

School-University-Community Partnerships: Promises and Challenges of a Parent  
Engagement Program

by

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A Dissertation submitted to the

Graduate School-Newark

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Urban Systems

written under the direction of

Arthur B. Powell

and approved by

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Newark, New Jersey

May, 2020

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

### School-University-Community Partnerships: Promises and Challenges of a Parent Engagement Program

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Parent participation in urban schools is essential to student success. In historically low-income communities, parents are often expected to participate in parental involvement activities aligned with middle-class norms instead of participating in parent engagement activities that welcome parents into the school communities. This study sought to better understand the experiences, promises, and challenges that educational stakeholders faced in a newly formed asset-based partnership connecting a school, a community, and a university to increase parent engagement. A qualitative inquiry methodology was used to explore a parent engagement program at a low-income hyper-segregated African American urban school located in a Northeastern metropolitan city. Participants were community residents who were unemployed or underemployed prior to participating in the program, teachers, school-based support staff members, school administrators, and a program administrator from a local university. This study employed Bourdieu's Social Capital Theory to understand the experiences of members of the school community and incorporated focus group interviews, document analysis, and individual interviews. The following themes emerged: mistrust between Parent Leadership Program (PLP) members and school officials, constant program changes, gaps in expectations between program participants and staff, increased social capital and leadership skills for parents, as well as positive relationships between cooperating

teachers and parents. This qualitative study is significant because it provides a multidimensional understanding of parental engagement as it looks at and examines various stakeholders' experiences within a low-income hyper-segregated African American school and describes how stakeholders made sense of their experiences in the PLP. The significance of this qualitative study lies in the fact that it seeks to reinforce a multidimensional understanding of parental engagement through the examination and inclusion of various stakeholders' experiences within a low-income hyper-segregated African American school and goes on to further describe how stakeholders made sense of their experiences in the PLP.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Arthur B. Powell, my mentor, who has been on this journey with me since the beginning. His unwavering support and thoughtful critical feedback have proved invaluable to this research project.

I would also like to thank my committee members for their support. Dr. Sabrina Chase, who taught me how to build a model and supported me in class throughout this process. Dr. Charles Payne who introduced me to the real world of parental engagement and inspired me to expand my vision to include what parents can do to improve schools. Dr. Michael Simmons who listened to my concerns and served as a knowledgeable and supportive thought partner. I would also like to thank and acknowledge others who have helped me along the way. Dr. Gabrielle Esperdy provided critical yet supportive feedback. Ahmad Watson helped collect data and conduct interviews, and also provided invaluable support. Jessica Goode who provided unwavering support and helped me get through my courses. Kendell Ali whose support was beyond price. I would also like to express my thanks to Jennifer Bucalo who helped me when I grew discouraged, held me accountable, and pushed me to graduate.

I would also like to express my thanks to Dr. Sherle Boone, for his mentorship and support and encouragement which led me to begin thinking about complexities that exist in urban systems years before I even thought about pursuing a doctorate. Lastly and most importantly, I dedicate my dissertation to my partner, Jasaun Boone.

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## **Introduction**

Educational inequities persist for low-income, African American urban students and limit their parents' potential to be engaged in schools. Researchers have explored forms of parental participation in public schools (E. Auerbach, 1995; S. Auerbach & Collier, 2012; Epstein et al., 2000; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Scribner & Fernández, 2017; Wallace, 2017), barriers to parental participation, (Freelon, 2018; Noguera, 2001; C. Payne, Kaba, M., 2001; Schueler, McIntyre, & Gehlbach, 2017; Scribner & Fernández, 2017) and strategies to increase parental engagement (Alameda-Lawson, 2014; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Jasis & Ordonez-Jasis, 2012; Luet, 2017; Shirley et al., 2006; Snell, 2018; Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009; Yull, Wilson, Murray, & Parham, 2018). However, little is known about how stakeholders in urban, African American schools experience parental engagement programs. This study contributes to the parental engagement literature by examining how stakeholders experience a university-led parental engagement program in a hyper-segregated African American community. The study is significant in that it provides knowledge about both the processes and challenges that take place when parents move from the periphery of school culture and activities to become integrated into not only classrooms but also the general school community.

What follows in this chapter is a summary of the literature. I introduce the work of Epstein and Auerbach on parent involvement. Next, I include Warren, Hong, and Barton's and their perspectives on the topic of parental engagement, a form of participation that primarily occurs in low-income schools. Noguera, Payne, and Shirley's work is then introduced to explain barriers to parental engagement. Next, a range of

experiences from participants who took part in a multiyear parent engagement program in which emerging themes were developed is introduced. That data was analyzed and the analysis that leads to the qualitative description of individual experience was presented. Next, promises, challenges, and limitations of parent engagement were explored. Lastly, the study closes with a conversation about the usability of the resulting findings to build active school-community-university parental engagement programs in low-income hyper-segregated African American schools.

