mandates, recent studies continue to exemplify the overrepresentation of African American males in special education (Albrecht, Skiba, Losen, Chung, & Middleberg, 2011). Research studies have identified patterns in placement when students of color were identified for special education.

For example, Skiba et al. (2008) stated that the Office of Civil Rights revealed consistent patterns of disproportionality in the special education programs overall and at even higher rates in the mental retardation and emotional disturbance categories. Multiple research studies also demonstrated that a child's race and ethnicity were significantly related to the probability that he or she would be inappropriately identified as disabled (Losen & Orfield, 2002; National Research Council, 2002). Parrish (2002) found that African American students were the most overrepresented group in special education programs in nearly every state.

Cartledge (2005) stated, "Perhaps one of the most direct ways to reduce the disproportionate restrictiveness for racial minorities is for schools to mandate that the initial placement for all students should be in the least restrictive placement" (p. 28). Special education advocates have recognized, as a result of IDEA, millions of students with disabilities have been provided a free and appropriate education in the least

restrictive environment; further, parents and students have been active participants in the decision making process as it pertains to special education services. However, access to the services aforementioned has not been distributed equitably particularly for students of color and low socioeconomic status (Losen & Orfield, 2002). For instance, according to the U.S. Department of Education (2006), 38.6 % of African American students were educated in general education for most of the school day. On the other hand, 54.7% of White students with disabilities were most likely taught in regular classrooms. African American students with disabilities were likely to spend more than 60% of their day outside of general education classrooms and more likely to be educated in “separate environments” (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Moreover, African American students were overrepresented in 10 out of 13 disability categories that were more restrictive and subjective such as mild mental retardation (MMR), specific learning (SLD) disabilities, and emotional disturbance (ED) (Green, 2005).

Explanation of Overrepresentation

There are various interpretations as to why there are racial disparities in educational programs. For example, the U.S. Department of Education (2002) presumed that “differences in placement by race/ethnicity may reflect the disproportional representation of some minority groups in disability categories that are predominately served in more restrictive settings” (p. III-45). Although less studied, one line of scholarship demonstrated that students of color, especially African Americans, were overrepresented in more restrictive educational environments and underrepresented in less restrictive settings (Fierros & Conroy, 2002; Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Simmons,

Feggins-Azziz, & Chung, 2005). So, the disproportionate placement of African American students in special education is not necessarily by happenstance, but requires further examination to get to the root cause(s) of such placements.

Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Simmons, Feggins-Azziz, and Chung (2005) studied the extent that African American students were disproportionally placed in more or less restrictive environments by examining five categories in one school's special education program. Through this study, in four out of the five categories, African American students were placed in more restrictive environments than their peers with the same disability. As the disability became less severe, such as learning disabilities, African American students were placed in more restrictive environments than their peers placed in general education. Thus, the study did not support the hypothesis that the disproportionality in the educational programs was a result of the proportion of minority students in a disability category. Rather, the more restrictive placements were likely due to other systemic factors such as educators who may mistake cultural differences for cognitive or behavioral disabilities (Oswald, Coutinho, Best, & Singh, 1999; Trent, Kea, & Oh, 2008).

Poverty

When examining the overrepresentation of African American males in special education, researchers have explored the notion that poverty is a variable that influences a child's probability of being referred to special education (Losen & Orfield, 2002). However, research is mixed in how poverty during early development may affect rates of disproportionality. While some researchers suggest that students of color may experience

increased risk of exposure to challenging biological or early developmental factors connected to poverty (National Research Council, 2002), other researchers downplay the role that economic status plays in whether students are identified for special education services (Losen & Orfield, 2002).

Watkins and Kurtz (2001) stated that nearly half of African American children were reported to live below the poverty line. In addition, Losen and Orfield (2002) stated that minority students living in poverty were disproportionately exposed to impoverished environments and stressors that made them less ready for school. As a result, these researchers discerned it seemed likely that poverty contributed to the disproportionality of African American students in special education. For example, Skiba et al. (2008) stated that poverty creates risk factors such as low birth rate, malnourishment, and exposure to lead toxins that impede cognitive development while increasing emotional and social behavioral problems. The 2002 National Research Council supported such claims and reported that minority students were more likely to be poor and have increased exposure risks that impede early childhood development and increase the need for special education (Donovan & Cross, 2002).

Donovan and Cross (2002) also noted that impoverished children were more likely to attend poverty schools that often provided less adequate teachers with lower student expectations, high teacher turnover, low per pupil expenditures, and fewer resources. Thus, poverty stricken children were affected by “various environmental physical factors that minimize their social and intellectual potential enter inadequate schools that further aggravate their deficiencies rather than enhance their abilities”

(Cartledge & Dukes, 2009, p. 386). Given the factors aforementioned, researchers argued that there was a relationship between poverty and special education because there was a relationship between poverty and school failure (Skiba et al., 2005).

While the research described above claims a direct relationship between poverty and overrepresentation of African American students in special education, other researchers argue that there are other variables that make this occurrence much more complex. For example, a study by Skiba et al. (2005) found some influence of poverty as the levels of MMR increased proportionately as poverty increased. However, the levels of LD decreased as poverty levels increased. In addition, poverty was not found to relate to either ED or moderate mental retardation. In another study, Losen and Orfield (2002) discerned that poverty did not account for the findings that disproportionality was greater in judgmental disability categories (MMR, ED, and LD) rather than biological disability categories (blindness, deafness, and autism) that require a medical diagnosis. Moreover, Oswald, Coutinho, Best, and Singh (1999) discovered that disproportionality within the emotionally disturbed category was greater for African American students in more affluent districts than low-income districts. However, there was a direct relationship between poverty and mild mental retardation, but the levels for severely emotionally disturbed did not increase with poverty.

Thus, the inconsistent correlation of poverty to the high incidence disabilities demonstrates the difficulty to contribute disproportionality in special education to one contributing factor. Instead, these studies inferred that there were other variables that

influenced the complexity of why disproportionality of African American males in special education continues to exist. Skiba et al. (2005) concluded that

The continued significance of race as a predictor of special education disability identification regardless of controls for a variety of other variables leads us to agree with those who contend that the process of special education referral and identification remains to some extent discriminatory. (p. 142)

In order to understand and address the disproportionality in special education, it is important to understand how both individual and systemic factors create and maintain educational inequity (Skiba et al., 2005). Teachers' misperceptions of the African American males' abilities is one dimension of how individual and systemic factors can maintain educational inequity.

Financial Incentive

There are some families that receive additional monetary assistance from welfare programs if their child is identified with special needs, which can be considered as an incentive (Cohen, 2007). Cohen stated

Growth in child SSI [*Social Security Income*] receipt was precipitated by the 1990 Sullivan v. Zebley Supreme Court decision, which significantly liberalized the standards for a child to qualify for SSI for a mental or emotional disability. High SSI benefits levels, coupled with the increasing diagnosis of mild learning and emotional disorders in the late 1980s, led to a dramatic increase in child SSI applications after the Zebley decision. (Cohen, 2007, p. 61)

Duggan and Schettini Kearney (2007) found that the child's SSI benefits could account for up to 48% of a family's income, which significantly reduces the probability of living in poverty. So, for many of the families living below poverty level, there could be a monetary incentive to have their children identified. Unfortunately, the families are often unaware of the detrimental effects that this limitation to mainstream education has on their children's academic outcomes and future academic school and career opportunities when they are referred for special education services (Cohen, 2007).

Research has shown there could be a financial incentive for school districts as well when students are identified for special education. For example, Cullen (2003) and Russo and Talbert-Johnson (1997) showed that districts increased special education services for more subjective disability categories (mental and emotional) when there were greater revenue disbursements that the district could allocate for special education and other non-related costs, thereby increasing the districts' overall budget.

Discipline

Another occurrence that is prevalent in public school is the disproportionate disciplinary actions towards African American males. Research has found that Black students receive more disciplinary sanctions compared to White students because the norms regarding acceptable behavior in schools are based upon White, mainstream beliefs that do not always match those behaviors of students of color (Cartledge & Dukes 2009). For example, African American male students tend to be disciplined more often than Whites, and as a result, the risk for referral and identification for special education on the basis of an Emotional Disturbance (ED) diagnosis is much greater. Therefore, the

disproportionality in discipline rates may explain the reason for disproportionality of African American males in behavioral categories such as ED (Patton, 1998).

Teachers' Misperceptions

The notion that African American males are excessively referred to special education as a result of teachers' misperceptions is another major line of inquiry into the overrepresentation problem. As the diversity in student population both culturally and linguistically increases, the composition of teaching is becoming less diverse (Synder, 2002).

It is estimated that 40% of public schools students are ethnic or racial minorities while 90% of the teachers are Caucasian. As a result, researchers theorize that teachers fail to provide “culturally responsive teaching” to their students, creating a “cultural mismatch” between the students and their educational experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. ___). Thus, students of color are educationally disadvantaged more readily and more prone to be referred to special education programs (Blanchett, 2010; Cartledge & Dukes, 2009; Shealey, Thomas, Green, & Fuller, 2006).

Teachers may be ill prepared to understand African American students. Teachers with limited exposure to other cultures view “Whiteness” and the behaviors, skills, and communication style that is associated with it as the norm. As a result, they may interpret any behavior or trait that does not conform to their model as deviant or abnormal (Blanchett 2010; Cartledge et al., 2002; Shealey et al., 2006). Artiles (1998) referred to the teacher's behavior as the “deficit view” when mainstream teachers view differences

as an indication of inferiority and in need of correction. Thus, teachers may view the White students as high achieving in contrast to African American students who they perceive as less successful and in need of remediation. The norms regarding acceptable behavior in schools were based upon White, mainstream beliefs that did not always match those behaviors of students of color. As a result, often teachers make judgments about students' behavior subjectively when referring students to special education (Cartledge & Dukes 2009). Such subjectivity is transferred to formal assessments used to assess student's behaviors using rating scales that are unreliable and subjective.

Special Education Referral

There are several board policies regarding special education services that are aligned and/or cited from the Education Code. For the purpose of identification and the referral process, school board policies have specified that referrals must be made in writing by school staff. The referral for special education testing must specify the reasons for the referral along with evidence that documents the interventions and assessments used to support the recommendation for special education evaluation (see Appendix A). Although there are guidelines and procedures set in place for the district employees to follow when making a referral to special education, there is still a disproportionate amount of African American male students who are placed in special education programs (Hosp & Reschly, 2003).

When teachers initiate the special education referral process, it is a strong predictor of eligibility for special services. For instance, studies showed that 73-90% of the students referred by classroom teachers for special education evaluations were found

eligible for services (Artilles & Trent, 1994; Harry & Klingner, 2006). Ultimately, the assessment of a child for special education programs becomes the responsibility of the teacher. Artilles and Trent (1994) found that teacher prejudices, racial bias, expectation, and differential treatment influenced referral decisions for minority students.

There are deeply rooted assumptions about inferior intelligence among students of color that represent one of the most enduring legacies of Western racism (Klingner et al., 2005). Despite various scholars who dispute this misperception, these beliefs are institutionalized in the policies and practices of public schools. Beliefs regarding inferiority are demonstrated in how students are tested for special education using intelligence tests that are biased and not culturally relevant (Patton, 1998). Several studies demonstrated that the use of standardized testing only further exacerbates the disproportionality issue because the tests are biased and do not accurately measure the students' actual intelligence (Sattler, 2001). For instance, litigation in the case of *Larry P. v. Riles* (1979) identified numerous issues regarding the legitimacy of using intelligence tests when determining placement of African American students in special education. As a result, the use of biased tests only contributed to how African American males were inappropriately identified as needing special education services (Gould, 1981; Patton, 1998).

Parental Participation

Parent involvement in special education is federally mandated and the importance of parental participation has increased since the inception of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) amendments of 1997 (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2000).

The priorities in the original law and the reauthorization in 2004 include safeguards for the parents such as due process, parent participation in Individualized Education Program (IEP) planning, and shared decision making with the evaluation, placement, services, and collaboration between the home and school (Zionts, Zionts, Harrison, & Bellinger, 2003).

There has been much research regarding parent participation in special education. For example, Zionts, Zionts, Harrison, and Bellinger (2003) conducted semi-structured interviews with 24 African American parents to analyze the parents' perception of the school's level of cross-cultural sensitivity and the way cross-cultural sensitivity can influence parental level of satisfaction with the special education system. This study found the relationship between cultural differences and satisfaction with the special education system was related to the respect and levels of comfort between the parents, teachers, and children. Therefore, due to the lack of cultural understanding, there was a common mismatch between the parents' actual desire to be involved versus the teachers' perception of parental involvement or lack thereof (Zionts et al., 2003).

Harry, Allen, and McLaughlin (1995) contended that while IDEA required that parents were invited to participate in the IEP referral process, "mandatory parent participation consists of the giving of written consent to initial evaluation plan (IEP)" solely (p. 365). There were no requirements for parents to be a part of the decision making regarding policies or any hand-on activities like other federal funded programs. Previous research showed a passive pattern of parental participation and the "passivity among minority families is often interpreted as reflecting numerous parental difficulties, such as lack of knowledge of their rights, or of system procedures and policies;

difficulties with transportation, child care, or work” (Harry, Allen, & McLaughlin, 1995, p. 364).

Most studies that examined parent participation for parents of color have utilized interviews as central sources of data. Two studies, Harry (1992a) and Bennett (1988), demonstrated how parental participation was structured in a way that “delegitimize parental perspective and that parents often withdrew from participation in confusion or resentment” (Harry, 1992a, p. 363). Additionally, the behavior of school professionals disempowered parents by disrespecting the parents’ viewpoints, focusing on the children’s deficiencies, and discounting cultural differences in parenting styles (Kalyanpur & Rao, 1991). Harry (1992b) argued that African American parents were at “double deficit” in schools that have “exclusionary attitudes” because the students were viewed with a deficit (p. 374).

In contrast to the deficit perspective of parental involvement, Joyce Epstein developed a well-known framework in 1993 that promoted parental involvement (Epstein et al., 2009). In Figure 2, Epstein’s six types of parental involvement are defined.

| Type | Name | Descriptors |
|-------------|---------------|---|
| Type 1 | Parenting | Assist all families to establish home environments that support children as students. Also, assist schools to better understand families. |
| Type 2 | Communicating | Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress. |
| Type 3 | Volunteering | Recruit and organize parent help and support. Provide volunteer and support opportunities at various times and locations. |

| | | |
|--------|----------------------------------|---|
| | | |
| Type 4 | Learning at Home | Involve families with their children in learning activities at home that include homework and other curriculum related activities and decisions. |
| Type 5 | Decision Making | Develop parent leaders and representatives by including parents in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, and other parent organizations. |
| Type 6 | Collaborating with the Community | Identify and integrate resources and services <i>for</i> families, students, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services <i>to</i> the community |

Figure 2. Epstein's parent involvement framework.

Epstein and Van Voorhis (2010) stated “affluent communities tend to have more positive family involvement, on average, *unless* schools and teachers in economically distressed communities work to build positive partnerships with their students’ families” (p. 12). Despite the view aforementioned, further research is needed to understand the nuances of parental involvement as it relates to African American males who have been referred for special education assessment.

Critical Theory (Cultural Reproduction/Critical Race Theory)

Skiba et al. (2006) used the theoretical framework *cultural reproduction* as a lens to understand disproportionality in special education. Initially, cultural reproduction was used to explain social class differences, but it now explains how the educational processes contributes to the reproduction of racial and economic disparity of larger society. Such disparities are “reproduced over time through institutional and individual patterns without ever reaching a conscious level of awareness on the part of those who

participate in those institutional actions” which results in maintaining “status quo at the expense of less privileged groups” (Skiba et al., 2006, p. 1426). These patterns can unintentionally reinforce inequities in the school system as seen in the special education programs (Skiba et al., 2006; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). The reproduction of institutionalized racism and inequity is demonstrated through Critical Race Theory (CRT) as well.

Mari Matsuda (1991) viewed critical race theory as the work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that work toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination. (p. 1331)

According to Delgado (1995), CRT evolved from the field of critical legal studies in the 1970s through the work of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman who were “distressed over the slow pace of racial reform in the United States” (p. xiii). In an attempt to understand racial issues and the overrepresentation of African American males in special education, the five tenets of Critical Race Theory were used to examine this issue.

First, CRT asserts that racism is a permanent component of American society and race is embedded as “normal, not aberrant” to the people affected in the culture (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv). Critical race theorists posit that racism is and has been an integral feature of the United States life, law, and culture and any attempt to eliminate racial inequities must be grounded in the socio-historical legacy of racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Thus, it is through this lens of race and all its manifestations that CRT challenges racial

oppression and subjugation in legal, institutional, and educational domains (Reynolds, 2010).

Second, CRT scholars (Crenshaw, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) argued that the United States was built on property rights, which historically, were the rights of Whites only. Whereas civil rights were on the premise of providing human rights to people of color who were once considered property. As “Whiteness” became the ultimate property, public education became a property right that primarily serviced the interest of Whites perpetuating racial stratification. Those in possession of such property dictate what is considered normative behaviors, so failure to adhere and comply with those norms may prohibit development of positive relationships in public institutions such as schools (Reynolds, 2010). CRT questions the position and privilege that comes with being White in the United States and seeks to challenge ideas such as meritocracy, fairness, and objectivity in a society that has a legacy of exclusion and racial discrimination (Crenshaw , 1993).

Third, CRT argues that Whites have been the “primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation” such as White women who benefitted from affirmative action, which only helped to further advance the Whites (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1999; McCoy, 2006).

Fourth, CRT scholars find it important to examine “interest-convergence” where the interest intersects with Whites and people of color. The underlining assumption of interest-convergence is that many Whites will tolerate racial advances for African Americans only when it promotes White self-interest (Delgado, 1995). According to Bell

(1980), the 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* demonstrated the tenet of interest-convergence. The thought is that the Supreme Court supported the advances for Blacks in the *Brown* case because it served the advances of Whites in the United States, supporting human rights (Bell, 1980). Bell (1980) argued that Whites would support racial justice only to the extent that such support would benefit their own interest.

Fifth, CRT argues that the experiential knowledge of people of color, otherwise known as “voice” or “story-telling” is appropriate, legitimate, and an integral part to analyzing and understanding racial inequality (Ladson-Billings, 1999). According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001)

the voice-of-color thesis holds that because of their different histories and experiences with oppression, African American, Indian, Asian, and Latino/a writers and thinkers may be able to communicate to their White counterparts matters that the Whites are unlikely to know. (p. 9)

With regards to the special education placement of African American males, storytelling can be a powerful tool for parents to narrate their unique experiences as participants in the referral process of African American males in special education, in which they are able to “apply their own unique perspectives to assess law’s master narratives” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 9).

Drawing on CRT, the meanings of disability are “historically constituted in U.S. society through the endemic nature of racism” (Marks et al., 2010, p. 5). Moreover, with the construct of race, the deficit model has become the “normative discourse” in which students of color are identified as less intelligent, able, and equipped to succeed than their

White counterparts (Erevelles, Kanga, & Middleton, 2006). As a result, students of color are often misdiagnosed and overrepresented in special education (Fierros & Conroy, 2002). Like race, disability has become a social construct that has been wrongfully used to maintain the status quo.

The theory of cultural reproduction relates to the CRT framework because both help to discern the central role of power in society and examine how presumed race-neutral structures in education actually reinforce racial borders and hierarchies (Marvin & Adams, 2002). Therefore, in order to effect change and address the disproportionality of African American males in special education it is imperative to examine the influence of oppression and power as it relates to the special education referral and placement process.

Summary

Blanchett (2010) summarized the issue of disproportionality of African American males in special education by stating that

segregation on the basis of race, poverty, disability/perceived disability, the intersection of race with disability/perceived disability and poverty, and the intersection of race and poverty is still a pervasive problem in our American educational system as a whole and in special education programs in particular. (p. 378)

Despite the legal implications of *Brown v. Board of Education*, IDEA, and efforts of the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) in mandating districts to address the disproportionality of African American students, these students in special education continue to be segregated. As a result, African American male students in special education have limited access to

the general education curriculum and general population, which reinforces the racial stratification and disparity in American society as a whole. Moreover, race and ethnicity remain both significant and often detrimental when placing students in special education, especially for students of color.

In order to examine the disproportionality of African American males in special education, this paper explained the history of racial disparities in special education and placed them in the context of segregation more broadly. Then, it explored major explanations for the persistence of the pattern such as the connection between poverty and learning disabilities as well as how teacher misperceptions about African American males contribute to the systematic over-referrals of African American male students. Lastly, the literature review examined the financial incentives related to special education and factors that affect parental involvement in the referral process. Although it is evident that both researchers and educators are aware that there is over identification in special education, there is still great difficulty to change practices that perpetuate such inequity in public schools.

In reviewing the literature that examines public school policies and practices and pertaining to special education for African American male students, an overarching question arises; why does the disproportionate amount of African American males in special education continue to exist despite the consistent data and research that show that disproportionality is a problem nationwide? Further, what factors influence the involvement of parents of African American male children in the special education referral process? How does the type of involvement for parents influence the special

education placement for their male children? By examining how race, gender, and disability intersect within the educational system, the researcher will examine the participation of parents in the special education referral process to deepen the understanding of disproportionality and attempt to provide recommendations to resolve such inequity for African American males in the special education program.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

This mixed method study aimed to capture the lived experiences of the parents of African American male children as they described their involvement in the special education referral process. By examining the beliefs, attitudes, experiences, and perceptions of the parents, this research may provide a deeper understanding of why the disproportionately of African American males in special education continues to exist. In addition, this research contributed to the literature related to special education and provided experiential insight for practitioners whose work is to support parents and students during the special education referral process.

