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Cover Page Footnote

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Perceptions of Family Engagement Between African American Families and Schools: A Review of Literature

Salandra Grice, Texas A&M University

The continued presence of racial disparities in achievement (NCES, 2017), discipline rates (Kunjufu, 2012), and special education referrals among African American students (Delpit, 2006) intensifies the perceived need to strengthen the relationship between African American families and schools. Among the complex issues that can contribute to these outcomes, such as poverty (Books, 2007), lack of qualified teachers, lack of resources, and lower-quality curriculum (Darling-Hammond, 2010), a promising solution to help mitigate the destructiveness of these realities seems to be increased parental involvement and improved family–school relationships for African American students (Latunde, 2018).

Research on the effects of increased family engagement on student achievement indicate that parental involvement increases academic achievement and positive outcomes in personal and social areas (Brandon, 2007; Yamauchi et al., 2017). Outcomes such as higher grades and graduation rates, increased satisfaction with school and attendance, fewer retentions, and the reduction of disciplinary actions such as suspensions and detentions are all concrete examples of the positive effects parental engagement can reproduce (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). Research on parental involvement and parent engagement have been instrumental in helping schools remove barriers to these important components of academic success and create greater pathways towards collaboration between families and schools (Baker et al., 2016; Epstein, 2011; Miller et al., 2013; Norris, 2018).

However, using these terms interchangeably has been problematic as *parent involvement* has been described as actions parents take to participate in school-sponsored, school-based activities and events (Jeynes, 2013), while *parental engagement* notates a partnership between schools and families where parental concerns are heard, addressed, and used to create positive learning environments for their students (Ferlazzo, 2011). The term *parent involvement* also often limits the participants of these traditional school-based activities to the child's parent and fails to consider both the many home-based interventions in which many diverse parents seek to participate and the extended family that is often involved (Yamauchi et al., 2017). Also problematic is that the traditional concepts of *parent involvement* and *parental engagement* have often been used to describe the needs of the school and the ways in which educators want parents to participate and support their children (Baker et al., 2016; Norris, 2018). This practice is exclusionary, one-sided, and hierarchical, and it ignores the diverse needs of the families that schools serve (Goldsmith & Robinson Kurpius, 2018; Lasater, 2019). A change is needed in describing the relationship schools desire to obtain with families.

Family–School Partnerships

The term *family–school partnerships* is a promising alternative as it focuses on the understanding that parental involvement/engagement with the school should be a collaborative effort (like a partnership) and that the perspectives of the parent and the school should be included in the decision-making process (Yamauchi et al., 2017). This term also expands who can be considered part of a family and school collaboration by including often-unnoted

participants in a child's education, such as siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other extended family members (Yamauchi et al., 2017). Essentially, authentic family-school partnerships reflect "respectful alliances among educators, families, and community groups that value relationship building, dialogue, and power sharing as part of socially just, democratic schools" (Auerbach, 2010, p. 729). Utilizing the goals of developing family-school partnerships as a focus, recognition of parental engagement among diverse student populations increases as schools become responsive to the needs of the families and students they serve. For the purposes of this article, the terms familial engagement (how families are involved) and family-school partnerships (collaboration between families and schools) will be used to convey the importance of recognizing students and their families' efforts while also centering their needs through relationship building between them and the school.

Many examples show how the family-school partnership model of collaboration has been successful in developing positive relationships and recognizing contributions between diverse families and schools of various backgrounds. Action research conducted by Lasater (2019) in a small rural high school in the Midwest is a powerful example of how focusing on the needs of not only the school but also the families can break down the barriers that lack of trust and cross-cultural misunderstanding can produce in diverse schools. Ratliffe and Ponte's (2018) phenomenological study of immigrant and local families in Hawai'i demonstrated the value that many marginalized families place on building relationships with their child's school and the difficulty some schools face when they do not develop teachers' understanding of the diverse needs of their students. Schools' gleaning from these studies is especially

appropriate for African American families whose perspectives and practices of familial engagement often go unnoticed and unrecognized, deemed invalid or inappropriate in the traditional school environment (Lotunde & Louque, 2016).