### **Studies Addressing the Problem**

Parent participation programs are defined as adults or caregivers performing activities in the home, school, or community that aim to meet the physical, intellectual, emotional, or social needs of their children to promote positive academic or non-academic outcomes. Parental participation programs are deemed essential because they promote student achievement (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2002; Jordan, Snow, & Porche, 2000; D. McDonald & Farrell, 2012). The research literature addresses two types of parental participation programs in low-income schools: involvement programs and engagement programs. Involvement programs are school-directed, which can mean that engagement programs are collaborative between parents and schools. Parental involvement activities are school-based programs that are typically directed by school officials and aim to promote parent or student academic or educational success (Epstein et al., 2000). Warren et al. (2009) define parental involvement as school directed and which keep parents on the periphery of governance and limit parent participation to apolitical school-centered events such as bake sales, parent-teacher conferences, fundraisers, and Parent-Teacher Association meetings (Warren et al., 2009).

Auerbach (1995) posits that in low-income, urban schools, parental involvement programs are not suitable to increase engagement because they typically have deficit-based underpinnings, perceive communities as consumed with challenges and rely on non-community partners to solve problems. Nevertheless, deficit-based parental involvement programs are prevalent in low-income schools. Research has found that parental involvement programs do not adequately result in increased parent participation (Hoover-Dempsey, 1997; Scribner & Fernández, 2017; Wallace, 2017). Scribner and Fernández (2017) argue that implicit and explicit school policies limit participation because officials often view parents as deficient and needy. Other scholars (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Wallace, 2017) suggest that deficit-based parental involvement programs are problematic and ignore systematic issues of inequity, power, and imbalance. (Auerbach 1995) indicates that parental involvement in low-income schools often limits engagement to school directed activities that restrict engagement in meaningful roles.

### **Parental Engagement**

Research has shown that there are limitations to parental involvement programs. To address these limitations, school officials have created what researchers call parental engagement. Parental engagement, which is a form of parent participation, was established because parental involvement did not meet the needs of underserved families. Although scholars do not always make a clear distinction between the two programs, parental engagement requires a higher level of parental participation in the decision-making process. These engagement programs strengthen collaboration between school personnel and parents, promote two-way communication, and encourage all parties to work collectively to identify issues and address challenges (Barton, Drake, Perez, St.

Louis, & George, 2004; Shirley et al., 2006; Warren et al., 2009). A distinguishing characteristic of parental engagement programs involves decision-making. Parents either make decisions autonomously or collaboratively with school administrators. This dynamic approach promotes parent leadership, authenticity, and mutually beneficial relationships. (Hong, 2012; Warren et al., 2009).

Parental engagement is minimal in low-income urban schools most often due to challenges such as culturally insensitive policies as well as a disconnect between families and school officials (S. Auerbach, 2007a; Schueler et al., 2017; Scribner & Fernández, 2017). Researchers have found engagement has weak boundaries that include non-school based spaces such as religious institutions, and community centers (Barton et al., 2004; Hong, 2012; McKenna & Millen, 2013; Shirley et al., 2006). McKenna and Millen (2013) believe that traditional and nontraditional forms of parent engagement exist. Shirley et al. (2006) posit that parental engagement occurs when school officials view parents and the community as assets, needed, and (Hong, 2012; Luet, 2017; Warren et al., 2009) suggest that to improve engagement, parents must become central figures to the school.

**Barriers.** The importance of parental engagement at home, at school, and in communities has been well documented (Barton et al., 2004; Luet, 2017; Shirley et al., 2006; Warren et al., 2009). However, a review of the literature shows that barriers exist which limit parental engagement in low-income urban schools. Researchers have found, for example, that school personnel often have social capital that aligns with middle-class norms. Differences in social capital can be problematic because school officials define

parental engagement as specific school-based activities, relationships, and actions (Barton et al., 2004).

Social Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986) helps to explain possible barriers to parent participation in schools which result from gaps in social capital, cultural capital, symbolic capital, and economic capital. Social capital refers to professional networks, cultural capital refers to dispositions attitudes, behaviors and knowledge, and symbolic capital refers to credentials, prestige, and recognition. Economic capital refers to job flexibility to attend school events.

