

BLACK PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS WHICH FACILITATE OR
INHIBIT PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in
VOCATIONAL, TECHNICAL EDUCATION

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September 16, 1994
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(ABSTRACT)

Many studies have been done which address parent participation and its relationship to student achievement. However, few studies have been done which specifically address the aspects of Black parent participation. This study sought to determine the factors that facilitate or inhibit Black parents' participation in the education of their children and what changes need to take place in order for them to be empowered in this area. Non-participating and participating parents of general education and special education students were interviewed. All parents were selected from a single rural school system in Northern Virginia. A total of 17 parents were interviewed.

The Black parents interviewed perceive that they and their children experience unfair and inequitable treatment. There was general agreement that Black parents do not participate to the extent that they should. Suggestions for bringing about change included the establishment of a Black coalition and the involvement of the Black churches and other civic groups which serve the Black community.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the Black parents who unselfishly gave of their time to participate in this endeavor. You are the change-agents and role models for other Black parents. I am grateful for your willingness to share very personal information. You are very special parents. Thank you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with sincere appreciation that I acknowledge the following persons who have supported, encouraged, and assisted me during the dissertation process:

My Dissertation Committee, Dr. Susan B. Asselin, Dr. Ann Marie Cook, Dr. Oscar M. Williams, Dr. Marion Asche and Dr. Frank W. Luth who have provided assistance and encouragement;

Susan and Tony Asselin for the key to their home, which they so graciously opened to me;

Ann Marie Cook, for her patience, phone calls, meetings, and encouragement;

My parents and family for their encouragement and confidence in me;

And finally, my husband, Conway, and my sons Chris, Mark, and Richie without whose support and understanding I could not have fulfilled this goal.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background

Studies indicate that parental involvement is a predictor of school achievement (Ascher, 1987; Edelman, 1986). However, if one visits an elementary, middle, or secondary school, Black parents are noticeably absent, not only as teachers and administrators, but as parent volunteers (Porter, 1993; Cox, 1993, Hawkins, 1994). The absence of Black parents can also be noticed at parent/teacher meetings, parent/teacher conferences, and as members of various educational boards and committees (Phillip, 1994). Why does this continue when Black students still lag behind White students in national tests? Black parents in particular appear to be an untapped source for improving the achievement of Black students and without it the gap between the achievement levels of Black students and White students will continue to widen (Strickland, 1987). Black parent participation may be difficult to secure but it can and must be done (Menacker, Hurwitz, & Weldon, 1988; Chavkin, 1989).

Parent participation was mandated in special education with P.L. 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act.

This legislative mandate, however, has apparently not altered the amount of parent participation. Research still indicates that parent involvement in this area remains relatively low while Black children continue to be found eligible for special education in disproportionately high numbers (Harry, 1992; Obiakor, 1992; Hilliard, 1989; Samuda, 1975; Kuykendall, 1992).

Prior to the desegregation of schools, Black parents were actively involved in the schools. The schools were an integral part of the Black community. Black parents felt ownership for these schools as they had given much of themselves to insure that these schools had the same basics as the other, all-White schools (Phillip, 1994). Desegregation changed the composition of the schools and the extent to which Black parents had participated in their children's education (Dempsey & Noblit, 1993).

This diminishing participation of Black parents is seen in general and special education (Kalyanpur & Shiridevi, 1989; Harry, 1992). This, the authors say, can be attributed, in part, to the myths that continue to exist about Black parents. One such myth is that Black parents do not care about their children's education. But, according to Chavin (1990) and Stevens (1993), the fact is that minority parents do care about their children. Rather, it is their sense of alienation that often prevents them

participating in their children's education and the public school is seen as a source of this alienation. This is confirmed by Calabrese (1990), who reports that minority parents not only have a higher sense of alienation than Whites, but they also have a higher sense of social isolation and normlessness.

Additionally, Lee and Thomas (1983) indicate that Black parents have significant impact on their children's "career choices, vocational interests, and aspirations" and suggest the formation of Counselor-Parent Partnership Models to assist parents in helping these adolescents (p.6). While Slaughter and Epps (1987) agree that parental impact on the achievement of secondary students is not as great as it is at pre-school and elementary levels, parental influence can still be noted especially as it relates to course selections, homework, and school attendance.

Purpose

As the minority continues to become the majority, the need to break this cycle becomes more pressing. If one accepts the premise that parental involvement improves student achievement, then this newly emerging minority majority must not be neglected. To do so "...is to willingly accept second-class status for the U.S." (Stevens, 1993, p.229). "The further prosperity of the United States will be jeopardized if it does not renew its commitment to

the advancement of minority groups, and parent involvement is the key to successful education and advancement of these groups" (Ford, 1993, p.50).

The above, coupled with the paucity of available research on this topic, supported the need for this study. The question of what inhibits and facilitates parent involvement must be addressed to make recommendations for changes in our educational practices regarding Black parent involvement. The specific questions that were addressed in this study were: 1) What are the barriers and facilitators to Black parent participation in education? 2) Do demographic variables effect parent involvement?; 3) What is the perceived level of involvement of Black parents? and, 4) What is the perception of the school climate for Black parents?

This study determined, through a qualitative research approach, what factors facilitate and inhibit the participation of Black parents in their children's education. This was accomplished through in-depth, person-to-person interviews. Parents of high school students in regular and special education were nominated by the school's administrative staff on the basis of participation and non participation.

Participating parents were defined as those parents who were involved with their children's education. That is,

they were usually present for parent/teacher conferences, volunteered for activities and generally maintained contact with the school. Non-participating parents were defined as those who did not attend parent/teacher conferences or volunteered for any activities. An IEP (Individualized Education Program) meeting may have been the only time the parent had contacted the school. In addition, their once-a-year visit may have been the spring band concert. Short of these special functions, the non-participating parent was absent from the school.

Limitations

Personal bias is inherent in qualitative research and may be considered a limitation in this study. The researcher is a Black female, a mother of three, and was an administrator in the school division. As a Black parent, the researcher was able to identify with many of the stories shared by the interviewees because of personal experiences. Because the researcher was able to match experiences with those of the respondents, it is possible to infer that this matching may account for the attention given to the negative issues and less attention devoted to positive items.

This study focused upon a single school system in a Southeastern state. It was not presumed that the findings would be generalizable. However, the data does provide a description of the locale as well as perceptions of the

parents regarding participation. This will allow the reader to determine which attributes are like or unlike his/her situation.

CHAPTER 2 - REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The significance of the need for this study was supported by two key factors. One is current status of Black youth and future trends for this population. The second factor is the lack of research in the field regarding the involvement of Black parents in education.

Black Youth and Future Trends

According to the 1991 report published by the Harvard Project on School Desegregation, 16.4 % of the total K-12 enrollment is made up of Black students. Almost half (44.8%) of these children are poor (Edelman, 1993). The data on standardized test scores, suspensions, expulsions, retentions and dropout rates would indicate that this population has needs which must be addressed (Kuykendall, 1992).

A closer look at these data shows an even more disturbing picture. Every 46 seconds of the school day, a Black child drops out (Edleman, 1993). According to Nunez-Wormack, (1989), 28 of every 100 Black high school students drop out. Only 21 of the 72 who graduate go on to college and of those, less than three complete a bachelor's degree. Consider also that Blacks make up almost 17% of the public school population and that 41% percent of students in special education programs are Black, while gifted and talented programs have only an 8% Black representation.

Black males make up 8% of the total student population and 37% of them get suspended from school. In urban areas, where most Blacks reside, the dropout rate can be as high as 50% and in these same schools, Black teachers make up only 5% of the staff (Phillip, 1994; Kuykendall, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1992).

While it is recognized that there exists a large number of poor White children, Black children are still more likely to grow up in poverty. Edelman (1993) points out that a Black child had a 39.8% chance of being poor in 1989 while a White child had a 12.5% chance of being poor. This picture does not appear subject to much change, when, according to the U. S. Department of Labor, "Blacks represent more than 20% of the nation's unemployed, lost more jobs than any other group as a result of the recession and have been unable to obtain top executive positions with corporate America despite solid academic credentials" (Phillip, 1994 p.11).

Despite these economic conditions, many of these Black children come from homes that are stable and nurturing, even if some are single-parent homes (Massaquoi, 1993). This is, of course, a view contrary to what one is exposed to through the media, and accounts for the recent description of this family unit as "The Black Family Nobody Knows" (Massaquoi, p. 28; Harry, 1992).

The literature does not indicate a promising future for Black youth, given the current status quo. The National Urban League (1986, 1989, 1992) describes this as the "lost generation." Kuykendall (1992) holds that the continued "isolation" and "underachievement" of Blacks and Hispanics constitutes a "national tragedy" that will continue to escalate. Stevens (1993) sees this lack of achievement as "worsening". She points out that even though there are more Black youth graduating, that they are "disproportionately, inadequately prepared for the workplace" (p. 230). Hare (1987) holds that "Given the inequality reproducing structure of the social system, there are limits to the amount of progress we can expect to make short of radical change" (p. 110). He adds, however, that efforts must continue to bring about change.

Parent Participation in Education

Dr. Ernest Boyer of the Carnegie Foundation feels that excellence in education will only be achieved when home-school connections are re-established and parental involvement is the first area that needs to be addressed (Cox, 1993). Society can no longer afford to ignore the potential contribution that Black families can make to the education of their children (Ford, 1993).

Most studies indicate that there is a positive correlation between parent involvement and student

achievement. Hart (1988) states that this is supported by two decades of research. Further, he points out that these conclusions are applicable to students from diverse educational, social and economic background.

A report done by the Maryland School Performance Program indicated that when parents are positively involved in their children's education, there is an improvement in student behaviors, attendance, academic performance, and attitudes. Even in alternative education programs, parent involvement is linked to student success (Glasser, 1992). Butterfield and Pepper (1991) point out that "... parent participation in any form improves parent attitudes, and behavior, as well as student achievement, attendance, motivation, self-esteem, and behavior" (p.121).

Melnick and Fiene (1990) found that there is a direct relationship between parents' attitudes toward school and student achievement. These authors point out that while this is not a causal relationship, their study of parents' attitudes does indicate that "...increased parental involvement not only contributes to positive school perceptions, but is also related to improved academic performance" (p.15).

Minority Parent Participation in Education

An examination of the literature reveals that much of the research that has been done pertaining to minority

parent participation involves language minority parents (Violand-Sanchez, 1991; Baratz-Snowden, 1988; Bransford and Chavez, 1988). Other research addresses home-school partnerships with minority parents (Hamilton-Lee, 1988; Ascher, 1987).

There are only a few studies which have addressed culturally diverse parents and their involvement in the education of their children. Butterfield (1991) studied parent participation of American Indians and Alaska native students. Lopez (1992) examined Mexican-American and Anglo-American parent involvement in public elementary schools. It is in these studies that the reader can begin to focus on the cultural influences and a sense of alienation that appears to be a commonality with minority groups. However, these issues are only addressed when a particular ethnic group is studied in isolation and parent participation is an area of focus.

Hamilton-Lee (1988) discusses The School Development Program Model which focuses on home-school partnerships and parental involvement. This model was an effort to establish a foundation of trust, cooperation and understanding between minority parents and White middle-class school staffs. The benefits derived from this model include increased parental involvement and achievement of minority students:

Swick and Parker (1989) conducted a study of a teacher/parent partnership project. The project involved sixty-one at-risk parents of kindergartners and first graders in three rural school districts of South Carolina. The focus of the study was to "...describe the participation patterns and perceived benefits of the involvement of at-risk parents in a planned teacher-parent partnership program..." (p. 2). Parents contracted with the project to participate at least once a month. Key to the program was the training of the teachers in parent involvement/education, home learning and school-family communications. This training also dealt with working with at-risk parents and students.

The *Parent Participation Record* was developed for this project and designed to measure parental levels and patterns of involvement in the project's activities. The *Parent's Perceptions of Parent Involvement Inventory* was also used to provide parents with the opportunity to assess their involvement during the project period. Data was collected during the 1989-90 school year. It was noted that as the parents became more comfortable with the project and more confident about their roles, participation increased. However, one of the most interesting findings was that the school with the least amount of parent participation was also the school with the fewest number of high school

graduates, a past record of poor parent involvement and the highest percentage of minority participants. Additionally, it was noted that at-risk parents do want to be involved in their children's education and that schools need to use non-traditional methods to involve these parents.

Motsinger (1990) used a different approach. She distributed questionnaires to high school juniors and seniors, high school age prison inmates, and high school dropouts, totalling more than six hundred students. Her goal was to determine if the difference between high achievers and low achievers had a parent involvement factor. The results indicated that parent involvement was a major key to school success. The author recommended a task force in which educators, parents, and community leaders come together to facilitate and train parents.

Baratz-Snowden (1988) conducted a national survey of language minority parents who were Puerto Rican, Mexican American, Cuban and Asian. The primary focus of the study was to determine parental language preference (English or non-English) in the instructional process. The study also looked at the parents' involvement in their children's education and determined that the "parents did support special language programs for language minority children."

Bransford and Chavez (1988) sought to determine if skills, knowledge, and attitudes that language minority

parents felt were necessary for them to play a meaningful role in their children's education. The results of the pilot study indicated that the parents viewed all areas as equally important and interrelated.

Black Parent Participation in Education

Comparatively speaking, the literature available that deals specifically with Black parent participation is miniscule. The research that has been done focuses on Black parent participation in the area of special education (Harry, 1992; Rivers, 1990; Kalyanpur, 1987; Cassidy, 1988; Lowry, 1983; and Ascher, 1987.

Ascher (1987), through a review of the literature, concentrated on the home-school connection and the history of parent involvement. She does not address special education in particular, but she points out that parent involvement goes back to the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act (The Federal War on Poverty). This act was designed to help the poor help themselves through such programs as Head Start and Job Corps. In the early 1970's, parent advisory councils were mandated for all Federal Title I programs. Even so, parent participation was not fully realized. This was attributed, according to Ascher, to the resistance of professionals, passivity of parents, and a change of focus from parent participation to improving the schools.

Ascher concludes that this renewed interest in parent involvement has come at a time "...when the schools are under serious criticism, particularly for failing to educate low-income and minority children" (p. 17). She describes the existing relationship between low-income minority parents and schools as "serious" and "fragile" and suggests that efforts should be taken to strengthen this relationship and decrease parents' alienation.

It has been suggested that integration may be partly responsible for the decline in the participation of Black parents (Porter, 1993; Hayes, 1994; Shipp, 1994). In one Virginia county, the band instruments and uniforms were purchased through the efforts of parents who had bake sales, lawn parties, sock hops, and other activities to raise money so that the county's Black high school would have a band. This school was an integral part of the Black community. It was a source of pride. With the desegregation of schools, the staff, administration, and parent participation changed. In the new desegregated atmosphere, parents were invited to participate but no credence was given to their suggestions or input (Porter, 1993). Dempsey and Noblit (1993) found a similar history in their three-year study of a Black school called Rougemont. At Rougemont, forty-one persons who had been connected with this school community were interviewed. Some of these

persons had connections as far back as 1920 and others as recent as 1990. The authors concluded that when Rougemont closed, in order to meet court-ordered desegregation, that the community lost its "...continuity of people, place and purpose" (p. 59). Within these continuities, they stated, was a sense of caring that served to "nurture and sustain the students" (p. 60). However, today, this caring has all but disappeared in the Rougemont community and with it parent participation.