Understanding familial engagement as a means of improving family-school partnerships has been an effective approach in increasing the visibility of the unique ways that diverse families show their involvement in schools. In this way, increasing teachers' understanding of the diverse behaviors that families use to show engagement can be a plausible remedy for promoting equitable schooling environments (Norris, 2018). Teachers and schools committed to eliminating current racial disparities should focus their efforts on increasing positive interactions with African American students and their parents by developing more collaborative family-school partnerships (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Unfortunately, research indicates numerous barriers in this endeavor as teachers and schools have been socialized to value dominant forms of familial engagement (Cooper, 2009; Peck & Reitzug, 2018). As schools continue to grow increasingly diverse, it is imperative that schools adopt more inclusive and culturally aware understandings of the multiple ways in which diverse families support their child's education (Baker et al., 2016). Schools need to be able to see not only all students but also all families.

Many forms of parental engagement schools encourage are typically based on White, middle-class, and school-based activities such as attending conferences, participating in booster clubs, and other on-site contributions (Boonk et al., 2018). The common misconception—that parents of marginalized students, particularly African American parents, do not value education if they do not replicate these practices—

continues to be a barrier to successful partnerships between families and schools (Baker et al., 2016). Teachers, when discussing the issues contributing to the struggles of their African American students, often cite a lack of care or commitment from parents (Cooper, 2009); however, these assumptions about African American families are false (Cooper, 2009). As revealed by many qualitative and quantitative studies, along with the history of African Americans' fight for access to high-quality and equitable education, these families not only care about education, but often take great risks to obtain the rights to education they deserve (Cokley, 2014; Hale-Benson & Hilliard, 1986).

Unfortunately, many teachers' understandings of African American families have been tainted by deficit views that render teachers unable to perceive their families from a strength-based lens (Cooper, 2009; Latunde, 2018; Wilson & Yull, 2016). On the other side of this dynamic, African American parents, concerned with the lack of achievement of their children, are frustrated with the lack of acknowledgment of their efforts to help their children in school and the silencing of their voices when trying to intervene and advocate for their children's needs (Louque & Latunde, 2014). These frustrations are often compounded by instances of racism, negative interactions with school staff, or unwelcoming atmospheres when entering schools (Cooper, 2009; Wilson & Yull, 2016). As a result, many of these instances have made it difficult for African American families to interact with teachers and schools, thus hindering the formation of collaborative and positive family-school partnerships (Thompson, 2004).

In this article, I examine relevant literature regarding authentic familial engagement for students of color, specifically African American youth, and

highlight how schools can use this knowledge to improve their family-school partnerships. In conducting this review, two questions were at the forefront of this analysis:

- 1) What is the nature of the relationship between teachers' perceptions of familial engagement and the perceptions of African American families?
- 2) How can increasing teachers' cultural competence increase their ability to recognize diverse forms of parental engagement and create positive family-school partnerships?

First, I discuss the literature that revealed obstacles between the family's positioning on school involvement and what teachers recognize as engagement. Second, I present solutions to bridge the gaps in perceptions of what family engagement looks like for African American students and how teachers can use their methods to help increase students' academic success and family-school partnerships. In addition, I include the importance of culturally responsive education for teachers in growing their cultural competency and bridging these gaps in perceptions.

Methods

The available research from empirical studies on African American family engagement was collected using the ERIC and EBSCO databases. Two searches were conducted using two different terms. The first search used the terms *family engagement* and *African American families*. The second search used the terms *family involvement* and *African American families*. Both searches turned up an overwhelming number of results, with one totaling 1,439 articles. To be included in this review, a study had to (a) investigate specific strategies African American families used to

participate in their child's education; (b) provide empirical overview of types of familial engagement for African American families; and (c) be published between 2001–2019 in a peer-reviewed journal. The research in the articles revealed a mix of qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Survey analysis was utilized as well as case studies, questionnaires, and interviews. Each article was reviewed for its references to specific strategies listed, and only those with reference to such strategies was used in this analysis. Articles with general information regarding strategies to increase familial engagement were omitted.

Theoretical Frameworks

Analysis of the included articles revealed African American families used similar methods to become involved in the education of their children. The theoretical frameworks which can be used to guide the discussions in these articles rely heavily upon the funds of knowledge approach (González et al., 2005; Yamauchi et al., 2017), and on community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Both approaches are backed by critical race theory (CRT), a lens which challenges the superiority of dominant (White, middle-class) norms and frames the cultural knowledge and experiences that students of color bring into the classroom as worthy of value and inclusion (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Ultimately, these frameworks remove the hierarchy of knowledge put in place by schools and enable them to take on the role of learner, which creates greater pathways for educators to gain essential knowledge of the needs of students and their families.