Noguera (2001) notes that when parents advocate for themselves as individuals or as a collective group, officials often view their engagement as unfavorable. Therefore, schools that primarily serve low-income African American students frequently lack trusting relationships, which Noguera (2001) refers to as negative capital. For this reason, creating bridges between families and schools is challenging (S. Auerbach, 2007a; Noguera, 2001; C. Payne, Kaba, M., 2001; Wallace, 2017). In a study on persistent failure in low-income urban schools, (C. Payne, Kaba, M., 2001) claim that high levels of distrust and skepticism exist between parents, teachers, and administrators. This exacerbates gaps, mistrust, obstacles, and barriers which then stifles engagement between parents and schools and leads to adversarial relationships (Noguera, 2001). Parents in low-income communities also participate in other forms of engagement, including resistant capital, fighting against school officials to secure rights, and bonding capital, relying on peers to help navigate barriers, instead of partaking in school-based activities (Yosso, 2005).

**Deficiencies in Past Literature**

Parent participation in low-income urban schools has been studied extensively. The three categories of research as reflected in the currently existing literature are parental involvement, parental engagement, and barriers to parental engagement. Currently, no research describes the experiences of parents functioning in dual roles as parents and school-based employees, or how stakeholders experience participation in a multiyear school-based parent engagement program within a school-university-community partnership in a hyper-segregated African American school.

**Target Audience and Significance of Study**

This proposed study will enable researchers, policymakers, educators, advocates, and other stakeholders to understand the nuances of parent engagement programs. The programmatic activities aim to effect student literacy outcomes and parents in ways that support them to increase their levels of social and cultural capital, thus enabling them to be more powerful individuals in the world.

Researchers will obtain empirical and theoretical knowledge of how parental engagement can reduce these inequalities in social and cultural capital in urban communities. This proposed study will also benefit individuals who are interested in improving the social and academic opportunities for marginalized students and families.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative description is to understand what sense stakeholders make of their experiences in a parent engagement program located in a low-income, hyper-segregated school that serves low-income African American students. At

this stage in the research, parent engagement is defined as a collaboration between parents and school officials that promotes parent participation in school-related activities.

**Research Question**

This study will be guided by the following research question:

What sense do stakeholders make of their experience in a parent engagement program through the Parent Leadership Academy?



## **Literature Review**

An exploration of School-University-Community Partnerships: Promises and Challenges of a Parent Engagement Program reveals a rich area of study and research. The key focus of the literature review as revealed by studies and research articles is urban, low-income parent participation, defined as adults or caregivers performing activities in the home, school, or community who aim to meet the physical, intellectual, emotional, or social needs of their children to promote positive academic and non-academic outcomes. For both this dissertation and the accompanying literature review, Doyle & Zhang's definition of a parent as an adult family member or caregiver of a child, including grandparent(s) and guardian(s) (Doyle & Zhang, 2011) was adopted. Given the focus of the research, the literature review focused primarily on programs designed to increase parental participation in schools that serve mainly low-income minority children.

This literature review is organized under a theme-based structure. First, there is a review of the two types of parent participation programs, Parental Involvement, and Parental Engagement along with the supporting research. Second, social capital is reviewed and summarized. Third, this is followed by a discussion of the literature found under the ecologies of parental engagement along with a summary. Fourth is the literature discussing low parent participation, moderate parent participation, and vigorous parent participation. And finally, the literature review focuses on improving patterns of participation as demonstrated by current research and published studies in the field.

During the initial search, an in-depth review of the literature revealed that parent participation programs were classified and defined within two categories: parental involvement and parental engagement. The first category of parental involvement is

defined as school-sponsored or sanctioned activities that align with middle-class norms. Auerbach points out that traditional definitions of involvement suggest that parents and school officials are supportive, reach consensus, collaborate, cooperate, and do not display or engage in contentious relationships. (S. Auerbach, 2007b). In addition, these parental involvement activities are often designed to encourage parents to conform to the cultural and social norms of school administrators, despite traditional contentious relationships that often exist between parents and school officials at urban schools. School officials orchestrate these parent involvement activities through mediating artifacts, such as literacy nights, Parent-Teacher Association meetings, and parent conferences that frequently limit parents' direct involvement and participation in the decision-making process in school governance (Barton et al., 2004).

The second category of parental programs researched is the category defined as parent engagement. Parent engagement programs aim to provide parents or caregivers with opportunities to collaborate or participate in self-directed education-related activities. These programs encourage shared leadership, governance, and decision-making in both traditional and nontraditional parent involvement activities that may or may not align with school priorities (S. Auerbach, 2007b). These parent engagement programs also include elements of parent orientations to the world and contexts that influence how parents in urban ecologies mediate space and capital to attend events.

### **Inclusion and Exclusion**

EBSCO, ERIC, the Social Science Index, and JSTOR, which produced approximately 500 articles published between 2002-2018 were the databases used for this literature review. A search was initiated using the following keywords: parent

involvement, parental engagement, parent, parent participation, social capital, cultural capital, and self-efficacy. That combination of keywords was selected based on investigations of the category of parent engagement and involvement programs and the subsequent identification of these primary keywords which could yield the data illustrating that parent engagement and involvement programs might increase social capital, cultural capital, and self-efficacy or be affected by them.