This chapter outlines the methodology of the study including research design, research rationale, theoretical framework, research questions, instrumentation, evidence sources, participants, significance, limitations, data analysis, and subject position.

Research Design

This research design utilized both quantitative and qualitative data. A survey and individual (1:1) interview with the parents was conducted to provide a rich, in depth account of the parents' perceptions of the special education referral process of African American male students. Creswell (2003) stated quantitative strategies were generally experiments or surveys that involved complex experiments with multiple variables, treatments, and elaborate equation models. The experiments usually had random assignment of subjects to treatment conditions and quasi-experiments that used non-

randomized designs (Keppel, 1991). Included within quasi-experiments were single-subject designs. With surveys, there were cross-sectional and longitudinal studies using questionnaires or structured interviews for data collection, with the intent of generalizing from a sample to a population (Babbie, 1990). For this study, the researcher used both a survey questionnaire and a semi-structured interview to make generalizations about the parents' experiences during the IEP process for their children. Qualitative research, in contrast to experimental research, applies a widely used methodology that provides a voice for the participants while researching a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2005). Therefore, the lived experience of the African American parents who are often marginalized was the focus in this study to understand how the referral process influenced the educational experience and opportunities for African American male students. Marshall and Rossman (2010) indicated that a qualitative study was "pragmatic, interpretative, and grounded in the lived experiences of people" (p. 2). According to Creswell (1998)

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological tradition of inquiry that explores a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 15)

Patton (1998) espoused that qualitative research provides the researcher with the opportunity to interact with the participants in a non-threatening approach. By conducting 1:1 semi-structured interviews with the African American parents, the researcher was able to observe both the verbal and non-verbal cues of the participants such as tone of

voice, pauses or “ums” during speech, eye contact, body position, and facial expressions. If needed, the researcher asked clarifying questions to gain a better understanding of the participants’ thought processes or behaviors while responding to questions. The participants’ cues were documented and analyzed throughout this study in order to capture the nuances that may lead to a better understanding of responses given by the participants.

Research Rationale

Klingner and Boardman (2011) posited that there was a gap between research and practice in special education because there was “failure to conduct the different types of research best suited for addressing the complicated issues faced in schools” (p. 208). Usually researchers use either quantitative or qualitative data. However, with mixed methods, researchers have the ability to support real world applications with empirical data that is both quantifiable and descriptive (Klingner & Boardman, 2011). Moreover, mixed methods can support stronger scientific inferences better together rather than in isolation (Klingner & Boardman, 2011).

The rationale for using mixed methods research is that it can “demonstrate and explain quantitative findings, describe both the process and product, check reasons for unexpected effects, develop the basis for instruments, show the extent of generality, validate and triangulate other data, and fulfill social or political purposes” (Klingner & Boardman, 2011, p. 209).

Theoretical Framework

Phenomenology. The theoretical framework derived from a phenomenological perspective uses counter stories to illuminate the experiences that the African American parents shared regarding the special education process for their children. Phenomenological research begins with the acknowledgement that there is a gap in our understanding and that clarification or illumination will be of benefit. Johnson, McGowan, and Turner (2010) stated the purpose of phenomenological study was to explain the structure and meaning of the lived experiences of a group of people around a specific phenomenon. The researcher collected data from particular individuals who have experienced the phenomenon and developed a textural description of “what” the participants experienced and structural description of “how” the group experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). In phenomenology, the researcher “analyzes the data by reducing the information to significant statements or quotes and combines the statements into themes” (Creswell, 2007, p. 60).

Counter-storytelling. By conducting research that highlights the perspectives of African American parents, this study deepened the knowledge of parent-school relationships and discerned how multiple variables influence the special education referral process for African American males.

Counter-storytelling is a methodological approach that uses oral perspectives to convey stories and struggles often not validated by the dominant culture (Reynolds, 2010). The approach draws explicitly on experiential knowledge so that parent voice can be a focus of this study (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Matsuda et al., 1993; Solórzano &

Yosso, 2001). Delgado and Bernal (1999) referred to counter-storytelling as a method of telling the stories of individuals whose experiences have been silenced and an approach to both analyze and challenge the stories told from a hegemonic viewpoint.

There is limited research that examines African American parents' engagement in the special education referral process from the parents' first-hand account of their experiences (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Harry et al., 1995; Harry, Klingner, & Hart, 2005; Jasso, 2007; Trotman, 2001). By using "culturally sensitive research approaches" such as counter-storytelling, Linda Tillman (2002) described these approaches as "interpretive paradigms that offer greater possibilities for the use of alternative frameworks, co-constructions of multiple realities and experiences, and knowledge that can lead to improved educational opportunities for African Americans" (p. 5).

Through counter-story interviews, the participants for this study added value to the research by illuminating what factors may contribute to the overrepresentation of African American males in special education and how African American parent participation in the referral process can influence the educational services for their male children. With the voice of the African American parents involved in the special education referral process, critical race theory is examined as their counter-stories are acknowledged and authentic experiences are expressed during the research (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Thus, the mixed method study may help educators and policymakers understand how the experience of African American parents, in the referral process, can influence the input parents provide regarding the services African American males receive in special education programs.

Participants

Although the disproportionality of African American males is evident in public schools nationwide, gaining access to the school sites can be difficult due to confidentiality. Consistent with Teddlie and Yu (2007), the researcher chose convenience sampling because this type of sampling is most practical to acquire information from a group that may be difficult to gain access. By using convenience sampling, the researcher chose a sample of participants from a school district where the researcher worked previously and forged relationships with the district personnel, which made access to the participants and student information less difficult to obtain.

The participants selected for this study were African American parents or guardians that had African American males who had attended one of the four schools in the district and received special education services including, but not limited to, RSP, SDC, and Speech and Language. The researcher sent surveys to the parents of the 58 African American males who received special education services. Then, the researcher made phone contact with the 24 to identify eight African American parents to interview regarding their experience during the special education referral process for their sons. Since there were less than eight parents who volunteered for the interviews, the researcher sent a second request to solicit participants within seven days of the initial request. The second request was sent through the U.S. postal service. As a result of the second attempt, the researcher was able to obtain eight interviewees successfully.

Participation was voluntary and participants were able to end their participation in the study at any time. There were no consequences if the participants selected to choose not to participate or terminate participation.

There were 8 of the 24 parents who participated in the survey that also participated in the 1:1 interviews. The parent profile for the eight parent participants showed that three parents had children who were identified with a Speech/Language disability solely. Two parents had children with a Specific Learning Disability (SLD). Three parents had children who were identified as having both Speech/Language and SLD or Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). Seven parents' children were in elementary school and one child was in middle school (see Appendix B).

There were 24 parents who participated in the survey. Fifteen parents had elementary aged children, seven parents had middle school children, and two parents had children who were enrolled in high school. Ten children were identified with a Learning Disability (LD) and five were identified with Speech Language Impairment (SLI). The other nine children were identified with other disabilities or a combination of both LD and SLI (see Appendix B).

Setting

The researcher chose to conduct the study in a small school district established in 1881. Located in Contra Costa County, the district has a total four schools. Currently, there is one elementary school, one middle school, one high school, and one continuation high school. This small school district services four neighboring communities. However, the majority of the students that attend the district's schools reside in one of the four

communities. Many of these students live in the nearby public housing development surrounded by industrial factories and a major oil refinery. Of the approximately 1,600 students enrolled in the district (Ed-Data, 2013), the diverse student demographics consist of 30% Latino, 21% White, 20% African American, 10% Asian, 9% Two or More Races, 9% Filipino, and 1% American Indian or Alaska Native (Ed-Data, 2013). Approximately 75% of the students receive free or reduced lunch. Hence, environmental, poverty, and other socioeconomic variables have a direct influence on both the social and behavior outcomes for many of the students (Losen & Orfield, 2002).

The school district has a total of 236 students who receive special education services (Dataquest, 2013). Although African American males only represent 9.7% of the total student population, they disproportionately represent 24.57% of the total special education population (see Appendix C). Further, African American boys and girls make up the largest group of students identified under the Specific Learning Disability and Intellectually Disabled categories. Therefore, the researcher decided to examine the district-wide experiences of their parents during the IEP process across all ages and age groups.

As shown in Appendix D, 78 African American students are identified with learning disabilities, which include students who receive services in the district and non-public schools (Dataquest, 2013). Thirty-seven of the African American students are identified with Specific Learning Disability (SLD), while 13 students are identified with a Speech-Language Impairment (SLI). Similar to the district's data, the 24 parents for

this sample have children who have been identified as SLD followed by SLI (see Appendix B).

Through an examination of the district-wide referral processes, this study examined whether African American parents or guardians of African American males experienced specific trends or systemic practices that contributed to the overrepresentation of students referred to special education. For example, Harry, Rueda, and Kalyanpur (1999) conducted a study with a group of African American parents and advocates from North Carolina. They expressed concerns to the local school board, government, and Office of Civil Rights regarding the misuse of policies and procedures that related to IDEA, Public Law 94-142, which was intended to provide students with a Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE) and safeguard parental rights during the special education process. This study showed how school personnel viewed parents from a deficit model when they attended the IEP meetings. IEP's were pre-written without the parents' input, parents were told to sign the IEP documents without having a formal meeting, and decisions were made by school personnel unilaterally without having parents participate as a part of the decision making process (Harry, Rueda, & Kalyanpur, 1999). Trends or practices such as these that impede parental involvement can possibly lead to disproportionality of African American males in special education.

Pilot Study

An initial pilot study was conducted with a parent, two teachers, and the school psychologist at the middle school within the school district to inform the researcher's study. The pilot study contained questions regarding the policies and procedures

conducted during the IEP referral process such as listing and describing the effectiveness of the intervention strategies, described the assessment tools used to identify students, discussing how parents were notified and engaged in the special education process, along with trends of highest incidence with regards to placement and identification. Due to the high responses regarding the need for parental involvement during the students' educational process, the researcher revised the interview questions in order to focus more on the parents' perspective and satisfaction with the special education services provided to their children.

As a result of the input from the participants in the pilot study, the researcher initially developed 14 questions that addressed the research questions regarding parent participation and satisfaction with services during the IEP decision making process. In addition, the researcher created a parent survey. Special education professionals and parents reviewed these questions for feedback. The researcher reworded the questions to provide clarification and reduced the number of the questions from 14 to 11 based on the suggestions provided (see Appendix E).

Instrumentation

This study consisted of two distinct phases in the collection and analysis of the data, which is known as "sequential timing" (Creswell, 2003, p. 66). In the first phase, the researcher collected and analyzed the quantitative data from the parent involvement survey (see Appendix E). In the second phase, the researcher collected and analyzed the qualitative data from the 1:1 parent interview protocols (see Appendix F). Conducting the research in two phases allowed the data to be collected at two different periods of time,

thus, helping the researcher fill in any gaps in order to provide a deeper understanding of the experiences African American parents had during the special education process for their children.

Phase One

Research Question 1: What are the African American parents' experiences and perspectives regarding the special education referral process?

During the first phase of the study, the researcher distributed surveys to the 58 parents identified, utilizing the adaptation of both the Parent Survey – Special Education, Form B developed by the National Center for Special Education Accountability Monitoring (NCSEAM) in 2005 and Joyce Epstein's School and Family Partnerships Survey (Epstein & Salinas, 1993) as the survey instrument for this study (see Appendix E). The purpose of the NCSEAM Parent Survey-Special Education Form B is to assess the parents' level of satisfaction with the special education referral process and the services provided for their children. Since parent participation in school and the IEP process are directly tied to the research questions for this study, the adaptation of both surveys helped to properly align the survey with the research questions. The survey measured different aspects of the parents' involvement in special education that included the schools effort to partner with parents, parent satisfaction with the special education services provided to students, impact of special education services on family's outcomes, and parent participation in their child's education.

NCSEAM consulted with families, parent advocates, special education staff, and community stakeholders across the United States to vet the survey. Then, NCSEAM

conducted a National Item Validation Survey from 2002-2005 with a sample of over 2,500 parents of children receiving special education services who vetted the survey items.

To ensure validity, NCSEAM used the Rasch (1961) analysis to confirm that the survey items measured the intended purpose. It was determined that reliability of 0.90 or above could be achieved with at least 25 survey items. Variations of the survey were used nationwide by institutions including the Pennsylvania Department of Education, the California Department of Education, and the Florida Department of Education.

The School and Family Partnership Survey (Epstein & Salinas, 1993) identified the parents' type of involvement with their children's education and the school's efforts to elicit parent participation. Epstein and Salinas (1993) worked with educators and parents to pilot the survey. The pilot sample included 243 teachers and 2,115 parents from 15 inner city elementary and middle schools in Baltimore, Maryland. The six page survey consisted of 10 questions with 80 items of information regarding the family attitudes about the school, family practices of involvement in the child's education, school practices to inform and involve families, information desired by families about children, classes, schools, and community services, homework patterns, family background and experiences, and open-ended comments.

Epstein and Salinas (1993) used the Cronbach's alpha to measure reliability because the survey included Likert-type questions (Mueller, 1996). The reliabilities of the parent scales ranged from 0.44 to 0.91, which helps researchers to determine the survey items' usefulness.

Research Question 2: How does the parents' involvement compare to the parents' evaluation of information disseminated to the parents during the referral process?

In order to examine the African American parents' perspective regarding the IEP process, type of parent involvement, and satisfaction with special education services, the researcher adapted a bank of 52 items combined from both surveys aforementioned (see Appendix E). The survey items 1-17 contained statements regarding the schools efforts to partner with the parents during the IEP process such as evaluation of the information parents received regarding the IEP decision making process. Survey items 18-30 related to the level of satisfaction with the special education services. The next 25 statements were adapted from Epstein and Salinas's (1993) parental involvement survey using the six types of parental involvement as the framework. Survey items 31-43 related to the schools' efforts to increase parental involvement. Survey items 44-52 related to the parents' behaviors that foster parental involvement in their children's education.

For the survey items 1-52, the Likert scale ranged from a highest value of 4 to the lowest value of 1. The value of 4 is given for "Strongly Agree," "Most Days," or "Well" responses. The value of 3 is given for "Agree," "Once a Week," or "OK" responses. The value of 2 is given for "Disagree," "Once in a while," or "Poorly." The lowest value of 1 is given on the scale for "Strongly Disagree" or "Never" responses.

To gain insight from the parents' suggestions regarding what practices would help to facilitate an increased level of parental partnership with the school, three open-ended questions (survey items 53-55) were asked at the end of the survey.

Figure 3 delineates how the literature and research questions connected with the survey and interview instruments.

| Research Question | Instrument | Rationale | Justification |
|---|--|--|---|
| 1. What are the African American parents' experiences and perspectives regarding the special education referral process? | Survey questions: 53, 54, & 55 Interview questions: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, & 12 | Both the survey and interview questions ask open ended questions so the parents can (a) explain how they were involved as a partner with the school, (b) evaluate the services and information provided to improve their child's progress, (c) identify the parents' role in the decision making process during the IEP, and (d) provide suggestions to enhance the parents' participation during the special education process. | Parent involvement in special education is federally mandated and the importance of parental participation has increased since the inception of the IDEA amendments of 1997 (Turnbull, 2001). The priorities in the original law and the reauthorization of 2004 include safeguards for the parents such as due process, parent participation in the IEP planning, shared decision making with the evaluation, placement, services and collaboration between the home-school (Zionts et al., 2003). |
| 2. How does the parents' involvement compare to the parents' evaluation of information disseminated to the parents during the referral process? | Survey questions: Parenting 31 and 50 Communicating 32, 35, 41, and 51 Volunteering 33, 39, 45, 47, and 49 Learning at Home 34, 38, 46, and 48 Decision Making 37, 40, 42, and 44 Collaborating with the | The survey items address to what extent parents are encouraged to be involved in school activities based upon Epstein's (1993) six types of parent involvement: Type 1-Parenting Type 2—Communicating Type 3—Volunteering Type 4—Learning at Home Type 5—Decision | The behavior of school professionals have disempowered parents by demonstrating disrespect towards the parents viewpoints, focusing on the children's deficiencies, discounting cultural differences in parenting styles (Kalyanpur & Rao, 1991). Epstein and Salinas (1993, 2007) demonstrates how parental involvement can be solicited by school sites to cultivate a |

| | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
| | Community 36, 43, and 52 | Making Type 6—Collaborating with the Community | positive relationship between school and home that have positive outcomes for students’ success. |
| 3. How does the parents’ involvement compare to the parents’ perception of their involvement in the decision making process during the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) meeting? | Survey questions: 5, 7, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, and 17 Interview questions: 2, 4, 5, 6, and 12 | The survey items evaluation to what degree do parents believe they were a member of the IEP team and played an integral part in the IEP decision making process The interview questions ask open ended questions, so parents can explain how they were included in the IEP process: | Research shows a passive pattern of parental participation and the “passivity among minority families is often interpreted as reflecting numerous parental difficulties, such as lack of knowledge of their rights, or of system procedures and policies; difficulties with transportation, child care, or work” (Harry et al., 1995, p. 364). Due to the lack of cultural understanding, research shows a common mismatch between the parents’ actual desire to be involved versus the teachers' perception of parental involvement or lack thereof (Zionts et al., 2003). |
| 4. To what extent does the parents’ involvement compare with the parents’ satisfaction with the educational services for African American male students? | Survey questions: 18-30 Interview questions: 6, 7, 8, and 11 | Survey and interview items examine to what degree parents are satisfied with the educational services provided for their child. | Harry (1992a) and Bennett (1988), demonstrated how parental participation was structured in a way that “delegitimize parental perspective and that parents often withdrew from participation in confusion or resentment” (p. 363). |

Figure 3. Research questions aligned to the literature, survey, and interview instruments.

Phase Two

Research Question 3: How does the parents' involvement compare to the parents' perception of their involvement in the decision making process during the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) meeting?

During the second phase, the researcher interviewed eight African American parents using set interview questions adapted from the Zionts et al. (2003) study (see Appendix E). Zionts et al. (2003) conducted semi-structured interviews with 24 African American parents to analyze the parents' perception of the school's level of cross-cultural sensitivity and the way cross-cultural sensitivity can influence parental level of satisfaction with the special education system. This study found the relationship between cultural differences and satisfaction with the special education system was related to the respect and levels of comfort between the parents, teachers, and children. For this study, the researcher conducted semi-structured 1:1 interviews with eight parents and the study did not focus on cross-cultural sensitivity. The purpose of the interviews were to provide parents the opportunity to share their lived experiences as it related to the IEP process and illuminated to what degree did their parental involvement and experience in the IEP decision making process influence their children's educational services overall.

Interview questions 1 and 2 asked parents how they were involved in their child's education and their opinion regarding the school's effort to develop a "partnership" with parents. The next three questions (3-5) asked the parents to share their experience during the IEP process and their involvement with the IEP decision making process. Questions 6, 7, and 8 asked parents about their satisfaction with services provided to their child. The

last three questions (9-11) asked the parents for suggestions to assist schools with improving the IEP process and increasing parental involvement.

Research Question 4: To what extent does the parents' involvement compare with the parents' satisfaction with the educational services for African American male students?

Overall, the interview questions gave the researcher the opportunity to compare how the sample of parents' responses to the survey questions were similar or dissimilar to the sample of parents' interview responses and helped to provide clarity regarding their experience that may not be as detailed in the survey. The interview questions were open-ended in order to enable the researcher to illicit the participant's authentic thoughts and experience (Creswell, 2009). By using a semi-structured interview protocol, the researcher provided the flexibility for the participants to speak freely about their lived experience and help to construct meaning as it relates to the phenomenon being studied.

Data Collection

The researcher's mixed methods approach emphasized the underlying assumption that collecting diverse types of data provides a deeper understanding of the special education process from the perspective of African American parents. In the first phase of data collection, parent surveys were administered and collected in order to generalize results to a specific parent and student population. A 1:1 semi-structured interview, which included open-ended questions, helped to collect detailed accounts from the parent participants in the second phase of data collection.

In the first phase, the Internal Review Board (IRB) procedures were followed. A letter was sent to the district superintendent, special education director, and site principals to inform them of the purpose of the survey and requested permission to conduct the research. In addition, the researcher met with the superintendent and director to discuss and answer questions regarding the study before the study was approved. After approval, the sample of 58 parents was identified with the assistance of the school district's special education director and site administrators. The researcher attended parent meetings such as Parent Teacher Association (PTA), School Site Council (SSC), Community Advisory Council (CAC) for Special Education, and other parent groups to recruit parents. At the meetings, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and invited parents to meet with the researcher after the meeting if they were interested in receiving additional information and/or interested in participating in the research study. In addition, the researcher solicited help from the special education teachers to reach out to parents who may be interested in the study.

The researcher provided each site principal two copies of the letter of introduction and survey to distribute to each parent who was identified as having an African American male student receiving special education services. One survey was given to the student in a sealed envelope to take home and the other survey was enclosed in a stamped envelope to mail the surveys home to the parent/guardian of the students listed on the envelopes. With each survey, the researcher provided a contact number for the parents if there were any questions and/or concerns. In addition, the researcher requested that the surveys and informed consent forms were returned within one week of the distribution. Initially, there

were 12 surveys returned, so the researcher mailed a second copy to the parents' homes using the 47 addresses available on the Special Education Information System (SEIS). Five additional surveys were returned as a result of the second round of distributing the surveys. Then, the researcher collected seven additional surveys by calling the parents' phone numbers and asking the parents to complete the survey over the phone. In total, 24 surveys were returned. The return rate was equivalent to 41% of the total parent sample. This return rates falls within the typical return rate for surveys by mail, which is 30-50% (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2006).