Rivers (1990) investigated whether there was a relationship between cultural background and parental perceptions toward educational programming for their children with severe disabilities. This study was conducted by means of a survey and did not focus on family participation but did indicate the need for an "integration of professional and family values" (p. 15).

The above study used the "Parental Perception of Functional Education Survey" instrument (Rivers, 1990). Forty-one items were selected for the parent survey and related to five areas: integration, data-based instruction, functional skills, professional practices and staff development. The participants were Caucasian, Black, and Hispanic parents of children with special needs. The results of the study indicated that family centered intervention needed to be dealt with on a family by family

basis in order to integrate the values of the professional and the family.

Cassidy (1988) conducted a similar study which focused on reaching and involving Black parents of children with disabilities. She investigated the barriers to participation in the individual education program, training, and parent organizations. The pilot project was conducted in Flint, Michigan using a sample of twenty-four Black parents. Black outreach workers conducted the interviews in the parents' homes. The study found that the barriers to IEP participation were scheduling, transportation, and an understanding of the process. The barriers to participation in parent training and parent organizations also involved scheduling and understanding the benefits of such participation.

This study found that the barriers could be overcome by scheduling meetings in the evenings and assisting with transportation and child care. It was also noted that assistance was most successful when provided by one-on-one contact with the outreach worker, who was Black, and when information was disseminated through Black churches and other organizations that served the Black community.

Only Lowry (1983) investigated both barriers and facilitators to parent participation. Again, this study was limited to Black parents of special education students. The

study was done using a qualitative design that used a forty-seven item interview instrument. Twenty-six parents from Atlanta, Georgia and thirty parents from Baltimore, Maryland were selected for the study by community agencies such as social services. Interviews were conducted in the homes of the parents by graduate students, parents and the principal investigator over a four month period. During this time frame, the study was to have addressed barriers and facilitators to parent participation. However, the findings emphasized the barriers, particularly the parents' lack of knowledge about special education. Other barriers included transportation and feelings of social isolation and helplessness. Facilitators were addressed in the form of recommendations: workshops and training for parents; distribution of information to parents; and, the establishment of self-help groups for parents. The study also suggested the need for additional research in this area, using a similar research design. Harry (1992) appears to have supported this idea.

Harry focuses on the need to restructure the discourse between Black parents and white professionals. She posits that the lack of participation is due, in part, to the continued belief in myths and stereotypes about Blacks which has led to "misassessment and miseducation" and cites the need for qualitative research in this area. Harry's study

of low-income Puerto Rican-American parents, most of whom were Black, revealed through interviews, that what was "... interpreted by professionals as disinterest or apathy was a mask for parents' mistrust and their consequent withdrawal from participation" (p.124).

Kalyanpur (1989) focused on the perceptions of low-income Black mothers with disabled children regarding outreach efforts. This qualitative study focused on four Black women over an eleven month period. The professional who worked with these mothers was herself Black and the mother of a disabled child. The study concluded that active participation can only occur if the values and the "parents' perceptions of their needs" are recognized and respected (p. 34).

Black parent participation is certainly vital to the educational process of students with disabilities but it is just as vital in the process of educating non-disabled Black students. Unfortunately, studies do not exist in this area. This further substantiated the need for qualitative research that investigated barriers and facilitators to participation of Black parents of students in special education and general education programs.

CHAPTER 3
Methodology

Research Questions

This study focused on the question of what inhibits and facilitates the participation of Black parents in the education of their disabled and non-disabled adolescents. The specific questions that were addressed were: 1) What are the barriers and facilitators to Black parent participation in education? 2) Do demographic variables affect parent involvement? 3) What is the perceived level of involvement of Black parents? and, 4) What is the perception of the school climate for Black parents?

Design

The long interview method was used to determine the barriers and facilitators to participation of Black parents in the education of their children. This method was chosen as it is "...one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative amory" (McCracken, 1988). This involved conducting interviews with parents in one school within one school division. McCracken (1988) states that "The long interview gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves" (p. 9).

This study had no treatments or variables to manipulate. Instead, the researcher concentrated on describing a particular phenomenon, Black parent participation. This is consistent with qualitative research design (Merriam, 1988).

Finally, it was anticipated that the end result would be what Merriam describes as an "intensive description and interpretation of a contemporary phenomenon". It was designed to be particularistic in that it concentrated on a particular phenomenon - participation and non-participation of Black parents. Further, it was heuristic in that it will "illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study" (Merriam, 1988, p. 13).

The long interview design allowed the investigator to discuss, through an open-ended interview process, what factors parents perceive to be barriers or facilitators to parent participation.

Instrument

The interviews were conducted in an open-ended fashion and there was a set of questions asked of each participant (see Appendix D). Additionally, the researcher served as an instrument. According to McCracken (1988) this "...emphasizes that the investigator cannot fulfill qualitative research objectives without using a broad range of his or her own experience, imagination, and intellect in

ways that are various and unpredictable..." (p.18). Thus, the researcher used her experience "...to find a match for the patterns evidenced by the data" (McCracken, 1988).

A set of questions was constructed using the guidelines suggested by Patton (1986). The questions were designed to address the following content areas: experience/behavior, opinion/value, feelings, knowledge, senses, and background/demographic. Five pilot interviews were conducted to check the validity of the questions. Three of the persons interviewed were Black parents who had children in school. Two parents had a daughter in elementary school and one parent's daughter was in junior high. The other two interviews were with two retired Black school teachers.

Their responses were reviewed to determine if they were indeed reflective of the respondents' views and were reality based. Parent responses and questions were discussed with two colleagues. No substantive changes were made following the pilot interviews.

Parents were contacted initially by a letter, which introduced the researcher and explained the purpose of the study. This allowed the researcher to begin to establish rapport with the parent. A few days after the parents had received the letter, they were contacted by phone, and if possible, arrangements were made at that time for the interview. The investigator went to the parents' homes.

Population

The school division in which the study was conducted is in a rural county in Northern Virginia. It is located approximately 40 miles southwest of Washington, D. C. According to the 1990 Census, it had a population of 48,741. It is a growing area of diverse neighborhoods ranging from small towns to rural living. This includes student homes without benefit of indoor plumbing. It is one of the richest counties in the state and has one of the lowest teacher pay scales.

The total student population in the school division was approximately 8,500. Almost 1,350 students were identified as disabled. There were 15 public schools in the county: 10 elementary schools, 4 junior high schools and one high school. The sample was selected from the high school. There were also 8 private schools in the county.

The high school's student population was 1,574. The number of Black students was 181 or 12% of the entire population. Two hundred and twenty students were identified as disabled. Twenty-two percent of these were Black students.

Interestingly, 12% of the school division's student population was Black and only 5% of the staff and administration was Black. According to the 1994 Outcome Accountability Project report (OAP), which is based on

figures from the 1992-93 school year, 20% of the students in this division were approved for free or reduced lunches. The 1990 U. S. Census reports that 79% of the adults in this community are high school graduates and 3% of the families live below the federal poverty level. The median adjusted gross income is \$27,980 (Virginia Department of Taxation, 1991).

The OAP (1994) also indicates that the minority dropout rate for students in grades 7-12 for this community was 8% in 1992-93. For minority students in grades 9-12, the dropout rate was 11%. This was an increase of 3% from the 1991-92 school year and twice as high as the state of Virginia at 4%. More alarming is the dropout rate of the special education students in this community. In 1991-92 4% of the special education students in grades 7-12 dropped out while in 1993-93 that figure had jumped to 9%. The percentage of special education students, in the same grades, state wide, remained at 4% for the 1991-92 and 1992-93 school years.

Sample Selection

Purposive sampling or criterion-based sampling was used to select the sample. The basic criteria were: parent would be Black, non-participatory or participatory, and would have children who were identified as disabled or non-disabled. For the purpose of this study, non-participatory parents

were defined as those who were not involved with their child's education. That is, they did not participate in school activities, serve on committees, attend parent-teacher conferences, eligibility meetings or IEP conferences. Some parents in this category may have only appeared for the IEP meeting or perhaps to see an activity in which their child was involved. Participatory parents were defined as those who were involved with their children's education. These were the parents who were in direct contrast to the ones described above. They attended parent conferences and school activities. They would often volunteer for committees or assist with school functions.

The above definitions were based upon those provided by Ascher (1987) and Swick (1989). Ascher defined parent involvement in education as advocacy, attending school functions, and participation in home and school learning activities. Swick defined parent involvement as "...any activity in which the parent engages to prepare for or was supportive of the child for home or school learning" (p.3).

This study, and the descriptions of the parents, were discussed with the principal of the school division's only high school. Following this discussion, the principal was provided with a list of all of the Black students at the high school through the county's Management Information Systems. The students who were identified as special

education, learning disabled or emotionally disturbed, were then put on list A. These two disabling groups were chosen because they comprise the largest number of students identified with disabilities. The remaining general education students comprised list B. The two lists were labeled List A and List B and contained only the students' names. A separate sheet contained instructions for identifying the parents of the students as participatory or non-participatory and the definitions for these terms was provided.

Upon the suggestion of the principal, the lists were circulated among the three vice-principals and the four guidance counselors. Each person marked the students' names with a P for participating or NP for non-participating. In some instances, the letters differed from one to another. As the staff met and discussed this project, it was discovered that while one vice-principal or counselor had not had contact with a parent, another had and was able to decide that the parent was or was not participating.

There were 49 special education students whose parents were to be identified as participating or non-participating. All but one were identified. There were 128 general education students and the high school staff was only able to identify 66 of the parents of these students. The list circulated the staff for almost three weeks, and when it was

returned it had 62 un-marked names. The principal was called and he assured the researcher that they had followed the directions given to them and that the names that were not marked were the result of no administrator or guidance counselor having any contact whatsoever with the student. In most instances, they did not know who the students were.

The final counts were as follows: a total 49 special education students, 14 were identified as having parents who were participating; 23 were identified as having parents who were non-participating; 9 students had been dropped from the roll; two students had been placed on homebound status; a total of 128 general education students; 15 were identified as having parents who were non-participating; 37 had participating parents; 62 were not identified as either participating or non-participating; 14 of the students whose parents were identified as non-participating had dropped out of school by the time identifications had been completed. (See Table 1, page 28.)

Table 1

Student Population by Parent Participation

	<u>Students</u>	
	<u>Special Education</u>	<u>General Education</u>
<u>Parents</u>		
Participating	14	37
Non-participating	23	15
Dropped	11	14
Not Identified	1	62
Total	49	128

Table 2

Selected Students' Grade Point Level by Parent Participation

	<u>Special Education</u>		<u>General Education</u>	
	<u>Parents</u>		<u>Parents</u>	
	<u>Interviewed</u>	<u>Available</u>	<u>Interviewed</u>	<u>Available</u>
<u>Participating</u>				
Average	2	7	2	22
Below Average	1	7	2	15
<u>Non-participating</u>				
Average	1	12	1	8
Below Average	1	11	0	7

Once each list had been subdivided into participatory and non-participatory parents, each list was then subdivided into high and low academic averages, which were based on the semester grades. This information was provided by the Management Information Systems. High academic average was set at a grade point average of 2.5 and above. Low grade point average was set at 2.4 and below. For the special education students, this yielded a total of 6 students, participating and non-participating, in the high academic range. For the general education students, there was a total of 14 students in the high academic range. This division did not provide an adequate number of parents within the various categories: participating, high and low for general education and participating, high and low for special education. Academic averages were then set at 2.0 for average and above and 1.9 and below for below average. For the special education students whose parents had been identified as participating, this resulted in 7 in the average range and 7 in the below average range. For the special education, non-participating, there were 12 in the average range and 11 in the below average range. For general education, participating, there were 22 in the average range and 15 in the below average range. For non-participating general education, there were 8 in the average

range and 7 in the below average range. (See TABLE 2, p. 28.)

A random selection of eight parents from each group, participating and non-participating, average and below average, was made. Of the 16 in the first random selection, only 4 agreed to participate. These were all parents of special education students. Three identified as participating and one as non-participating. Of the participating, two were in the average academic range and one in the below average academic range. The one non-participating was in the below average range. This process was repeated, randomly selecting parents from the groups discussed above. This was to have yielded a sample of 16 sets of parents to be interviewed. This was not achieved due to the unwillingness of the parents to participate. The total number of parents who were interviewed was 17. There were 7 married couples and 3 single parents. Five parents of special education students, 3 identified as participating and 2 identified as non-participating; five parents of general education students were interviewed. Of those, four were identified as participating and one as non-participating. (See TABLE 3, p. 29.)

There were to have been eight sets of parents who had children identified as disabled under the Individuals with

Disabilities Education Act. These students had been identified as either learning disabled or emotionally disturbed. This group was subdivided into parents who did participate and those who did not. The second set of parents, of which there were to have been eight, had children in the general education program. This group, too, was divided into parents who participated and those who did not. All of the parents were selected from students who attend the county's only high school. This cross-section of parents allowed the researcher to make comparisons and contrasts and draw conclusions regarding participation of Black parents in the above groups.

Parent Responses

The parents in each group were assigned numbers. The numbers were then placed in a container and drawn one at a time. This was the method of random selection. Once the parents were identified, letters were mailed to each (see Appendix E). The letter identified the researcher, the study and its purpose, and indicated that they would be contacted within a few days of receipt of the letter. Of the 16 original letters, follow-up calls yielded positive responses and a willingness to participate from four parents, who were identified above. Due to the limited response rate, it was then decided to forego the letter of introduction and make the introduction by telephone. Using

this more direct approach, the researcher was able to get six more parents to agree to participate in this study. These were one non-participating, average academic, general education and 4 participating, general education, two in the average academic range and one in the below average academic range. By the time the researcher had secured these 17 parents to be interviewed, there was only two weeks of school left for the year. Given the flurry of end-of-the-year activities and 26 refusals, the decision was made not to seek any additional parents for interviews.

Data Analysis

The data analysis consisted of examining, categorizing, combining and recombining the information which addressed the research questions for this study. This was an ongoing process, the first step of which was data reduction. This involved determining which information was to be coded, which was to be discarded, and determining what theme(s) may have been emerging. The interview summary form aided in this process. This form (see Appendix A) allowed the investigator to reflect on the interview and determine main issues, themes, or problems noted during the contact. According to Miles and Huberman (1984) "Without such reflection, it is easy to get lost in a welter of detail" (p. 50).

The next step involved having the full text of the interview transcribed. The text was typed on the left side of the page and each line was numbered. This allowed the researcher to highlight key words and phrases within the text and to make notes in the right margin.

The third step in this process was what Miles & Huberman (1988) refer to as "data display" or narrative text. This is "...an organized assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action taking" (p. 21). This was accomplished by designing a grid upon which the responses of parents were noted for each question. This allowed the researcher to visually note commonalities in the responses, recurring patterns, and themes that emerged from the data.

While this, too, was an ongoing process, the researcher had to maintain "openness and skepticism" until the data collection had been completed. The investigator had arranged to discuss interviews with a colleague "...to develop intersubjective consensus" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 22). This was done mid-way through the process and again at the end. This involved discussing the parents' responses to the questions with a colleague and asking for his reaction. He was able to call items to the researcher's attention that might have gone unnoticed.

Validity and Reliability

According to Merriam (1988), " Internal validity deals with the question of how one's findings match reality." Qualitative research must focus on perspectives and this obligates the researcher to present a picture of how the participants view themselves and their experiences (p. 168).

Of the suggestions offered by Merriam (1988) to ensure internal validity, the researcher has chosen peer examination (asking colleagues to comment on findings as they emerge). As described above, a colleague was selected to comment upon findings as they emerged.