Additionally, a combination of the following keywords: engagement, parent, urban, involvement, social, and capital were also utilized to expand, define, and focus on the topic of study. Further research involved searching research articles that included urban, parents, experiences, involvement, and engagement. Articles that were not related to the research question that aimed to understand the experiences of parents who participate in parent engagement programs were excluded. The exclusion criteria included the following terms: suburban, affluent, rural, white. Furthermore, it was determined during the literature search and review that parent engagement research focuses on minorities who reside in underserved communities with substandard levels of parent participation.

In an additional in-depth search of the relevant literature, the ERIC database was used and included the following keywords: parent, engagement, and urban parent. After a close review of the study abstracts and a careful critical examination and evaluation of the articles, it was determined that the majority of the articles were not parent engagement articles. This led to a third search during which it was discovered that researchers had conducted a considerable number of studies exploring parental involvement programs and parent engagement programs. However, recent research led to

the discovery that the researchers focused their studies with the result that more contemporary findings show that parental engagement programs, a type of participation that requires a deeper partnership with schools, primarily exist in low-performing urban centers because more affluent parents have greater access to other levels of influence.

Based on the articles, studies, and research that were found and examined, the decision was made to add the following keywords: parent participation, voice, social capital, cultural capital, and self-efficacy. A wide variety of different combinations of keywords were used in the search. Articles that were in alignment with the topic were saved. The research also revealed that the primary interest served was in understanding the experiences of marginalized urban parents who participated in parental involvement or parental engagement programs. In addition, search terms such as program, parent experiences, urban schools, and perceptions were also used.

After reviewing a variety of source materials including the abstracts, additional exclusionary categories featuring articles that focused on teachers' experiences were added. The various combinations of selected keywords yielded abstracts from over 200 articles. These were then reviewed and separated into categories based on an initial read of their abstracts. One hundred and four articles that provided adults or caregivers with the opportunity to share their experiences and perceptions about participating in a parent involvement program or a parent engagement program were saved. These research interests were then shared with a member of the dissertation committee. This led to the recommendation that the focus be on parent engagement programs in low-income hyper-segregated schools.

This researcher is currently exploring parental involvement and parental engagement programs that aim to engage low-income families in urban schools. One challenge experienced when reviewing the literature was that the distinction between parental involvement and parent engagement is not always clear. Certain authors refer to parental involvement as traditional parent engagement or parent engagement, while others include a distinction between parent involvement and parent engagement (S. Auerbach & Collier, 2012; Ferlazzo, 2011; Hong, 2012). Therefore, for this literature review, the focus will be on asset-based parental involvement programs and parental engagement programs that aim to promote positive relationships. Additionally, the goal is to look at how programs are established sustained and operationalized rather than how they may be labeled.

The literature review begins by exploring the types of parental participation including definitions of parental involvement and parental engagement. It then identifies and examines components of parental involvement and also discusses asset-based and deficit-based forms of involvement in urban communities.

Social Capital Theory is then introduced and is used to transition from types of parent participation to Ecologies of Parental Engagement. Social Capital Theory is included because issues such as mismatched social capital, cultural capital, economic capital, and symbolic capital between school officials and families are why parental involvement often does not meet the needs of marginalized students and families. Additionally, it explores challenges to parental involvement such as barriers, privileged involvement, and issues such as mistrust that stifle parental involvement. Then, Ecologies of Parental Engagement is introduced as a means of exploring environmental

conditions that influence parent participation. Next, examples of low, moderate, and vigorous forms of parent participation are explored.

The literature suggests that vigorous parental engagement programs are important for vulnerable populations. Therefore, the last portion of the literature review describes improving patterns of parent participation in schools. It also discusses forms of parent engagement, such as parent initiated and institution initiated engagement. Also, the literature discusses obstacles, barriers, and policies that influence parental engagement. In addition, more specific forms of parent engagement such as individual, collective, ecological, and transformative parent engagement are discussed. The review concludes with a discussion of both relationship building within communities to strengthen engagement as well as gaps in parent engagement literature.

### **Types of Parent Participation**

**Parental Involvement.** The first category of parent participation programs is parental involvement. Parental involvement in schools is widely documented and is comprised of general school-based activities aimed at strengthening relationships between families and schools (S. Auerbach & Collier, 2012; Epstein et al., 2000; Hoover-Dempsey, 1997).

Epstein's framework of parental involvement includes parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. These programs are school-based programs that are typically directed by school officials and which aim to promote parent or student academic or educational success. These programs encourage parents to participate in apolitical causes and to avoid conflicts. Frequently in these programs, parent participation is minimal, school-

centered, activity-based, and primarily focused on parental involvement as an individualistic enterprise.