The researcher followed up with those who volunteered to participate in the interview process within one week from their returned response. The parents that signed the consent forms were called by phone and eight parents were selected in the order that the parents agreed to participate in a follow up 1:1 interview. The interviews were held in a two- to four-week timeframe that varied depending on the parents' availability.

Each participant received a copy of the interview questions prior to the scheduled interview to review. The participants had the option to participate in the semi-structured interviews face to face or by phone. The location of the interview (school site, district office, home, or public place) was mutually determined by the participants and researcher based upon what was comfortable and had a suitable noise level to hear the participants' interview responses. The length of the interview was approximately 30-45 minutes. The researcher used a digital audio recorder and handwritten notes during all interviews to accurately collect data that documented what participants said. The researcher shared the

data collected with the parent participants to review and ensure accuracy. Then, the data collected was analyzed for major themes and categories.

To provide anonymity, all the names of the participants and school sites were replaced with pseudonyms. The researcher used a numbering system for the surveys, interview recordings, and notes instead of the participants' names for confidentiality purposes. The transcriptions were conducted by a professional business that maintained confidentiality and the transcriptions were kept on an external drive using a numbering system. After the study, the surveys, transcriptions, and notes were carefully destroyed.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this data analysis was to examine if there was a correlation between parental involvement and the parents' evaluation of the information received, decision making opportunities, and satisfaction with the special education services provided.

Phase One

The researcher used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0 to analyze the data including descriptive statistics, mean comparisons, and correlations to understand present school district program practices and needs. Through these analyses of the survey responses, the researcher was able to construct a profile of the schools' practices that either helped or hindered the parents' ability to be involved, informed, and actively involved in the decision making process for their child's education. The researcher created tables to display the quantitative data from the survey (see Appendix H, Tables 1-11).

In order to gain a better understanding of the parents' experiences during the special education referral process, the researcher analyzed the responses of parents to the 55 survey items as they related to the research questions (see Figure 3). The researcher used the quantitative data to calculate the mean of the parents' responses in the survey instrument and provided a descriptive statistical analysis regarding the parents' types of involvement and the parents experience during the special education process.

First, the researcher used descriptive statistics to examine the parents' responses to the survey items that related to Epstein and Salinas' (1993) six types of parental involvement (see Appendix E). The researcher identified the variables and type of parental involvement for each parent based on the parents' responses to the survey items, ranging from 1 to 4 on the Likert scale. The researcher calculated the mean from the parents' responses to the survey items that corresponded to each type of parent involvement. Then, the researcher compared the mean of the parents' scaled scores to the cut off points for each parental involvement type. Using a statistical analysis software program, the researcher assigned each parent participant 1-6 point values based on how closely their responses related to the six types of parental involvement respectively.

The researcher compared the parent's type of involvement to the mean from the parents' responses to the survey items that related to the three variables: dissemination of information, decision making process, and provision of services. The purpose of comparing the mean of the types of parental involvement to the three variables (information, decision making, and satisfaction) was to see if there was a correlation between the parents' involvement at the school site and their perception regarding the

IEP process. The researcher hypothesized that the more the parents' involvement increased, the more the parents would have a positive agreeability with the three variables aforementioned.

Phase Two

After the researcher examined the quantitative analyses in phase one, an analysis of the qualitative data collected from the interviews in phase two was conducted. Patton (1998) discerned that data analysis is searching for meaning from open-ended data by reducing non-essential information and identifying patterns. In order to make meaning of the qualitative data, the researcher implemented four methodical steps to identify patterns and themes in the research that included (a) transcription reflection, (b) constant comparative technique, (c) open and color coding, and (d) data clustering.

Interview questions 1 and 2 asked parents how they were involved in their child's education and their opinion regarding the school's effort to develop a "partnership" with parents. The next three questions (3-5) asked the parents to share their experience during the IEP process and their involvement with the IEP decision making process. Questions 6, 7, and 8 asked parents about their satisfaction with services provided to their child. The last three questions (9-11) asked the parents for suggestions to assist schools with improving the IEP process and increasing parental involvement. By analyzing the parents' responses to the interview questions, the researcher was able to examine the parents' lived experience during the special education referral process.

After each semi-structured interview was conducted, the audio recordings were professionally transcribed. The researcher read each transcription while listening to the

audio aloud to correct any potential errors. The researcher read each entire transcript twice and recorded any observations or reflections about the interview using a designated reflective notebook. By re-reading and listening to the audio, this process provided the researcher the opportunity to accurately record the participants' voices and get an accurate sense of the text with regards to the participants' voice inflections, pauses, and emphasis (Darlington & Scott, 2002).

Next, the researcher used the constant comparative method of data technique. With this technique, the researcher read the text and analyzed the data simultaneously to develop key concepts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss (1967) identified four stages of the constant comparative method (a) comparing incidents applicable to each category, (b) integrating categories and their properties, (c) delimiting the theory, and (d) writing the theory. These stages are not linear; rather, they overlap throughout the data collection and analysis activities.

The researcher used color-coded significant findings in the data and synthesized how the data was interconnected in a coherent manner. For example, the researcher used color words or phrases that signified satisfaction with services in blue, levels of communication in yellow, or decision making processes in green. After color-coding two interviews, the researcher labeled the highlighted passages and categorized the data using a systematic open coding method. Strauss and Corbin (1990) described open coding as the "process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (p. 61). By examining the interview transcriptions for key words or common themes that developed from the participants' responses, open coding allowed

the researcher the ability to compare and contrast the data, develop questions, and develop initial categories. Since open coding does not have to follow a certain order, the categories were created using actual words or descriptions from the participant's interviews (Creswell, 2007).

Using both the transcript and notes recorded from the interviews, the researcher used open coding to identify the emerging themes from the text. By using concise phrases, the researcher was able to develop conceptual understanding from the participant's experiences.

The researcher clustered the themes by similarities or particular concepts. The researcher looked for patterns from the themes and outlined any converging ideas. Then, the themes were structured using a table that exemplified the specific thematic categories as it related to the research questions such as the Epstein's model of parent engagement, quotes from the interviews along with the page numbers, and running time to reference from the audio recordings and/or transcription. After, the researcher completed the data analysis process for each interview. The researcher developed "clusters of meaning" by combining the themes and tables into one master table and then interpreted the themes from all of the interviews combined.

With research, the validity and reliability of the evidence collected is imperative. Triangulation of the research is one method to help to support the cross-data validity of the findings. Thus, the use of multiple data collection methods, sources, and perspectives were used in this study. Through the collection of various sources of information from the surveys and 1:1 interviews, the theme(s) were both corroborated and validated as

credible evidence (Creswell, 2011; Merriam, 1998). In addition to triangulation, member checking was a useful way to maintain the integrity of the research. In this process, the researcher asks one or more participants to review the description and themes documented to see if the information captures an accurate account or representation of the participants' viewpoint (Creswell, 2011). The researcher asked each participant to review data for accuracy. In addition, the researcher had colleagues cross-reference to ensure the information was reported accurately and without any biases.

Limitations of the Study

There were possible limitations from the data. First, the school district is relatively small with less than 2,000 students. Moreover, the special education program has 300 students (K-12). As a school district with approximately 30% of its special education program consisting of African American students and even less as males, the options for participants in this study were relatively small. Because, this study only included interviews with eight parents, the opinions and experiences of the participants in this study may not speak to all African American parents' experiences in the special education process. In addition, the participants selected may vary in socioeconomic status, years in the school district, years in the special education program, and other varying factors that may influence their perspective of the special education referral and placement process.

In order to find out more information about the referral process within our district, the researcher interviewed parents who had their male child identified in need of special education through the specific school district and had been in the district for three or

more years. The time and the origination of special education identification helped with the validity the parents and/or students experience in the district. However, the selection process may not capture all the parents' experiences. Also, the parent participants who volunteered may influence the data results to be positive or negative responses, depending on their experiences.

While this study focused on the experiences of African American male students and their families, other genders and/or ethnic groups may experience the special education programs differently. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized for all school districts, but may be helpful to districts that have an overrepresentation of African American males in special education.

Subject Position

Qualitative researchers “conduct the inquiry in a subjective, biased manner” (Creswell, 2005, p. 39). The researcher for this study is an African American female who works in the field of public education, so there is awareness that there is the potential for the researcher's biases. In order to reduce bias, the researcher used the process of bracketing which can be defined as the act of suspending judgment about the natural world preceding phenomenological analysis (Husserl, 2000). The researcher understood her position as a previous employee of the district might influence the way that those interviewed chose to answer the questions. Therefore, member checking was implemented to remove the researcher's bias if applicable. The participants in the study provided the researcher feedback and suggestions on actions, thoughts, and behaviors to help eliminate any potential bias.

The researcher hopes this study added value in understanding what happens to students and families during the special education referral process that leads to overrepresentation in special education and what can be done by educators and/or parents to help reduce the imbalance of educational opportunities for African American male students.

Assumption

The researcher assumes that the participants were open and provided an accurate account of their experience(s).

CHAPTER 4

MIXED METHODS RESULTS

This mixed method study is aimed to capture the lived experiences of the parents of African American male children as they described their involvement in the special education referral process. The researcher compared the relationship between Epstein's six types of parental involvement framework and (a) the parents' perception of how information was disseminated during the IEP process, (b) the way parents were included in the decision making process, and (c) the extent of parental satisfaction with the services provided to their male children enrolled in the special education program.

This researcher conducted two phases of data collection through the use of a survey and semi-structured 1:1 interviews. During the first phase, the researcher collected quantitative data using an adapted NCSEAM (2005) and Epstein and Salinas' (1993) survey instrument that was distributed to 58 parents as described in Chapter 3. There were 24 parents who completed and returned the survey. The return rate was equivalent to 41% of the total parent sample. This return rates falls within the typical return rate for surveys by mail, which is 30-50% (Lodico et al., 2006). During the second phase, the researcher collected qualitative data by conducting eight semi-structured 1:1 interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to examine the beliefs, attitudes, experiences, and perceptions of the parents to understand the parents' lived experiences during the special education process for their African American male children.

Each parent was identified to participate in this study through a purposive sampling procedure in which the participants were preselected using a specific criteria as

Maxwell (1997) described as “particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices” (p. 87). The purposive selection process for this study was established by mailing surveys and a letter of introduction to the 58 parents of African American male students that received special education services in the school district. To increase the response rate once the surveys were returned and documented, the surveys were mailed again to all parents who had not already completed them. In addition, phone calls were made to parents who did not respond to the first two survey attempts. A total of 24 surveys were collected and analyzed, equivalent to a 41% response rate. Next, the researcher interviewed eight responding participants to deepen the knowledge of their experiences and make further connections between parent involvement and the special education process. The sample size recommendation for phenomenological studies ranges from 6 to 10 (Creswell, 1998, p. 64; Morse, 1994, p. 225). Therefore, the number of participants was consistent with sample sizes from other qualitative studies.

This chapter is divided into two parts. First, the quantitative data findings from Epstein and Salinas and the NCSEAM adapted survey will be identified. Then, the qualitative data results will be reported based upon themes that evolved from the parent interviews. Both parts of the chapter include the research questions and discussion of the findings.

Phase One: Quantitative Results

During the first phase of the data analysis, the researcher analyzed the 55 survey items as they related to the research questions (see Figure 1). Survey responses were

analyzed to identify the parents' perceptions of school practices that either supported or impeded engagement in the special education referral process. The researcher hypothesized that the parents' mean scores for the types of parent involvement would correlate positively with the parents' responses to the other three variables that included dissemination of information, decision making, and satisfaction with provision of services. The researcher used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0 to analyze the data including descriptive statistics, mean comparisons, and correlations to identify the parents' types of involvement and the parents' experiences during the special education process. The data was compared to understand how the type of parental involvement related to the parents' experiences during the special education process.

The analysis of 24 parent surveys provided a profile of the parents' experiences of being informed and a part of the decision making process for their child's education. The researcher created tables to display the quantitative data from the survey. In addition, a narrative was written to explain the findings.

Descriptive Statistics

The calculations of the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation for the nine variables were performed. Table 1 (see Appendix H) displays the descriptive statistics for all the key variables and the Cronbach's alphas (Cronbach, 1951). The Cronbach's alphas for the parenting variables and the other measures ranged from 0.53 to 0.96. This high degree of internal consistency is similar to Epstein and Salinas's (1993) reliability of 0.44 to 0.91 in the School and Family Partnerships Survey (1993). The

Cronbach's alpha for the Type 1-Parenting could not be calculated since the variable only consisted of two items. The parent type with a high internal consistency is Type 6-Collaborating with the Community. The Cronbach alphas for the other three measures (dissemination of information, decision making, and provision of services) were also high, ranging from 0.85 to 0.96.

The parenting type with the highest mean score was Type 1-Parenting. The lowest average score was Type 3-Volunteering. The standard deviation was 0.40 to 0.66, indicating that there was a significant variance in the parents' responses to the survey items (see Appendix H, Table 1). The mean score for Dissemination of Information indicated that, overall, parents felt the school provided them with information related to the IEP process such as parental rights, student goals, and evaluation reports. The mean score for the Decision Making Process indicated on average that parents believed they were a member of the IEP team and played an integral part in the IEP decision making process. Moreover, the scores for Provision of Services indicated that parents were satisfied with the educational services provided for their child.

Table 2 (see Appendix H) shows the distribution of parenting types across the participants. The parent participants were assigned to a "dominant" parenting type based on their highest parenting type score. Those who had a highest score for more than one parenting type were assigned to a parenting category that was considered to be most involved, ranging from Type 1 to Type 6, with Type 6 being the highest. For example, if a participant had a score of 4.0 for Parenting (Type 1), Communicating (Type 2), and Learning at Home (Type 4), they were classified as having a parenting type that reflects

Learning at Home (Type 4). There were four dominant parent types among the parent participants as identified from the data results (see Appendix H, Table 2).

Research Question 1

What are the African American parents' experiences and perspectives regarding the special education referral process?

In order to gain a general sense of the parents' perspective regarding the special education referral process, the researcher analyzed the content of the parents' written responses to three open-ended survey questions as follows (a) what parental involvement practice has helped you most and why?, (b) what is the best thing that this school could do for next year to help you with your child?, and (c) any other suggestions? The researcher documented the parents' responses verbatim and identified key words directly from the parents' responses (see Appendix G). There were 15 out of the 24 parents who responded to the open-ended questions.

The responses indicated that the parents believed the IEPs were informative; timely communication from the teachers via conferences, phone, email, and/or written communication was vital to keeping the parents informed; and the on-going communication enabled the parents to respond and help their children as needed. However, the parents wrote that more services and/or resources such as tutoring and 1:1 para-educators were needed to improve the schools' current practices. Although nine parents appreciated the communication that they received regarding their child's progress, three parents expressed the need for more consistent communication from the school via newsletters with school and community updates. One parent suggested that the

schools create a set schedule for parents to be able to volunteer more regularly to foster more parent involvement. Another parent suggested that the school personnel provide more flexibility and listen to their children, rather than make general assumptions.

Research Question 2

How does the parents' involvement compare to the parents' evaluation of information disseminated to the parents during the referral process?

The parent involvement type was calculated using the item response means corresponding to each parenting type. Pearson correlations were used to determine the degree of association between the parenting type and perceptions of dissemination of information (see Appendix H, Table 3).

As the parents' use of parenting, communicating, learning at home, and collaborating with the community increased, the parents' perceptions that the school provided them with information related to the IEP process such as parental rights, student goals, and evaluation reports increased.

Next, the average scores for Dissemination of Information were calculated for each parenting type (see Appendix H, Table 4). When comparing groups of respondents, these differences were not tested for statistical significance due to low statistical power. However, the parenting type with the highest Dissemination of Information score was Type 6-Collaborating with the Community followed by Type 4-Learning at Home. This data would suggest that parents who identify themselves as collaborative with the community perceived that they had access to more information than the other parent types.

In Table 5 (see Appendix H), the parents' responses to the survey questions (see Appendices E and G) indicate the parents' satisfaction with dissemination of information. These survey statements related to procedures and documents federally mandated during the IEP process. One hundred percent (100%) of the 24 parent participants strongly agreed or agreed with survey statement, "I was given information about my rights as a parent or provided a special education booklet regarding procedures." In addition, almost all (95.8%) of the parents strongly agreed or agreed with survey statement number two that "At the IEP meeting, we discussed accommodations and modifications that my child would need." The majority (91.7%) of the parents strongly agreed or agreed with survey statement number three, "My child's evaluation report (written summary) is written in terms I understand." In response to survey statements not connected to federal mandates, 29.2% of the parents strongly disagreed or disagreed with survey statement number four, "I fully understood the special education process and my rights." There was approximately one-third (29%) of the parents who disagreed with survey statement number 10, "I was given all reports and evaluations related to my child prior to the IEP meeting." In addition, more than a third (37.5%) of the parents disagreed with survey statement number eight, "The school explains what options parents have if they disagree with a decision of the school."

Research Question 3

How does the parents' involvement compare to the parents' perception of their involvement in the decision making process during the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) meeting?

Pearson correlations were used to determine the degree of association between the parenting types and perceptions of decision making.

The correlations in Table 6 (see Appendix H) revealed that scores for Decision Making were significantly and positively correlated with Type 1-Parenting, Type 2-Communicating, and Type 4-Learning at Home. These results indicated that as the parents' use of parenting, communicating, and learning at home increased, the parents' perceptions of their involvement with the IEP team and decision making process also increased. The average scores for Decision Making were calculated for each parenting type (see Appendix H, Table 7), although these differences were not tested for statistical significance due to low statistical power.

In Table 8 (see Appendix H), most of the parents (96%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement number 11, "Teachers and administrators encourage me to participate in the decision making process." All (100%) of the parents agreed or strongly agreed with number 16, "Teachers treat me as a team member." On the other hand, two-thirds (70%) of the parents disagreed or strongly disagreed with survey statement number five, "I have been asked for my opinion about how well special education services are meeting my child's needs." There were more than one-third (42%) of the parents who disagreed or strongly disagreed with survey statement number 17, "IEP meetings are scheduled at a time and place that are convenient for me."

Research Question 4

To what extent does the parents' involvement compare with the parents' satisfaction with the educational services for African American male students?

Pearson correlations were used to determine the degree of association between parenting type and satisfaction with provision of services (see Appendix H, Table 9).

The data indicated that scores for Provision of Services were significantly and positively correlated with Type 1-Parenting, Type 2-Communicating, Type 4-Learning at Home, and Type 6-Collaborating with the Community. As the parents' use of parenting, communicating, learning at home, and collaborating with the community increased, parents' satisfaction with the educational services provided for their child also increased.

Next, the average scores for Provision of Services were calculated for each parenting type (see Appendix H, Table 10). These differences were not tested for statistical significance due to low statistical power. The parenting type with the highest average Provision of Services score was for Type 6-Collaborating with the Community ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 0.34$), followed by Type 4-Learning at Home ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 0.81$), Type 1-Parenting ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 0.42$), and Type 2-Communicating ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 0.73$).

Most (92%) of the parents agreed or strongly agreed with survey number 18, "My child's school provides my child with all the services documented on my child's IEP" and survey number 23, "My child's school regularly evaluates whether my child's program continues to meet his/her needs" (see Appendix H, Table 11).

In contrast, close to one-third (29%) of the parents disagreed or strongly disagreed with survey item number 20 that their "child's school responds appropriately to my child's needs." Similarly, close to one-third (29%) of the parents disagreed or strongly disagreed with survey item number 22, "My child's school gives me enough information

to know whether or not my child is making adequate progress.” Last, over one-third (39%) of the parents that disagreed or strongly disagreed with survey statement number 21, “My child’s school has helped me find resources in my community such as after school programs, social services, etc.”

Quantitative Summary

Phase One presented an analysis of the data from this study that surveyed 24 African American parents who have African American male students enrolled in the special education program. The purpose of the survey was to analyze how the parents’ type of involvement compared to their perception of the dissemination of information, decision making, and satisfaction of services during the special education referral process.

The parenting types with the largest percentage of participants were Type 1-Parenting ($n = 9$, 37.5%) and Type 4-Learning at Home ($n = 7$, 29.2%) followed by Type 2-Communicating ($n = 4$, 16.7%) and Type 6-Collaborating with the Community ($n = 4$, 16.7%). Type 3-Volunteering and Type 5-Decision Making were not dominant parenting types for this sample. The parenting type with the highest mean score was Type 1-Parenting, whereas Type 3-Volunteering was the parenting type with the lowest average score.

The quantitative results of Chapter 4 indicated a strong, positive correlation for the parents’ type of parental involvement and their perception regarding (a) dissemination of information, (b) decision making process, and (c) satisfaction with special education services. The quantitative research findings in this study support the hypothesis, as the

parents' involvement increased, the parents' positive agreement with the three variables aforementioned also increased.

As the parents' use of parenting, communicating, learning at home, and collaborating with the community increased, the parents' perceptions that the school provided them with information related to the IEP process such as parental rights, student goals, and evaluation reports also increased. As the parents' use of parenting, communicating, and learning at home increased, the parents' perceptions that they were a member of the IEP team and played an integral part in the IEP decision making process also increased. In addition, as the parents' use of parenting, communicating, and learning at home increased, the parents' satisfaction with the educational services provided for their child also increased. Overall, the mean of all of the parents' survey responses revealed that parents felt positive about the dissemination of information, decision making process, and provision of services.