Merriam (1988) defines reliability as the "extent to which one's findings can be replicated." This was accomplished through an "audit trail". Information relative to sample selection and data collection that was used for this has been described above. This will allow another researcher to replicate this study.

"External validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations" (Merriam, 1988). This was addressed by an in-depth description of the school system, parents, and children involved in the study. This provides the reader with the opportunity to determine which aspects are similar to his/her situation and which conditions might make the findings transferrable (Kidder, 1981).

CHAPTER 4

Results

This study sought to determine the barriers and facilitators to the participation of Black parents in the education of their children, as perceived by the parents themselves. This was done through person-to-person interviews with 17 parents. There were 10 interviews. Three interviews were with single parents and 7 were with married couples.

Parents of children identified for special education services and parents of children in the general education program were selected. As noted earlier, the parents were further subdivided based upon the semester averages of the students - average and below average. Parent responses did not appear to be influenced by academic averages or educational placements. Parents wanted their children to be successful and treated fairly. Neither grades nor placements were mentioned as items of concern and thus have received no further attention in this study.

This chapter will discuss the interviews in terms of the research questions. This will be followed by a discussion of the emergent themes and then a summary of each individual interview.

The research questions addressed in this study were: 1) What are the barriers and facilitators to Black parent

participation in education? 2) Do demographic variables affect parent involvement? 3) What is the perceived level of involvement of Black parents? and, 4) What is the parents' perception of the school climate for Black parents?

The interview questions (Appendix B) were designed to answer research questions #1, #3, and #4. The demographic information sheet (Appendix C), which all parents were asked complete, information to answer research question #2.

Research question #1 was What are the barriers and facilitators to Black parent participation in education? The corresponding interview questions were: I would like for you to pretend that I am a new resident of this county. Tell me about the schools and what I might expect as a Black parent; What do you think the school expects from you as a Black parent?; What would you like to see happen regarding school-parent relationships with Black parents specifically?; What would you like to see happen in this county to facilitate parent involvement?; and, What else would you like to share that relates to this discussion?

Research question #2 was Do demographic variables affect parent involvement? As indicated above, information from the demographic sheet, which included age, level of education, family income, number of children in the family, job location and involvement of parents' parents, coupled

with the parents' responses, were used to answer this question.

Research question #3 was What is the perceived level of involvement of Black parents? Interview questions that addressed this answer were Describe your level of involvement with your child's education and What is your opinion of the level of involvement of other Black parents? and, What else would you like to share that relates to this discussion?

Research question #4 was What is the perception of the school climate for Black parents? The interview questions that answered this question were Describe your last visit to your child's school. Why did you go? What happened while you were there? How did you feel you were treated? How do you feel when you have to go to school for a meeting/conference with your child's teacher/administrator? and, What else would you like to share that relates to this discussion?

Description of Parents

The economic backgrounds of the parents in this study were varied. Some indicated earning \$20,000 yearly and others indicated earning over \$50,000. All of the parents had jobs. Some of them work in the county and others travel to neighboring locations. Two of the single parents

indicated working two jobs to make ends meet. One single parent was contributing to the support of her grandchildren.

The question on the level of education revealed that one parent was a high school dropout and all of the others had graduated from high school. Two were college educated.

The majority of the parents own their homes. Two single parents were renters and the other single parent lived with her mother. There was one case where extended family members lived in the home.

Collectively the parents presented themselves as caring and concerned about their children specifically as well as other Black children and their education. Their responses appeared honest and from the heart.

Research question #1 - What are the barriers and facilitators to Black parent participation?

Barriers

The parents who were interviewed, both participating and non-participating, painted a bleak picture of the school system in terms of how the system relates to them and to their children. They see a system fraught with negatives and one that is generally hostile to them. Certain negative issues raised by the parents, were generally irrespective of any of the demographic information. These issues were prejudice, dual standards, low expectations, indifference of

school staff, too few Black teachers and administrators, and an intimidating school climate.

Prejudice and dual standards were issues that parents, in all categories, became most agitated about. These issues dealt mainly with perceptions. However, some parents gave examples of incidents that happened to them or their children, which served to reinforce these perceptions. One parent recalled an instance where his son had been accused of threatening a White student. When the father went to school to discuss the matter with the principal, he was told that the White student had come from a "respectable" family and therefore could not be guilty of any wrongdoing.

Another parent, identified as non-participating, recalled going to school to pick up his son. Upon entering the office, he approached the counter and waited to be helped. He said, "I wasn't sure what the procedure was." He stood there and no one asked if he could be helped or if he had been helped. However, when a White parent entered, he was immediately offered assistance. The Black parent indicated that this had really angered him.

There is a general perception among the Black parents that Black students are held to a different standard. One parent remarked, "Only Black kids get into trouble." Another said that, "If they get into trouble, they get marked." Another parent said, "Black students are singled

out for punishment." Another said, "A lot of Black kids are put in special education." The above comments were made by participating parents of general education students.

The perception of the parents that prejudice and dual standards are prevalent in the interaction between the students and the school staff appears to constitute a barrier to participation. In an atmosphere where the parents do not trust the school to treat their children fairly, parents are not apt to enter any collaborative effort with an open mind. As one parent put it, "I go in with an attitude."

Another barrier was the low level of expectation. When asked "What do you think the school expects from you as a Black parent?", the responses were mixed but the majority of parents said that the school expected little or nothing of them. These responses cut across all demographic lines, including whether the parents had children in general or special education programs. One parent said "School does not expect much, if anything." While another parent said, "Sit back and be quiet." Yet another said, "They hope you don't come for anything." It appears to the researcher that this might be a self-fulfilling prophecy - Black parents perceive that they are not expected to participate and therefore many do not participate.

Another barrier appeared to be too few Black teachers and administrators. This response occurred in question #1 and again in questions #7, #9, and #10. Parents appeared concerned that there were no role models for their children. Many of the parents recalled their own school experiences, most of which had been in segregated schools. They remarked that the Black teachers and administrators, in that time, had set high expectations for the students and had maintained regular contact with the parents on an informal and formal basis. These Black teachers and administrators served as role models for them. They perceive this as an advantage for them and one that their children do not have.

Some of the parents, while uncomfortable with the racial imbalance of the staff, appeared resigned to the situation. They expressed a desire to bring about change but at the same time felt that they were powerless to do anything.

Another barrier to Black parent participation appears to be the school climate. There were few positive descriptors used relative to the high school. One parent said that she always goes in with an open mind. Another commented about how friendly the photographer had been when she took her daughter to have senior pictures taken. But, none of the parents used terms like "warm" or "friendly" to describe the high school. Most appeared to have

preconceived notions about what would occur and how they would be treated. One parent said she was always "anxious" when she got a call from school. Another said of her twin boys, "What kind of trouble are they in now?"

Some of the parents indicated that they felt they had been treated fairly, especially when they had gone to school for a negative issue, but added that the teacher/administrator had only been "nice" to get parental agreement. Other parents, while acknowledging that the school climate was not inviting, appeared to ignore this aspect and focus entirely on the purpose for being at school. One parent said that he goes in feeling "confident and comfortable". Another parent said that when he goes to school, "...they take me seriously. They know I'm there for business." Attitude appears to impact parents' perception of the school climate. Some feel defeated and "hopeless" before they get to school. Some of these feelings were based upon previous negative experiences, some were not. Others seem to use a positive but offensive approach. That is, in some prior contact, these parents have made it clear to teachers and administrators that the primary concern is the well-being of the child and their presence signals their intention to realize that goal. Some of the mothers who were interviewed expressed this view, but these affirmations were more animated when voiced by the fathers.

Facilitators

The facilitators were often the opposite of the barriers. For example, one of the facilitators appeared to be the level of expectation. Parent responses, as noted above, indicated that the school expected little or nothing from them. However, in their responses, as they talked about experiences with the elementary schools, it was noted that at that level it was expected that parents would participate and according to them, they did.

Another facilitator to parent participation appears to be fair and equitable treatment. Again, this is in contrast to the barrier of prejudice and dual standards. Parents who indicated that they felt they had been treated fairly and equitably, said so with confidence. One parent indicated that whenever she had to go to school for a discipline problem, that she made it clear that she wanted to hear all sides of the story and that she fully expected that any punishment would be imposed in an equitable fashion.

Generally the parents admitted that their children were not perfect. They recognized that they may have been and possibly would be discipline problems. However, they all insisted that their children should receive the same treatment, discipline, as the White students. While the parents expressed concern about how they were personally

treated, their primary focus was on fair treatment for their children.

Parents' attitudes about involvement appears to be a facilitator to participation. All of the parents viewed themselves as involved, even those who had been identified as non-participating. While many parents were negative in their descriptions of school expectations, teacher/administrator attitudes and school climate, they remained vigilant in their efforts to be involved with their children's education. Two parents, who talked with the researcher for more than four hours one evening, had little to say, of a positive nature, about the high school. They were both positive about the elementary school their son attends. However, when asked why they continued their involvement, given their negative feelings, these parents, and others interviewed, indicated that this was their responsibility. On the lighter side of this issue, one parent indicated that he maintained his involvement because, "I want my kids to succeed. I don't want them in my house for the next 15 or 20 years." He went on to point out that at an awards program where 150 students received awards, only 5 had gone to Black students and his son had been one of the five. He said, "I know there are more than five smart Black kids in that school, but the parents aren't pushing them to succeed. Why, I don't know."

It appears that parental involvement is an intrinsic quality. The parents who participate do so because they want what is best for their children and they want them to succeed. Whether or not there is a history of parental involvement does not appear to influence parental involvement. Some of the parents who were interviewed had parents or guardians who had participated and others did not. Again, this was irrespective of any of the demographic information.

Research question #2 - Do demographic variables affect parent participation?

None of the demographic variables addressed (Appendix C) appeared to influence parental involvement. In a like fashion, having a disabled or non-disabled child was not a factor in the parents' participation or the perceived lack of participation. Some of the parents felt that having a job outside the county prevented some parents from being involved. However, some of the parents who made this comment also worked outside the county. It appears that some of the Black parents interviewed saw this as an inhibitor for the lack of participation of other Black parents, but would not allow it to prevent themselves from being involved.

While the level of education did not appear to impact on parent participation of those interviewed, some did say

that they felt this might contribute to the lack of participation of other Black parents. One parent said, "Some parents feel inferior because of their level of education." This writer did not sense that any of the interviewed parents felt inferior. However, a feeling of inadequacy was noted with one mother who was very concerned about the possibility of being asked a question by her son's math teacher. This mother and her husband expressed concern about the inability to help their children with some of their advanced classes. They were quick to note that they had and would arrange for additional help for their children. It was clear that their feelings of inadequacy would not prevent them from being actively involved in their children's education.

Research question #3 - What is the perceived level of involvement of Black parents?

All of the parents interviewed perceive themselves as being involved, including the three who had been identified as non-participating. When asked to describe their level of involvement, they made the following comments: "Very involved", "Highly involved", "Not as involved as previously because of personal problems", "Not as involved as I should be." The parents appeared very self-assured in their descriptions of their levels of involvement. There was

little or no hesitation in their responses to this question as was noted in other questions.

One father who indicated that he was not as involved as he should have been, at the end of the interview, when asked if they had anything else to share, said, "I feel ashamed of myself. I fell short and neglected some of my child's education." His wife made no additional comment. These parents had been identified as non-participating. At the start of the interview their perception of themselves seemed to be one of limited involvement. At interview's end, this seemed to have changed as indicated by the father's comment and the mother's silence.

Responses to the level of involvement of other Black parents were varied. However, all but one agreed that there was little or no participation. Some appeared angry with other Black parents as they noted that parents who do not attend parent-teacher conferences always seem to be present for the weekly bingo games. Others offered explanations for the non-participation: "Scheduling is a problem", "Parents think they don't have a voice", "Parents don't care", "Some parents feel inferior because of their educational level", and "Black parents feel intimidated." While they recognized that some of these explanations were valid and some were genuine perceptions, the parents did not feel that this gave the parents absolution from participating. Once again these

comments were common to the majority of the parents and did not appear to be influenced by demographics, whether the parents were participating or non-participating or if the children were in general or special education programs.

Research question #4 - What is the perception of the school climate for Black parents?

Most parents did not describe the school climate as hospitable. As noted earlier, parents report being ignored by personnel upon entry into the school. Others spoke of indifference on the part of teachers and administrators. One parent said, "They hope you don't come. They get nervous when Black parents come."

While these appear to be the predominant perceptions, these parents continue to go to the school. These parents appear to be armed with the resolve to advocate for their children at whatever personal cost to themselves. With some other parents there was a sense of resignation that things would not change because they had been this way for too long. Still, these parents appear to be determined to do whatever they could to insure that their children would have a successful school career.

Emergent Themes

The following five themes relate to issues that were common to the majority of the interviews. These were areas where parents became most animated. It was during

discussion of these topics that the volume of their voices would rise. At times they would lean closer to the researcher and the tape recorder. At other times, some parents, especially the fathers, when expressing anger, became noticeably tense. It was these visible and audible signs, coupled with the matrix of parents' responses, that allowed the researcher to arrive at the themes below.

Parent relationships at the elementary school and the Black male student were not addressed in the interview questions. However, in most instances, as parents responded to items 1, 2, and 4 of the interview questions, they would comment on how things were or had been when their children were in elementary school. Additionally, their responses also noted the perceived inequitable treatment of Black males. These two themes, as well as the others, became apparent to the matrix was filled with the parent responses following the transcription of the interviews.

One theme that appeared through the interviews was that school-parent relationships were much better in the elementary grades than junior or senior high. It appears that as student get older, these relationships become strained. Four of the participating parents have children in the elementary schools. These parents noted that teachers and administrators were supportive and encouraging in the students' early years. Parents, who only have

children currently in secondary schools, recalled having close contact with teachers when their children were younger. However, as their children became older, especially the males, these relations gradually began to break down. Part of this breakdown would appear to come from, what one parent called "fear" on the part of the White teachers in particular. White teachers and administrators appear to feel threatened by the older Black students, especially the males. This would seem to be in keeping with the old myths and stereotypes (Harry, 1992).

Black male students appear to have a more difficult time at the high school than do Black females. Seven of the parents, all participating except one, recalled incidents of inequitable treatment of their own sons or of other Black males of whom they had personal knowledge. Three of these parents commented on incidents that had occurred when their sons were in elementary schools. The incidents usually involved a Black and White student and the assumption, made by the administrator, according to the parents, was that the Black student was almost always at fault.

Additionally, of the 10 students who dropped out of school while this study was being conducted, 8 of them were males. Upon checking the withdrawal information, it was found that each student had been withdrawn for "15 consecutive days absent." The researcher contacted the

director or Pupil Personnel Services to determine if there was any kind of follow-through on these cases. There is a form letter that goes out to the parents but the process stops there. There are no additional steps taken to get these students to return to school.

Another theme centered on the parents' perception that school personnel were "indifferent" and "cold". It appears that the high school staff, for the most part, do not take time to discuss issues with parents, even issues relative to selecting a college. One parent had been given information and left to figure out how to proceed. The parent had fully expected that the guidance department would assist them in this process, but that was not the case. The parent speculated that this had to do with the fact that their son did not want to attend a predominantly Black college.

The perception of indifference was also noted in the parents' reports of being encouraged to withdraw their children from school, registering for lower track classes, and settling for grades of D and F.