Epstein et al. (2000) describe parental involvement as taking the following forms, among others including home parenting; creating home environments suitable for their children's academic success; communicating with families and schools, about academic progress and program offerings; volunteering, by supporting school-led initiatives; home learning activities, with parents providing homework assistance, tutoring and building curriculum capacity; decision making, participating in committees, advisory groups, and other organizations such as Parent Teacher Associations; and community collaboration, establishing and partnerships with external stakeholders.

**Parental Engagement.** The second category of parent participation programs is parental engagement. Parent engagement activities as defined here are not parent involvement activities. One main distinction of parental engagement is that parents can make either autonomous decisions or make decisions in collaboration with school officials. Parental engagement suggests that parents and school officials collaborate to identify and address issues, promote two-way communication, listen to what works for children, and also allow parents to identify topics that may or not be in alignment with school officials' priorities. Ideally, in these programs, parents or parent coordinators are encouraged to identify needs and collaborate with schools to work towards solutions (Shirley et al., 2006). Luet (2017) refers to two types of parent engagement. The first form, parent initiated is defined as parent-led activities that are outside of the school. The second form of engagement is institutional engagement, defined as programs that are led

by school officials. These authors report that multiple barriers exist that can prevent parents from participating in parent-led or institutional led engagement activities.

**Asset-Based.** Parent involvement and parent engagement can be asset-based or deficit-based (E. Auerbach, 1995). Asset-based parental involvement is a strength driven opportunity and an internally focused process that builds on community strengths and creates solutions with individuals. In some instances, parent involvement can be asset-based and deficit-based. The deficit-based approach asserts that families and communities are deficient, while asset-based programs build on strengths and work to find untapped resources. In low-income communities, parental involvement tends to be deficit-based (E. Auerbach, 1995).

**Deficit Based.** Parent involvement in low-income urban schools is often minimal and not suited to meet the needs of children or families due to deficit-based underpinnings. Thus, school officials often limit involvement to parent participation in school directed activities such as bake sales, parent-teacher conferences, fundraisers, and Parent-Teacher Associations and keep parents on the periphery of schools (Warren et al., 2009). This approach suggests that parents do not have the skills needed to improve their conditions and keeps families in submissive roles.

Deficit-based thinking suggests that parents in underserved communities are problematic and ignores systematic issues of equity, power imbalance, and structural effects that limit participation (E. Auerbach, 1995). As a result of these power structures, school officials and policymakers can blame marginalized communities for low parental involvement. This approach ignores challenges in low-income urban schools such as ineffective systems, communication issues, and the unequal distribution of power and



resources. Deficit based parent participation is often prevalent in low-income, hyper-segregated schools, which identifies communities as needy, consumed with problems, and relies on non-community members to name and to solve problems.

### **Social Capital**

Bourdieu's theory on social, cultural, economic, and symbolic capital allows us to understand variances in parental participation. Similarities and differences in capital affect participation in schools. Oftentimes, low-income parents who express high interest in participating in schools do not have the social capital; networks that allow others to provide information about school activities (Bourdieu, 1996); cultural capital; dispositions, attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge (Bourdieu, 1996); symbolic capital; credentials, prestige, and recognition that can convert to obtaining additional resources or economic capital (Bourdieu, 1996); job flexibility to attend school events needed to participate in meetings, events, and understand school expectations (Bourdieu, 1996).

Ineffective parental engagement strategies create a disconnect from minority families who tend to view their children holistically, are interested in their socio-emotional development, and employ cultural and holistic approaches to motivating, supporting and validating their perspectives. Mismatched expectations and competing priorities between school officials and parents have been shown to contribute to patterns of parent participation. These patterns affect both parental involvement and parental engagement programs and are influenced by mistrust, barriers, tense relationships, and differences in social and cultural capital. Gaps in expectations and understanding of parental involvement limit participation from parents or caregivers (Freelon, 2018; Noguera, 2001; C. Payne, Kaba, M., 2001)

Epstein's framework, which used data from 2,300 parents who attended inner-city schools, found that parent involvement, promotes middle-class norms, professionalism, positive interactions neutrality, and collegiality, and often does not meet the needs of underserved students and families (Epstein et al., 2000). In underserved urban communities, complex issues create mistrust which stifles parental involvement. In those instances, parental involvement has been unable to meet the needs of students and families. Quite often, school officials believe those deficit-based perceptions that suggest that parents in urban ecologies are not involved in their children's educational lives. Deficit-based thinking ignores structural, economic, and social inequalities that often limit parent participation. Additionally, cultural gaps and misunderstandings between middle-class teachers and minority parents often result. In these situations, parents often opt to provide their children with moral or academic support outside of school (S. Auerbach, 2007a).