While the mean scores indicated that the parents felt relatively positive about the three variables aforementioned, the parent survey responses identified both strong district practices and areas of improvement. For instance, the parents responded with high agreeability when the survey items related to the special education law (IDEA) such as providing the parents their rights, reviewing accommodations or modifications, and providing students with services that were documented on the IEP. However one-third of the parents disagreed that they fully understood their rights such as what to do if they disagreed with the schools' decisions. One-third of the parents disagreed with the statement that the special education services were meeting their child's needs and the IEP

meetings were scheduled at a time conducive for parents. These examples demonstrated that the parents' depth of involvement during the special education process was somewhat limited.

Overall, the data indicated that parent involvement correlated with the parents' perception of the special education referral process. The implications of these findings are discussed in Chapter 5. The next section presents the qualitative data collected from the 1:1 interviews and helps to further capture the lived experience of the parents who have African American males in the special education program.

Phase Two: Qualitative Results

Phase Two presents the qualitative data collected from the eight parents who volunteered for the individual (1:1) interviews. During this phase, the researcher used the theoretical framework of phenomenology (Creswell, 2007) and counter-storytelling (Delgado & Bernal, 1999) to capture the "voice" of parents who have African American male children that have been affected by the special education referral process as they recount their lived experiences and perspectives. A total of 50 hours of data collection was conducted that included interviews, transcriptions, field notes, and member checking.

The 1:1 interviews were conducted over three weeks in April 2014. The interviews were held at locations that were convenient and comfortable for the researcher and parents, including the district office, a coffee house, and over the phone. The interviews were recorded and transcribed using US Transcription. For triangulation, the researcher compared the data collected from the surveys, interviews, and field notes. In addition, the researcher conducted member checking to validate the information

collected. The researcher reviewed the parents' answers during the interview to verify the accuracy of information recorded. Then, the transcriptions were sent to the parents via email to review and provide feedback and/or further insight. In addition to member checking, the researcher read the transcriptions multiple times and analyzed the data using the HyperRESEARCH (Researchware, 2012) qualitative analysis software. The transcriptions from the interviews were compared to the results from the parent surveys to see if similar results were found. Then, the researcher had a third party read the transcriptions and codes for corroboration. The open coding method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used when analyzing the transcriptions to see what themes emerged from the data.

The findings are related to Research Question 1 and are organized based upon the following themes that derived from the quantitative questions: parent involvement, dissemination of information, decision making, and satisfaction with special education services. There are subthemes connected to the four themes aforementioned that emerged from the study through the open-coding process as described below.

Research Question 1

What are the African American parents' experiences and perspectives regarding the special education referral process?

Parental Involvement

Homework. All of the parents expressed that they help their children at home to support their academic success. Homework was the activity that all the parents shared that they did with their children.

I help him with his homework. Um, he doesn't watch TV Monday-Friday. Only the weekends. I volunteer for his class, like, twice a week because the teacher's pretty overwhelmed. And...I guess that's about it. I don't know. His tutoring. I forgot. He has, um, tutoring three times a week. (Parent #2, personal communication, April 5, 2014)

When the researcher asked if tutoring took place on the school site or a different location, the parent replied, "It was at the library, but we changed tutors. So now it's all at the school. So, three times a week" (Parent #1, personal communication, April 7, 2014).

I help with homework. I read for them. I've been reading to them for years. We go on to like sport stadium aquarium. And sometimes we go to the library when there's no school. I also bought him a tablet, learning tablet at Christmas. (Parent #1, personal communication, April 7, 2014)

Communication. Similar to Parent #1, eight (8) out of the eight (8) parents reported helping their children with homework assignments. However, Parent #1 was the only parent that mentioned she takes her children to the library for educational enrichment. In addition to homework, some parents shared how they maintained written communication with the teacher(s) to monitor their child's progress.

He gets a progress report every day and on Friday, he works with the teacher and she gives him a progress report regarding how was his week too. I usually get a call from the principal or the teacher or text messages from the principal to let me

know how his day was and how he is doing in the activities at school like that.

(Parent #14, personal communication, April 20, 2014)

Parent #10 described her interaction with her son's teacher by stating

We email each other from time to time. Sometimes we would have a note. We would do that. He's doing pretty good. He is mainstreamed with Language Arts and Science. The five W's, I started doing in late November. But a week ago, when I had a meeting with the teacher, she said that it would be helpful if I have him to write. She did notice some improvement as far as comprehension. You know, asking what the story is about. Read, read, read, but you have to [pause] you have to know what you are reading in the five W's. (personal communication, April 16, 2014)

Some of the parents, such as Parent #9, incorporated other educational activities to support the curriculum received from the school site. "I try to supplement some of his work with using websites that they used in the classroom, talk to his teacher to send something and password to their website" (Parent #9, personal communication, April 10, 2014).

Volunteer. Sometimes it was not always possible for the parents to volunteer at the school site due to other obligations such as work. However, two parents stated that they tried to volunteer at the school site when they could do so.

I am not able to volunteer as much as I used to because I work too much now.

However, I try to go ahead and do a few things on Friday with the class when the teacher needs me to. As far as at home, he doesn't get a lot of homework, but

when he does we try do one-on-one and we switch off from parent to parent, so we both know what is going on with his education. As far as reports, I try to make him understand, instead of just turning in a paper or the way Ms. Rose just tells him to just write it down, I work with him to make him be a little bit more creative. (Parent #8, personal communication, April 12, 2014)

Generally, I make sure to go to all of the meetings that they have. His IEP's. Also, I'm active by helping them with their homework. And, speaking to their teachers and the principal, if I need to. And, the resource teacher. I'm also in the PTA and I help, when I can, in the classrooms. (Parent #11, personal communication, April 9, 2014)

Learning at Home. When the parents were asked, "How are you involved in your child's education? What activities do you do at home, school, and/or community to support your child's learning?" the parents provided various examples of activities they did to support their children such as parenting, helping with homework, communicating with school personnel, volunteering at the school, and/or participating in other educational opportunities in the community.

It's a little bit of a tug of war with him between the video games and homework. But we go to the library and then I manage to help him get his homework done. You know. We read out loud and the teacher asks me to ask him five "W" questions, where, when, what and why. (Parent #10, personal communication, April 16, 2014)

Partnership. When the question was posed whether the parents felt like a partner with the school, the majority of the parents agreed.

Yeah, they do. One thing I have to say about this school, the principal is really hands-on. She knows all the kids' names. I've watched her. Random kids walk in and she knows their names. Um, if I have a question, I can email her. I can email the teachers. Um, they always make me feel like they're interested in making sure my child gets the best education that he can get...and very helpful. (Parent #11, personal communication, April 9, 2014)

Parent #9 stated, "When I called the Special Education Director and asked her where are we with this? She was very helpful. I never felt like I was bothering her when I was calling her and trying to figure things out" (personal communication, April 10, 2014).

The parents felt like a partner when there was communication from the teacher, principal, and/or district personnel. In some instances, when the teacher encouraged parent participation, the parent felt more inclined to participate and volunteer at the school.

Teacher Plays a Key Role. Each parent who stated they felt like a partner with the school site provided an example of a positive interaction with their child's teacher.

Yes, most definitely I feel all involved...his teacher and I have open communication and she always sends me update. If he's having a bad day or incident, she is very quick to email about that, but also email me to let me know his achievement and special things that he's done, that he deserves kudos for. (Parent #9, personal communication, April 6, 2014)

Parent #9 continued

She just amazes me. She has a great background for the Special Ed department for training and education. I think this helps her immensely with being able to deal with the special children. And she's just so creative and her methods of implementing learning are just phenomenal. She takes an out of the box approach. You know, she's not -- she doesn't just -- I mean I'm sure her curriculum comes from the standard stuff but she just tried different approaches and then she really takes the time to evaluate the learning pattern of each child and then she will accommodate them. (personal communication, April 6, 2014)

Parent #7 said, "The teacher's always encouraging me, whenever I have the time or I'm available, to come up to come to the school. And, she thanks me and says she appreciates it when I do come" (personal communication, April 20, 2014).

Another parent commented

The teacher she is great! I mean, I cannot explain. I wish I could show you the letter of recommendation that I wrote for her. She is wonderful...I mean, the last few years that Jacob has been with her, his grades have gone from a 1.0 to 3.2 and higher, and she made it fun for him to learn and you know she always keeps me involved in everything, and I really appreciate that. Whether it is good behavior, bad behavior, a concern or whatever it might be, she always keeps me informed about everything that is going on with my child and I really appreciate that. (Parent #8, personal communication, April 12, 2014)

In all three instances, the teacher's approach to show a genuine interest in educating the children and/or make the parent feel welcome was an integral part of developing a positive partnership with the parents.

Dissemination of Information

Lack of Communication. While the parents appreciated contact from the school personnel to foster a positive partnership between the school and home, some parents faced roadblocks that prevented them from feeling like a partner with school personnel. Parent #2 shared how she had to be persistent in her communication with the teacher because the teacher would not communicate directly with her. Instead, the teacher would send home communication with the student and the letters were lost. Parent #2 gave an example of her experience with her son's teacher stating, "If there's any problems you can call me. But, she would never call me" (Parent #2, personal communication, April 5, 2014). Parent #2 shared how she had to assert herself and let the teacher know that she wanted to remain in contact with the teacher so she could know how to support her son's learning at home. By being persistent, Parent #2 described how the teacher's behavior changed from being non-responsive to providing more contact with the parent, "But now she knows I'm serious. She emails me now" (Parent #2, personal communication, April 5, 2014).

Parent #2 also explained how she felt when her child was falling behind and needed further evaluation. She stated the teacher agreed and provided her with a district contact number, but despite numerous attempts she was not able to get in contact with anyone who could help her.

He's not getting it. So, um, I had a conference with the teacher. She agreed with me and gave me a couple numbers to call a person that's responsible for that. They never called me back. To this day, they've never called me back and I call, like, once a week. I still haven't gotten a call back from that department. So, what I'm doing is just, I've pretty much given up. (Parent #2, personal communication, April 5, 2014)

In this example, the parent tried to collaborate with the district to assist her son. However, her roadblock was the lack of follow up from the school that negatively affected the parents' partnership with the school. The parent was so frustrated by the lack of communication that she had "pretty much given up" (Parent #2, personal communication, April 5, 2014). Another parent experienced resistance to providing her son with special education services. Instead of giving up, she relied on a partner outside the district that she identified as an "advocate."

We had two children that were in the special education program. And one of my children was attending junior high and I was getting some resistance from the teachers on him, getting accommodations and I had to actually contact one of -- a friend of mine who works at the disability advocate for the county. And she sat in on one of his IEPs to ensure that he was getting the proper accommodation that he needed, 'cause at that point I was fairly new to the system and I didn't know what I needed to know I needed to ask for? So, she helped me with that. (Parent #9, personal communication, April 10, 2014)

Parent #8 shared her experience of working with the site principal and teacher to come up with a solution to help her child stay in the classroom and become less affected by behavioral incidents that were causing her child to want to leave the classroom often.

So, with Ms. Marshall and Ms. Campbell working together, trying to figure out how we can get Jacob to stay in class, so he can continue to get his education instead of roaming. His thing is, Jacob wants to prove to the adults there that he has changed, so he wants to report everything that he sees or if somebody teases him or like starting to make trouble to get him in trouble. So, we had to figure out something that some kind of a way to help him to know that we know that it is not always his fault. And he needs to stay in classes a little longer until he can get to talk to an adult outside of the class. So you know, they worked with me a lot on how to keep in class, which has helped. (Parent #8, personal communication, April 12, 2014)

The parent's example exemplified when there is a partnership between the school and home the child is supported while being held accountable.

Decision Making. When the researcher asked Parent #11 to describe the ways she was involved in the decision making during the referral process (i.e., determine the IEP goals for your child, provide input regarding placement such as special day class, resource, and/or additional services) she stated

Basically, with the IEP, they'll say, "Okay, this is what we recommend. Would you like this to be done?" They don't just do it. And, you say yes or no. They say, "what do you feel as a parent, your child should know or be doing at this point in

time? What would you like them to do?” So, with Gary, sometimes it had been like, “Okay, I’d like his vocabulary to get a little bit higher, his reading to get a little bit better.” They’ll write down those goals and then, when you come to your next one, they’ll let you know if they’ve met those goals or not. (Parent #11, personal communication, April 9, 2014)

Parent #11 expressed satisfaction in being an active participant during her child’s IEP process.

The one good thing I like about his school is they sat down and line by line, they’ll say, ‘Okay, this is what we’re going to discuss.’ And then, at the end of what we have discussed, they have a series of questions such as did you understand what was going on? You initial it or you don’t initial it. And, they’ll explain, if you need more explanation. (Parent #11, personal communication, April 9, 2014)

When the researcher asked if this was how the parent would have preferred to be involved, she said, “Yes. I wanna be in the whole thing. I’m not gonna just leave that to somebody else” (Parent #11, personal communication, April 9, 2014).

When the researcher asked Parent #10 how she was involved in the decision making process for her child, she stated

I’m involved because I’m in a meeting when they come up with an educational plan saying, do I agree or disagree? Initial here. Sign there. From what I understand you can have an IEP at any given time, as a parent. (Parent #10, personal communication, April 16, 2014)

When the researcher followed up with the question, if this decision making process was the way she would have preferred, she responded, “I don't know. That's how it was presented to me. It was just me and a couple others, the principal, the teacher, the day teacher, and then he had the mainstream teacher” (Parent #10, personal communication, April 16, 2014). When the researcher probed by asking what decision the parent was able to give input or add additional information, Parent #10 said, “I'm not really sure” (personal communication, April 16, 2014).

Parent #9 explained that during the special education process, the school personnel made the decision making process easier for her by explaining the terms used in the IEP in simple terms, which made it easier to understand.

Well, first thing that come in my mind is instead of just having the paper it was explained to me in layman terms. So you know they would read to me what we're seeing and then explain what should happen next...always asking me if I had any question and if I agree with this. I was also able to give my feedback on what I see at home or what were the needs for my son and it was implemented into the IEP at that time. They wrote it down as a part of the IEP. They were hearing and agreeing with me. (Parent #9, personal communication, April 10, 2014)

Parent #9 described how the school personnel explained the special education terms and gave their professional advice about the next steps that should occur with her son. In addition, the school personnel also solicited her input and made sure her suggestions were not only heard, but also recorded on the actual IEP. Parent #1 shared

how she was actively involved in the decision making process during the special education process.

I made the decision on what I wanted him to do. It was my signature. They gave advice but it was really basically up to me what I wanted to do. So, I made all decisions for him and what was best for him at the time. (Parent #1, personal communication, April 7, 2014)

Parent #14 described the partnership between her and the school as a shared decision making process.

We just all sit at the table and they ask me what my decisions are or what I need. I think he needs to work on or what do I think he needs to be doing. So it's like a 50-50. It's 50-50 on everything. I involved with everything. They let me know what they'll be doing with him and what I think should be the best way for him to learn. (Parent #14, personal communication, April 20, 2014)

She also shared the following

His doctor in San Francisco recommended medication when they first diagnosed him with ADD because he couldn't sit still for a long time. So, now that he's on medication, he was able to go a whole day without, you know, 'cause sometimes he goes off ...the majority of the time he stays on his medication so he don't go off. (Parent #14, personal communication, April 20, 2014)

When Parent #8 was asked to describe how she has been involved with the decisions that pertained to her son and whether this was the way she would have liked to be involved, she explained the school staff's actions that made her feel fully included.

I don't know what those were called, but we would have a meeting with Ms. Rose, Ms. Clinton and Ms. Dennis. And you know even if I couldn't be there, they offered to have me on speaker even if I couldn't be there, so I do appreciate the fact that they wanted to have me involved with everything. There was never a point where I felt like I was not being involved or they didn't keep me informed of what was going on. There have been times when he couldn't tolerate different electives, so they made the decision to change him. Of course they conferred with me first, to make sure that I was okay, so there has never been a time where I wasn't involved or informed. (Parent #8, personal communication, April 12, 2014)

While most of the parents felt that they were a part of the decision making process in ways that they had preferred, Parent #2 had a different experience. First, she did not remember having any meetings to discuss her son's progress since he was in the prior district and she felt there was a disconnection with the way the school communicated her son's needs, not only to the parent, but to his teacher as well, which was frustrating to Parent #2.

I would say, maybe, all the goals and stuff that I do remember was more so, like third grade and below. Anything higher than that, I don't remember. I don't even think I put any goals. Just like, keep speaking. To continue his therapy, you know. But I didn't put any goals down. Recently, no...it was more when he was younger and we were in a different district. (Parent #2, personal communication, April 5, 2014)

Parent #2 continued to share her experience

I think it should be more hands-on. Like, let me know more details of what's going on. It's real vague. I mean, I really don't know who his teacher is. I mean, it's like, almost nothing. It's funny because every time I go in his class, the teacher never knows he's in speech therapy. And, she never gets a report, like, how did he do or anything. It's only to the parent. But the teacher kind of complains, like, 'Why doesn't he ever tell me what's going on? I'm the teacher. I have to know what's going to too.' And, it's like I'm like left in the dark. (Parent #2, personal communication, April 5, 2014)

Previous Experience. Some of the parents had background knowledge regarding the special education process because they had a previous child in special education and/or the parents were in the special education program as children themselves.

When the researcher asked Parent #11 what kind of information she received during the special education referral process, she replied

They gave a packet. They had a write-up on all the stuff that was of concern. They send you home with a packet of information. Being in that kind of environment when I was a little kid, I already knew that it was available. So I sought it out. (Parent #11, personal communication, April 9, 2014)

The researcher probed further and asked Parent #11 to talk about her personal experience that influenced her decisions with her child. She stated

I was always in special education when I was a kid. And so, being [Laughs.] my age now, I knew they'd have the same thing. So I first had him tested and told

them to check him out and see what was, if there was anything wrong. Or, if it was just me. And then, they found out that he did have a hearing problem at the time. And that his words were delayed because of that hearing problem. It just proceeded from there. (Parent #11, personal communication, April 9, 2014)

As a result of Parent #11's prior experience as someone who also received special education services, she was able to recognize that her son was having speech difficulties and knew what was available at the school. Her prior knowledge enabled her to actively pursue assessments and services in special education for her son.

Early Identification. Six (6) of the eight (8) parents shared that their children were identified at an early age as having a disability. The request for testing was from either the parent or school personnel.

He was in first grade. So, he was 5 or 6. Or, somewhere close to there. But I had a concern with his speech and things like that and his motor skills like he didn't know how to use scissors. At the age of 6, he should know things like cutting up things and he didn't have that. And as far as the concept 1+1 or 2+2, he had no idea what to do. (Parent #8, personal communication, April 12, 2014)

When the researcher asked Parent #1 at what age her son was identified with special needs, she explained

I think he was at -- I think kindergarten was when they put him in those classes -- first grade okay. Put him there at first grade. They connected me with, um, I think one was a psychologist and the other one was -- I think she was with social work. I'm not sure, but they were professionals and I was handed like a packet of

different sources and we all picked what was best fitting for Charles. (Parent #1, personal communication, April 7, 2014)

When the researcher asked Parent #1 how she felt about the identification, she stated, “At that time, I was upset” (personal communication, April 7, 2014). The researcher probed further by asking the parent if she could explain further. Parent #1 felt that the identification of her son was premature since he was enrolled at the school for a short time.

Possibly because they really didn't understand my child and his condition.

Basically he was there for a year already prior to that. They kept switching his teacher so no one really got to know him. So it was like they didn't give him time to settle, to even know what he can do or what he can't do. (Parent #1, personal communication, April 7, 2014)

The son of Parent #14 was identified with a learning disability at the early age of five because he made noises and would not sit down.

It started in 2008 when he was 5. I was living in San Francisco at the time. The school campus said he was making a lot of noises and he wouldn't sit down and he couldn't concentrate, so that's when they noticed, I noticed, he would have ADD. Well I think he has both ADD and ADHD. (Parent #14, personal communication, April 20, 2014)

When the researcher asked the parent how she felt about the identification when they told her that her son had a disability, Parent #14 responded

I mean, I was shocked. I didn't want to know. I mean, I kind of figured something was going on with him because he was always have problems in school, but they didn't know what it was. So, I was crying at first, but then I thought, okay, well, at least they start early instead of late. So it was okay with me. (Parent #14, personal communication, April 20, 2014)

Identification Using an Outside Resource. Some of the parents noticed that there were developmental concerns with their children prior to entering school. Parents took their children to the doctor to have their children assessed.