Another theme centered around what White teachers/administrators expect from Black parents. As noted earlier, at the high school level, there is little, if any expectation that Black parents will participate and it was the perception of the parents that Black parent participation really was not wanted. There was no

indication from any of the parents that any measures were taken to reach out to Black parents in an effort to involve them in the school program, except where there were discipline issues. Then, the administration sought parental help usually by suggesting that the student be withdrawn.

The final, and most disturbing theme, is the parents' perception of "racism", "bias", and "prejudice" that exists at the high school. The parents reported that they perceive a double standard exists there, especially where discipline is concerned. One parent, identified as participating, stated that she felt that her son and other Black students, were "victimized" at the high school.

The interview summaries that follow reflect those comments that the researcher determined were most enlightening. The specific quotes chosen appear to portray the parents innermost feelings on these personal and sensitive issues therefore giving the reader a very intimate view of these parents and their perceptions.

Interview Summaries

INTERVIEW - 1

Non-Participating - Special Education - Below Average

I met with Mrs. A at 5:30 PM. We had both put in a full day but she looked more haggard than the researcher felt. She welcomed me into her townhouse and we sat at her kitchen table and chatted for a few moments before beginning the interview.

Mrs. A's husband was terminally ill when school began this fall. She believed that this accounted for the behavior of her oldest son. She related that she was constantly being called to school for something he had done and that the situation had become worse since her husband died this past January.

Question #1 - I would like for you to pretend that I am a new resident of this county. Tell me about the schools and what I might expect as a Black parent.

Mrs. A's response began by describing how crowded the high school was as if this accounted for students' misbehaviors, her son's in particular.

As she talked about her many trips to the high school, this researcher sensed Mrs. A's frustration with the administration. She related that the principal had referred to her son as "retarded". He is identified as learning disabled. Her perception is that only Black kids get into

trouble, "...never the white ones. It seems like the schools are prejudice." She indicated that she was encouraged, by the administration, to withdraw her son from school and place him in the GED program. She finally did. "He's going to night school and he is doing really good."

Mrs. A has two other sons at the high school. These young men are also in the special education program and are maintaining passing grades. She has not heard from the school since she withdrew her oldest son.

Question #2 - Describe you level of involvement with your child's education.

Mrs. A was identified as a non-participating parent and yet she indicated that everytime she was called to school that she had gone. Mrs. A appeared to perceive herself as an involved parent, but resented the fact that the only time she heard from school was when there was a problem with this one son.

Question #3 - What is your opinion of the level of involvement of other Black parents?

She described the involvement of other Black parents as "fair". She added that there had been some special meeting about school discipline and that "most of them (Black parents) were there."

Question #4 - Describe your last visit to your child's school. Why did you go? What happened while you were there? How did you feel you were treated?

Mrs. A said that when she went to school she was treated "alright". However, she added that "... some of the teachers act like they don't care if your child gets an education or not." This may have some merit if the administration is encouraging students to drop out. This too, may be contributing to the increase in the drop out rate of minority students.

At Mrs. A's last meeting with the school staff, she said, "They were nice to me." She felt that this was part of their strategy to convince her to withdraw her son from school.

Question #5 - What do you think the school expects from you as a Black parent?

Mrs. A's perception is that the school does not expect much, if anything, from Black parents and she added "... (county) will never change." There was a sense of hopelessness when she made this statement and her attention turned to pictures of her grandchildren which she had gotten to share with the researcher.

Question #6 - How do you feel when you have to go to school for a meeting/conference with your child's teacher/administrator?

When Mrs. A is requested to come to school for a meeting or conference, her first thought is "What kind of trouble are they in now? What have they done?" She admitted that meetings concerning her sons are usually positive, unlike meetings about her oldest son, and that the teachers do relate to her how well behaved and well mannered the twins are. There was a sense of pride evident as she related this to the interviewer.

Question #7 - What would you like to see happen regarding school-parent relationships with Black parents specifically?

When asked what the school might do to increase parent participation, Mrs. A suggested that there needed to be a meeting to get a lot of parents together. Once again she made reference to the administration calling parents when there was trouble and hastened to add that most of the Black parents did come when called. She seemed to be saying that these same parents would come, if there were no trouble, if teachers or administrators would call. Mrs. A added that more flexible scheduling of events might encourage more Black parents to participate. Evening conference hours are scheduled at least once every quarter, usually between the hours of 6 and 8 PM. Her feeling was that these hours were not flexible enough considering the number of parents who work outside the county and often do not return until sometime between those hours.

Question #8 - To what extent did your parents participate in your education?

Mrs. A was raised by a stepmother. She said that she always participated in the schools activities and attended all meetings. There was no indication that the stepmother had served on any boards or committees. She did not mention anything about her father's participation.

Question #9 - What would you like to see happen in this county to facilitate parent involvement?

Mrs. A felt that there needs to be more community activities that would involve Blacks. Her feeling was that if you could get Black parents and their children together for some kind of Saturday event, like a ball game, that this would somehow encourage parents to participate in the schools. Her comments seems to reflect what another parent called a sense of community with Blacks. This sense of community no longer appears present. As a final note, she added that she would like to see home visits made by school personnel.

Question #10 - What else would you like to share that relates to this discussion?

Mrs. A had no final thoughts on this subject. She is a high school drop out and regrets that she did not listen to the advice of her stepmother. She feels that she has emphasized the importance of an education to her five

children. Her sons will graduate this spring and there is a sense of relief that she will not have to deal with the school system after graduation.

Non-Participating - Special Education - Average

Mr. and Mrs. I met with me at their church prior to their Bible study class. They are both in the mid-thirties and have two children, a boy and a girl. Their daughter is a high school student in the 10th grade and identified as learning disabled. The son is in junior high and in the general education program.

The parents indicated that each had completed high school. Both of them work in the county and their combined salaries were in the \$15,000 to \$20,000 range. They were identified as participating parents.

Question #1 - I want you to pretend that I am a new resident of the county. Tell me about the schools and what I might expect as a Black parent.

Mrs. I reported that if you keep in contact with the teachers that they will be willing to work with you. She pointed out that some teachers greet you with open arms while others are very cold. "Show your face as often as you can", was Mrs. I's advice.

Mr. I added that when you go into some schools that the teachers, some of them, "...will walk past you like they don't see you." He continued with, "Some of the teachers just don't care. They are just there for a paycheck."

Question #2 - Describe your level of involvement with your child's education.

Mrs. I began by reporting that she had always been there for her daughter's conferences, field trips, plays or any activity. "I am always there to let them know that I am behind her and I tell them whenever they need me, just give me a call." Mr. I had no comments on this issue.

Question #3 - What is your opinion of the level of involvement of other Black parents?

Mrs. I indicated that that while "...you seldom see Black parents at conferences, banquets, plays, etc., there are White parents who are absent also." She went on to say that when parents made excuses for not attending meetings or activities, that children feel the parents don't care and they develop the same attitude.

Mr. I stated that he is not always able to make meetings because of his work schedule, but his wife is usually there.

Question #4 - Describe your last visit to your child's school. Why did you go? What happened while you were there? How did you feel you were treated?

Mrs. I said that her last visit to school was to accompany her daughter to have her pictures taken. She

recounted how warm and friendly the photographer had been. On other occasions when she has gone to the high school, "I am always treated nice because I make myself known. I tell them that I am here for business." She added that parents need to go in early in the year and set the stage.

Question #5 - What do you think the school expects from you as a Black parent.

Mr. and Mrs. I saw this as a difficult question. Mr. I initially said, "I don't know." His wife's response was, "Let me that about that too." They responded to the remaining questions and then returned to this one.

Mr. I, "I think they expect us to take more interest in what is going in the schools and for Black parents to be on those committees in the schools." He went on to say that Blacks have "good opinions on things" but what happens is that when they go to meetings parents' comments are "cut down and whatever they suggest is not going to be thought about." He indicated that this discourages parents from further participation.

Mrs. I added that, "You should not let that stop you. It hurts, but if you have a child in that school, you should not let that stop you." She pointed out that parents need to continue to participate so that the children see that

they are interested in their education. "That way the children won't give up on themselves."

Question #6 - How do you feel when you have to go to school for a meeting/conference with your child's teacher/administrator?

Mr. I, "Sometimes when I go it irritates me because the teacher, in so many words, is trying to say that 'Your child is dumb and doesn't know nothing and never will know nothing.' I just tell my children to 'Do your work and show the teacher that you can do your work.'" Mr. I added that sometimes the teacher seems to be saying 'You don't need to be here at all.'

Question # 7 - What would you like to see regarding school-parent relationships with Black parents specifically?

Mr. I's perception is that "...a lot of Black parents have something against White teachers. Some feel that the child will learn more if it is a Black teacher. If they are going to learn, they will learn no matter who it is." He added that parents need to go to school with the attitude that the child can learn from whoever teaches them.

Mrs. I said that Black parents need to "swallow their pride" and ask for help from the teachers. She pointed out that parents needed to remember that this was "to help the

child" and this could help establish better relationships in the school.

Question #8 - To what extent did your parents participate in your education?

Mr. I indicated that his parents were "on top of things." He said, "Whenever there was something going on, they were there and they let the teachers know, up front, that this was business." His parents insisted on knowing what was going on with his grades before reports were distributed. He said that if there was a problem, his parents would call the teacher and seek resolution.

Mrs. I said that her mother "did not have time." Then she added that her mother "did not drive." She said that neither of her parents went to school for any activity. She was always accompanied by a cousin. "I think that is why I am constantly at school because my mom and dad did not do that with me." She also reported that her mother "kept on top of things" concerning school. Her mother made sure that they were at school every day and always let the teachers know to contact her if there were any problems.

Question #9 - What would you like to see happen in this county to facilitate parent involvement?

Both parents felt that more needed to be done to let parents know about various activities at the schools. They indicated that the schools their children have been in have invited parents in at any time to make classroom visits. They felt that this needed to be done throughout the county.

Mr. I added that Black parents needed to "come out, voice themselves, and be heard. If they see that the child has nobody is interested in them, then they will push that child to the back."

Question #10 - What else would you like to share that relates to this discussion?

Mrs. I stated that she would like to see more Black teachers and coaches. "You seldom see over 5 Black teachers in a school. I think that makes some of the parents feel bad. I think if they had more Black teachers, they would have more Black parent participation.

"Some of the White teachers are scared of the Black kids, especially if the child is a bully. Black teachers are not going to put up with that stuff. They will tell you that 'You are here to learn.' She also said that Black students recognize that Black teachers mean business.

Non-Participating - General Education - Average

Mr. and Mrs. J live in one of the most southernmost areas of the county in a modest brick rambler. They are in their mid forties and have one son at home who is in the 12th grade. Both parents are high school graduates and both work, one in the county and one outside the county. Their combined income is in the \$40,000 to \$50,000 range.

Question #1 - I would like for you to pretend that I am a new resident of this county. Tell me about the schools and what I might expect as a Black parent.

Mrs. J, "Personally, we have not had a lot of problems, but things go on in the school that (son) tells us about. I would tell them that the school program itself is pretty good."

Mr. J said that he had not had problems at the high school but at the junior high his son had attended he said, "I did not like things." He recalled going to the junior high to pick up his son. He said that he walked into the office and stood at the counter. The secretary did not recognize his presence. However, when a White parent walked in, she walked right over to the counter and said, "Can I help you?" "Things like that are uncalled for," said Mr. J.

He continued, "You can see why some Black people act the way they do."

Question #2 - Describe your level of involvement with your child's education.

Mr. J indicated that he was not as involved to the extent that he thought he should have been. Mrs. J said that she tries to make the meetings but she was not able to make them all. She said that she stayed in touch enough to know what was going on, but she too, did not feel that she was involved as much as she should have been.

Question #3 - What is your opinion of the level of involvement of other Black parents?

Mrs. J, "From what I can see, they are less involved than I am. Evidently, they just don't have that interest." She went on to say that when there are parent-teacher meetings or open house, very few Black parents are present. She said that she did not understand why this was the case.

Following the above comment, the parents returned to the previous questions. Mr. J said, "I have noticed at parent night that the teachers don't act very friendly. They act like they don't want to give you any time. You can see the difference in how they treat you. You can hear how

they answer on individual and then act as if you (Black parents) don't have the right to ask those questions."

Question #4 - Describe your last visit to your child's school. Why did you go? What happened while you were there? How did you feel you were treated?

Mrs. J reported that the last visit to the high school was parents' night. "I had no problems and nothing out of the ordinary happened. It was still the same few who showed up."

Question #5 - What do you think the school expects from you as a Black parent?

Mrs. J, "I don't think they expect anything. If they did, they would want you to be more involved in what is going on. The less you show up, the less involved you are and it sounds good for them." She went on to say that when Black parents are present at meetings that often they are not asked to participate or if they want to be a part of something. "They (Whites) don't want to see you go anywhere or move up. They pretend that they are happy for you, they really are not. In the long run, they really don't want you to get higher than they are."

Question #6 - How do you feel when you have to go to school for a meeting/conference with your child's teacher/administrator?

Mrs. J, "It depends on what I am going for but most of the time I am going to see how he is doing in school. I haven't had a lot of problems, but sometimes they try to be nice and you can tell." She added that when her son was in junior high that the only calls she ever go was when there was a problem. She received one call in that three year period from one teacher who wanted to share that he was proud of a project that her son had done. She remembered thinking at the time, "What has my child done?" She was pleased that the news was so "great." However, she added, "I remembered then, when I thought about it later, I wondered if it was because he was Black." The only communication from the high school has been interim reports that are distributed quarterly.

Question #7 - To what extent did your parents participate in your education?

Mrs. J indicated that she lived with her grandparents and when they were able, they did attend meetings. Mr. J said that his parents did not participate "very much", but added that his father made sure that "we behaved." Mrs. J added that the teachers in those days, all of whom were

Black, "...kept in touch with parents, more so than today. Those teachers knew everything that went on. If you did something that day, Mama knew about by the time you got home."

Question #8 - What would you like to see happen in this county to facilitate parent involvement?

Mrs. J, "They need to encourage the Black families. They need to make those parents feel that they need their participation. They have to let the parents know that they really need to be a part of their child's education and what is going on. If the parents feel welcome, they would probably participate more in what is going on."

Question #9 - What would you like to see happen regarding school-parent relationships with Black parents specifically?

Mrs. J felt that Black parents need to "get together" and be a part of what is going on in the schools. "We have to show that we are going to be involved. Some of it has to come from the parents."

Mrs. J also commented that "They don't send letters anymore. They put things on that calendar. That comes at the beginning of the month. If you don't look at that calendar, you are not going to remember. There was a time

when they would send out notices. If they would go back to that, that would help."

Question #10 - What else would you like to share that relates to this discussion?

Mr. J, "I feel ashamed of myself because I fell short and neglected some of my child's education." Mrs. J had no additional comments.

Participating - General Education - Average

Mr. and Mrs. B live in a rental house in the center of town. Both parents are in their late forties. There are two children, a boy and a girl. The son is in the ninth grade and the daughter is a senior at the high school. Neither of the children has been identified for special education services. Both parents are high school graduates who earn between \$20,000 and \$40,000 yearly. Mr. B works in the county and Mrs. B works outside the county. Her job, caring for an elderly gentleman, keeps her away from home for several days at a time. Mr. and Mrs. B were identified as participating parents.

Initial contact with this family was through Mr. B. I called one evening and talked with him about this project. He was very receptive to participating but indicated that his wife was staying with a sick gentleman and we would have to schedule the interview the following week when his wife would be at home. We agreed upon a date and time and he assured the researcher that he would let his wife know of the arrangements that were being made.