Funds of Knowledge

The funds of knowledge approach focuses on transforming the school

atmosphere to include and recognize the value in the social capital of the families the school serves (Moll et al., 1992). This strengths-based approach helps teachers use the cultural values, attitudes, and beliefs of students' families to make school culture and content more relevant and meaningful for each student (Grant & Ray, 2019). Historically, this framework has been instrumental in allowing teachers to build more collaborative relationships with newly immigrated families through home visits and interviews (Llopart et al., 2018). However, this approach, when utilized correctly, also helps teachers use “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning” to create more culturally relevant classrooms and curriculum (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133). African American families, when viewed through the lens of the funds of knowledge approach, can help educators increase their knowledge of the “sociopolitical, historical, and economic contexts” that surround African American families and use that knowledge as a tool for growing more positive and collaborative family–school partnerships with them (Grant & Ray, 2019, p. 51). However, recognition of funds of knowledge cannot suffice on its own to create partnerships between African American families and schools. Educators also must view the knowledge through an appropriate lens to see students' culture in positive ways.

Community Cultural Wealth

Incorporating community cultural wealth focuses on the kinds of cultural capital communities of color possess. Bourdieuean theories of what constitutes cultural capital are based on deficit views of communities of color, placing White, middle-class knowledge and social norms as

the pathway towards social and economic upward mobility (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Community cultural wealth challenges that view by highlighting the strengths of communities of color. Initially coined by scholars Solórzano and Villalpando (1998), community cultural wealth breaks down to be “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77).

Yosso (2005) described the six forms of capital that communities of color possess as “aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital” (p. 77). *Aspirational capital* refers to the resiliency of many communities of color and their ability to maintain hope for the future even in the face of seemingly immovable oppression and opposition (Yosso, 2005). *Linguistic capital* refers to the value of the multilingual status many families of color possess. Not only are they multilingual, but also they are skilled in communicating through multiple means, such as storytelling, comedic, rhyme, and translation skills (Yosso, 2005). *Familial capital* explains the sense of family and commitment to community well-being; *social capital* highlights their use of social networks such as fraternities, sororities, or religious organizations to help them obtain education, employment, or even legal assistance; *navigational capital* refers to their skill in moving through historically oppressive systems; and *resistant capital* refers to the skill of challenging and resisting the inequalities that maintain the status quo (Yosso, 2005). Essentially, these frameworks paint a clear picture of the assets teachers and schools miss when evaluating efforts of parents of color, particularly African American, to participate in their child’s schooling and the means in which they choose to do so.

Literature Review

All of the reviewed literature reported on the similarities in the ways African American families participate in their children’s education and the lack of acknowledgment of those efforts by teachers and schools. Each referenced article sought to impart knowledge on how African American families engage in the schooling of their children, how teachers view this engagement (or fail to), and solutions to rectify the gaps in perceptions towards increased family–school partnerships between African American families and schools.

Identifying the methods African American families used to engage in their children’s schooling was important, as many teachers’ understandings of the diverse ways in which African American families historically and currently participate are little to non-existent (Jupp et al., 2019). Highlighting the many ways in which African American families participate in their child’s schooling provides a much-needed insight into one of the most marginalized student groups and can aide in transforming teacher perceptions.

Analyzing teacher perceptions of African American families’ participation in schools highlights the power of teacher biases and their impact on attempts to form positive school environments and build collaborative family–school partnerships with culturally diverse students and their families. Suggestions and examples are given to rectify these gaps in knowledge and perception in effort to increase positive school environments and collaborations between African American families and schools.

Researcher-Identified Barriers to Increased Engagement for African American Families

Research on the positive effects of parental involvement in the lives of students is plentiful (Baker et al., 2016; Epstein, 2011; Grant & Ray, 2019; Goldsmith & Robinson Kurpius, 2018; Miller et al., 2013). As many of these studies focus on general understandings of the importance of family engagement and the many benefits to students when effective collaboration is obtained, not all studies are created with a culturally aware lens. Despite a great deal of knowledge surrounding parental engagement, less familiar is the fact that although many schools are actively engaged in increasing collaboration with parents, many barriers exist to this collaboration with African American parents (Latunde & Louque, 2016). African American families “often feel their efforts to engage with their children’s education are largely ignored by schools and in literature” (Latunde & Louque, 2016, p. 72). The following studies have captured the consistency of these barriers, which often collide with the attempts at more inclusive collaboration with African American parents and schools.