I noticed the problem first with his speech. And then, we had a series of tests done through Kaiser. I explained to them that I had an older daughter, that I know I can't really [pause] I couldn't really compare them, but by this time I felt that Mason should be talking. And, his words were gibberish and made no sense at his age. So by two-and-a-half they started doing testing. And then, by three he was eligible. (Parent #11, personal communication, April 9, 2014)

When he was three years old, his mother complained at a doctor's appointment or something and they referred him for further assessment. He was devel- (pause), he was behind. When he was three years old, he was behind and they thought she might have been Autistic. And, they did tests and later determined: No, he's not Autistic, he was just behind. And, he has speech therapy because some of his words still...um...Um, like, um...I can think of some of the words he says, but "Ee-ver" instead of "Either" and stuff like that. So he's still working on his speech. (Parent #7, personal communication, April 20, 2014)

I just know he improved a lot on his speech. Because for a while he couldn't talk. He would-he wouldn't talk. I don't know if he couldn't or wouldn't, but he definitely delayed with the talk. So he couldn't speak that well, so that's why I had him in the speech before he even started school. The doctor recommended it. He was in speech since he was a small kid. (Parent #2, personal communication, April 5, 2014)

Identification Creates Internal Dissonance. In the three instances above the parents requested a medical diagnosis from the hospital doctors. Instead of seeking an outside referral Parent #9 expressed her concerns with the school site. When she felt that her son should receive testing for special education the school did not agree. "Yeah, it was around identifying his needs. They were putting it back on him as lazy or non-attentive and my questions were what are you doing to engage him and why is it that he isn't focusing?" (Parent #9, personal communication, April 10, 2014).

As a result of persisting that the school personnel examine more closely why her child was not focusing, Parent #9 stated, "...we found that a lot of the conversation went above his head, so he would shut down because of that" (personal communication, April 10, 2014). She found that after she had her son assessed he was diagnosed by the school as having a learning disability.

Parent #9 expressed how the teachers were not always willing to make the accommodations. She stated, "there was a particular incident where a teacher refused to give the accommodation in class once we have them established. So, we ended up having to move him out of that class" (Parent #9, personal communication, April 10, 2014).

Parent #9 faced many obstacles by first having a disagreement with the school personnel whether her child was disabled or lazy. Then, once he was identified there were teachers not willing to make accommodations for her son. In this instance Parent #9 had to assert herself in the decision making process and advocate for her son.

Parent #2 shared how her son received speech therapy, but she believed that he was also struggling academically. She said, “He goes for speech therapy, but I’d been asking for them to add on for a comprehension. He needs more help” (Parent #2, personal communication, April 5, 2014). She continued to explain her son’s need for additional help, “Because it’s not just a speech thing. He’s not getting it. So, I had a conference with the teacher. She agreed with me and gave me a couple numbers who to call that’s responsible for that” (Parent #2, personal communication, April 5, 2014).

Parent #2 expressed what she observed as her son’s academic challenges and stated her observations were confirmed by the teacher who agreed. However, when she attempted to follow up with the Special Education Director to see how her son’s needs could be addressed, she had difficulty reaching someone who could assist.

They never called me back. To this day, they’ve never called me back and I call, like, once a week. I still haven’t gotten a call back from that department. So, what I’m doing is just I’ve pretty much given up. So, next IEP or whatever, I’m going to let them know again. I’ve been calling a lot of times and there’s never a response. (Parent #2, personal communication, April 5, 2014)

Due to the lack of communication and the concerns Parent #2 observed, she considered retaining her son for the next school year.

I just want to start this going and... You know, he's already gonna be in the next grade, which going to be a different school, a different city and he doesn't have the help. So now it's my husband and I talked about it and we decided we're gonna hold him back. We're gonna retain him in keep him in the fifth grade for next year school year. (Parent #2, personal communication, April 5, 2014)

The parent noticed for years that her son struggled academically and his comprehension became more delayed over time. She shared although she mentioned these observations to the school personnel, they told her to wait another year to see if her son improved.

Because I was figuring on keeping him back in the third grade. They said, "Oh, he might develop in the year." They discouraged it. And then, fourth grade came and he's so behind. He's not getting any better. They were, "Just give him one more year," you know? "He'll get it." And he's not getting it. It's not that he's not doing his work. It's not sticking. He's not comprehending at all. (Parent #2, personal communication, April 5, 2014)

Parent #2 stated even though she followed the school personnel's advice to promote her son to the next grade, she found that he was still far behind academically. She expressed that her son's academic delays were not from a lack of effort. Instead, she felt his inability to comprehend needed further assessments.

And, um, so he needs more help. It's not that he's a bad kid watching video games or hanging more outside. No, he's doing extra work and has restrictions on it, but it's not working. So we know it's something else. We're crying out for help

and no one's hearing us, but the teacher now. Now the teacher hears us. She agrees that, yeah, it's a comprehension thing. He needs extra special services.

(Parent #2, personal communication, April 5, 2014)

Second Opinion. When Parent #8 had her son assessed by the school, she also had her son assessed by the doctor at the hospital.

...and, then in fourth grade, that's when we saw the school's psychologist. She said that she thought that he really needs to be in a special day class because I took him to Kaiser to have him evaluated there and they diagnosed him with ADHD. (Parent #8, personal communication, April 12, 2014)

The researcher asked Parent #8 why she decided to seek a second opinion from the physician. She responded

Well, one was that with him being born premature, I was concerned if his learning was a delayed process because he was born so early and come to find out that wasn't really the issue. They just said that just what he had, ADHD. Which he has grown out of it a lot since then. There was a lot of things like the back of his brain was not functioning with the front part...whatever they were telling me. I mean you could see that it wasn't here. He couldn't get it together. A regular classroom setting was too hard for him. He could not keep up with the regular students. He could not keep up with regular students who were not diagnosed. So that was my concern, because I couldn't understand why my child needed so much extra help and that is when they told me. (Parent #8, personal communication, April 12, 2014)

While Parent #8 agreed with the school and accepted their diagnosis for her son's disability, her son's father did not agree readily, which prompted the need for a second opinion.

When the lady at the school mentioned it, it was like one parent agreed and the other didn't and so that is why I got a second opinion from the doctor so that the father would see and understand it more. Instead of hearing it from a teacher who does this every day. I am not sure why he did not understand that, but I guess it was more comforting for him to hear from the doctor than the teacher. (Parent #8, personal communication, April 12, 2014)

Parent #9 was another parent who had her child assessed at a young age outside of the school to acquire a second opinion.

So, my son has always been in speech therapy even before he began grade school. So that was something that they knew was a need for him. And then, the teacher identified other issues. I also had him assessed for a learning disability at the Regional Center, which is for Autism. I did not know that at the time, but they did give me an analysis of his disability. So, I was able to work with the teachers to have him assessed properly. And they had him meet with a speech therapist. I don't know what this person's background was, but they did a whole assessment for him to see where his needs were and presented me with that information prior to getting him enrolled into the special education program. (Parent #9, personal communication, April 10, 2014)

When the researcher asked how Parent #9 knew to go to the Regional Center to have her son assessed, she stated that her friend who was an advocate for children with disabilities referred her.

Advocate. Parent #9 shared that she had an advocate attend the IEP meeting with her. The researcher asked, “What advice did the advocate provide you with for either of your children” (personal communication, April 10, 2014). Parent #9 explained that the advocate informed her about what resources and testing options were available for her child. In addition, the advocate explained the IEP process with the parent. When the researcher asked if the advocate’s explanation was similar or different than the school, Parent #9 replied that the advocate provided more thorough information.

I think, it was more informative just because she just knew what were out there. You know I had two very different experiences with Countryside Schools. For two reason, at one site, I wasn’t being told too much what I needed. That’s when my friend came in which was very helpful. So, when my second son came of age and was eligible for the special education program, I was already aware of what was he needed and what to ask for because of my oldest son. So, I was more experience in the process by that time. Just knowing what the accommodations needed to be made. (Parent #9, personal communication, April 10, 2014)

Parent #14 explained her experience during the special education process.

They make sure that we know all the information and everything that they are working on at school with him. They gave me all the information, anything that's going on with you, what activities they are doing, what school is working on, for

the whole year and everything. (Parent #14, personal communication, April 20, 2014)

When Parent #14 was asked how this information helped her understand the process, she responded

It's really becoming a good process because at first I try to understand what is going on. He didn't understand the homework and a lot of things. But now he understands everything 'cause they -- he got a special tutor that he goes to. (Parent #14, personal communication, April 20, 2014)

Satisfaction with Services

Lack of Services. For some parents, the special education process and reviewing their child's goals was repetitive and lacked meaningful interaction.

I don't remember getting any information regarding the IEP to be honest with you. I mean, I know we did an IEP at the other school, when he first came...No, I'm lying...His first IEP was done at elementary where he came from, so everything was transferred over there to Waterfall Elementary. So we didn't do another IEP. She just went off what was there from the other school. That was in third grade. I swear, I don't remember doing another meeting until he was in the sixth grade. (Parent #8, personal communication, April 12, 2014)

It was almost three years before the parents had an IEP meeting to review his goals. Parent #8 expressed

To me, nothing was addressed and taken care of until he got to Magic Middle School. That's when I start seeing results. Ms. Davis drove me crazy, but she was

concerned. She was a sweetheart too. I figured that as I went through so much at Waterfall Elementary that I kind of pushed her away a little bit. But I got more information from Magic Middle School than I did from Waterfall Elementary. A lot more. I saw that his goals were being worked on at Washington. (Parent #8, personal communication, April 12, 2014)

For speech therapy, the district outsourced the resource and provided the students speech through an online service. When Parent #2 attended the IEP meeting, the meeting was held at the school site with district personnel along with the speech therapist who participated in the IEP via video conferencing.

We had, like, interviews, through a computer or what have you. She [speech therapist] would just tell me that he's improving in reading, and pronouncing the words, and you know. That's really vague. I really don't remember it, but, I mean, I don't know. It didn't sound that serious. It sounded like he still needed it. But, um, I don't know. It's just really, I can tell that's not the problem with school. My main concern is maybe the comprehension, how he's not learning and not actually holding the information. (Parent #2, personal communication, April 5, 2014)

Parent #2 felt that the information she received regarding her son's progress was vague and did not address his comprehension deficiencies that she identified as a problem. Moreover, Parent #2 was concerned that her son's general education teacher was not aware of the details from her son's IEP. When the researcher asked Parent #2 about her son's IEP process this current school year, the parent responded, "We haven't had one this school year yet" (Parent #2, personal communication, April 5, 2014). She

stated although it was April and the school year would end in June, her son had not had an IEP during the current school year. Parent #2 felt that the late date for the IEP contributed to the lack of coherence in services for her child.

Parent #8 explained that when her son was identified that he needed additional services, she was told that the school did not have the services needed for her son. As a result, she had to find another school outside the district for her child.

He just couldn't grasp the concept of learning...how to do addition or the simple things like that. So, the school that he attended at that time just didn't have a special education program, which was Waterfall Elementary. So, I had him transferred to another school. At that school, he was able to get speech therapy and occupational therapy. (Parent #8, personal communication, April 12, 2014)

Impact on Students' Success. Parent #2 stated

There's no connection. I think that's a major problem because he spends more time with her and he's in her class. And, she's not learning what his needs are. My question is, 'What is he doing in class?' She can't answer that, to give an idea, you know, whether he's improving or not. (Parent #2, personal communication, April 5, 2014)

Parent #2 described how the school did not include or inform her son's classroom teacher of his goals. As a result, the teacher was unable to communicate with the parent whether her son was improving and/or provide strategies for the parent to support her son's progress. Parent #2 described how the lack of communication was counterproductive to helping her son, which was frustrating for the parent. She provided

a suggestion to how the communication could be more productive, including all stakeholders in a “team” approach.

Yeah, she’s a new teacher this year, so she didn’t know anything about it. I mean, it’s like, really bad because if my IEP interview, whatever, parent-teacher conference, whatever is in May, and he’s been in school all this time, it doesn’t work. They should start talking to her monthly or weekly about what’s going on. And, communicating with her and giving a monthly or weekly report. That way, she can say, “Oh, it’s working. I see it right away.” Or, “Oh, I don’t see any difference.” And then I can help at home. Then, it’s, like a team player. It’s like a triangle. It’s 1-2-3. We should all work together. (Parent #2, personal communication, April 5, 2014)

Parent #2 stated that the school should have communicated with the teacher far more frequently rather than waiting until the IEP that was scheduled for May. Parent #2 believed that this was much too late and stifled her ability as a parent to converse with the general education teacher and assess whether her son’s special education services were helping him. She emphasized that the special education department, teacher, and parent should work in partnership for the betterment of her son’s education.

Some of the parents who had children receiving speech therapy believed that the services helped their children improve. For example, Parent #11 said

I think it’s helped him. It’s made him feel more confident. His speech is much better now. He’s only in there for 20 minutes, versus the whole day now. And, at

some point, I see him being out of that and totally mainstreamed. (Parent #11, personal communication, April 9, 2014)

Parent #9 was highly satisfied with the impact the special education speech services had for her son. When she was asked what she thought contributed to his success, she replied

I think the encouragement that he received...being able to work at his own pace and have the helping hand that help him see things and definitely speech therapy has helped him a lot in. And yeah, he gets a lot of encouragement from the special ed team. (Parent #9, personal communication, April 10, 2014)

On the other hand, the parents who had children with other learning disabilities shared varied opinions. Parent #10 stated that the work was not challenging for her son. Instead, she said, "It's too relaxed for him because he gets bored. That's the problem. Some of the subjects like the phonics, he's ahead in that. He needs work with his sentence or something more challenging" (Parent #10, personal communication, April 16, 2014).

The son of Parent #1 was in a self-contained classroom with the same teacher for the past two years. While his fellow classmates have changed teachers each year, her son remained in the same classroom. When the researcher asked how the special education program was helping her son, she replied

He wants to get out of Ms. Cresel's class. He wants to get out of that classroom. So he's trying to do everything he can to get out of that class. He's there all day. He goes to a Math tutor for like an hour a day, but other than that, he doesn't go anywhere. He understands that he has to do all your work by himself and get the

work needed for him to get to the next level and get out of her class. So he's really trying to get out of her classroom. (Parent #1, personal communication, April 7, 2014)

Parent #8 shared her opinion about how her son was first placed in the special education program.

To put it on record for you, he learned nothing, absolutely nothing! He was with this teacher for 2 years and he learned absolutely nothing. I said that because when he got to the junior high and he was put in a regular setting classroom. He had no idea how to count. He had no idea how to count money, he didn't know his times table, addition, division. He no idea about his fractions. Nothing that he should have at least been introduced to in the fifth grade. (Parent #8, personal communication, April 12, 2014)

Parent #8 validated her claim that her son did not learn anything by sharing her account of what she observed when she visited the teacher's classroom.

What I saw every time I went to the school, because I wasn't working at that time, I was able to go there a little more. Every time I walked into the classroom, the kids were coloring and they were coloring all the time. So, I thought maybe it is only when I come to the school, but it was the only thing they did in class every day-same thing every day! He was far down [academically] as a third grader and I was like, 'What are you learning?' He learned absolutely nothing. (Parent #8, personal communication, April 12, 2014)

Parent #8 stated that her son did not learn anything in class. Instead, she observed the students coloring each time she came to visit the class. Initially, she thought it was coincidental that the students were coloring when she came to visit the classroom, but she found out that her son was so far behind that he was not able to comprehend basic concepts.

I had to go so far as to prove to Ms. Dennis that he didn't even know the concept of learning math, how to read or use a period or things like that, in order for him to even have him placed in Ms. Rose's class. Sad that I had to prove that to her. Even Ms. Dennis's class was hard for him. (Parent #8, personal communication, April 12, 2014)

Parent #8 shared that her son was so far behind when he arrived to middle school that she had to "prove" to the resource teacher that due to her son being so far below academically that he could not understand the coursework in the resource class and that he needed to be placed in the Special Day Class. Due to the change in placement, Parent #8 explained that he was much more successful and was able to make academic progress.

To me, nothing was addressed and taken care of until he got to CMS. That's when I start seeing improvement... Well I can tell you, the academics has been wonderful. Like I said, he went from 1.2 to 3.2 GPA and higher. This is his second semester on honor roll. Behavior is still...not so much of what CMS is not doing is not helping, but Jacob. He needs to know how to control his behavior. He has to control his behavior. It has come a long way but it is not 100%, but it is better. Since his education and the way of learning, for him has made him feel

more comfortable...” and he is not angry all the time but it is still there. But it is not a problem. I have to work with him on that, but other than that, everything has been working out okay. (Parent #8, personal communication, April 12, 2014)

Parent #2 experienced difficulty in getting her son the help she thought he needed. She stated that he had been at the same school for the past few years but failed to show academic improvement. She felt that her options for her son were limited due to the small size of the district. She considered homeschool or a charter school as an alternative for her son.

There’s a big disconnection and I’m really discouraged. I’m thinking if I’m going to keep him in the fifth grade. Why keep him in the same road that doesn’t work. I was thinking about taking him out of the district. Because in this district, there’s only one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school. And, it’s not working for him. I was thinking of pulling him out and putting him in a charter school or maybe homeschooling because I just don’t feel like he’s getting anywhere. That’s three years of waiting and waiting for what? And, there’s no improvement. Now, in speech, maybe. All right, there’s improvement. More than learning. Learning? I don’t think he’s learning too much in the school. (Parent #2, personal communication, April 5, 2014)

Satisfaction

When the parents were asked, “How satisfied are you with the services or additional support that you receive from your child's school?” Parent #2 expressed

displeasure with the lack of communication and follow through regarding services from the school personnel.

Yeah, it's getting me upset. Because all my other sons, you know, I push on them. And, I talk to the teacher. Call me, daddy. Anytime. We will pick up the phone. Or, night when we can, if we're at a class, whatever. We will go. We will show up. If you want us to show up, we will show up. But here it's like, Ehh...maybe too much problems, you know? Kids are having too much problems. They're overwhelmed in this school. I don't know. I need to get him to a better district.
(Parent# 2, personal communication, April 5, 2014)

Three parents shared that they were moderately to extremely satisfied with the special education services their children received which included pull out for additional support or speech therapy.

Parent #7 stated that she was satisfied and felt this would be something he would outgrow. She did state that she thought her son needed more personalized instruction because "with Michael, you've got to be consistent" (Parent #7, personal communication, April 20, 2014). Although Parent #7 recognized the teacher's limitations, she still expressed dissatisfaction with the special education services.

We recognized the fact, in the meeting, that the teacher has 24 other students. So how's she gonna sit there and just drill...you know, talk with Michael. So, she really doesn't have the time to devote that we do, when we sit down and work with him." I didn't agree with that. I could say they should offer more, but it could

be the county not having the resources. I'm not satisfied but it's fair, I guess.

(Parent #7, personal communication, April 20, 2014)

Parent #10 stated she knew of additional tutorial services offered in other districts, but was not able to obtain these services for her son in this district. Therefore, she disagreed and thought the services offered were limited.

I think it should be better. I don't know why they don't offer additional services such as tutoring with companies like Sylvan. I know some other school districts are doing that. I asked a question about that and they said 'No, he has to use the resources here.' I didn't agree with that. I could say they should offer more, but it could be the county not having the resources. I'm not satisfied but it's fair, I guess. (Parent #10, personal communication, April 16, 2014)

Parent #2 described how her son was relatively quiet in class so his needs can be easily overlooked. She felt like she was without any options with this school district and thought about sending her son to a private or charter school where she felt he would receive additional support.

I just have to do what I have to do here. Then, next school year, try to get him out of that school and try to get him in a charter school, you know? Now, if I was working, I'd try to put him in a private school. I mean, they exist. But, yeah, when you have that kid you just...I mean, he just sits there quiet and you just blend into the walls. He's just quiet. He doesn't say anything. He just sits there. (Parent #2, personal communication, April 5, 2014)

Parent #2 felt, “When we moved to this district, he suffered more” (personal communication, April 5, 2014). She expressed dissatisfaction with the services because she did not think that her son was progressing academically. Instead, she felt he was regressing and, despite her efforts to receive assistance from the school, she was faced with obstacles such as not receiving returned phone calls to her messages and not receiving feedback to know what efforts could be made to help her son reach academic standards. Parent #2 stated

I don't know if they're overwhelmed or - Here I guess they're so overwhelmed they just don't even call back. And, every time, I've been trying to get him in the afterschool program for the longest. And, I asked the secretary. I asked the teacher. This is since third grade. And, um, I never heard a response. It's either they give the paperwork late or they give it to my son and I never get it. Then, it's too late. (Parent #2, personal communication, April 5, 2014)

Parent #2 tried to make sense of the lack of response from the school. She stated that the school may be overwhelmed, but she accounted many attempts that she made to get her son into tutoring with no success. As a result, her frustration only increased. Parent #2 felt that the only way to have her voice heard was to become more aggressive and demanding. She stated, “And, um, now I was really on them, like, ‘Look, I'm gonna stop holding back because obviously it's not working to just keep waiting for the next grade to graduate” (Parent #2, personal communication, April 5, 2014).

Parent #2 described how she was always an active parent in her children's schooling. She had high expectations and would push them to do well. She stated that she

communicated with the teacher and asked the school personnel to contact her if there were any problems with her son, but she received very little input. She compared this district with other districts and felt this district lacked the resources and initiative to help the students. Parent #2 said

Yeah, it's getting me upset. Because all my other sons, you know, I push on them. And, I talk to the teacher. Call me, daddy. Anytime. We will pick up the phone. Or, night when we can, if we're at a class, whatever. We will go. We will show up. If you want us to show up, we will show up. But here it's like, 'Ehh, maybe too much problems, you know? Kids are having too much problems.' They're overwhelmed in this school. I don't know. I need to get him to a better district.
(Parent #2, personal communication, April 5, 2014)

Parent #2 continued

So I don't know. I don't get what's going on here. I don't know in the system that they have here that they're just packing kids in small space. Or something. I don't know what it is. But it's really bad in this district. It's the worst district we've moved to. (Parent #2, personal communication, April 5, 2014)

Parent #2 summed up her dissatisfaction by saying, "Because you know 'No Child Left Behind?' He's being left behind because he's not getting the proper services. So I'm pretty upset" (Parent #2, personal communication, April 5, 2014).