The appointed time arrived for the interview and the interviewer appeared at the home of Mr. and Mrs. B at the agreed upon time. Mrs. B answered the door. She was very pleasant as we exchanged greetings and then realized that

her husband had not said any thing to her about this meeting. Nonetheless, she agreed to participate and was anxious to vent.

Mr. B was not at home when the interviewer arrived. We waited about twenty minutes before starting. Throughout the interview, Mrs. B did most of the talking. Mr. B would nod in agreement to his wife's comments or he would say, "Yeah, she's right."

Mr. and Mrs. A's daughter will graduate this June. When they mentioned this, they also shared some of the negative dealings they had had with the school system. They both perceive that the teachers "... don't care and have no interest in the children. Some are just out for paychecks." Mrs. A recalled that when she was a student that the teachers would take time and talk to students when there was a problem. She said that today's teachers just "send them out". She was asked to define "send out" and she replied that when the students had done something wrong that the teacher would send them either to the office or out into the hallway to sit. Mrs. B was becoming very animated at this point. When asked what kinds of incidents would get a student sent to the office she replied, "If they ask too many questions. In my case, my son asks a lot of questions. How else is he going to learn, especially if he's not sure of something. That is what the teacher is there for, but

she did not want to take the time to answer him. That really bugged me and I could not understand why she would be like that."

Question #1 - I would like for you to pretend that I am a new resident of this county. Tell me about the schools and what I might expect as a Black parent.

It should be noted here that the incident above related to her son, a ninth grader at the same junior high which her daughter had attended. Mrs. B's perception is that her son had been "marked" because of the difficulties that her daughter had had. She went on to tell the researcher that Black kids have to "... walk a tight rope. They have to be careful of the ways they present themselves in school because whatever little things they do, if they get in trouble, they get marked." Mrs. B added that this reputation follows the students from class to class and teacher to teacher. Her perception is that this treatment is only levied on the Black students.

Question #2 - Describe your level of involvement with your child's education.

Mr. and Mrs. B were identified as participating parents. Neither parent seemed to feel that they were involved to the extent that they wanted to be but quickly

added that when they were called, and it was usually for something negative, that one or both would drop what they were doing, leaving their jobs if necessary and go to school. Mrs. B indicated that both children have been instructed to call home immediately when something happens at school. She said that her children should be punished when they have done something wrong, but she wants to be present to hear both sides of the story and to be assured that her son or daughter is not the only one to be punished. She has learned, over time, that more is accomplished if she goes to school calmly and with an open mind.

Mr. and Mrs. B are both high school graduates, in their mid-forties. Neither felt that they could help their children with all of the academics, "...because there are a lot of things we don't know." Both children have been told to listen carefully in class and ask questions. Mrs. B also indicated that if one of the children requested additional help that the teachers had agreed to stay after school, but the child had to make the request.

Question #3 - What is your opinion of the level of involvement of other Black parents?

Mr. and Mrs. B felt that most Black parents do not get involved with the schools. Their perception was that these parents "don't care." When asked why these parents seem not

to care, they had no answer. They both related that they knew of other Black parents who had been called to school when there was some incident and that they had gone in "whooping and hollering" rather than sitting down and trying to find out what was going on.

At this point Mr. B added, "Some (Black parents) don't think they have a voice." He went on to say that, "Their opinions are different and don't mean nothing (to the staff) and I don't like that." Mrs. B was slightly more forthright in her comment, "I think she (the vice-principal) was prejudice. She was prejudice, that's my opinion and I am sorry." Mrs. B said that it was clear to her that this particular vice-principal did not "really listen" to Black parents. She said that whenever her daughter went to see her, the vice-principal's first remark would be, "What have you done now?" Mr. and Mrs. B had several encounters with this particular vice-principal and it was only when they decided to "kill her with kindness" that things began to change in their relationship. Mr. B added, "We would go in with smiles on our faces. We fooled them." His facial expression was the one you see when someone has just played a joke on you.

Mr. and Mrs. B expressed concern about the low numbers of Black students in the sports and gifted and talented programs. Mr. A felt that money had a lot to do with Black

students not participating in sports. It appears that there exists a strong athletic booster club which is headed by local businessmen or other influential White parents who are in a position to make substantial contributions. It is the students of these parents who get the playing time. Black students, who are often better players, sit on the bench.

Mrs. B confirmed this by describing how her daughter had tried out for and made the volleyball team. She was present for all practices and still was not given any playing time. Mrs. B would go to the games but all she was able to see was her daughter sitting on the bench. They finally made the decision to quit the team. Whether or not they talked to the coach before doing this, was not made clear.

Mrs. B stated, "They (the staff) don't give the young Black ones a chance. It is a whole lot of smart Black kids, but do you think they give them a chance? No way. They will not do it!"

Interviewer, "Are parents advocating to get their children into the gifted program?"

Mrs. B, "I don't think so."

"Why don't they push?"

"They (Black parents) feel like there is nobody to look out for them. I can count the Black teachers on one hand."

Mr. and Mrs. B seemed to feel that Black teachers could provide a support system for the students as well as for the parents. The problem is that there are so few Black teachers at the high school. The total staff at the high school is one hundred thirty (130). This includes the principal, four vice-principals, five guidance counselors, and the teaching staff. There is one Black guidance counselor, the only one the high school has ever had and he was just hired this school year. There are eight Black teachers.

Mr. and Mrs. B feel that the few Black teachers there do not advocate for the Black students the way they should because of fear. "...some of the Black teachers are afraid of saying anything." They are afraid of losing their jobs, according to these parents. They added that they have experienced this at the administrative level also. They related how a White physical education teacher had grabbed their daughter. She, in turn, struck the teacher. The student was suspended. The parents appealed the suspension and went to the administrative assistant who handles these cases, and is Black. His response to them was, "You know how it is. I can't do anything." Mrs. B went on to say that it was the president of the local NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) who talked with her and with school officials to resolve this

situation. Mr. and Mrs. B are still resentful because the Blacks within the system did not support them.

Question #4 - Describe your last visit to your child's school. Why did you go? What happened while you were there? How did you feel you were treated?

Neither parent specifically answered this question. Mrs. B in particular, seemed more concerned about events of the past, some of which has been related above. It did not appear that there have been any major problems this year with either of the children. However, there have been difficulties in the past, according to both parents, and neither have been entirely satisfied with how situations were handled by the administrations in both the elementary and junior high that both children attended. Currently, the son is a ninth grader at the same junior high that his sister had attended. The daughter is currently a senior and has had no difficulty except what the parents related about the participation in volleyball.

Both parents reported that while they questioned the fairness of their treatment on previous occasions, currently they felt that they were treated all right. It appears that the parents have taken a more proactive role as advocates for their children and this has helped their relationship with school staff.

Question #5 - What do you think the school expect from you as a Black parent?

Both parents feel that the school expect them to participate. "If parents show concern, then the school is willing to help." While the parents responded in this fashion, the stories they shared of their encounters with the school would seem to tell another story.

Question #6 - How do you feel when you have to go to school for a meeting/conference with your child's teacher/administrator?

Both parents talked about previous visits to the school. As mentioned above, most of these incidents pertained to discipline issues. This was a main focus for them. Their preoccupation with this was such that they could not be redirected to the specific question. It was not clear whether there had been a recent visit to school that had been on a positive note.

Mrs. B reported that while there were discipline problems with her daughter, they don't compare to the phone calls that she has received about her son. She said that she would be called at work if her son was caught chewing gum in class. Mrs. B recalled being called to pick up her son from school. A teacher had accused the young man of

something. The student said that he did not do and walked away. As he walked away, he was mumbling and the teacher asked what he had said. He told the teacher, "You get on my nerves." It was at this point that the parent was called. When Mrs. B heard this, she said, "You asked him what he was mumbling. Well, he told you."

Mr. and Mrs. B's son had been listening to this conversation often nodding to confirm what his parents were saying. At this point however, he felt compelled to join in the conversation. He added that no matter what happened at school that the teachers and administration would not believe his side of the story, if he was allowed to give his version. He remembered an incident from kindergarten when he was accused of taking a girl's shoe strings. He said he told them that he had not done it but they made him stand in a corner in the office. He stood in the corner so long that he finally said he had taken the shoe strings, just to get out of the corner. When Mrs. B arrived she was told that her son had threatened this little girl. "He didn't even know what threaten is", said Mrs. B.

Question #7 - What would you like to see happen regarding school-parent relationships with Black parents specifically?

Mr. and Mrs. B said that they would like to see some indication that they (the White staff) "understand us."

They feel that they do not take enough time with the Black students and often take the word of the White teacher or administrator without giving the Black student a chance to tell his/her story, "They listen to the teachers and not the students."

Question #8 - To what extent did your parents participate in your education?

Mrs. B indicated that an aunt had raised her. Her mother died when she was nine years old and her father was not with them. However, her aunt took an active role in school functions and encouraged her to participate in activities like the chorus and basketball.

Mr. B's parents were separated when he was young. His father was not involved at all. His mom went to school once a year and after he went to high school, "...that was it."

Question #9 - What would you like to see happen in this county to facilitate parent involvement?

Mr. and Mrs. B agreed that one thing that would facilitate Black parent participation is more Black staff. They also indicated a need for programs that would allow Blacks and Whites to learn about each others cultures. Their perception is that many Whites fear Blacks, perhaps because they do not understand the Black culture.

Question #10 - What else would you like to share that relates to this discussion?

Again, the parents came back to the issue of having more Black staff at the high school, "Somebody that the young people can look up to...." They suggested that ministers from the local Black churches might be able to assist with providing role models for the students. Additionally, the churches could set up committee or groups that could be available to help parents and students.

Mr. and Mrs. B were both concerned about the future of Black students, especially Black males. "...we have lost so many. Nobody cares." Their perception is that the Black males have little chance, especially if the parents are not involved. The school system appears to be waiting for the opportunity to expel them.

Participating - General Education - Average

Mr. and Mrs. F are an inter-racial couple. Mr. F is Black and Mrs. F is White. They live in a modest home in the center of town and are parents to three children, two boys and one girl. The oldest son is completing his first year in college. The middle son is in the 10th grade and the daughter is a fifth grader. All three children are in the general education program.

Mr. and Mrs. F were identified as participating parents. They are both high school graduates. Mr. F said he dropped out and later went back to school and earned his GED. Both parents work in the county, have a combined income in the \$40,000 to \$50,000 range and are in the late forties.

Question #1 - I would like for you to pretend that I am a new resident of this county. Tell me about the schools and what I might expect as a Black parent.

Mr. F stated that if Black parents don't have a good education, the kids are lost. "I don't think the schools are reaching out to the Black kids to get them to do more in school besides sports and basketball."

Mr. F also pointed out that the guidance counselors did not offer much assistance to Black students or parents in selecting colleges. Mrs. F added, "You almost have to do all the work yourself." She said that she had been given

this "big book" to look through. When her son talked to the guidance counselor, he was encouraged to look at Black colleges and he did not want to go to an "all Black school." Mrs. F felt that she really did not know enough to help direct her son in his selection of a college.

Mr. F's response to this was, "See, that person should not be in the system. It is a shame, too. There are Black kids who want to do things besides sports. The only way to get anything over at that school is through sports and the parents themselves." Mr. F feels that Black students are discouraged and that the counselors tell the students what they think they should have rather than assist the students with selections.

Question #2 - Describe your level of involvement with your child's education.

Mrs. F responded that she helps her daughter as much as she can, but pointed out that she feels limited in the help that she can give. She shared that while she was a high school graduate, that she had not done her best while in school. This is something that she regrets now. Mrs. F recalled a back to school night where she sat in her son's accelerated classes. She remembered being afraid that the teacher might ask the parents some questions and she said, "I didn't have any idea what he was talking about." She

said that this might be why some parents don't attend these functions, especially if they have less than a high school education.

She went on to say that their 10th grader had had problems with geometry this year and neither of them had been able to give him any help at home. The teachers often tell students they don't have time to go over items again and just move on. Mrs. F asked the interviewer, "Who made the rule that we've got to cover everything?" She pointed out that many students do not get it the first time and frequently Black students will not admit that they do not understand a concept.

Both parents expressed concern about the amount of homework their elementary daughter has and that some teachers are allowed to fail a high percentage of their students. "Now, something is wrong," said Mr. F. He continued by saying that he felt many Black students drop out because they "don't want to be the dummy sitting in that classroom."

Question #2 - Describe your level of involvement with your child's education.

Both parents indicated that they were actively involved with their children's education. They attend functions and conferences. Both parents work and are not available for

volunteer activities but are always there at school when requested.

Question #3 - What is your opinion of the level of involvement of other Black parents?

Mr. F, "It's non-existent. I am going to be honest with you. It is the same handful of Black parents."

Mrs. F stated that every time they go to their daughter's school her comment is, "There are no Black people here." She pointed out that some Black parents drop off their children for activities but do not stay themselves.

Mr. F seemed to feel that having so few Black teachers and coaches contributed to the lack of Black parent involvement. Regarding the Black teachers who are present he had this comment, "Either they are trying to survive for their lives or they are not interested."

Question #4 - Describe your last visit to your child's school. Why did you go? What happened while you were there? How did you feel you were treated?

Mr. and Mrs. F recalled that they had been contacted by their son's college band director and informed that the band would be stopping at the high school to do a performance in honor of their son. Mr. and Mrs. F were both very excited about this and thought that the high school staff would be

too. The appropriate parties were notified and the parents fully expected that this would be something special. As it turned out, the day the band arrived to play, was also the high school's Spring Fling day, where all sorts of out door activities had been planned for the students. No announcement was made about the band's performance and thus there were few students present for the performance. No administrators were there and only one person from the music department. Mr. & Mrs. F were both disappointed. Mrs. F said that she was sure that had her son been "the right person" with the "right name", everybody would have know what was going on.

Question #5 - What do you think the school expects from you as a Black parent?

Mr. F, "I think they hope you don't have to come over there for anything. I think they get nervous when they see you coming. I don't think you get the same reception if a White person went over there. I think when they see a Black person coming they feel something is up. I really believe that because when you go in the office, you can almost tell."

The interviewer asked Mrs. F if she had had any negative encounters because she is married to a Black man.

She said, "Not really. I get, 'Can I help you?' and I say we are together."

Mr. F reported that the school knows that when he comes in he is to be taken seriously and he does not think that color is an issue. He feels that he is given the respect that is due him.

Mr. F went on to recount an incident involving his middle son while in elementary school. According to Mr. F, his son was accused of threatening a White student. When the incident was reported to the principal, Mr. F's son was detained in the office for most of one school day. Mr. F went to school to discuss the matter with the principal. He found out that the principal had not talked to his son, only the White student. When Mr. F asked the principal why he had not talked to his son, the principal replied, concerning the White student, "He comes from a respectable family. He is a good boy." Mr. and Mrs. F report that they are still angry about this incident. Mr. F, "I was mad then and today. I still have not forgotten that. I don't even speak to that man. I have no respect for anybody like that."

Mr. F said that when parents go into the school they need to "set the tone" and let them know that "you mean business."

Question #6 - How do you feel when you have to go to school for a meeting/conference with your child's teacher/administrator?

This question was answered in the above descriptions of previous incidents.

Question 7 - What would you like to see happen regarding school-parent relationships with Black parents specifically?