Researchers suggest that creating bridges between African American families and schools can be challenging due to issues of historical mistrust and conflicting relationships. Neckerman indicates that families experience suspicion and mistrust due to racial and exclusionary policies and that issues such as authority and trust affect student relationships. Also, the brief tenures of urban teachers make it difficult to build trusting relationships (Neckerman, 2007). In a historical case study that spanned from 1900-1960, Neckerman showed how segregation and decisions made by school administrators and superintendents often resulted in challenges that stifled engagement. C. Payne, Kaba, M. (2001) suggest that high levels of distrust and skepticism among parents, teachers, and school administrators exist in urban schools. Over the two decades, Payne explored

challenges in Chicago's low-income schools and described that dysfunction and decisions that are disconnected from reality often stifle progress in initiatives. Payne also suggested that schools can improve in those instances where parents are not cooperative (C. Payne, M., 2008).

Noguera (2001) indicates that when parents advocate for themselves as individuals or as a collective group, school officials often view their engagement as negative. In a case study of a middle school in California, Noguera described how Black parents, who are involved in schools, yet critical of school officials, have negative capital, referring to the absence of trusting relationships between parents and schools which causes mistrust and the perception that they are engaging in inappropriate or destructive behaviors (Noguera, 2001). Noguera further argues that negative capital can show a decrease when families and educators collaborate and attempt to build positive relationships. Comer, Ben-Avie, and Joyner (2004) also suggest that when parents experience mistrust, their children are also likely to be alienated or misunderstood by school officials. To improve relationships, the researchers studied the effects of Parent Teams in low-income urban schools throughout America from 1990-2004.

Hoover-Dempsey (1997) describe nuances that stifle parental involvement. In a review of parental involvement literature, the researchers argue that issues such as parent motivation and the belief that being active participants in American schools may differ from their cultural beliefs. In some instances, parents do not typically question classroom teachers' decisions or attempt to become involved in their child's school. Researchers also suggested that if school officials want to increase involvement, they should extend themselves and invite families into schools. While findings indicate that school

administrators may often attempt to increase parental involvement through traditional activities, research also shows that popular one-off parent involvement activities such as family literacy nights, math night, or programs designed to teach parents about school curricula or increase involvement in schools do not increase parent involvement (Warren et al., 2009).

Henderson and Mapp (2002) describe the importance of parental involvement and suggest that teachers should initiate relationships. In a case study in a Midwestern school, Lareau and Horvat (1999) interviewed twenty-four students and their parents and their findings suggested that parental involvement from middle-class families is often aligned with school officials. School officials generally view the social and cultural capital of these white families positively because their definition of parental involvement includes conforming to their cultural, class, and social capital norms. As a coping mechanism, black parents have reported avoiding making any challenges to teacher beliefs or overtly expressing doubt about school personnel decisions (Wallace, 2017).

Mistrust in urban learning environments affects parent involvement in schools and is frequently found to be the result of multiple issues including parents receiving misinformation, late notification of deadlines and requirements by teachers and the schools, and suggestions that parents are not interested in collaborating with school officials. Mistrust is frequently prevalent among schools due to multiple factors such as differences in social class, cultural gaps, and beliefs that suggest that parents who are not able to attend school events or participating in traditional activities are not adequately involved or engaged. Also, mistrust is exacerbated when involvement is limited to

school dominated activities that do not bridge relationships with African American or Latino families.

Adversarial relationships have been found to become barriers to parental engagement when parents become actively involved in advocating for change as cultural citizens. Yosso (2005) describes low-income parent participation as involved but at times adversarial. His framework allows us to understand that while parents have high hopes and aspirations for their children, they often engage in resistant capital, fighting to secure their perceived rights and expanding their social capital with peers and their social networks.

In a study of twelve parents, who were, for the most part, undocumented and who spent time in a school district and learned about inequalities it was reported that their knowledge prevented true collaboration (Scribner & Fernández, 2017). Scribner and Fernández (2017) also underscore the importance of understanding implicit and explicit ways that schools prevent meaningful engagement when those ways not aligned with the schools' priorities or when parents reject deficit roles as needy recipients or instructional laborers.

### **Summary**

Social Capital allows us to understand the nuances that promote or inhibit parent participation in low-income hyper-segregated schools. In instances where parents, lack prestige, and dispositions valued by educators, it is difficult to establish trusting relationships between families and schools. This has been shown to be problematic because oftentimes, parents resist participation, or do not participate in school-based activities and continue adversarial relationships. However, when schools attempt to close

gaps in perceptions and are willing to address historical mistrust, dysfunction, and negative relationships, research indicates that participation can improve and trust can be established and maintained (Hong, 2012; Noguera, 2001; C. Payne, Kaba, M., 2001).