Trotman (2001) studied barriers to familial engagement that resemble dominant norms and ways to remove barriers and adjust teacher perceptions. According to Trotman (2001), barriers that often hinder replication of dominant forms of familial engagement for African American families can include “family structure/socioeconomic status, parents’ schedule, educational level, and the expectations of the administrators and teachers” (p. 280). Trotman explained how low socioeconomic status and parents’ schedules can hinder African American families from attending conferences, finding childcare to attend those conferences, or keeping a working phone available when

teachers need to reach them. Lower educational levels amongst parents often signal to teachers a lack of care about education, thus lowering teachers’ expectations of students and the educator’s efforts to reach out to communicate. These lowered expectations often result in “hostile insensitive school environments” where teachers fail to seek parent help and parents (sensing this disregard) are reluctant to communicate with the school (p. 281). However, Trotman (2001) insists that although these barriers are significant, they can be overcome by building rapport with parents, not judging parents, and utilizing parents as teaching partners.

Williams and Sanchez’s (2011) article examined a study of majority low-income African American parents and their perceptions of the barriers that keep them from mimicking dominant familial engagement methods. Of the barriers noted, four major themes emerged: time poverty, lack of access, lack of financial resources, and lack of awareness. Similar to Trotman’s (2001) findings, the study showed that socioeconomic barriers which restrict the amount of time and attention low-income parents can spend on-site at their child’s school, combined with ineffective means of communication between them and the school, limited dominant expressions of familial engagement for African American families. However, job and financial constraints were not the only mountains these parents had to climb.

Research conducted by Cooper (2009) on the perceptions of care on behalf of African American mothers provided insight into the disconnect in understanding how African American families show love, interest, and concern for their children, in comparison to the socially accepted ways that schools expect familial care to be expressed. Cooper’s research focused on how the deferential parental engagement

wanted by educators creates a barrier to authentic engagement with African American families. In fact, the researcher noted that the school-based parent involvement many teachers held in high esteem was not based on the needs and interests of many African American families. This maintaining of White cultural behavior patterns of middle-class, stay-at-home mothers is often incompatible with the working-class, single-parent lifestyles of many families. In this view, the many assets that African American parents bring into the learning environment have been undervalued, disregarded, or disdained. Typical African American familial engagement, such as reading to children, helping with homework, and activist-oriented practices, go unnoticed as care. Consequently, teachers “assume that parents do not care,” which results in “teachers not caring about their kids either,” or instead, “giving up on them, especially black males” (Cooper, 2009, p. 387).

Wallace’s (2013) article focused on a study conducted at a high school. In this study, parents of African American students actively banded together to increase their familial engagement yet encountered institutional barriers in the form of teacher resistance and non-participation amongst the staff. This article highlighted how when schools continue to frame familial engagement in narrow ways, or base it off dominant cultural norms, the needs of ethnic minority students and their families are not met. Wallace also demonstrated that when parents did attempt to advocate for the needs of their children, educators resisted these efforts as teachers were only interested in valuing parent support, compliance, and deference to what teachers and schools were already doing. When parents take a critical approach, they are often excluded and marginalized therefore reducing their efforts to participate in the future (Wallace, 2013).

Identifying the complex barriers to not only recognizing familial engagement but also to closing the gaps in building family–school partnerships with African American families is critical in forging a pathway towards collaboration and increasing students’ academic achievement. In focusing on the research question regarding the relationship between teachers’ perceptions of African American families’ engagement, the disparities are clear: teachers often place a priority on parents mimicking White, middle-class norms in regards to familial engagement even though it is not culturally relevant for many African American families to do so. It is also clear that the culturally relevant way African American families do participate is admonished by educators and rejected as engagement.

However, this theme of elevating White, middle-class norms as the standard for what familial engagement should look like is prevalent not only in dealing with African American parents, but also is found in teachers’ understandings of Latino and immigrant families (Auerbach, 2007; Durand & Perez, 2013). A repetitive theme of the need for educators to be aware of the cultural differences and capital that diverse students and families bring to the classroom can aide them in their ability to recognize diverse forms of familial engagement.

Researcher-Identified Engagement for African American Families

To upset the dominant narrative amongst educators that African American families do not care about education, many scholars suggest the inclusion of more race-conscious counternarratives to inform teachers of how African American families view familial engagement (Cooper, 2009; Wilson & Yull, 2016). While revealing a deep concern for the education of their students, these counter-narratives collected

from the surveys taken by African American families noted three main methods used to engage in their children's education: utilizing outside networks geared toward the African American community, participating in the school decision-making process, and engaging in learning activities outside the home.