Mr. F, "Black parents need more say so in the schools...." He pointed out that Black parents needed to get together but the only time he saw this happening was at church or bingo. "You should not have to preach in church that you need to go to school and look out for your kids' interest."

Mr. F said that he would like for people to refrain from calling Black students "minority". He said that his children found the term "minority" to be offensive.

Question #8 - To what extent did your parents participate in your education?

Mr. F reported that this mother always encouraged him to stay in school and do his best. However, she was not physically present at many functions. He said this his mother did not have much education, but he did not specify how much she did have. He did not mention his father.

Mrs. F said that she had lived with her mom for a while and that she had paid no attention to school. Then, she went to live with her grandparents. Her grandmother stressed the importance of a good education, but because of her age, she did not attend any school functions.

Question #9 - What would you like to see happen in this county to facilitate parent involvement?

Mr. F said that there needed to be more Black participation at all levels. "I think they need to open the doors to more Blacks in the schools and the government."

Mrs. F added, "Black students need somebody to look up to so they can say, 'Look at what they are doing.'" She added that Black students need role models.

Mr. F pointed out that "...none of the old baton carriers (referring to former Black administrators) had anything named after them." The elementary schools in this county that had been the "Black" schools were given directional names -Central, Southeastern. The other elementary schools were named for White educators or other prominent Whites in the community.

Question #10 - What else would you like to share that relates to this discussion?

Mrs. F indicated that from conversations she has had with her children, it is their perception that the White kids get everything, including the extra help. She said that "...a lot of Black kids don't have anybody to back them", especially if their parents are not involved. She went on to say, "If the parents are not going to push them or help them out, then they are lost. They can't make it. Then they say, 'Forget it. I am not getting anywhere here.'"

Mr. F predicted that more Black students will return to the streets and "dope" unless we get them "interested in education."

Participating - General Education - Below Average

Mrs. G is recently divorced. She is the mother of 4 sons, two of whom live with her in a new apartment complex in the southern end of the county. One son is in elementary school and the other is a tenth grader at the high school. Both boys are in the general education program.

Mrs. G is a high school graduate and works two jobs both in the county. She is in her late thirties and indicated that her income is in the \$20,000 to \$40,000 range. She was identified as a participating parent.

Question #1 - I would like for you to pretend that I am a new resident of this county. Tell me about the schools and what I might expect as a Black parent.

Mrs. G, "I never thought that they (her sons) were earmarked because they were Black and I never thought they were treated differently because they were Black, on the elementary level. I think the elementary level education is fair. It is a loving environment. People are genuinely concerned about all of the children and the teachers were cooperative. On the high school level, I think it breaks down. The high school does show bias according to race. This is my feeling with the principal. It is a racial attitude. I do think he has a problem, but I don't think that he thinks he has a problem. I don't think the teachers

are as caring as at the elementary level. Basically, their attitude is 'You get or you don't get it; if you want to get it you will; if you don't, tough, you can come back next year. They are very cut and dry and cold as to the education itself."

Question #2 - Describe your level of involvement with your child's education.

Mrs. G said that in the last year she had been less involved than ever. She said that this had been a difficult time for her because of the pain in her life, referring to her recent divorce. Nonetheless, she said that she had made time to check homework and talk with her children's teachers. She said that she makes a point of being active in their education and asks questions about their test results. She indicated that she would like to volunteer, but her job prevents her from doing that.

Question #3 - What is your opinion of the level of involvement of other Black parents?

Mrs. G reported that at the school where she works, she has not seen any Black parents show up for conferences or IEP meetings. She said that she knew that there were some parents who were "extensively" involved with the school system. She added, though, that the impression she gets

from the Black students is that their parents don't care. She continued, "I don't think they see the importance of school. I don't think that school was important to them (the parents). Usually these are parents with limited education. Perhaps their failing is that to say that they don't care gets them out of being responsible for seeing that their children do well in school. Maybe they feel like they can't help them in that way."

She went on to say that many Blacks who have moved up socially and economically, have left the county. She pointed out that the jobs are few and the cost of living is very high.

The interviewer asked if she thought that there was more Black parent participation at the elementary level than the junior and senior high. Her response, "Definitely." She went on to say that the high school was "a whole different set up." She said she understood that there needed to be rules, but added that the high school's policy gives you a "feeling of hopelessness." She said, "It's like a Communist state. You really don't have any power."

Interviewer, "Do you think that impacts on the Black students?"

Mrs. G, "Oh, sure. I think the Black students at the high school are all categorized, especially the Black males, as 'armed and extremely dangerous', and that is how they are

approached. Even if they allow themselves to see a Black male as a human being, it would only take one action, that they deemed as typical of Black men, to put them in that same category."

Question #4 - Describe your last visit to your child's school. Why did you go? What happened while you were there? How did you feel you were treated?

Mrs. G, "I went because my son was failing because of absences. I know him to be a bright person and capable of doing the work and I felt that his attitude was directly related to my husband and I being separated. It was his way of dealing with that. Initially, I wrote a letter to the principal, with a copy to the counselor, requesting that special consideration be given because of that. My son told me that the principal had called him in and said that he would honor the request, if he would work for the quarter and pull up his grades. However, the principal never informed the teachers of this arrangement and the counselor did not say anything either." The result was that Mrs. G's son failed all subjects for the year and will repeat 10th grade in the fall.

Question #5 - What do you think the school expects from you as a Black parent?

Mrs. G, "Probably at the high school level, they expect nothing from you. They expect you to be non-involved." She added that this was not the case at the junior high where she worked. She said that there she does not get a "Black and White feeling. I don't think there is a distinction that Black people act this way and White people act that way. Parents who are not involved are Black and White."

Question #6 - How do you feel when you have to go to school for a meeting/conference with your child's teacher/administrator?

Mrs. G said when the former principal was there, "I thought he was fair." She described the new principal as a "liar". She added, "One of the teachers at the high school said 'I don't know what you are going to do with him. Get him a GED.' If it wasn't for my Christian upbringing, I would have let her have it. I just left the room." Mrs. G said her impression was that this teacher was saying to her that her son was a "typical Black male" who was not going to become anything. Mrs. G said, "I will probably be less involved over there (the high school) because it is a hopeless situation for Black people on that level."

Question #7 - What would you like to see happen regarding school-parent relationships with Black parents specifically?

"I think Black parents should be more involved. Not so much for the sake of what people will think of the Black race, but for the sake of the children. Society is changing to a point, but I do believe that we are not afforded chances simply because we are Black. I think Black parents should be involved and let their children know that they have a strong family and you are important to us and we are behind you to get you where you need to go in this world."

Question #8 - To what extent did your parents participate in your education?

Mrs. G, "None. My dad died when I was three. My mom had to raise eight children, so she worked all the time. She came home extremely tired because she had to get up so early. She worked hard to provide us with a home and we never went hungry and we were clean. As far as helping us with our homework, she only had a 7th grade education. We were all, fortunately, very bright. If my father had lived, then she would have been a housewife and she would have done things differently. She came to graduation and that is just about it."

Question #9 - What would you like to see happen in this county to facilitate parent involvement?

"I think there should be more cultural exposure and that would draw out Black parents. This cultural exposure should be woven into the whole curriculum. There are not many activities on the secondary level."

Question #10 - What else would you like to share that relates to this discussion?

"We know that our education is important and we know that without it you will have a job with calluses and splinters. I think that it is important to show an interest and make our children feel that they have to have more education."

Mrs G went on to say that she thought this generation was "angry". "There was a time when you came to work every day, showed yourself loyal and moved up, but it is not about that any more. White people don't have jobs either. We are left behind because you have to take of your own first."

Participating - General Education - Below Average

Mr. and Mrs. H live in an upper-middle class neighborhood in the northern end of the county. They have three sons, all in the general education program. One is in elementary school, one in junior high and one in the tenth grade at the high school. Both parents work in the county. They are in their late thirties. Both graduated from high school and their combined incomes exceeds \$50,000.

A couple of days before the interview, Mrs. H called and said that her husband had to accompany their middle son to an awards program at his school and would not be there at the beginning of the interview. Because of difficulty with scheduling, it was decided to start without him. The interview was completed by the time Mr. H arrived but he wanted to respond to the questions, also. Thus, the reader will find two sets of responses, one from each parent.

Question #1 - I would like for you to pretend that I am a new resident of this county. Tell me about the schools and what I might expect as a Black parent.

Mrs. H reported that while on the surface things seem to be fine she is aware of continued prejudice. "I can still see some of the prejudice from some of the same people who have lived here since the beginning of time. If you are a new parent or student, you would not see it at all. Being

a resident and insider to this county, I feel like it there and always was." She went on to say that "...a lot of times Black students are singled out as far as trouble goes, often that wasn't started by them but ended up to be their fault. As far as punishments go, just from what I've seen, it is one sided."

Question #2 - Describe your level of involvement with your child's education.

Mrs. H indicated that she has been involved with the PTO's since her first son started school. "I'm involved with the sports and other activities within the school. We go to conferences and get familiar with the teachers."

Question #3 - What is your opinion of the level of involvement of other Black parents?

Mrs. H, "I think it is very low. They complain, but they don't join in. They want to see results but they don't want to stick around to help get them." She continued, "I think they think that their opinions won't be heard and they are not used to being involved in things like that so they shy away from it."

Question #4 - Describe your last visit to your child's school. Why did you go? What happened while you were there? How did you feel you were treated?

Mrs. H reported that her last visit to school was to pick up her son so that he did not have to ride the bus. She also said that her husband had visited the high school with a concern about their son's grades. She said that he had spoken to the guidance counselor and was treated fine. She noted that the appointment had been made promptly.

Question #5 - What do you think the school expects from you as a Black parent?

Mrs. H, "I don't think they expect a whole lot. I think they expect you to keep your children out of trouble and get them through there, but I really don't think they expect a whole lot from Black parents. I think this is because of the stereotyping but that is just the way the county is. They have always had mostly Whites sitting on the board of this and the board of that and when a Black parent comes in I think they feel threatened."

Question #6 - How do you feel when you have to go to school for a meeting/conference with your child's teacher/administrator?

Mrs. H, "I feel like I've done it myself and I am going to be punished. So that's the first thing that comes to my mind. What have I done?" She went on, "Once I get in there, I just want to hear both sides. I want to hear the teacher's side and the child's side and then compare. The first thing I tell the teacher is that I expect them to be fair as far as punishment is concerned."

Question #7 - What would you like to see happen regarding school-parent relationships with Black parents specifically?

Mrs. H indicated that she would like to see more Blacks on the board. " I would like to see more Black teachers and more Black role models within the schools."

Question #8 - To what extent did your parents participate in your education?

Mrs. H indicated that her parents "did a lot." She said that her mother helped her study by calling out questions and quizzing her. She said that her parents were not at school a lot, but they were there to help.

Question #9 - What would you like to see happen in this county to facilitate parent involvement?

Mrs. H said that she would like to see parents encouraged to participate. She felt that parents were

discouraged because when they give their opinions they never hear the idea again. "Letting them see it happen would encourage them to think that they are heard. That could really be good for the kids."

She went on to say that she did not want to see Blacks singled out with Black organizations or Black programs. "I would like to see it all come together."

Question #10 - What else would you like to share that relates to this discussion?

Mrs. H said she did not want Blacks to think that if they moved into this county they would have "a hard way to go."

Question #1 - I would like for you to pretend that I am a new resident of this county. Tell me about the schools and what I might expect as a Black parent.

Mr. H views the school system as a "quality system with quality teachers." He added, "One of the things that this county lacks, from a Black parent perspective, is the fact that there is not enough parent involvement and participation." He went on to say that he thought many parents felt that once students started school, they became the school's responsibility. He also pointed out that many parents commute out of the county to work. These parents

are gone in the morning when the children get up and have not returned home when the students get in from school. "They (the parents) don't know if homework or assignments are done. I won't say they don't care but do they have the energy to follow through and see if the homework gets done."

Mr. H then stated that he thought many parents were not interested in their children's education. "I think some of them feel intimidated by the school system. They think their voices won't be heard and their concerns won't be addressed."

Interviewer, "Why do you continue to be involved?"

Mr. H, "Because I want my kids to succeed. I don't want them in my house for the next 15 or 20 years. I want to see them succeed. I think a lot of parents feel intimidated by the fact that the majority of teachers are White and the administration is White. They feel that they don't have any representation in the school system."

Question #2 - Describe your level of involvement with your child's education.

Mr. H, "I try to stay as involved as I possibly can. Both in school activities and projects these kids bring home. I probably get too involved in those, but I want my kids to succeed."

Question 3 - Do you have anything else to add about your opinion of the level of involvement of other Black parents?

"There really should be more participation. The message I would like to leave with parents is 'don't feel intimidated.' Those teachers are more than willing to sit down and spend as much time as you need to work through your child's problem."

Question #4 - Describe your last visit to your child's school. Why did you go? What happened while you were there? How did you feel you were treated?

Mr. H reported that his last visit had been earlier that evening. He had gone to see his junior high son receive an award for creativity. Prior to this, he had been to the high school to discuss his oldest son's grades. He said that after talking to his teacher he found out what the problem was and together they worked out a plan to solve the homework situation.

Question #5 - What do you think the school expects from you as a Black parent?

Mr. H, "I don't think they expect anything because they haven't had that kind of participation. So I don't think they are surprised at the low turn out."

Question #6 - How do you feel when you have to go to school for a meeting/conference with your child's teacher/administrator?

Mr. H said that he felt very confident and very comfortable. He said that he felt no sense of intimidation at all.

Question 7 - What would you like to see happen regarding school-parent relationships with Black parents specifically?

Mr. H said that if the school system was interested in raising the level of Black parent participation and the Black parents were not taking the initiative, then it was left up to the school administration to take that initiative.

Question #8 - To what extent did your parents participate in your education?

Mr. H reported that his parents did not visit the school as much in his later years "because I showed most of the responsibility. I was an OK student." He said that his mother saw to it that his homework was done. He described her as an involved parent.

Question #9 - What would you like to see happen in this county to facilitate parent involvement?

"I would like to see members of the school administration available other than those traditional school hours. He added, "Someone needs to initiate a meeting that would reduce the intimidation or fear factor and say to the parents 'We are here to help.' I think if the school made more of an effort that parents would feel that their comments and views were welcome. I also think they need more guidance counselors."

Mr. H's high school son, "It seems like some of the students want to try and do better but they get lost in the shuffle. Sometimes it takes ten days to see the guidance counselor and if you have a problem with a grade or class, by that time it is too late."

Question #10 - What else would you like to share that relates to this discussion?

Mr. H, "I think parents need to be more accountable and responsible for the education of their children. They need to be more involved."

Participating - Special Education - Average

Mr. and Mrs. C live on the local military base in the county. They have been here for eight years. Each completed high school and have taken some college classes. Mr. C indicated that he has almost completed his associate degree through the Army. They are both in the late thirties with a combined income that exceeds \$50,000 yearly. Their base quarters were attractively decorated. The interviewer was warmly received. Mrs. C was very anxious to share her feelings about the school system.

Mr. and Mrs. C have two children. A son, identified as emotionally disturbed and learning disabled, who should graduate this year, and a daughter in the ninth grade general education program. Only the parents and children live in the home.

As with Mr. and Mrs. B, Mrs. C did most of the talking. Mr. C did make contributions throughout the interview, but he was not as animated as his wife.

Question #1 - I would like for you to pretend that I am a new resident of this county. Tell me about the schools and what I might expect as a Black parent.