During the interview process some parents expressed there were barriers that prevented them from fully participating in the special education referral process for their

children. For example, Parent #9 stated there might be difficulty in fully understanding the disabilities and accommodations.

Just not knowing what's available and understanding the disability of their child.

It is one thing knowing the name of the disability, but it is another to understand what that really means...that's another thing and how to know what accommodations need to go along with assisting them with their disability.

(Parent #9, personal communication, April 10, 2014)

Suggestions

The researcher asked the parents what advice they would give other parents and the schools regarding how to foster a positive partnership during the special education referral process to support their child's success? Six participants advised parents to be actively involved in the IEP process by asking questions and providing input regarding what the parent felt would be the best educational program for their child.

From the parent responses, the majority of the parents emphasized the importance of being an active participant during the referral process and if they were uncertain about the process to either ask questions and/or seek a second opinion.

Be an Active Participant. Parent #11 suggested that parents should not merely accept what is stated during the IEP process. Instead, parents should be an active participant during the discussions so they can know not only what the school can do for their child, but what the parent can do to assist their child as well.

I'd tell them to just make sure they're an active participant. Don't let people just say, 'Okay, this is what it is and this is what we're going to do.' Just, uh, be part

of discussion, so you can help your child. And, help them help your child. (Parent #11, personal communication, April 9, 2014)

One parent suggested in order to be an active participant, asking questions is helpful to understanding the IEP process and services suggested for their children.

If you're mature enough to ask a good question before you get there or you just don't know when you get there. You probably know more than what you know, but if you are not for certain, you should write your questions down. When you go the second time, then you know. You can write questions. Take notes while you're there. That's what I do. (Parent #10, personal communication, April 16, 2014)

Parent #9 agreed with the suggestion that parents should ask questions during the special education process. She stated, "Ask questions and make sure that you completely understand what they're telling you and it's not to make sure that they explained it to you in a way that you understand and know that your opinion matters" (Parent #9, personal communication, April 10, 2014).

One parent compared services in Countryside Unified School District with another district and noticed differences in the school's approach.

There's gotta be a connection, you know? Um, when Oakland did it, it was a little more hands on. I would say be very persistent and be very involved because they are going to fall asleep behind the wheel. So if there's a driver, don't expect them to know where to go, where you're going. Because you really need to keep your hands there and have a lot of time to get in there and figure out what's going on. (Parent #2, personal communication, April 5, 2014)

Seek Another Opinion. Another parent suggested if a parent is uncertain if their child has a learning disability or what accommodations may be needed, the parent should seek an “outside source” for an alternative opinion to compare the information the parent received from the school site to the physician’s opinion in order to ensure accuracy.

I would advise him to take them -- their child to an outside source first. Like a psychologist or something and then bring him back to school and get their opinion as a second opinion, not a first opinion because it depends on the child. They may not know the child. They might not know the condition. The teachers aren't psychologists or doctors, so they really don't know what goes wrong with the child mentally. (Parent #1, personal communication, April 7, 2014)

Improve Communication. The parents made a few suggestions of ways the schools could actively engage parents’ in their child’s learning. Parent #14 stated, “I would just say, keep the parent informed on how their child is doing” (Parent #14, personal communication, April 12, 2014). Parent #8 stated

Communication. I really believe that is what it would be. Communication. I feel as long as the parent is involved and the school is keeping the parent involved. And what is going on, what is new and what other recommendations that they may have. I think that it would go smoothly for any other parent. Communication is the main key. (personal communication, April 12, 2014)

Parent #2 commented

I feel they should give monthly reports instead of whole semester reports. That’s a little late. Again, the whole semester. Especially if you have an IEP or whatever

evaluation in May or late April. That's late. It's too late. There's a long wait there, you know? What does one even do? It's almost summer. I think they should do monthly reports. Weekly, maybe, is too difficult, especially in this district. But, I would say monthly, at least. Communicate with the parents. Let them know what's really going on, you know? And, what can we do to help out? I haven't got that, you know? (Parent #2, personal communication, April 5, 2014)

Parent #9 suggested, "the teachers talk to parents and make sure they communicate the positive and not always just the negative" (personal communication, April 6, 2014).

Parent #11 suggested that the school keep open communication with parents about their child using clear language that parents could understand about their child's progress.

I say just be open. If there's something really wrong or whatever, I think a parent can handle it as long as you speak to them one-on-one and in their language about what's wrong. And, just come to some decisions together. (Parent #11, personal communication, April 9, 2014)

When Parent #11 was asked to elaborate what she meant by school personnel using "their language," she stated

Sometimes parents just don't know those really big words. Just say, plain English, simple language, what you're trying to say about the child, what's wrong. Don't give no really big words because sometimes that just (pause). A parent is already frustrated and if there's words that is a parent feels is over their head, it's not gonna go well. (Parent #11, personal communication, April 9, 2014)

Value Parent's Input and Home Environment. Another suggestion provided was to value the parents' input and be aware of the children's home environment and how that can influence the children's behavior in the school environment. Parent #9 stated school personnel should "be open to suggestions, becoming aware of the home situation and parents' interaction with the children at home. I feel like that all plays apart when they come to school. You know how they're going to respond the school" (Parent #9, personal communication, April 10, 2014).

Parent #7 thought it was important for the school to value the parents' opinions. She stated

Value what the parent has to say. Don't discount it because you are the teacher or the administrator. And, like I said, you're only with that child three hours a day. I see him longer. I deal with him longer. So, you know, it's about being firm. So, to me, to have a positive we both have to you know, we can agree to disagree, but we [can] both share our viewpoints. (Parent #7, personal communication, April 20, 2014)

Encourage Parents to Volunteer. Parent #1 suggested that the school make deliberate actions to encourage and solicit parents to volunteer at the school site.

Maybe they can have parents, parents that are available to volunteer at the school 'cause I'm a parent that live in the local area by the school and I know a lot of children and a lot of children in my neighborhood go to Rodeo Hills, so they know me. So to say the parents can help from the neighborhood could help the school also. (Parent #1, personal communication, April 10, 2014)

Provide Training. The parents stated their child's accommodations and/or modifications were not always addressed by the teacher. Parents suggested that training be provided for the teachers that would help teachers learn strategies to support their students' specific needs. For example, Parent #9 suggested

Have designated teachers to take special ed students when they are mainstreamed and have those teachers trained. Especially in high school, with my older son, he was going -- he was mainstreamed in a certain classes. You know he had accommodations. Sometimes the teachers, like I said, was not willing to accommodate or didn't understand, you know, I just felt like they need to have a clear understanding of why it's important. (personal communication, April 6, 2014)

The researcher asked for clarification by paraphrasing, "If I understand, what you are saying is have teachers designated who are willing and have the knowledge of working with kids with special needs" (personal communication, April 6, 2014). Parent #9 replied

Yeah, 'cause the willing part is key to the success of the student. Once my son got moved into the teacher's class that was willing and mostly had a soft spot for kids with a disability students, because he said that he also had a disability growing up. He thrived and the teacher loved him. You know, with no problems at all. (Parent #9, personal communication, April 10, 2014)

One parent suggested that the schools should collaborate with parents and provide parents with effective strategies the parents could do with their children at home to help

improve their children's academic success. "Communicate with the parents. Let them know what's really going on, you know? And, what can we do to help out? I haven't got that, you know?" (Parent #8, personal communication, April 10, 2014).

While there may be training provided for teachers to know how to help students with specific needs, the parents also have the desire to know what they can do to help their children be successful as well.

Provide Additional Resources. Lastly, the parents suggested that the school provide more resources such as placing an instructional aide in the classrooms to assist both the teacher and students. The parents thought that additional resources were needed because the parents perceived the teachers were overwhelmed and/or unable to adequately provide services for their children due to the teacher's limited time compared to the number of students who needed individual help from the teacher. Parent #1 stated that the schools needed

more resources for these types of children 'cause I know that the teachers just don't have the time to, you know, focus on this one child. So, I would say more tutoring, more teachers, and more resources for these children. (Parent #1, personal communication, April 7, 2014)

Summary

During the 1:1 interviews, the parents described their involvement in their child's education by assisting their child with homework, spending time at the library, and scaffolding their child's understanding of concepts that were taught at school. At times,

the parents would volunteer at the school depending on their schedules and/or teachers' requests.

The parents found that dissemination of information was most productive when the communication came from the teachers. The teachers played a key role in providing parents information about how their child was progressing and whether their child met the IEP goals. When the teacher did not communicate with the parent, there was often a disconnection for the parent regarding their child's level of academic and social progress, which increased the parent's frustration.

Most parents shared that compliance was met in most IEP meetings by asking the parents what they felt their child needed from the school district to be successful, discussed the students' goals, and requested the parents' signature.

The majority of the students were identified for special education early in the primary grades. Some of the parents felt there was shared decision making for special education services for their child while others sought second opinions before agreeing that their child had a special need. Most of the parents were satisfied with the services, but there were parents who felt their children needed additional services and did not think their child demonstrated adequate academic and/or social progress as a result of special education services. In addition, there were parents who stated they had reached out to the school for additional support but were told that the district did not have the resources to provide the additional support. Other times, the parents were not contacted at all by the school or district office. The lack of resources and communication created dissatisfaction for many of the parents that felt the districts' special education services were subpar.

In order to improve the school partnership with parents and the IEP process, the parents suggested that the school present information during the IEP in layman terms so the parents could fully understand the IEP. The parents suggested that the schools send out newsletters or set a schedule so parents knew when they could volunteer at the school. In addition, the parents suggested that the schools provide para-educators in the classrooms to support both the teacher and students.

This chapter presented both the quantitative and qualitative data collected during this study. The quantitative and qualitative data demonstrated that the parents were satisfied with the special education services overall, but there were specific areas that could be improved. Chapter 5 will provide an overview of the study and an analysis of the findings for the research questions. Then, the chapter will present implications and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 5 provides an overview of the study by reviewing the purpose of the study, research questions, and methodology. Then, this chapter will include a discussion regarding the study while making connections with existing literature. The implications from the study are discussed thereafter, followed by recommendations for future practice and research. Lastly, this chapter will provide a conclusion of this study.

Purpose of the Study

Through the lens of the critical race theory framework, the researcher documented the “voice” of African American parents who have male children directly influenced by the special education referral process. By examining the experience for African American families during the special education referral process, the researcher sought to understand the overrepresentation of African American males in special education. Therefore, the purpose of this mixed method study was to analyze the lived experiences of the parents of African American male children as they described their involvement in the special education referral process. Specifically, the researcher analyzed how the parents’ type of involvement influenced the parents’ evaluation of the information received during the special education process, parents’ participation in decision making, and the parents’ satisfaction with the provision of services.

This study addressed the following four research questions

1. What are the parents’ experiences and perspectives regarding the special education referral process for their African American male children?

2. How does the parents' involvement compare to the parents' evaluation of information disseminated to the parents during the referral process?
3. How does the parents' involvement compare to the parents' perception of their involvement in the decision making process during the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) meeting?
4. To what extent does the parents' involvement compare with the parents' satisfaction with the educational services for African American male students?

Methodology

The study was conducted in a small district located in West Contra Costa County. The purposive sample included 58 parents of African American male students in the district receiving special education services. These specific parents had the knowledge and lived experience by participating in the special education process for their children: key insights to capture for the purpose of this study. In order to accurately capture the parents' experiences, the researcher conducted two phases of data collection that include both quantitative and qualitative data. First, the researcher mailed surveys along with consent forms to the parents during two rounds and made personal phone calls to the 58 parents to participate in the study. Twenty-four parents responded to the survey, a 41% response rate. The researcher called the 24 participants by phone and chose the first eight parents who agreed to participate in the follow up 1:1 interviews that were conducted during the second phase of the research. The data from the survey was analyzed using SPSS software 22.0.

The 1:1 interviews were transcribed by a third party, reviewed by the researcher for accuracy, and then analyzed using open coding in HyperRESEARCH to find common themes. The open codes that originated from the parent interviews were organized in four main themes that related to the research questions, including (1) parent involvement, (2) dissemination of information, (3) decision making, and (4) satisfaction with provision of services. The qualitative interviews were triangulated with the quantitative survey responses and field notes that helped to deepen the understanding of the patterns in the special education process and capture the parents' lived experiences.

Discussion of the Findings

The researcher examined the findings from this study by connecting the findings with the research questions and relevant literature.

Research Question 1: *What are the parents' experiences and perspectives regarding the special education referral process for their African American male children?*

Parent Involvement

Harry et al. (1995) posited that school personnel seldom acknowledge or elicit parents' knowledge as a means to understand their students. Instead, "African American parents tend to be seen from a deficit perspective that is intensified when the child is designated disabled" (Harry et al., 1995, p. 612). In order to better understand the parents' experience during the special education process, the researcher first examined how parents were involved with their child's academic program generally.

All the parents who participated in the study shared that they wanted their children to succeed academically. Eight of eight parents stated they were actively

involved in their child's academic development to ensure progress for their children. The types of parental involvement varied from providing their children with a space at home conducive for studying, volunteering at the school, connecting enrichment activities to the foundational content skills taught in the classroom, and/or working with community organizations for additional support such as counseling and tutoring for their children.

Epstein and Van Voorhis (2010) stated "affluent communities tend to have more positive family involvement, on average, *unless* schools and teachers in economically distressed communities work to build positive partnerships with their students' families" (p. 12). The researcher used Joyce Epstein and Salinas's (1993) parental involvement framework that included six types of parental involvement, ranging from Type 1 Parenting to Type 6 Collaborating with the Community (see Figure 2). Epstein did not rank the types of parental involvement in order of importance, the researcher hypothesized that the more the parents participated in parental involvement and were more involved at the school site and community, the more the parent would feel connected and a part of their decision making process for their child's educational outcomes.

The researcher used Epstein and Salinas's (1993) six types of parental involvement framework to examine how the parents' type of involvement correlated with their experience during the special education process. Although Epstein did not rank the types of parental involvement, this researcher identified the order of the Type 1 (Parenting) to Type 6 (Collaborating with the Community) sequentially as Type 1 being the lowest level of involvement directly with the school site and community to Type 6 as

being the highest level of involvement. The researcher found in the survey data that the parenting type with the highest mean was Type 1-Parenting and the lowest average was Type 3-Volunteering (see Table 1). The most dominant parenting types were as follows Type 1-Parenting (37.5%), Type 4-Learning at Home (29.2%), Type 3-Communication (16.7%), and Type 6-Collaborating with the Community (16.7%). None of the parents were dominant in the Volunteering or Decision Making parenting type, which are more directly tied to parental involvement at the school site (see Table 2).

During the 1:1 interviews, all eight parents described their involvement as helping their children with their homework. The majority of the parents expressed that they communicated with the teachers to check their children's progress and find out what they could do at home to support their children. The parents stated that they tried to volunteer at times but it was not always possible due to other obligations such as work. For example Parent #8 said

I am not able to volunteer as much as I used to because I work too much now.

However, I try to go ahead and do a few things on Friday with the class when the teacher needs me to. (personal communication, April 12, 2014)

This example demonstrated that the parent was not always able to volunteer at the school, but the parent was more likely to adjust her schedule to volunteer if the teacher asked her to do so. Another parent stated it would be helpful to have a volunteer schedule from the teacher and/or school, so the parents knew when she could volunteer and plan accordingly.

This data was consistent with the research that parents were more involved at home than they were at the school site (Diamond, Wang, & Gomez, 2004). In both instances, the parents shared examples that demonstrated when the teacher and/or school site solicited the parents' help the parents were more likely to become more involved at the school site. The researcher contends that the school personnel play an integral role in fostering parental involvement at the school sites.

From both the quantitative and qualitative data, the researcher found overall that the parents were satisfied with the services and their level of parental involvement. Despite their general satisfaction, there were specific areas the parents expressed as a need for improvement that included communication, parents involvement in the decision making process, and the additional services for their children.

Research Question 2: *How does the parents' involvement compare to the parents' evaluation of information disseminated to the parents during the referral process?*

The researcher analyzed the parents' responses to the survey questions and compared the parents' responses during the interviews to examine how the parents' involvement correlated with the parent's evaluation of the information they received during the IEP process. Some of the themes highlighted from the data included dissemination of information, teachers' communication, lack of communication, and the teachers' special education background knowledge.

Dissemination of Information

In the surveys and interviews, all of the parents expressed general satisfaction with the dissemination of information they received from the school personnel.

From the survey responses the researcher found as the parents' involvement related to the Parenting, Communicating, Learning at Home, and Collaborating with the Community increased, the parents' perceptions that they were a member of the IEP team who played an integral part in the IEP decision making process also increased (see Table 4). All of the parents (100%) agreed with the survey statement that they were given information about their parental rights or provided a document regarding the special education procedures. In addition, the majority of the parents (96%) agreed during the IEP that their child's accommodations and/or modifications were discussed. Consistent with the intent of the special education law and mandates such as IDEA, parents in this study were provided with formal notices, formal meetings, and legal documents that were intended to increase parental involvement (Howland, Anderson, Smiley, & Abbott, 2006). However, one third of the parents responded that they were not given the IEP report prior to the meeting, they did not fully understand the special education process or their rights, and the school did not explain the parents' options if they disagreed with a decision of the school.

Howland, Anderson, Smiley, and Abbott (2006) stated the typical formal communication between parents and school personnel during the special education process "perpetuated the overuse of technical language, hierarchal relations and one-way communication" that relegated parents to "the role of recipient of professional judgment versus empowered participants in their child's education" (p. 49). Instead of formal meetings and documents, researchers found parents preferred and were more likely to be engaged when the conversation between the parent and school personnel was informal

(Harry, 1992a; Turnbull & Winton, 1984). The researcher found this finding was also evident in this study as parents described their experience while engaging with their children's teachers.

Teachers' Communication

The parents' comments during the interviews strongly indicated that teachers played a key role in disseminating information that fostered a positive partnership between the parents and the school personnel. The parents expressed how their communication and understanding of the special education process was positive when the parents were able to easily communicate with the teachers. For example, Parent #7 shared how she inquired about her son's IEP services and academic progress by communicating with the teacher. She said, "The teacher is always encouraging me, whenever I have the time or I'm available, to come up to come to the school. And, she thanks me and says she appreciates it when I do come" (Parent #7, personal communication, April 20, 2014).

The researcher found that the ease of informal communication helped foster a positive relationship between the parents and teachers.

Lack of Communication

When there was a lack of communication from the teachers, there were negative experiences and barriers for the parents. Parent #2 stated that she vocalized to the teacher to call her if there were any problems, but the teacher did not and was dismissive with her request. Therefore, the parent stated that she had to be persistent, assert herself, and pressure the teacher to stay in contact with her regarding her child. Parent #2 also shared how she tried to obtain further evaluation since her son was falling behind by attempting

to contact both the school and the district administrators. However, despite her multiple attempts to contact the school and district office, she did not receive any follow up. She said that she had “pretty much given up” (Parent #2, personal communication, April 5, 2014). The lack of communication from the school personnel disempowered the parent and created a barrier for the parent to become involved. Overall, the lack of communication created a negative experience for the parent that influenced the parent to distrust the school personnel, thereby creating further distance between the home and the school.

Teacher’s Special Education Background Knowledge

During this study, it was evident if the teacher had a background or understanding about the needs of students with special needs, this awareness helped to build a positive relationship with the parents as described by Parent #9. She described the teacher and stated

She just amazes me. She has a great background for the Special Ed department for training and education, I think this helps her immensely with being able to deal with the special children...she really takes the time to evaluate the learning pattern of each child and then she will accommodate them. (Parent #9, personal communication, April 10, 2014)

The parent explained how the teacher shared her knowledge with the parent in a way that was easy to understand and it was evident that the teacher had a genuine interest in educating her child. The teacher’s willingness to use layman’s terms and think of creative ways to educate her child helped the parent to be more open to collaborating with the

teacher and supporting her child's educational needs. In this study, the parents suggested that school personnel explain special education terms to parents in simple terms so the parent fully understands the IEP plans and process.

Researchers posited when parents are unable to understand the special education terms and jargon, they are more like to perceive themselves as unprepared to address their children's education needs. As a result, parents rely heavily on the decisions made by the school personnel rather than provide input and actively participate in the decision making during the IEP process (Goldstein, 1993; Lytle & Bordin, 2001). However, when the teachers are willing to explain the terms, show a genuine interest in the children's academic growth, and encourage parents' input, this interaction promotes a positive collaboration with the parents.

Research Question 3: *How does the parents' involvement compare to the parents' perception of their involvement in the decision making process during the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) meeting?*

Decision Making Process

Johns, Crowley, and Guetzloe (2002) stated parents should play an integral role as an equal partner in decision making during the IEP process. However, previous research showed a passive pattern of parental participation and the "passivity among minority families is often interpreted as reflecting numerous parental difficulties, such as lack of knowledge of their rights, or of system procedures and policies; difficulties with transportation, child care, or work" (Harry et al., 1995, p. 364).

The parent responses related to the parent types of Parenting, Communicating, and Learning at Home that were positively correlated. However, the parent types that would involve parental involvement at the school site such as volunteering and collaboration with the community did not have statistical significance.

Johns et al. (2002) stated the IEP meeting should be scheduled during a time when the parent would not feel uncomfortable or rushed. In addition, the school personnel must schedule the IEP meetings in advance and include the parents in deciding the best time and location to conduct the meeting (Fish, 2008; Simpson, 1996). Despite the research and federal laws governing parental participation in special education, 42% of the parents in this study disagreed that the IEP meetings were scheduled at a time and/or location conducive for the parent.