Latunde (2018) noted methods such as the utilization of available networks, requesting access to data, and attempts to participate in decision-making in schools served as the go-to methods of engagement for African American families. First, networks such as local clergy, fraternities, sororities, and business professionals were commonly used to share information and create advisory groups. Second, parents' desire for access to data helped them create a concern for student needs that were unaddressed in their schools. By having access to data on achievement, discipline, and special education rates, parents were able to advocate more clearly for the needs of their children. Finally, this access paved the way for African American parents to advocate for more say in the decision-making process for services, programs, and professional development for teachers.

Similarly, Louque and Latunde (2014) also highlighted the many ways in which African American families are concerned for and engage in increasing their children's academic success. Their study found that the most utilized methods African American families used to show engagement included participating in parent groups, communicating with school officials, school visits, and attempts to participate in the school decision-making processes. However, because of the often hostile or unwelcoming atmosphere of the school, many of these parents used resources outside of the school to get their needs met. Once more, the utilization of networks and organizations in the African American community, personal

experiences, professional services, and the social networks of friends and family were common.

In a 2016 article, Latunde and Louque continued their findings of how African American families participated in the education of their children. As stated in similar findings, their participation rested in strategies and methods outside of the socially acceptable roles teachers' value. They addressed the false assumption of the lack of value of education in families by conducting surveys with African American families. In these surveys, parents revealed two primary resources utilized to engage in their child's learning, through seeking out organizations geared towards the African American community and through social interaction with friends, other parents, or the internet. In turn, these resources provided ways for parents to help with learning at home and engage in educational activities outside of school.

All these methods which African American families used to show engagement are outside the socially acceptable ways in which teachers look for familial participation; however, if understood by educators at large, they can create greater pathways in creating family-school partnerships because educators will no longer seek to compare African American families by the standards of others. They will instead be able to see them for who the students actually are and what they actively bring to the table.

Solutions to Closing Gaps in Perceptions

The process of closing the gaps in these perceptions and allowing teachers to see the value in the culturally relevant ways that African American families *do* engage will be key in mending these long-tattered relationships. Research can point teachers and parents in the direction of where to

begin to mend current rifts in their relationships. For teachers, Trotman (2001) recommended a variety of strategies to consider in creating family-school partnerships between African American families and schools. Her suggestions included establishing rapport, increasing parent authority by incorporating parental concerns, integrating parental interests into the classroom and the curriculum, and not judging parents.

Latunde (2018) took a more comprehensive approach to address family engagement for African American families. The author's focus was on the many strengths African American families brought into the school and addressed ways to help educators interrupt the often deficit-oriented narratives that surround African American families. To interrupt the many negative perceptions of African American families as promiscuous, brash, lazy, angry, and violent, Latunde suggested room for counter-narratives to be employed to give educators more accurate and complete information about the families they serve. The author maintained that the lingering of these harmful myths and misperceptions of the African American family create barriers to the participation of African American parents due to the racialized oppression that occurs as a result of these narratives.

Latunde (2018) also suggested that schools take a more active approach to reach out to African American families and consider their strengths and needs in creating opportunities for engagement. Latunde proposed schools consider the cultural capital of African American families in their social circles, acknowledge their efforts to participate in their child's schooling, and create more welcoming school cultures and climates. The researcher recommended that a funds of knowledge and culturally responsive approach among teachers and schools would greatly benefit

closing the gaps in perceptions of familial engagement for African Americans.

Latunde and Louque's (2016) suggestions on how to improve the relationships between African American families and teachers also included schools becoming knowledgeable about the needs and concerns of African American families and making schools more welcoming. The authors proposed more training in developing interpersonal relationships and productive meetings for teachers also be considered. They introduced the importance of teachers receiving cultural competency education, as the lack of preparation many educators have in this kind of pedagogy remains an underlying theme in the lack of the presence of welcoming and inclusive school environments for many families from marginalized groups (Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2010; Howard, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Some researchers have even more specific recommendations in the form of actual programs. Huang and Mason (2008) investigated motivations of African American families regarding their young children's education. Their focus group study conducted with parents of preschool children involved in a family literacy program called LEAPS (Literacy Enrichment and Achievement for Preschool Success) revealed three major themes in motivations for these parents. The African American parents in their study indicated strong needs to develop relationships, to have power in influencing their children's learning, and to use education as a tool for success for their children. LEAPS met all three of these desires by allowing parents to develop relationships with literacy trainers who would often be accommodating to parents' schedules when trying to relay information. The program also gave parents a sense of power by providing them with much needed literacy strategies so parents

could help their children at home. LEAPS programs built parents' confidence in their ability to teach their own children and also helped parents create greater pathways towards success, as many viewed educational attainment to a better life for their children. Huang and Mason suggested that "to develop an effective family education program, it is critical to understand and meet parents' motivational needs for involvement and address their concerns in their children's education" (Huang & Mason, 2008, p. 26). Schools must become willing to listen to African American families and their concerns and use those concerns to create educational atmospheres that meet their needs.