Mrs. C's response to the first question seemed to center around the issue of the county taking so long to

evaluate her son for special education services. Except for this one area, she indicated that she had not had any problems with the school system.

Currently, there are some problems with her son at the high school and she seems to feel that had he been evaluated earlier and received appropriate services, some incidents may have been avoided. She recalled that initially the problems were only manifested at school and the school's solution was to suspend her son. Gradually, she and her husband began to see a change in their son's behavior at home. This was when they began requesting an evaluation. However, they were denied on the basis that his test scores and grades were good. Mrs. C said that she "... was not persistent enough." Events, with the son, finally came to the point where the parents had him hospitalized. Following this hospitalization, the county agreed to evaluate and he was found eligible for special education services as an emotionally disturbed student. They began seeking help for their son when he was in the seventh grade and it was not until the eleventh grade that the evaluation took place.

During this time, the school never contacted the parents, except to ask them to pick up their son from school. There seemed to be little concern for his behavior. The school appeared to accept this. Mr. C added that the

system "...does a fairly decent job, if there are no behavior problems or learning disabilities."

Question #2 - Describe your level of involvement with your child's education.

Mrs. C indicated that she is very involved with her children's education. She said that she always wants what is best for her children. "I am at the meetings trying to find out more so that I can help out. If you don't try or ask questions, nobody is going to volunteer to tell you anything and if there is something that you don't know, you just don't know."

Question #3 - What is your opinion of the level of involvement of other Black parents?

Her perception of other Black parents is that they are not involved, especially the parents of special education students. Her feeling is that these parents do not care and she fears that eventually the children will not care either.

When asked why parents may not care about their children's education, Mrs. C indicated that a lack of education seemed to be part of the reason. She recalled the numerous times when notes had been sent home to parents, to which no response was ever received. She feels that many of these parents think that their only obligation is to send

the children to school but she added that "...it is more than that."

Mr. C said that he is not as involved as his wife because he is often on the road. Mrs. C makes most of the decisions, but she keeps him informed.

Question #4 - Describe your last visit to your child's school. Why did you go? What happened while you were there? How did you feel you were treated?

Mrs. C has not had to make many extra trips to school for her daughter. She has not received any calls about her daughter, not even to say that she was doing very well. Mr. and Mrs. C are always present for conferences and will call the teacher if the daughter's grade drops in a class. It was clear that they did not expect the school to call if her grades began to slip; but, they fully expected to be called if there were any type of misbehavior.

Mrs. C returned to the issue of parents of special education students not participating. She suggested that one way to increase participation would be to provide support groups for these parents, so that they might be educated about their children's disabilities. She pointed out also, that scheduling and transportation were often difficult for these parents and that the school system should try to assist with these areas.

The parents were asked to describe their last visit to their son's school. They had been asked to come to school because the administration was about to suspend their son. The incident which had prompted the suspension, has happened two days earlier. The vice-principal indicated that she had been "thinking about it" and had just decided that their son would be suspended. The other student who was involved was given in-school suspension. Mr. and Mrs. C's son was to get an out of school suspension because it was felt that he "intimidated" other students. Once again, there is the issue of equitable suspensions.

Throughout the conversation with the vice-principal, the parents felt that there was no concern for their son, only for the teacher. Mrs. C said, "I sat there and I was so disappointed. I wanted to smack that lady. She had an attitude that wasn't fair....From that day, I realized that my son was in trouble at the high school."

The parents were also upset that they were reminded several times that their son was already nineteen years old. "They were ready to kick him out of school", said Mrs. C.

Both parents felt that the attitude of the administration was negative but added that the guidance counselor and special education teacher had been very nice. Mr. C added that this negative attitude often intimidates parents. When asked if he thought this stance was taken

with just Black parents, he responded, "I think they would do it to anybody." Mrs. C characterized them as "prejudiced".

Mr. C then commented that he felt that the manner in which his son had been handled was because he was Black. "I do think that the lack of accommodations for him had something to do with him being Black."

Mrs. C said that this all related to the negative perceptions of Black students, held by the White teachers: "... they are no good; they can't do anything but run, play basketball and smoke crack. That is the image White people have put on our Black kids." Mr. C agreed, "...they get the message by not being called upon in class or getting the help they need in class. Black kids are the most victimized ones. It happens at all levels. They don't give us a chance."

Question #5 - What do you think the school expects from you as a Black parent?

When asked what they thought the school expected from them as parents, Mrs. C replied, "Nothing. They don't care." Mr. C said, "I don't think they expect us to understand the system." He pointed out that when he had been in a meeting with a teacher that the teacher did not offer any information. If he made suggestions or asked

questions, he was given a response. But, once he stopped, so did the exchange.

Question #6 - How do you feel when you have to go to school for a meeting/conference with your child's teacher/administrator?

Neither parent indicated that they felt intimidated about going to school for meetings or conferences although they admitted they were anxious when it concerned their son. What did trouble them at the meetings was the teacher's attitude of "I have mine and you have to get yours". One teacher had indicated that she/he demanded respect because he/she had a masters degree.

Question #7 - What would you like to see happen regarding school-parent relationships with Black parents specifically?

Mr. and Mrs. C felt that the one thing that might help to improve school-parent relationships would be to make home visits. Some teachers, at the elementary level, make home visits. The particular special education teacher with whom Mrs. C works is one teacher who makes home visits. "You got parents not active, so we go to them." She went on to tell the interviewer that one of their parents is mentally retarded and that no matter what is sent home, this parent does not understand. Thus, they have taken the

responsibility to make home visits to help this parent understand what is happening at school. She added that they do this with the full support of their principal.

Question 8 - To what extent did you parents participate in your education?

Mrs. C indicated that it was her older sister who participated in her education. Her mother could not read or write. Mr. C said that his mother had taught him to read before he started kindergarten. His parents were very involved in his schooling and he remembers that report day was a "big event" at their house.

Question #9 - What would you like to see happen in this county to facilitate parent involvement?

Mr. C felt that the Black churches in the county need to come together and provide support for the Black parents. He suggested that workshops be offered to educate parents about their rights and how to maneuver the system.

Question #10 - What else would you like to share that relates to this discussion?

When asked for final comments, Mr. C had this to offer, "...the worst thing that could have happened to us was integration. If it was up to me, we would still have our

own schools, teachers, and community leaders....trying to depend on the school system is not going to work in getting what we need for our children."

Mrs. C commented on how few Black teachers and guidance counselors there are. "They don't have any Black figures to look up too. All they see is White."

INTERVIEW - 9

Participating - Special Education - Below Average

Mrs. D is a single parent in her mid-thirties who lives with her son in her mother's home. She was very receptive to participating in this study. The only difficulty was scheduling a time that was convenient for her.

Mrs. D is a high school graduate. She works outside the county and declined to share income information. There are no other children living in the home. However, this appears to be a large family as Mrs. D's mother delighted in showing the interviewer pictures of her other children and their families and describing the different areas where they live.

The interviewer had some difficulty finding Mrs. D's home as it was located in a somewhat remote area. However, upon arrival, there was a warm greeting extended by Mrs. D and her mother. Mrs. D's mother sat in the doorway to the living room during the entire interview. She did not offer any comments, but she could be seen nodding her head in agreement as her daughter responded to the questions.

Mrs. D was identified as a participating parent of a special education student who is identified as emotionally disturbed. A review of her son's record indicated that there had been numerous behavior problems at school. However, it appeared that Mrs. D had always been cooperative

with the school and had been receptive to suggested program changes for her son. It appeared that his first year in high school had been reasonably smooth, behaviorally.

Question #1 - I would like for you to pretend that I am a new resident of this county. Tell me about the schools and what I might expect as a Black parent.

Mrs. D felt that the school system was a "good one". Her one concern was the absence of Black teachers, particularly at the junior high school that her son had attended the year before. "I think the kids feel really good when they do see Black teachers."

Question #2 - Describe your level of involvement with your child's education.

Mrs. D stated that she is as involved in her son's education as she could be. She pointed out that she has stressed the importance of an education and has tried to impress upon her son the need to study even if there are no assignments.

Question #3 - What is your opinion of the level of involvement of other Black parents?

When asked about the involvement of other Black parents in their children's education, she said that a lot of them

were not involved like they should be. She pointed out that at meetings, there are "... hardly any Black parents there." She felt that for some parents scheduling was a problem. Some parents do not get home until 7:00 PM and if they have to pick up children from the baby sitter, then it is often too late to go to a meeting.

Mrs. D said that things would have been different with her son had she not been so involved, and she added, "I think he (her son) wants me to be involved as much as I can." She indicated that her son is anxious to share the positive things at school, but not the negatives. However, she said that she always knows when something is wrong. "I can see it in him. I can tell if something is wrong with him. I can see the tension."

Question #4 - Describe your last visit to your child's school. Why did you go? What happened while you were there? How did you feel you were treated?

Mrs. D reported that her last visit to the high school was for a discipline problem. While there, she felt that she, and her son, had been treated fairly. She said that she had had to deal with about half of her son's teachers and administrators.

Question #6 - How do you feel when you have to go to school for a meeting/conference with your child's teacher/administrator?

She pointed out that she always goes in with an open mind, but is always determined to ask questions, and voice her opinion. She feels that this keeps the lines of communication open. Her advice to other Black parents is to keep in touch with the teachers. She views it as the parent's responsibility to take the first step in this process of establishing open communication.

The interviewer pressed Mrs. D for her perception of why Black parents do not take that first step. She pointed out that some do not get involved because they are Black. Some feel, "It does not matter what I say. They will pay no attention. Then some parents say, 'My child is doing fine. I have no need to go.' That is sad. That child needs to know that the parent is concerned."

Question #5 - What do you think the school expects from you as a Black parent?

"I think they expect me to participate in the things I can, in dealing with my child. I think they want me to be concerned as a parent about the grades my child is making, about his future and his attitudes. They just basically, the bottom line, want you to be involved with your child."

Question #7 - What would you like to see happen regarding school-parent relationships with Black parents specifically?

Mrs. D felt that communication from the school needed to be more personalized and should contain statements like "We want you to come", "We want you to be involved", "We want to hear what you have to say." She also suggested some type of informal get-together where parents and teachers could just talk to each other.

Question #8 - To what extent did you parents participate in your education?

Mrs. D's parents were actively involved in her education. She recalled how they were "...always checking on me to see how I was doing." She recalled that they would have a half hour to rest before dinner and then after dinner it was "homework time." When homework was done, then they could watch television or play a game.

Question #9 - What would you like to see happen in this county to facilitate parent involvement?

She suggested that if the county provided more activities for the students that this would help parents to be more involved. She also suggested that Black parents

form some type of group wherein they could get together, discuss their concerns, and try to determine why it is that so many parents are not participating. "Our kids are our future. What kind of future will they have if people don't start paying attention to their children?"

Question #10 - What else would you like to share that relates to this dicussion?

Mrs. D's final comments concerned getting the Black churches in the community to take a more active role in the whole educational process. What she would like to see happen is that someone would come into the churches and talk to the parents. This, she pointed out, would indicate to her that they really want the parents involved. "Their coming out to me, makes me happy and maybe what I say will make a difference."

When asked if this person should be a representative of the school system, she replied, "Maybe." The interviewer pointed out that many parents had refused to be interviewed. Mrs. D said that "Some people have a fear that something they say may hurt...Some people are very private and they won't say a word."

Participating - Special Education - Average

Mr. and Mrs. E were identified as participating parents. They have two children. A son who is in first grade and in the gifted and talented program and a daughter who is in the eleventh grade and who has been identified as learning disabled.

Mr. and Mrs. E identified their ages in the 36-45 year range. Mrs. E is a high school graduate. Mr. E has his masters degree in vocational technical education and teaches in another county. Their income exceeds \$50,000 yearly.

Question #1 - I would like for you to pretend that I am a new resident of this county. Tell me about the schools and what I might expect as a Black parent.

Mr. E stated that it was his opinion that the kids at the elementary level get "a fair shot." He holds that parents have to be visible in the schools. He and his wife believe that their son would not get the attention he does were it not for their involvement. They both felt that if the parents showed an interest, then the teachers would. Likewise, if parents show no interest, then there is minimal interest shown by the teachers. Mr. E pointed out that he and another black father had gone on a field trip. "They paid attention to his kid and mine. The other kids got minimum attention. The distinction was obvious."

Mr. E feels that parent involvement at the high school makes no difference unless you "... really shine in academics or athletics, other than that, you are nothing Charlie Brown."

Mr. E went on to relate that his daughter had not been identified for special education until her first year at the high school. He holds an English teacher responsible as his daughter was having difficulty with this class. Mr. E went to the principal as he thought the problem was with the teacher and not his daughter. He finally went to the school board and it was shortly after this that his daughter was identified and subsequently removed from this English class. "This is their way of dealing with or not dealing with a problem. We will put her in special education and get rid of her. That is what they are doing to a lot of black kids."

Mrs. E who is an aide at the high school said that it bothers her that the teachers are constantly reminding the Black kids that they are in special education. "They are telling the kids 'You can't learn, you have a learning disability and that is why you are in this LD class.'" Mrs. E reports hearing a teacher say, "Why did you come back today? The class was so much better off when you weren't here."

The interviewer asked if these kinds of statements were made to White students and she responded "Yes." However, she added that these statements were directed "...mainly to the Black kids."

Mr. E went on to say that "...what I am finding is that they don't want parents involved at the high school. That was why I quit going to the Parent Advocacy meetings." He reported that these meetings focused on "...the good things that kids were doing, the upper eight percent, which was White for the most part...and didnt' effect the everyday day kids, where most Blacks are...that was their way of skating around issues."

The high school's principal is new this year and the interviewer asked if this attitude of keeping parents uninvolved was new. Mr. E's reply, "It has gotten worse." Mr. E continued, "To a new person coming into the county, my only recommendation to you would be, if you want your kids treated fairly, and get their share, get involved and show your face in the place. Not just involved with the school but get involved with the community. That's the other thing where Blacks fall short of the mark. You have to show your face in the place. Being involved means putting yourself out. It means putting your life on hold in some cases."

Question #2 - Describe your level of involvement with your child's education.

"We don't do our kids' homework. We don't do projects. We do help and if we can't, we make sure we find someone who can." Both parents indicated that they provide a home environment that is conducive to learning by providing the materials and books they need to supplement their learning. They were quite proud of the number of books they have in their home.

Question #3 - What is your opinion of the level of involvement of other Black parents?

Mr. E, "You see them at the basketball and football games; you see them in the grocery and liquor stores, bingo, and that's it. I think when you ask for the level of involvement, I think we need to go back to a primary question, 'Do they go to church?'" Mr. E holds that there is a connection between church involvement and school/community involvement.

Mrs. E felt that the level of involvement had a lot to do with the educational level of the parents. Mrs. E's perception is that most of the White parents have college degrees and white collar jobs - doctors, lawyers, teachers; however, this is not the case with Blacks, many of whom are

house keepers, or do some kind of manual labor. According to Mrs. E, this makes the Black parents feel inferior.

Mr. E added that "...you don't survive as a Black parent because you feel intimidated...by the White administration and staff." Again Mr. E talked about the role of the Black church and Black ministers. He recalled that some years ago they had provided leadership for Black families outside the home and had given them encouragement. This does not happen any more, according to Mr. E.

Mr. and Mrs. E agreed that many Black students and parents need to know that someone cares. "Some of those kids really need someone to spend time with them," said Mrs. E. She went on to say that people can sense when they are wanted and that for some parents they can tell the minute they walk through the school door and the Black parents' response is, "I am not going to waste my time coming here anymore."