Federal law mandates, such as IDEA, require that school personnel ensure active participation and meaningful parental involvement during the IEP process as well as confirm the parents' understanding of procedural rights and proceedings (Dragow, Yell, & Robinson, 2001; Fish, 2008; Salas, 2004). Despite the federal law to promote active parental involvement during the IEP process, parents often feel alienated because the school personnel tend to dominant the decision making process (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997; Vaughn, Box, Harrell, & Lasky, 1988). The parents' limited involvement in decision making was also evident in this study. For example, while most parents agreed that school personnel encouraged them to participate in decision making, 70% disagreed with the statement "I have been asked for my opinion about how well special education services are meeting my child's need." It can be inferred that the parents were asked to

participate, but were not posed any questions that would help to foster parent participation or provide their opinion as it relates to their child's special education services and/or needs. This finding is evident as the parents recalled the experience when their children were first identified for special education services.

Early Identification

Stoner et al. (2005) did a study of parents' perceptions during the IEP process and found that the parents perceived the initial IEP meeting for their child as confusing, complicated, and, at times, traumatic, which led to dissatisfaction with the special education program.

Majority of the students were identified for special education services at a relatively young age (see Appendix B) ranging from ages 3-7. Similar to the research, although the parents attended the IEP meetings, they did not always make decisions regarding their child's academic program. Instead, parents were often minimized to passive roles such as listening to what the school personnel stated about their child's disability and simply signing documents rather than actively participating in the decision making process during the IEP process (Harry, 1992b).

For example, the researcher asked the parents about how they felt when their children were identified. Most stated that they were shocked, in disbelief, and/or in tears about the identification. Parent #1 said, "At that time, I was upset" (personal communication, April 7, 2014). She was upset because she felt her son was only at the school for one year. During his first year of school (kindergarten) multiple teachers were assigned to his class and his parent felt there was no teacher that really knew him to truly

discern what he was capable of learning. Another parent's son was identified at age five because he was making noises in class. The parent was shocked and cried, but later, she was satisfied that he was identified early since he was getting in trouble at school and she did not know what to do. These two examples are similar to research when parents felt that decisions were imposed on them rather than co-constructed (Boyd & Correa, 2005; Lowry, 1983). Kalyanpur et al. (2000) has found that collaborative relationships were almost non-existent between schools and parents, particularly parents from low socioeconomic status and cultural diversity.

In a research study with 73 parents with students receiving special education services (Pruitt et al., 1998), educators were commonly unwilling to listen to parents' input and parents were not respected (Salas, 2004). In this study, the parents shared experiences consistent to the research that they had great difficulty getting in touch with personnel when they had concerns and/or their opinions were disregarded.

Previous Experience

Boyd and Correa (2005) cited the work of Welch (2003) and stated that one of the factors that special educators may overlook when interacting with low-income African Americans is the possibility of the parents' own involvement with the special education system as children. Thus, parental history and direct experience has helped to shape some parents' expectations, or lack thereof, and biases toward professionals working within the system of special education. (p. 6)

Some of the parents had background knowledge regarding the special education process because they had a previous child in special education and/or the parents were in the special education program as children themselves.

When the researcher asked Parent #11 what kind of information she received during the special education referral process, she replied

They gave a packet. They had a write-up on all the stuff that was of concern. They send you home with a packet of information. Being in that kind of environment when I was a little kid, I already knew that it was available. So I sought it out.

(personal communication, April 9, 2014)

As a result of Parent #11's prior experience as someone who also received special education services, she was able to recognize that her son was having speech difficulties and knew what was available at the school. Her prior knowledge enabled her to actively pursue assessments and services in special education for her son.

There were other parents who initiated evaluation of their children due to experience and/or knowledge of the special education programs available. One parent shared that she sought advice for a medical doctor regarding her son's speech, then followed up with her son's school to provide speech therapy. She explained that she knew to ask about services because "I was always in special education when I was a kid. And so, being [Laughs.] my age now, I knew they'd have the same thing." (Parent #11, personal communication, April 9, 2014)

Other parents were aware of the process to request testing or knew of their parental rights because they had older children who received special education services or

they sought an opinion from an outside resource such as a medical doctor or special education advocate. Each parent who sought a second opinion or had an advocate shared how they felt they were involved in the decision making process.

In this study, it was evident that the more resources and knowledge the parent acquired outside the school regarding the special education process and the more parents were informed of their rights played a more active role in the decision making process for their child; in contrast to the parents without an advocate or second opinion.

Parent #11 considered herself actively involved by explaining

The one good thing I like about his school is they sat down and line by line, they'll say, 'Okay, this is what we're going to discuss.' And then, at the end of what we have discussed, they have a series of questions such as did you understand what was going on? You initial it or you don't initial it. And, they'll explain, if you need more explanation. (Parent #11, personal communication, April 9, 2014)

When the researcher asked Parent #10 how she was involved in the decision making process for her child, she said, "I'm involved because I'm in a meeting when they come up with an educational plan saying, do I agree or disagree? Initial here. Sign there" (personal communication, April 16, 2014). During the interview, when the researcher asked the parents what input was she able to provide, she did not know. When the researcher asked the parent if this was the way she preferred to be involved, she replied, "I don't know. That's how it was presented to me" (Parent #10, personal communication, April 16, 2014). Parent #2 also shared her limited knowledge and experience during the

special education process by stating, “I think it should be more hands-on. Like, let me know more details of what’s going on. It’s real vague...And, it’s like I’m like left in the dark” (personal communication, April 5, 2014). From this study, it was evident if the parent did not have previous experience or receive a second opinion from an advocate or medical doctor, the parents’ knowledge and involvement in their child’s special education services was quite limited to listening to the school personnel and signing the IEP documents.

Research Question 4: *To what extent does the parents’ involvement compare with the parents’ satisfaction with the educational services for African American male students?*

Satisfaction with Provision of Services

The difference for parenting types and Provision of Services were not tested due to low statistical power. However, during the survey, 92% of the parents strongly agreed or agreed that schools provided their children with all the services documented on the IEP and evaluated whether the program met the needs of their children. Despite the high response rate that the school program evaluated their child’s progress, 39% of the parents strongly disagreed or disagreed that the school responded appropriately to their child’s needs and disagreed that the school personnel provided enough information to know whether their children made adequate progress towards their learning goals. More than one-third of the parents strongly disagreed or disagreed that school personnel connected the parents with community resources.

In previous research, despite the parents’ lack of knowledge regarding the special education system, Boone and Smith (1981) found that parents generally expressed

satisfaction with the services their children received. Similarly, in this study, 75% of the parents strongly agreed or agreed that the special education services their children received were effective and they were satisfied with the quality of services that their children received.

Most of the parents who had children receiving speech therapy were satisfied with their child's goals and the growth they saw in the child's speech development. The parents stated that their children would receive tutoring, "pull out" for specific subject support, or modifications with testing and homework. For students who had a cognitive disability, the parents expressed the need for more personalized instruction, but verbalized that they recognized the teachers' limitations to provide such support due to the number of students enrolled in the class.

For example, Parent #2 stated, "...she really doesn't have the time to devote...I could say they should offer more, but it could be the county not having the resources" (personal communication, April 5, 2014). Another parent shared how she tried to get her son in the school's afterschool tutoring program for the last two years without success. She tried to understand by stating the school may be "overwhelmed" but she still expressed her frustration due to the school's lack of response to her requests.

Most of the parents shared how the district had limited resources, the school personnel did not always respond to their questions or requests regarding services for their child. As a result, parents felt that their children were falling behind without knowing what else to do to help. Parent #9 shared, "It is one thing knowing the name of the disability, but it is another to understand what that really means...that's another thing

and how to know what accommodations need to go along with assisting them with their disability” (Parent #9, personal communication, April 10, 2014) while Parent #2 said, “He’s being left behind because he’s not getting the proper services. So, I’m pretty upset” (personal communication, April 5, 2014). Despite some level of frustration, the parents were satisfied with the services provided given the circumstances of limited resources available.

The findings from this study illuminated parental barriers that were similar to previous research. For example, Kalyanpur and Rao (1991) stated there was a barrier for parent participation in the IEP process due to the lack of parents obtaining and applying information about the special education system. Lowry (1983) stated, “there appeared to be an implicit understood dissatisfaction with the school system’s abilities to provide quality support for their children” (p. 55). Similar, in this study, when the parents’ knowledge regarding the special education process and services increased, there was also an increase in the parents’ perception that the special education services did not adequately meet the needs of their children due to limited resources or support for their children.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

Parents’ voices play an integral role in understanding the special education process for deciding placement and services for their children. Although the parents should influence the educational outcome for their children, it is evident that the parents’ “voice” is not always heard and/or appreciated by school personnel. These findings from the study help to inform recommended practices and policies that could positively

influence special education placement and services. Based on the findings of this research study, the following are recommendations suggested to improve the special education process for parents and their African American male children.

Teacher Training. The teacher's education program should spend time not only discussing the need to build partnerships with parents, but should give the teachers the practical knowledge and skills to know how to forge relationships with parents. Teachers should be taught practical strategies that include actively engaging parents from diverse backgrounds such as what kind of communication is most effective to promote parental involvement and culturally relevant pedagogy (Zionts & Zionts, 2003). Learning about the importance of including parents in the education process with an asset model rather than deficit view would help to foster positive relationships between teachers and parents that would enhance the educational opportunities for students of color.

Professional Development. Districts should provide professional development around building positive relationships with parents and the special education law. In addition, the special education department should spend time with staff annually to discuss the data and examine which students are referred to examine if there is disproportionate referrals for students of color, discuss cultural differences that may influence the students' behaviors in the classroom, and provide intervention strategies that teachers can implement prior to making referrals to help reduce the amount of students who are referred to special education. In addition, the special education programs should spend time explaining how referrals to special education can have a

great impact on the students' outcomes and discuss strategies that should be implemented as an intervention prior to making special education referrals.

Leadership Training. The special education program should work with principals regarding the special education students' rights to a free and appropriate education so when there are teachers who refuse to follow the students' IEP accommodations, the principal is equipped with the knowledge and steps to advocate for the students' academic rights (Lasky & Karge, 2006). The principals should review special education data annually and examine the reasons students are referred to special education. The principal should receive training regarding intervention strategies to observe in the classrooms so principals are knowledgeable and able to keep their school personnel accountable for attempting intervention strategies in the classroom before referrals are made to special education. In addition, school leadership should receive training to learn how to build a community of learners at their school site where learning is collaborative and strongly encouraged between the school and the family they serve.

Parent-School Collaboration. Schools should invest in parent programs that actively involve staff and parents, such as WestEd's Academic Parent Teacher Teams (APTT), and focus on educational goals and enable teachers to explicitly share with parents what foundational skills students will need to be successful at school. In addition, the teachers should engage in dialogue with the parents to find out the ways the parents are teaching their children at home. This way teachers can build on the parents' strategies they use at home with the students. Unlike typical parent education programs that aim to teach parents how to parent from a deficit viewpoint, school personnel should provide

programs that view parents from cultural and family viewpoint that builds upon the parents' strengths (Browder, 2001).

Parent Liaison. The school sites may consider having a parent liaison that can assist parents when their child may be identified as having a disability. The liaison can partner with the parents to let the parents know about the process in layman's terms and help parents understand the jargon and process more easily. The liaison can assist to see if the child has received intervention prior to the referral and/or provide the parents with community resources that can provide additional support. The liaison can assist the parents by reviewing and discussing the IEP goals and data, informally, prior to the IEP meeting.

Use Layman's Terms. The use of special education jargon can create a "dichotomous relationship" between the school and parents (Boyd & Correa, 2005, p. 7). During the IEP meetings, school personnel should be intentional in the language they use to explain the IEP plan. To ensure that parents and stakeholders understand what is communicated, the school personnel should explain information using simple terms that most people could understand without any formal school background or familiarity with school acronyms and/or terms. For example, instead of assuming that parents know the terms, they should always explain what the terms mean. The schools could have a list of commonly used terms during an IEP with simple definitions that can be provided to parents and referred to explicitly during the IEP meetings. This would aid in providing clarity during the IEP meeting so the parent is fully aware and knowledgeable of what is

shared during the meeting, enhancing the parent's ability to fully participate during the decision making process.

Increase Communication. In order to foster positive interactions with families and schools, the districts should create policies that mandate communication from school personnel be timely. School personnel should be required to respond to a parents' phone call or email within 48 hours. By requiring timely responses, this will help parents and school personnel to remain in contact for the best interest of the students. If the parents receive timely responses to their questions, they will more likely stay involved and engaged with the school site.

To increase parental involvement at the school site, the schools should post times when parents can volunteer. In addition, schools should find out from their parents what is the best way to communication with them such as newsletters, emails, or phones calls to engage parents. The schools should be strategic with communication by offering grade-level parent meetings that are informal and more personalized, where parents feel comfortable to exchange ideas with the teachers and/or administrators. In addition, school sites should consider ways they can involve the students as a part of the communication process, to receive feedback regarding the students' experiences at the school, and to learn what would be most helpful to promote students' success. Viewing both the parents' and students' feedback as added value would help to foster a more positive relationship with the schools' families that can be meaningful and long-lasting.

Collaborate with Community Organizations. The school districts should seek collaboration with organizations such as SELPAs that can assist with knowing what is

current in special education law and find out what successful strategies other district have implemented to engage parents in the special education process. Many of the parents expressed the need for additional services for their children. There are many resources in neighborhoods that are low cost or free that schools could refer parents and their children to for additional support such as counseling, healthcare, childcare, and tutoring to name a few. If the school is collaborative with the community, this would only enhance the opportunities available to increase parental involvement and provide students with positive support networks.

Survey. The district or school personnel should conduct a survey or a focus group of parents to examine specifically what parents may have difficulty understanding. Then, the information collected from the survey or focus groups should inform the districts' practices in providing parents additional support in which the parents have identified as an area for improvement. In this study, parents had difficulty with technical terms and did not fully understand their parental rights, particularly if they did not agree with a decision or recommendation made by the school personnel. If the parents are equipped with this knowledge, they can be empowered to make informed decisions about their child's placement and academic outcomes.

Equity of Voice. Williams (2007) cited the work of Harry et al. (1999, p. 124-125) suggesting that professionals use "a posture of cultural reciprocity" where school personnel engage in dialogue with families about differences in cultural values and practices between home and school. In this forum, parents and school personnel have an equitable voice and interdependence as they collaborate with each other for the benefit of

their students. Williams (2007) stated, “Parental perceptions of efficacy are shaped by their expectations of students and parents, and the degree of divergence, or convergence between school and home cultures” (p. 251). Consistent with this point, Parent #9 stated school personnel should “be open to suggestions, becoming aware of the home situation and parents’ interaction with the children at home” (personal communication, April 10, 2014). When it is evident that the parents’ input is both solicited and valued, interdependence between the parent and the school would help to increase parents’ involvement during the special education process.

Future Research and Limitations

Majority of the parent respondents were female. Future studies may compare the experience of male and female parents to see if there is a difference in the type of parental involvement and/or perception of the special education process. Or, researchers may want to compare the experiences of parents from different ethnic subgroups such as Asian or Hispanic to see if there are any similarities and/or dissimilarities in the parents’ experiences.

Some of the quantitative findings were not significant; therefore, it was difficult to determine if a parent’s involvement type influenced their perception of the special education process. For example, the Provision of Services could not be tested due to low statistical power. In addition, there were some parents who had high mean scores in multiple parent types. In further studies, researchers may want to examine parents with multiple parenting types versus one dominant type to see how the parents’ perception regarding their participation at the school site varies.

Researchers may also want to use a different parent model to compare the parents' involvement and perceptions. By deepening understanding of the involvement of parents during the special education process this may help to further understand what strategies are needed to increase parental involvement and decrease the overrepresentation of African American males in special education.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to understand the parents' perspective of the special education process and examine how parental involvement connected with the parents' perceptions with the dissemination of information during the special education process, decision making, and satisfaction with provision of services as they advocate for their African American male children.

Fish (2008) stated, "Educators should use parents' knowledge because Goodall and Bruder (1986) emphasized that no one knows a child better than his or her parent" (p. 9). From the results of this study, it is evident that there is a great need to actively engage parents in the special education process to improve the educational outcomes for their children. While the parents expressed general satisfaction with the special education process for their children, it was also evident that the parents' involvement in meaningful parent participation and decision making in the educational system was quite limited. The overrepresentation of African American males continues to exist while their parents' involvement continues to be limited. It is time to de-privatize the educational system and actively engage parents in the decision making process for their children. Specifically, instead of school personnel working in silos, personnel should actively collaborate with

parents regarding instructional practices and student expected outcomes, value parents' input, and encourage parental involvement at the school site. When school personnel began to view parents from a value-added perspective rather than from a deficit viewpoint, we may see more positive learning outcomes for our African American males.

While the overrepresentation of African American males in special education is multi-faceted, this study helped to capture the "voice" of the parents who have tried to be a part of their child's educational experience. Through the lens of the parents it was evident that parents were able to play an active role in their child's learning when they were given the opportunity to do so. However, when parents were discounted and left without voice or choice, the options for both the parents and their children were limited. Instead of continuing the marginalization of African American males and their parents, it is essential that schools listen openly to the parents and respond responsibly in order to effect a positive change to the experience of the African American males and their parents who are a part of the public school systems.

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Appendix A

Special Education Evaluation

Article 3. Identification, Referral, and Assessment. Referral.

(a) All referrals for special education and related services shall initiate the assessment process and shall be documented. When a verbal referral is made, staff of the school district, special education, local plan area, or county office shall offer assistance to the individual in making a request in writing, and shall assist the individual if the individual requests such assistance.

(b) All school staff referrals shall be written and include:

(1) A brief reason for the referral.

(2) Documentation of the resources of the regular education program that have been considered, modified, and when appropriate, the results of intervention. This documentation shall not delay the time-lines for completing the assessment plan or assessment.

Authority cited:

Education Code 56100(a), (i) and (1),

Reference:

Education Code 56300-56303

Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34, Section 300.128

Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34, Section 300.220.

(Amended by Register 88, No. 15.)

(a) In addition to provisions of Education Code Section 56320, assessments shall be administered by qualified personnel who are competent in both the oral or sign language skills and written skills of the individual's primary language or mode of communication and have a knowledge and understanding of the cultural and ethnic background of the pupil. If it clearly is not feasible to do so, an interpreter must be used, and the assessment report shall document this condition and note that the validity of the assessment may have been affected.

(b) The normal process of second-language acquisition, as well as manifestations of dialect and sociolinguistic variance shall not be diagnosed as a handicapping condition.