Kugler (2010) also discussed the importance of understanding the values, hopes, and dreams of marginalized families, tackling the global effects of these notions. The author discussed experiences teaching in South Africa and compared them to the US, noting that many schools often discounted the contributions of poor or immigrant families as many teachers' ideas on good parenting stemmed from White, middle-class norms. According to the study, teachers often discounted the hard work, perseverance, and dedication many marginalized families brought to the table. The author offered suggestions for making school environments more welcoming to diverse families. Kugler suggested schools should reach out to families and communities, make more personal contact, and look for ways to engage targeted groups. The researcher also noted that the seeming lack of motivation or care for education many teachers attribute to marginalized families stemmed from cultural differences in attitudes about education and school. Many immigrant parents "bring with them the rules and expectations of their home countries. They tend to keep their distance from their children's school as a sign of

respect" (Kugler, 2010, p. 34). Immigrant families also may feel overwhelmed trying to navigate the ins and outs of the requirements of U.S. education systems. Kugler (2010) suggested that "we need family outreach that respects their personal experiences, their culture, and their knowledge. Then we can build true partnerships with families that foster student success" (p. 36).

Jacobbe et al.'s (2012) study examined the influence of a Family Math Night on pre-service teachers' perceptions about low-income African American families and their engagement. According to the study, pre-service teachers' perceptions and assumptions about low-income African American families' school involvement were negative and deficit oriented. The teacher perception was that low performance was due to parents' lack of involvement or a lack of care or concern. To challenge this assumption, pre-service teachers were required to participate in the making of Family Math Night. The results indicated some changes in negative perceptions about the families. The Math Night created an opportunity for the teachers to interact with the parents and share tips on how to help their children with math at home. Suggestions were made to provide pre-service teachers with more opportunities to participate with low-income families to dispel the myth that families do not care about their children's education.

And finally, Wilson and Yull's (2016) study on the impact of their Parent Mentor Program in which African American parents were assigned as mentors to help in the classrooms of the schools their students attended, provided promising active engagement strategies any school can emulate. Their study, which formed out of the concerns for the disproportionate academic and discipline rates of their students in their Rivertown City School

District, not only had a positive impact on the students but also resulted in creating more positive interactions and experiences between the teachers and the parents. Their approach in utilizing African American parents as mentors in the classroom changed the perceptions of the teachers, from seeing parents as problems, to seeing them as important assets in helping to understand the needs of their children. One notable difference in the way these researchers framed familial engagement was how they intentionally upset the common White cultural lens that fogs educators' views of African American families, and instead led with a critical race theory approach that allowed African American family participants to engage with the school "without requiring Black parents to assimilate into Whiteness—to modify their dress, speech, culture, and interactional styles—in order to be palatable to the Eurocentric culture of the school" (Wilson & Yull, 2016). This change in perspective of the value of "Blackness" in its entirety is key to the successful implication of the suggestions to improve family–school partnerships between African American families and schools. The key component in changes in perspectives lies in creating greater opportunities for teachers to engage in culturally responsive education.

Gaps/Limitations of Studies Reviewed

All literature focused on barriers and solutions to recognizing familial engagement for African American families. Although many studies highlighted the many barriers to family engagement to make educators more aware of family obstacles, a few analyses fell short on examining the roots of gaps in perceptions. One limitation of findings in these sources of literature was the lack of emphasis on the importance of teacher bias and its effects on creating more

collaborative partnerships with African American families (Jupp et al., 2019). Although each study offered numerous examples of ways to increase opportunities for African American families to be involved, one of the common barriers was teachers' attitudes towards families. It must be understood that the often hostile, unwelcoming, and dismissive attitudes held by many teachers in regards to African American families and students cannot be removed with simple exposure to literature about their worth or by placing emphasis on superficial expressions of politeness when parents enter the building (Rosario, 2019).

A few of the recommendations for creating family–school partnerships missed the opportunity to showcase the ways that African American parents *do* participate, such as in Trotman (2001). When addressing barriers, Trotman based solutions on what the teacher viewed as valuable and appropriate. Overall, after the explanation of the culturally different ways in which African American families participated, recommendations continued to highlight ways to get parents to perform more school-based, White, middle-class behaviors.