Question #4 - Describe your last visit to your child's school. Why did you go? What happened while you were there? How did you feel you were treated?

Mr. and Mrs. E related that their last visit to the high school was for a meeting with their daughter's guidance counselor. The parents were concerned that her health and art grades had dropped considerably, from A and B to D and

F, respectively. The guidance counselor told them that the D and F were "OK". The guidance counselor justified this with, "She's just growing up." When the parents reminded her that their daughter wanted to be a respiratory therapist, they were told that she should focus on being a nurse's aide. "In other words, forget shooting for the stars, let's settle for less," said Mr. E. This was how he read the guidance counselor's statement. Additionally, they related how another guidance counselor had encouraged another Black student, whom they both knew, to take classes in a lower track level.

According to Mr. E, this situation with the guidance counselors has been going on for at least five years. He related another story that involved his mother-in-law and a grandson that she was raising at the time. Mrs. E's mother would go to school and come home very frustrated. She finally asked Mr. E if he would go to school in her place. He indicated that he did and also arranged to have this young man in counseling. Unfortunately, this young man is now in prison. Mr. E stated, "The thing is, the high school didn't care. The same attitude that that Ms.____ (his daughter's counselor) has now with the kids is the same attitude that Mr. _____ (nephew's counselor) had give years ago."

Mr. and Mrs. E's perception was that for the White counselors, this was "Just another Black person deciding not to do anything with his life...."

Question #5 - What do you think the school expects from you as a Black parent?

Mr. E, "Honestly, to stay out and sit back and be quiet."

Mrs. E, "Just don't start any trouble."

Mr. E's perception is that at the elementary level parent involvement is wanted. However, he went on to say that as the students move up in the grades that they (staff) do not want parents visible, especially the Black parents. "At the elementary level, problems are handled in the classroom. There is a student-teacher relationship and that is where it stays. Once you get past elementary, they become teacher-student-principal-parent. They don't want you in the chain at all if they can help it. Then you would get to see the double standard that exists so badly at the high school. I have had Black and White graduates tell me the same thing about the double standard. If you keep parents out, you can keep the double standard. If enough parents came in,...if you had more Black parents substituting, for example, can you imagine the hell that would cause in the county when they saw what was going on."

Mr. E also noted that at a recent school board meeting the superintendent had talked about discipline and that there were behaviors that just would not be tolerated. Mr. E said he told the superintendent that he had no problem with that, but added that his concern was the fair administration of a tough discipline policy. "It won't happen. Black kids will be gone," said Mr. E.

According to Mrs. E, when two Blacks fight at the high school, both are suspended. When two White students fight, the administrator's policy seems to be, "Let's talk about it." White students, reports Mrs. E, often do not suffer any discipline consequences. Black students, however, always do. Mrs. E said that sometimes it appears to her that the administration is just "looking for something" especially when the students are at lunch. She also related that when Black students are in a group in the halls, they are made to disperse, but this does not happen to groups of White students.

Question #6 - How do you feel when you have to go to school for a meeting/conference with your child's teacher/administrator?

Mr. E responded, "It's a tough question for me. I don't respect them because I know they are lying and I have caught them in their lies." He said that at the last parent

advocacy meeting he had attended that he had raised the issue of students being disrespectful and cursing teachers. Mr. E said he was told that that did not happen at the high school. "They jumped right down on me. I haven't been back since," said Mr. E. He continued, "I told them,...in order to get respect, you have to give it. Not just to parents, but to the kids. It is not happening up there; they want to take it from the kids. The parents don't mean didly. They have lost total track of who the customer is."

Question #7 - What would you like to see happen regarding school-parent relationships with Black parents specifically?

Mr. E, "I would love to see a Black parents coalition and parents really participating. Something where they can come in and air their sincere feelings about how they perceive the school and staff." Mr. E went on to say that this coalition should function as a "concern house" where everyone would lay their concerns on the table, recognize them and accept them. Once this happens, then the group could brainstorm for possible solutions and that the central office staff and school staff need to be involved. Mr. E feels that once parents feel there is support, they will become involved.

Question #8 - To what extent did your parents participate in your education?

Mr. E, "Mom was 69 when I was going to college."

Mrs. E, "My parents boarded Black teachers and I think that was a great help to us. What my parents did not know, they were there to show us what to do and tell us what to do."

Question #9 - What would you like to see happen in this county to facilitate parent involvement?

Mr. E made reference again the Black parent coalition which he discussed earlier. "I think that Black parents need to feel safe." Mr. E pointed out that this "body", would allow Black parents to "...focus, then we can move forward again."

Question #10 - What else would you like to share that relates to this discussion?

Neither parent had additional comments at this point. It was 11:30 PM and they had been relating incidents to the interviewer since 7:30 PM.

CHAPTER 5

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine the barriers and facilitators to Black parent participation in education. While the researcher took measures to insure objectivity, some bias is inherent in qualitative research. In this study it must be a consideration as the researcher is a Black parent.

The specific research questions that were addressed in this study were: 1) What are the barriers and facilitators to Black parent participation? 2) Do demographic variables affect parent involvement? 3) What is the perceived level of involvement of Black parents? and 4) What is the perception of the school climate for Black parents?

Barriers to Participation

As noted in the previous chapter, the barriers to participation were: prejudice and dual standards, low level of expectation, too few Black teachers and administrators, and an intimidating school climate. The facilitators were high level of expectation, fair and equitable treatment, and parents' attitude about involvement.

Ascher (1987) described the relationship between low-income and minority parents and schools as "serious" and "fragile". This appears to be an appropriate description of the relationship between the school system and minority parents in this study. Serious is a fitting term given the

parents' perceptions of dual standards and prejudice. Fragile is also an apt term. It was the researcher's impression that some parents are literally holding themselves in check. This was particularly evident with the parents with whom the researcher spent four hours. With many of the parents there seemed to be a need to unload all of these feelings. It was reassuring that the parents felt this comfortable with the writer. At the same time, however, it gave cause for concern that some of the parents felt that this might be the only setting in which they might be heard.

The parents' perceptions of dual standards and prejudice must be given some credence in light of the OAP (1994) report which indicates that this school system's drop-out rate for minority students has doubled in the past year and exceeds the state average. Disproportionate figures of a like nature were also cited by Edleman (1993) and Kuykendall (1992) with regard to suspensions, expulsions, and drop-out rates for Black students.

It does not appear to be a substantial amount of open communication between the White professionals and the Black parents interviewed in this school system. Black parents perceive the school staff to be indifferent and in Harry's (1992) study, Black parents were perceived to be apathetic and disinterested by White professionals. Harry (1992)

posits that these perceptions are merely camouflage for mistrust. It appears to this writer that in this school system this may be the case for the Black parents as well as the White professionals. This sense of mistrust would also account for the parents' perception of an intimidating school climate.

The perception of too few Black teachers and administrators must also be given some validity. Only 5% of the teaching and administrative staff of this school system is Black. Two of the elementary schools have no Black teachers. Thus, some Black students and White students leave elementary school with the possible notion that there are no Black teachers.

Facilitators to Participation

As indicated earlier, most of the perceived barriers can become facilitators. Parents' responses would point to the need to be recognized and respected. Kalyanpur (1989) found this to be true in her study and concluded that recognition and respect are necessary if parents are to be active participants. Mutual respect, while not currently perceived by the parents, could alter the course of events regarding the participation of Black parents.

While it was not documented in the review of the literature, it appears that parental attitudes regarding involvement serve as the real driving force. Most of the

parents, even those who were most critical of the school system and those who expressed a sense of hopelessness, gave no indication that they would give up on the system or their children. The researcher was struck by the parents' resolve.

Demographic Variables

Demographic variables did not appear to impact parent involvement. Neither parents' income, level of education, age, number of children, nor job location significantly influenced their participation or lack thereof. Parents' participation also did not appear to influence current parent participation. In a like manner, there was no significant distinction in the responses of parents of disabled children and those parents of children in general education programs. Contrary to Lowry (1983), the parents of disabled students in this study gave no indication that they lacked knowledge regarding special education. One parent boasted that he would keep his daughter in school until she was 21 if it was necessary to insure a smooth transition for her, noting that he was sure that the administration did not realize that he knew that his daughter was entitled to be educated until that age.

Level of Involvement

It would appear from the parents' responses that the definition of participation is a fluid term. The parents'

perceptions of their level of involvement was different from that of the administration, especially in the cases of the parents who were identified as non-participating. Not one of the parents identified as non-participating viewed themselves as such, although some did admit that they were not as involved as they should have been. It would appear that the non-participating parents were holding firm to at least a part of Swick (1989) and Ascher's (1987) definitions of parent participation. These refer to involvement as "advocacy" and being "supportive". Certainly these are crucial to parental involvement but it does not appear to have been a consideration of the administration. Any further studies would warrant more clarification of these terms, participating and non-participating.

School Climate

The parents' perception of the school's climate appears to be a negative one. This would appear to be a direct outgrowth of all of the other negative perceptions held by the parents. Some of the parents' responses appear bitter. Others seem to reflect a sense of hopelessness for this generation of children. Still other parents were angry with themselves, with the system, and with the Black parents who do not take part in their children's education.

Summary

The barriers to Black parent participation were the perceptions of prejudice, dual standards for students, indifference of school staff, too few Black teachers/administrators and an intimidating school climate. The facilitators were the perception fair and equitable treatment, a resolve to be involved and a high level of expectation.

This school system needs to be more aware that there is a group of Black parents within the school's parent community who do not share feelings of well being, security, and fair treatment. The absence of these feelings has created a sense of alienation, frustration and in some cases hopelessness on the part of the parents. While these feelings are based on perceptions, which may or may not have basis in fact, they are nonetheless very real to these parents and remain barriers to their constructive participation in their children's education. This school system should acknowledge these perceptions and take steps to encourage more productive dialogue with Black parents.

Recommendations

1. The school system should work with parents, teachers, and administrators, Black and White, to deal

honestly and openly with the perception of racism and prejudice.

2. School administrators should work with the Black churches and other organizations that serve the Black community as a means of reaching the Black parents and enabling them to advocate for their children. This involves the administration reaching out and taking the initiative. It will take small group collaboration, perhaps family by family, to bring about changes.

3. Black parents should form a self-help group in which they can learn to hone their skills of active involvement with the children's education. Ultimately, this responsibility belongs to them.

4. This school system should develop methods to attract more Black teachers and administrators. The parents in this study perceive the presence of Black role models as an important part of their children's education.

Reflections

Now that this study is finished, I would like to comment on the insights that I gained from this process. First, I found it reassuring that there are Black parents who are tenacious in their involvement with their children's education, despite the perceived barriers. These parents are to be applauded for their resolve. But I cannot help but wonder what it is about these parents that sets them

apart from the others whom I interviewed. There did not appear to be any stark differences in their backgrounds or home environments. I feel that this is what this study is ultimately all about and while I felt I had gotten honest and forthright answers and had touched upon some important themes, the intangible qualities that caused parents to be involved and motivated are still not clear to me.

I view myself as an involved and participating parent in the education of my three sons. Two have graduated from high school and one is still in high school. Had I been interviewed, using these same questions, my responses would have been similar to many of the parents in that personal experiences have made me sensitive to many of the issues discussed by the parents.

Secondly, I gained a new admiration for the single parents in particular. The single women in this study were vigilant in their determination not to have their sons become a part of those negative statistics on Black males. While they are not always visible at school, they gave many indications that they are providing nurturing and supportive environments for their sons while stressing the importance of education.

I found this qualitative process one of growth for me. I was forced to accept the fact that Black parents were not willing to talk to me. At first this was taken personally.

I had not anticipated refusals because I, too, am Black. However, I learned that race does not matter when you are dealing with personal issues and when you are viewed as part of the system which has alienated you.

Finally, having gone to school in a system, albeit segregated, where school was an integral part of the community and where the values and expectations of school were reinforced by my family, I find it difficult to come up with answers to the problems that beset the Black families in today's integrated system. The usual problems of discipline, achievement and motivation are made more complex by the dynamics of the racial interactions. As Black parents and persons involved in the educational system, we seem to bring a lot of negative baggage to the process. As long as we are unable to shed this baggage and move beyond those preconceived notions and negative perceptions, we will continue to deny our children the full benefit of our involvement and therefore the education to which they have a right and which we earnestly desire for them.

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APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. I would like for you to pretend that I am a new resident of this county. Tell me about the schools and what I might expect as a Black parent.
2. Describe your level of involvement with your child's education.
3. What is your opinion of the level of involvement of other Black parents?
4. Describe your last visit to your child's school. Why did you go? What happened while you were there? How did you feel you were treated?
5. What do you think the school expects from you as a Black parent?
6. How do you feel when you have to go to school for a meeting/conference with your child's teacher/administrator?
7. What would you like to see happen regarding school-parent relationships with Black parents specifically?
8. To what extent did your parents participate in your education?
9. What would you like to see happen in this county to facilitate parent involvement?
10. What else would you like to share that relates to this discussion?

APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Age (please check one) _____ 25-35
_____ 36-45
_____ 46 and above

Level of Education (please check one)
_____ less than high school
_____ high school graduate
_____ college graduate

Family Income (please check one)
_____ \$15,000 - \$20,000
_____ \$20,000 - \$40,000
_____ \$40,000 - \$50,000
_____ \$50,000 and above

Number of children in family _____

Work in Fauquier County _____

Work outside Fauquier County _____

Were your parents involved in your schooling? ___YES ___NO

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

I, Miriam H. Porter, am a graduate student at Virginia Tech, currently completing the doctoral program. To this end, I am conducting a study regarding the participation of Black parents in the education of their adolescent children. It is anticipated that the results of this study will be used to enhance the participation of Black parents, as no one else has attempted to gather this kind of information from Black parents.

PROCEDURE: Parents have been selected using a random selection procedure. This is similar to how the lottery operates. Parents selected will be interviewed by me. The interview questions will focus on the participation of Black parents in the county where the study is being conducted.

CONFIDENTIALITY: The information generated from the interviews will become part of my dissertation. However, no names or identifying information will be used in the final document. The school administration is aware of this study, but has been told that I will not release the name of the parents who have participated. Additionally, before I submit anything to the university, I will review the interview with parents to insure that the information is accurate and true. A tape recorder will only be used with parent permission. All identifying materials will be destroyed once this process is finished.

In order to participate, you must sign below indicating that you understand the purpose of the study and agree to participate according to the above information.

AGREEMENT: I understand the purpose of this study and agree to participate according to the guidelines set forth above.

Parent Signature

Date

Parent Signature

Date

Appendix E

Route 3, Box 203
Warrenton, VA 22186
Home - 347-7216
Work - 788-1319

April 18, 1994

Mr. & Mrs.
P. O. Box 515
Warrenton, VA 22186

Dear Mr. & Mrs. :

I am a doctoral student at Virginia Tech and in the process of completing my dissertation for a doctorate in education.

The topic that I have chosen for my dissertation is The Participation of Black Parents in the Education of Their Adolescent Children. Your name was selected at random to participate in this study. Your participation, if you agree, will involve allowing me to interview you.

I am sure that you will agree that this is an important topic. Your input will be extremely valuable in this study and I would greatly appreciate your assistance.

I shall call you within a few days of your receipt of this letter. At that time, I will answer any questions you may have. And, if you agree to participate, we can set a date and time for the interview.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Miriam Hall Porter

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