### **Ecologies of Parent Engagement**

Ecological Systems Theory Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggests that individuals are influenced by five systems in their environment which provides for an understanding of neighborhood conditions that influence home, family, school, and community interactions. The framework allows us to understand the nature of the interaction between individuals and their communities. Bronfenbrenner suggests that the following systems influence individuals:

- 1) Microsystems- family, school neighborhood, religious affiliations
- 2) Mesosystem-connections between microsystems and indirect environments such as school systems, neighborhoods, government agencies;
- 3) Macrosystems- social and cultural values
- 4) Chronosystems- patterns of environmental events over a series of time

The Ecologies of Parental Engagement Framework (EPE) (Barton et al., 2004) expands further on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) of parental engagement. However, rather than focusing on specific activities, relationships, and actions that parents participate in while working in a school, EPE includes orientation, situations, and other contexts that influence decisions including activity networks, such as a church, home, and community. In this three-year longitudinal study conducted in a high poverty urban school, twenty parents participated in biweekly conversations and school leaders, community leaders, and teachers explored

roles, relationships, and activities that influence parent engagement. The study suggested that parent engagement has weak boundaries and includes space, beliefs, and capital (Barton et al., 2004). Comer and Haynes (1991) reported on the Parent Assistant program that paid parents minimum wage to be classroom aides and suggested that parental involvement programs are most effective when they are integrated into family ecologies.

This expands from traditional parent engagement which describes engagement as participating in school-based academic and nonacademic school-based activities, into all spaces where parental engagement occurs and suggests that true parental engagement requires a shift that enables parents to define their interactions which may diverge from school officials (Barton et al., 2004).

### **Summary**

The EPE framework acknowledges the complex and dynamic interplay between schools, families, and communities and suggests that extended families, religiosity, peer associations, and other related groups play critical roles in children's experiences (Barton et al., 2004). As such, it promotes authentic relationships, shared leadership, and collective power in decision making processes within schools. Additionally, EPE attempts to understand how and why parents are involved in schools and to build mutually beneficial relationships between schools and families. In the following sections, examples of levels of parent participation in low-income urban schools are explored

### **Low Parent Participation**

Parental participation in low-income schools has been shown to vary from low to vigorous. Issues such as mistrust, negative relationships, fear, social capital, cultural practices, and educational policies can affect participation levels (Noguera, 2001; C. Payne, Kaba, M., 2001; Yosso, 2005). In the following section, policies that contribute to low parent participation in low-income hyper-segregated urban schools are described.

Research shows that educational policies and mandates, directly and indirectly, can prevent vigorous participation (Scribner & Fernández, 2017). Federal policies narrowly define achievement and can limit school officials from having a holistic approach to parental engagement. In a research study of sixteen parents in an urban high school, Auerbach described challenges with policies and increasing parental participation. While school officials have stated the importance of building and sustaining healthy relationships between home, school, and the community, these officials have often attempted to use parent engagement funds and activities to raise student test scores rather than promoting engagement and democracy in schools (S. Auerbach, 2007b).

In a case study of twelve parents at an elementary school (Scribner & Fernández, 2017) the researchers explored whether policies such as fingerprinting requirements stifle engagement from highly interested adults who desire to provide academic support or monitor students. In the study, Latino parents expressed frustration because they felt school officials ignored their concerns and that insensitive policy limited undocumented parents from interacting with their children. Instead of working collaboratively to increase parental engagement, the study described the actions of school officials who



invited parents to participate in menial tasks such as making copies, decorating bulletin boards, and organizing files (Scribner & Fernández, 2017).

The research found that school officials who lack an understanding of families' cultures have a lower level of participation. Latino fathers have been reported to be involved in non-school based forms of educational activities with their children – activities that are often not understood or recognized by school officials. Further, these activities in which Latino fathers are involved have been found to focus on culture and values, and indicate that these fathers have high academic expectations for their children – all of which are described as often misunderstood by school officials. In one school located in an urban district with a purposive sample of sixteen, Latino fathers instilled cultural values in their children and promoted academic success. (S. Auerbach, 2007a). Understanding that their Latino culture is also not valued by schools, these fathers become what S. Auerbach (2007a) refers to as moral supporters, meaning that they have a hands-off approach at school but provide motivation as struggling advocates at home and try to negotiate for their children at school, or become ambivalent companions who encourage, provide support at home and assist their children to reach goals (S. Auerbach, 2007a). The Latino fathers reported that they were often ignored by school administrators and excluded from the school community, but all the fathers reported that they had high academic expectations for their children and a high degree of commitment to maintaining their culture, even though they also reported mistrust in the schools.