Discussion

The purpose of this literature review was to examine the nature of the relationship between teachers' perceptions of African American familial engagement and solutions to reverse negative perceptions and create family–school partnerships. The common assumption that African American parents are uncaring regarding their child's education is based not on facts and evidence, but on historical myths of the pathology of African American people (Valencia, 2010). The numerous ways that African American parents seek to be involved and engaged in their child's education are not nonexistent; they are unrecognized. The barriers that

many African American parents face are not unmovable; they are misunderstood.

Teachers' Negative Perceptions Influence Ability to Recognize Cultural Capital

Educators' perceptions often reflect negative or deficit views of African American students and their families. Educators and administrators often fail to value and appreciate the ways in which African American parents show engagement in their child's education. There is a disconnect between how African American families typically engage versus what teachers' value. A shift to de-centering dominant cultural norms as the standard for all student groups can help shift teachers' perceptions, allowing them to be open to acknowledging different methods families use to participate in their child's schooling.

Understanding African American Families' Community Cultural Wealth

The findings from the literature identify many common themes in types of family engagement employed on behalf of African American parents. Their utilization of social networks, using access to data to participate in the school decision-making process, and exposing their children to educational resources outside the home, such as community members and organizations geared toward African Americans, should all be considered acceptable forms of familial engagement by educators and schools.

Schools dedicated to creating positive family-school partnerships with African American families should provide greater focus on increasing teachers' understanding of their community cultural wealth. As deficit perceptions of African American familial engagement methods are often unrecognized, rejected, or seen as insufficient, the literature included in this

review highlighted the powerful changes schools can create in their opportunities to collaborate with African American parents if they adjust their approach. Findings of these studies illustrated the many assets of African American families and provided suggestions on how schools can capitalize on those assets to create positive family-school partnerships. Schools should use their knowledge of authentic familial engagement methods to support families in their efforts and provide tools and resources that are culturally relevant to their current engagement style.

Need for More Culturally Responsive Educators

Overall, suggestions to remedy many of the disconnects between schools and African American families include reframing the way educators view family engagement to be more "inclusive, culturally sensitive, and critically informed" (Cooper, 2009, p. 390). As suggested by other scholars, the need for more culturally competent educators will aid immensely in creating more positive and collaborative relationships between African American families and schools (Banks, 2019; Gay, 2010). Norris (2018) underscored the foundation of all culturally responsive education, stating, "Culturally responsive practices typically require teachers to spend critical time in self-reflections, examining their thoughts, ideas, and beliefs about cultural diversity" (p. 11). This process is often the most difficult in preparing teachers for culturally responsive practices, but Norris continued emphasizing this important component, saying "teachers should understand that everyone holds stereotypical beliefs and that those beliefs affect how they view and interact with others" (p. 11).

In reference to Trotman's (2001) evaluation of the impact of family

structures, socioeconomic status, schedules, and parents' education levels, through the lens of cultural responsiveness, should not signal to educators a flaw in the lives of African Americans that are affected by these factors, but instead should lead to consideration for the different circumstances many parents face in trying to help their children. More culturally responsive education amongst teachers will also influence the patterns found in the ways that African American families do engage and care about their children, leading to their becoming recognized as just as valid as the mainstream ways many schools are trained to accept. With increased efforts to provide in-service and pre-service teachers with culturally responsive learning opportunities and professional development, schools concerned with the perceived lack of engagement of their African American parents and families can begin to reframe these deficit approaches to these concerns with more positive, affirming, and inclusive means.

Cultural Competence Is Key

Lack of knowledge about the cultures, perspectives, frames of reference, values, and experiences of African American peoples heavily contributes to misconceptions about lack of familial engagement. Disparities in graduation rates, disciplinary actions, special education referrals, state assessment results, access to Advanced Placement courses, and college attendance rates can be remedied by helping teachers understand the cultural differences amongst their students and families (Banks, 2019; Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2010; Howard, 2016). Contrary to mainstream ideological beliefs in the lack of importance of race in the classroom, numerous educational researchers and practitioners paint a very different picture (Banks, 2019; Gay, 2010;

Howard, 2010; Howard, 2016; Kafele, 2009). Engaging teachers in culturally responsive education practices and professional development will reveal the blind spots in many teachers' current deeply held beliefs about family engagement and replace them with more accurate, complete, and authentic approaches to effectively engage all families (Gay, 2010; Norris, 2018). Culturally responsive education for teachers will create the necessary changes in teacher perceptions about diverse students and families by creating opportunities for teachers to learn more authentic knowledge about students, their families, histories, and communities.