Authority cited: Education Code 56100(a), (i) and (j)

Appendix B

Parent and Student Profile from Survey Responses

| Parent | Student's Grade | Student's Current Age | Student's Age when identified | Student's Disability | Services |
|-------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|--|---|
| P1-Guardian | 3 rd Grade | Age 8 | Age 7 | LD | Self-Contained |
| P2-Mother | 5 th Grade | Age 11 | Age 4 | SLI | Speech Therapy |
| P3-Mother | 7 th Grade | Age 12 | Age 5 | LD | Alternative testing, Resource |
| P4-Mother | 6 th Grade | Age 11 | Age 8 | Other: "extra help" | Alternative testing, classroom aide, counseling and Resource |
| P5-Father | 6 th Grade | Age 15 | Age 6 | LD, Developmentally delayed but high functioning | Alternative testing |
| P6-Mother | 10 th Grade | Age 16 | Age 13 | LD | Alternative testing |
| P7-Mother | Pre-K | Age 4 | Age 3 | Autistic | Classroom aide, Occupational Therapy, Speech Therapy |
| P8-Mother | 8 th Grade | Age 13 | Age 9 | LD | Self-Contained, Instructional Aide |
| P9-Mother | 5 TH Grade | Age 10 | Age 8 | LD/SLI | Speech Therapy, Instructional Aide, modified work and alternative testing setting |
| P10-Mother | 5 th Grade | Age 11 | Unknown | SLI/ADHD | Alternative Testing, Counseling, RSP, and Speech Therapy |
| P11-Mother | 3 rd Grade | Age 8 | Age 3 | SLI | Speech Therapy |

| | | | | | |
|--------------|-----------------------|--------|--------------|----------|--|
| P12-Mother | Kindergarten | Age 6 | Age 3 | SLI | Speech Therapy |
| P13-Mother | Pre-K | Age 5 | Age 3 | SLI/ADHD | Classroom Aide, Counseling, Speech Therapy |
| P14-Mother | 4 th Grade | Age 9 | Age 5 | ADHD | Classroom Aide, Counseling and Occupational Therapy |
| P15-Mother | 5 th Grade | Age 11 | Age 5 | LD/SLI | Speech Therapy, Classroom Aide, and alternative testing |
| P16-Mother | 9 th Grade | Age 14 | Kindergarten | Autistic | Classroom Aide, Extended School Year, Self-Contained, Speech Therapy |
| P17-Mother | 7 th Grade | Age 12 | Age 11 | LD | Resource |
| P18-Guardian | Grade 1 | Age 6 | Age 5 | SLI | Speech Therapy |
| P19-Guardian | Grade 6 | Age 12 | Age 7 | LD | Resource |
| P20-Mother | Grade 5 | Age 11 | Age 9 | LD | Alternative testing, Resource |
| P21-Mother | Grade 7 | Age 13 | Age 11 | SLI | Speech Therapy |
| P22-Mother | Grade 3 | Age 9 | Age 6 | LD/SLI | Alternative Testing, Counseling, Resource, Speech Therapy |
| P23-Mother | Grade 3 | Age 8 | Age 7 | LD | Alternative Testing, Resource |
| P24-Guardian | Grade 5 | Age 11 | Age 9 | LD | Resource, Counseling |

Appendix D

Special Education Enrollment by Ethnicity and Disability for 2012-2013

| Ethnicity | ID | HH | DEAF | SLI | VI | ED | OI | OHI | SLD | DB | MD | AUT | TBI | Total |
|------------------|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|------------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|------------|
| Native American | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Asian | 2 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 16 |
| Pacific Islander | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Filipino | 3 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 11 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 30 |
| Hispanic | 3 | 0 | 0 | 16 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 7 | 34 | 0 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 73 |
| African American | 6 | 0 | 0 | 13 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 37 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 0 | 78 |
| White | 2 | 3 | 1 | 10 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 30 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 61 |
| TOTAL | 17 | 3 | 1 | 52 | 1 | 9 | 5 | 20 | 119 | 0 | 0 | 36 | 0 | 263 |

Appendix E

Parent Involvement Survey-Special Education

ADAPTED FROM JOYCE EPSTEIN & SALINAS (1993) AND NATIONAL CENTER FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION ACCOUNTABILITY MONITORING

For each statement below, please select one of the responses choices. In responding to each statement, think about your experience and/or your child's experience with special education over the past year. Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate; you may skip any item that you feel does not apply to you or your child. The researcher is conducting the research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

A. PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE REGARDING THE IEP PROCESS

- 1. How well has your child's teacher or someone at school done the following THIS SCHOOL YEAR to include you in the IEP process?** Circle ONE answer on each line to tell if the school does this: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), or Strongly Disagree (1).

| School's Efforts to Partner with Parents | SA | Agree | Disagree | SD |
|---|-----------|--------------|-----------------|-----------|
| 1. I was given information about my rights as a parent or provided a special education booklet regarding procedures. (info) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 2. At the IEP meeting, we discussed accommodations and modifications that my child would need. (info) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 3. My child's evaluation report (written summary) is written in terms I understand. (info) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4. I fully understood the special education process and my rights. (info) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 5. I have been asked for my opinion about how well special education services are meeting my child's needs. (DM) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6. The school gives parents the help they may need to play an active role in their child's education. (info) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 7. I felt a part of the decision making process for my child's IEP. (DM) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 8. The school explains what options parents have if they disagree with a decision of the school. (info) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 9. The school communicates with me regularly with me regarding my child's progress on IEP goals. (info) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 10. I was given all reports and evaluations related to my child prior to the IEP meeting. (info) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 11. Teachers and administrators at my child's school invite me to share my knowledge and experience with school personnel. (DM) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 12. Teachers and administrators seek out parent input. (DM) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 13. My concerns and recommendations were documented in the IEP minutes, goals or some part of the IEP. (DM) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 14. The evaluation results were thoroughly explained to me. (info) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 15. Teachers and administrators encourage me to participate in the decision-making progress. (DM) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 16. Teachers treat me as a team member. (DM) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 17. IEP meetings are scheduled at a time and place that are convenient for me. (info) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

B. THE SCHOOL'S PROVISIONS OF SERVICES

- 2. To what degree are you satisfied with how well your child's school has provided the following special education services THIS SCHOOL YEAR? Circle ONE answer on each line to tell if the school does this: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), or Strongly Disagree (1).**

| My child's school... | SA | Agree | Dis- agree | SD |
|---|----|-------|---------------|----|
| 18. My child's school provides my child with all the services documented on my child's IEP. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 19. My child's school is intentional in providing my child with services that maximize time and support for my child to succeed in regular education classes. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 20. My child's school responds appropriately to my child's needs. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 21. My child's school has helped me find resources in my community such as after school programs, social services, etc. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 22. My child's school gives me enough information to know whether or not my child is making adequate progress. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 23. My child's school regularly evaluates whether my child's program continues to meet his/her needs. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 24. My child is educated in regular classes, with support, to the maximum extent appropriate. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 25. The regular education teachers make accommodations and modifications in the regular education class as indicated on my child's IEP. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 26. My child's teachers and service providers have the resources they need, such as books and technology, to provide my child with effective services. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 27. The special education services and programs my child receives are effective. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 28. My concerns about my child and education services provided were addressed to my satisfaction in the IEP. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 29. I am satisfied with the quality of services that my child receives. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 30. I feel I can disagree with my child's special education program or services without negative consequences for me or my child. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

C. THE SCHOOL'S CONTACT WITH YOU

- 3. How well has your child's teacher or someone at school done the following THIS SCHOOL YEAR? Circle ONE answer on each line to tell if the school does this:**
Well (4), OK (3),
Poorly (2) or Never (1).

| My child's teacher or someone at the school... | Does this... | | | |
|---|--------------|----|--------|-------|
| | Well | OK | Poorly | Never |
| 31. Helps me understand my child's stage of development. (Type 1) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 32. Tells me how my child is doing in school. (Type 2) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 33. Asks me to volunteer at the school. (Type 3) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 34. Explains how to check my child's homework. (Type 4) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 35. Sends home news about things happening at school. (Type 2) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 36. Provides information on community services that I may want to use with my family. (Type 6) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 37. Invites me to PTA/PTO meetings. (Type 5) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 38. Assigns homework that requires my child to talk with me about things learned in class. (Type 4) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

| | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| 39. Invites me to a program at the school. (Type 3) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 40. Asks me to help with fund raising. (Type 5) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 41. Has a parent-teacher conference with me. (Type 2) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 42. Includes parents on school committees, such as curriculum, budget, or improvement committees. (Type 5) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 43. Provides information on community events that I may want to attend with my child. (Type 6) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

D. YOUR INVOLVEMENT

4. Families are involved in different ways at school and at home. How often do YOU do the following activities? Circle ONE answer on each line to tell if this happens:

Everyday or Most Days (4), Once a Week (3), Once in a While (2), or Never (1).

| How often do you... | Every day/ Most Days | Once a Week | Once in a while | Never |
|---|-------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-------|
| 44. Go to PTA/PTO meetings. (Type 5) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 45. Volunteer in the classroom or at the school? (Type 3) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 46. Review and discuss the schoolwork your child brings home? (Type 4) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 47. Visit your child's school? (Type 3) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 48. Check to see if your child Jacob did his/her homework? (Type 4) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

| | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| 49. Go to a school event (e.g., sports, music, drama) or meeting? (Type 3) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 50. Ask your child how well he/she is doing in school? (Type 1) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 51. Talk to your child's teacher? (Type 2) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 52. Take my child to special places or events in the community. (Type 6) | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

53. What school practice to involve parents has helped you most and why?

54. What is the best thing that this school could do next year to help you with your child?

55. Any other suggestions?

Additional Information:

I am the child's parent, educational surrogate or guardian (please circle one):

Child's Grade:

Child's age:

Child's age when first referred to Special Education:

Child's Primary Category of Exceptionality/Disability:

Educable Mentally Disabled

Blind/Visually Impaired

Autistic

Emotionally Disturbed

Learning Disabled

Speech/Language

Trainable Mentally Disabled

Developmentally Delayed

Severely Mentally Disabled

Deaf/Blind

What types of services does your child receive? (check all that apply):

Alternative test-taking format

Assistive device or other aide

- Classroom aide
- Counseling
- Extended school year
- Instruction in a Resource classroom
- Occupational therapy
- Physical therapy
- Self-contained classroom
- Speech therapy
- Other accommodations (specify):



Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships

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December 1, 2014

To: Quiauna Scott

From: Joyce L. Epstein & Steven B. Sheldon

Re: Permission to use:

- Sheldon, S. B. & Epstein, J. L. (2007). Parent and Student Surveys on Family and Community Involvement in the Elementary and Middle Grades. Baltimore, MD: Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University.
- Epstein, J. L. & Salinas, K. C. (1993). Surveys and Summaries: Questionnaires for Teachers and Parents in the Elementary and Middle Grades. Baltimore, MD: Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University.
- Epstein, J. L., Connors-Tadros, L., & Salinas, K. C. (1993). High School and Family Partnerships: Surveys for Teachers, Parents, and Students in High School. Baltimore, MD: Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University.

This letter grants you permission to use, adapt, or reprint the surveys noted above in your dissertation study.

We ask only that you include appropriate references to the survey and authors in the text and bibliography of your reports and publications.

Best of luck with your project.

Appendix F

Interview Protocol

In order to gain a better understanding of the parents'/guardians' experience during the special education referral process, the researcher will ask the participants the following questions:

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

1. How are you involved in your child's education? What activities do you do at home, school and/or community to support your child's learning?
2. Does your child's school treat you as a "partner" and seek your participation? Describe the school's actions that make you feel this way.

EXPERIENCE DURING THE INDIVIDUALIZED LEARNING PLAN (IEP) PROCESS

3. How was your child identified as eligible for special education services? How did you feel about the identification?
4. What kind of information did you receive about the special education referral process prior, during and after the IEP meeting? How did the information received help you to understand the IEP process for your child?
5. In what ways were you involved in the decision-making during the referral process (i.e. determine the IEP goals for your child, provide input regarding placement such as special day class, resource and/or additional services)? Is this how you would have preferred to be involved? Explain.

SATISFICATION WITH SERVICES

6. What types of services or additional support does your child receive as a result of his IEP? How were you included in making this decision?
7. How has the special education services impacted your child's academic and/or social behavior?

8. Overall, how satisfied are you with the services or additional support that you receive from your child's school?

SUGGESTIONS

9. Suppose a friend called you and said their child was going to go through the same evaluation process that your child did. What would you tell him or her? What advice would you give him or her?

10. What advice would you provide school personnel regarding how to foster a positive partnership with parents to support their child's success?

CLOSING

11. Are there any further comments about your experience that you would like to add?

PROBES

Why or why not?

Can you tell me more about that?

Can you think of an example of when that has happened?

You mentioned (). Could you be more specific?

Appendix G

Survey Open-Ended Questions and Responses

Open Ended Question - What school practice to involve parents has helped you most and why?

| Parents' Open Ended Responses | Key Word(s) |
|--|---|
| P1. Parent teacher conferences they keep me updated on my child's status. | Parent-Teacher Conferences |
| P2. When my son's teacher emails me daily and info weekly about my son and PTA meetings. | Teacher Communication Email/Weekly reports |
| P4. Communication, being on the same page. | Communication |
| P6. IEP Meetings because I have been trying to get Vinson the help he needs for some time now. | IEP meetings |
| P7. None. | N/A |
| P8. I liked the way my son's teacher always provided information about my son's education and involved me with all his work. | Teacher communication |
| P9. My son's teacher and I have established a strong line of communication and she is quick to respond to my email or voicemail. | Teacher communication Email/Voicemail |
| P10. I read teacher email to me and we write back and forth along together. | Teacher Email |
| P11. Being able to email or leave a voice message for my kids teachers. | Teacher Email/Voicemail |
| P12. Pare able to sit in class, to have a better understanding what they do every day. | Para-educator |
| P13. Parent conferences. Mrs. L explains everything in detail. She is the best. | Parent-Teacher Conferences |
| P14. The way they communicate with me because if I can't be reached by phone they try other ways. | Communication |
| P17. The automated calls I sometimes get. | Automated calls |
| P21. Everything is well | Everything |
| P24. IEP because it sets realistic goals and it | IEP goals |

| | |
|--|--|
| keeps one informed | Informed |
| <i>Open Ended Question - What is the best thing that this school could do for next year to help you with your child?</i> | |
| Parents' Open Ended Responses | Key Word(s) |
| P1. Keep in contact. | Contact |
| P2. Have tutoring, mentoring in the beginning of the year so it could help students get the help they need and it can show progress throughout the school year. | Tutoring Mentoring |
| P4. Well, Hillside teachers have been awesome. | Teachers |
| P6. Stop having so many foolish detentions. For instance, Vinson was subpoena to court which the school was informed of beforehand, but when I dropped him off as school after court he was given a detention for coming to class late. That's stupid. | Stop detentions |
| P7. Be more flexible. | Be flexible. |
| P8. My son will be in high school next year. | N/A |
| P9. Offer additional tutoring services and/or homework help. | Tutoring Homework help |
| P10. Not sure because I am not in the classroom, full time, only a teacher could tell me a suggestion to see if it will improve for the better. | Teacher's input |
| P11. Keep open communication. | Open Communication |
| P12. Give her more attention or hire an aid to assist the teachers. | Para-educators |
| P13. Give me information and/or help me help him learn how to read and focus. | Help parents with teaching strategies |
| P14. Maybe believe him more and not feel like everything is always his fault. | Believe students |
| P17. Periodically calling and asking has the child been bringing the notices and homework to the parent. | Contact parent Verify receipt of notices/HW |
| P21. Everything is well | Everything well |
| P24. Spend more time with speech therapy. | Increase services |

Open Ended Question - Any Other Suggestions?

| Parents' Open Ended Responses | Key Word(s) |
|---|---|
| 7. Offer more services to children with special and autistic needs. | Increase services |
| 9. Send a monthly calendar via email with school and community events and services. | Calendar Email Community events Services |
| 12. Aides for teachers with special needs children. | Para-educators |
| 13. If the school would make certain days for parents to help out that would make it easier for me to take a day off and help. Other than that, they school is awesome. | Volunteer schedule |
| 14. Be fair to the children. Don't just go off of what one person said. It's two sides to every story. | Be fair |

Appendix H

Data Tables

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics (N = 24)

| Measure | Min | Max | Mean | SD | Cronbach's Alpha | # of Items |
|-------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|----------------------|------------|
| Parenting | 2.50 | 4.00 | 3.66 | 0.40 | Unable to calculate* | 2 |
| Communicating | 2.50 | 4.00 | 3.38 | 0.49 | .53 | 4 |
| Volunteering | 1.20 | 3.40 | 2.52 | 0.52 | .60 | 5 |
| Learning at Home | 2.25 | 4.00 | 3.42 | 0.56 | .61 | 4 |
| Decision Making | 1.00 | 4.00 | 2.62 | 0.66 | .60 | 4 |
| Collaborating with the Community | 1.33 | 4.00 | 2.79 | 0.93 | .80 | 3 |
| Other Measures | | | | | | |
| Dissemination of Information | 1.78 | 4.00 | 3.33 | 0.63 | .92 | 9 |
| Decision Making Process | 2.25 | 4.00 | 3.32 | 0.51 | .85 | 8 |
| Provision of Services | 1.69 | 4.00 | 3.22 | 0.68 | .96 | 13 |

*The Cronbach's alpha for the Type 1-Parenting type could not be calculated since the variable only consisted of two items.

Table 2

Frequency and Percentages for Dominant Parenting Types

| Dominant Parenting Type | <i>N</i> | % |
|----------------------------------|----------|-------|
| Parenting | 9 | 37.5 |
| Communicating | 4 | 16.7 |
| Learning at Home | 7 | 29.2 |
| Collaborating with the Community | 4 | 16.7 |
| Total | 24 | 100.0 |

Table 3

Correlation between Parenting Types and Perceptions of Dissemination of Information (N = 24)

| | | Dissemination of Information |
|-------------------------------------|----------|------------------------------|
| 1. Parenting | <i>r</i> | .65** |
| | <i>p</i> | .01 |
| 2. Communicating | <i>r</i> | .53** |
| | <i>p</i> | .01 |
| 3. Volunteering | <i>r</i> | .23 |
| | <i>p</i> | .27 |
| 4. Learning at Home | <i>r</i> | .48* |
| | <i>p</i> | .01 |
| 5. Decision Making | <i>r</i> | .27 |
| | <i>p</i> | .19 |
| 6. Collaborating with the Community | <i>r</i> | .41* |
| | <i>p</i> | .04 |

Note. ** indicates the correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed); * indicates the correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed). *r* = Pearson Correlation, *p* = statistical significance.

Table 4

Mean Dissemination of Information Score by Parenting Type

| | Parenting Type | <i>N</i> | Mean | <i>SD</i> | Min | Max |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------|------|-----------|------|------|
| Dissemination of Information | Parenting | 9 | 3.19 | 0.35 | 2.56 | 3.67 |
| | Communicating | 4 | 2.63 | 0.68 | 1.78 | 3.44 |
| | Learning at Home | 7 | 3.58 | 0.71 | 2.33 | 4.00 |
| | Collaborating with the Community | 4 | 3.88 | 0.15 | 3.67 | 4.00 |
| | Total | 24 | 3.33 | 0.63 | 1.78 | 4.00 |

Table 5

Parent Satisfaction with Dissemination of Information

| Survey # | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|----------|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| 1 | 62.5% | 27.5% | 0 | 0 |
| 2 | 58.3% | 37.5% | 4.1% | 0 |
| 3 | 54.2% | 37.5% | 8.3% | 0 |
| 4 | 50% | 20.8% | 29.2% | 0 |
| 6 | 46% | 33% | 17% | 4.2% |
| 8 | 50% | 13% | 29.2% | 8.3% |
| 9 | 42% | 46% | 8.3% | 0% |
| 10 | 38% | 33% | 25% | 4% |
| 14 | 79% | 8.3% | 8.3% | 4.2% |

Table 6

Pearson Correlation between Parenting Type and Perceptions of Decision Making (N = 24)

| | | Decision Making |
|-------------------------------------|----------|-----------------|
| 1. Parenting | <i>R</i> | .44* |
| | <i>P</i> | .02 |
| 2. Communicating | <i>R</i> | .50* |
| | <i>P</i> | .01 |
| 3. Volunteering | <i>R</i> | .21 |
| | <i>P</i> | .31 |
| 4. Learning at Home | <i>R</i> | .40* |
| | <i>P</i> | .04 |
| 5. Decision Making | <i>R</i> | .17 |
| | <i>P</i> | .42 |
| 6. Collaborating with the Community | <i>R</i> | .36 |
| | <i>P</i> | .08 |

Note. ** indicates the correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed); * indicates the correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed). *r* = Pearson Correlation, *p* = statistical significance.

Table 7

Mean Decision Making Score by Parenting Type

| | Parenting Type | <i>N</i> | Mean | <i>SD</i> | Min | Max |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|----------|------|-----------|------|------|
| Decision Making | Parenting | 9 | 3.18 | 0.46 | 2.38 | 3.75 |
| | Communicating | 4 | 3.00 | 0.36 | 2.63 | 3.50 |
| | Learning at Home | 7 | 3.51 | 0.63 | 2.25 | 4.00 |
| | Collaborating with the Community | 4 | 3.64 | 0.29 | 3.33 | 4.00 |
| | Total | | 24 | 3.32 | 0.51 | 2.25 |

Table 8

Parent Satisfaction with Decision Making

| Survey # | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|----------|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| 5 | 46% | 20.8% | 29% | 41% |
| 7 | 46% | 37.5% | 17% | 0 |
| 11 | 23% | 59% | 14% | 4% |
| 12 | 42% | 33% | 21% | 4.1% |
| 13 | 63% | 29% | 8% | 4.1% |
| 15 | 71% | 25% | 8% | 0 |
| 16 | 50% | 50% | 0 | 0 |
| 17 | 79% | 17% | 42% | 0 |

Table 9

Correlation between Parenting Type and Satisfaction with Provision of Services (N = 24)

| | | Provision of Services |
|-------------------------------------|----------|-----------------------|
| 1. Parenting | <i>R</i> | .77** |
| | <i>P</i> | .01 |
| 2. Communicating | <i>R</i> | .62** |
| | <i>P</i> | .00 |
| 3. Volunteering | <i>R</i> | .37 |
| | <i>P</i> | .07 |
| 4. Learning at Home | <i>R</i> | .57** |
| | <i>P</i> | .01 |
| 5. Decision Making | <i>R</i> | .38 |
| | <i>P</i> | .06 |
| 6. Collaborating with the Community | <i>R</i> | .46* |
| | <i>P</i> | .02 |

Note. ** indicates the correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed); * indicates the correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed). r = Pearson Correlation, p = statistical significance.

Table 10

Mean Provision of Services Score by Parenting Type

| | Parenting Type | <i>N</i> | Mean | <i>SD</i> | Min | Max |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|----------|------|-----------|------|------|
| Provision of Services | Parenting | 9 | 3.10 | 0.42 | 2.46 | 3.85 |
| | Communicating | 4 | 2.57 | 0.73 | 1.69 | 3.38 |
| | Learning at Home | 7 | 3.46 | 0.81 | 2.23 | 4.00 |
| | Collaborating with the Community | 4 | 3.72 | 0.34 | 3.22 | 4.00 |
| | Total | 24 | 3.22 | .68 | 1.69 | 4.00 |

Table 11

Parent Satisfaction with Provision of Services

| Survey # | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|----------|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| 18 | 54% | 38% | 8% | 0 |
| 19 | 42% | 33% | 25% | 0 |
| 20 | 46% | 25% | 25% | 4% |
| 21 | 30% | 30% | 35% | 4% |
| 22 | 46% | 25% | 25% | 4% |
| 23 | 46% | 46% | 4% | 4% |
| 24 | 38% | 42% | 20% | 0% |
| 25 | 50% | 33% | 13% | 4% |
| 26 | 52% | 26% | 22% | 0% |
| 27 | 46% | 29% | 21% | 4% |
| 28 | 46% | 33% | 21% | 0% |
| 29 | 37.5% | 37.5% | 21% | 4% |
| 30 | 64% | 23% | 14% | 0% |