Implications

For teachers and schools focused on creating family–school partnerships with diverse families, these findings and suggested recommendations to remedy disparities should be acknowledged. Continuing to rely on dominant, mainstream, White, middle class cultural frames of reference and cultural norms to assess the value and methods of diverse families should be discontinued with expediency. If the collection of literature reviewed on the subject of family engagement for African American families is to be utilized in establishing such relationships, the dismantling of the predominance of White cultural norms as the barometer for “normal” and “appropriate” in schools must be addressed first. The developing of culturally responsive educators will be key in this endeavor; yet, however helpful it is to develop cultural responsiveness in educators, it is nonetheless challenging.

A trailblazer in the field of culturally responsive pedagogy, Gay (2010) warned educators and teacher educators who embark on these learning journeys to take heed of

the potential roadblocks that may ensue. Because many of the deficit attitudes and beliefs that educators bring into the classroom stem from cultural biases and stereotypes learned from their upbringing or biased media consumption, breaking the chains of the hold of negative stereotypes about African American people can be particularly challenging (Rosario, 2019). Gay and Kirkland (2003) reminded us that many educators when challenged or asked to engage in dialogues or reflections about race engage in acts of silence, diversion, guilt, or benevolent liberalism to refute their need to engage in such dialogues or learning experiences. Nevertheless, delivering these findings to educators, seeking to improve the educational outcomes of African American students by forming positive family–school partnerships, should help to overcome perceived attacks on ones’ moral character with promises of becoming more effective educators for their students.

Recommendations

The aim of this review was to highlight the gap in perceptions of familial engagement between African American families and schools and discuss solutions to close these gaps. For parents, this review should stand as confirmation of their current methods and encourage them to continue advocating for the needs of their students. For educators, the self-reflection process necessary to create more culturally conscious educators should be given greater focus due to the devastating consequences to student outcomes when unexamined teacher bias goes unchecked (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Greater importance should be placed on the power of teacher expectations, biases, and beliefs in creating avenues for greater collaboration between teachers and African American families. Teachers who can grow in their cultural competency, sociopolitical

awareness, and best practices in culturally responsive teaching are better able to create the positive relationships needed to foster more collaborative family–school partnerships. Teachers who can reflect on deeply held beliefs about race and diversity are better equipped to interrupt and challenge deficit views about African American families (Jupp et al., 2019). For this to occur, teachers need in-depth and prolonged professional development in culturally responsive education.

Administrators should be actively focused on creating opportunities for educators to positively and authentically interact with the diverse families they serve. Cultural immersion experiences which allow educators to authentically engage with diverse families in their communities has been found to be monumental in altering indifferent and hostile attitudes amongst educators towards more collaborative and positive interactions (Nieto, 2006). Also, the disparities between student demographics and teacher demographics should be considered (Miller, 2018). As most schoolteachers are White, middle class, and female, the underlying cultural differences between many teachers and students should be evaluated. One measure to reduce the negative effects of these disparities is to increase the presence of more teachers of color. In the case of increasing the positive experiences of African American students, greater retention and attainment of African American teachers is recommended. The research around the positive impact that African American teachers (particularly male) have in positively impacting the achievement of not just African American students, but *all* students, should not be underestimated (Kirk, 2017). The cultural capital and insight that African American teachers can bring into the school should be regarded golden and be treated as such in

overturning many of the negative outcomes in African American student achievement.

Conclusion

Bridging the gap in perceptions about family engagement between African American families and their schools should become a priority on campuses with significant racial disparities in achievement. Continuing to ignore the differences in experiences, perceptions, and beliefs between diverse families and schools will make remedies to close these gaps more difficult. Continuing to ignore the importance of every educator being knowledgeable of not only whom they are teaching, but what their needs are should be made a priority in teacher education preparation programs. Growing teachers' understanding of the funds of knowledge inherent within the cultures of African American families should be used as a guide in helping teachers become more effective for their students. The need to develop culturally responsive educators who are effective in educating and communicating with diverse families will be vital in establishing more collaborative and positive family-school partnerships.

There is no denying the need to create greater opportunities for families to participate in their child's education. For African American families, this need is not just important for the sake of creating positive educational environments, but also for the overall educational success of their children. To work collaboratively with the adults in a child's life is essential to the child's success. Continuing to grow teachers' knowledge and skills in how to communicate and understand the diverse families they serve is key in this endeavor. Teachers and school officials have a responsibility to ensure that these relationships are formed and that the gifts,

talents, and perspectives of parents are no longer ignored, but viewed as vital in the schooling of each child.

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