S. Auerbach and Collier (2012) suggest that creating opportunities for parental involvement without understanding families and other cultures limits involvement. In a qualitative study of ten fathers in urban schools in the United States and the United

Kingdom, these fathers reported microaggressions they face in schools while interfacing with teachers who do not understand students' cultures (Wallace, 2017). Non-white fathers reported hearing comments from white teachers who often praise them for bringing their children to school, attending back to school nights, and providing other types of paternalistic reinforcement. In an urban school, a father reported that he experienced a microaggression incident during a school play when his son approached him after a performance. Wallace also reported an example of a father who gave his son a fist bump, which in their cultural context is an informal handshake, but a teacher questioned the interaction because she believed the father was a peddler. (Wallace, 2017). The actions inhibit vigorous parent participation in low-income schools.

### **Summary**

Low participation programs are typically deficit-based and school officials attempt to control and limit participation to school directed activities. It was also found that this dynamic does not address inequalities, cultural barriers, or dysfunctional relationships and systems that stifle progress and the building of strong home, school, and community relationships. School officials and parents in these environments often have tense relationships, as educators do not respect parents and families, while parents lack respect for school personnel, procedures, and regulations. The next section describes moderate parent participation, which can occur when school officials understand the importance of relinquishing power and making a concerted effort to connect with parents.

### **Moderate Parent Participation**

Moderate parent participation programs aim to build productive relationships with parents, school officials, and the community in low-income hyper-segregated schools. In

these programs, educational stakeholders establish programs that aim to increase parent participation in areas that have experienced low levels of participation. The following section describes programs with moderate parent participation.

In a randomized control trial of ten schools comprised of low-income Latino students, school officials wanted to build strong relationships between school families and to that end assigned parents to a support group (L. McDonald et al., 2006). One hundred eighty Latino parents were assigned to Families and Schools Together, an afterschool program designed to build healthy home-school relationships and encourage families to share meals, play games, and sing songs for an hour. After the activities, parents separated into unstructured peer groups where they had an opportunity to build social capital and collective identity (L. McDonald et al., 2006). Family Education (FAME) was a program that provided families with pamphlets and encouraged them to attend a culminating event in their child's school. Results from the study demonstrated that families who attended the FAST program reported higher levels of inclusion, and also experienced higher levels of involvement in future school events two years later versus the FAME group (L. McDonald et al., 2006).

Teachers Involving Parents in Schoolwork Literacy Program is an early literacy asset-based partnership that was created in 2016 to increase literacy outcomes for students in Colorado. This program was established by Epstein and promotes three-way conversations between parents, students, and teachers. This interactive homework program has as its goals to get families comfortable with literacy skills, to promote positive family relationships, to build relationships and also to offer parents opportunities to provide feedback to teachers (Epstein et al., 2000)

Early Head Start, a federal program that serves low-income families, aims to promote positive educational outcomes by conducting home visits and offering classes that include physical, educational, and emotional development. Researchers studied 3,000 children in seventeen sites. In a California program serving African American children, parents were given mathematical educational materials and taught by an African American teacher (Henderson & Mapp, 2002) whose background was similar to that of the families. Parent participants reported that having a teacher who was seemingly from a similar background made them receptive to participating.

Project EASE, a program for kindergarten students, works with educators and families to provide school-based and home-based school literacy support for low achieving students in four low-income schools in Minnesota. Parents learn to lead discussions while reading to their children. Results indicated that students who participated in more of the school-based and home-based activities in language performed better than their classmates. (Jordan et al., 2000).

Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters is a home-based, early childhood literacy program aimed at providing low-income and immigrant parents with training and reading materials by a trained individual from a similar background. Researchers evaluated one hundred eighty-two programs in New York. This program enables parents who have children between the ages of four and five to engage in role-play scenarios in order to increase their children's literacy and cognitive skills (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

It was found that identifying community interests as well as understanding students' families might increase long-term parental involvement. In a qualitative study

of principals in Northern California who used strategies to increase parental involvement, one principal was mentioned who piloted a colloquium aimed at providing Latino community members with training about America's schools and parent rights.

Throughout that training, parents also received training from the Mexican American League, a nonprofit organization that provides legal services to documented and undocumented individuals. By incorporating culture and community concerns through a series of sequential workshops, this principal was shown to be able to improve parental involvement substantially.

A study of four principals in low-income schools comprised of low performing students described another principal who had created a literacy program. This program was organized by teachers to increase literacy outcomes utilized parents as authors. Class visits, home visits, and hosting community meetings that encouraged parents to collaborate with the Parent-Teacher Association to write children's books, and family trees, it was found improved parent literacy levels (S. Auerbach, 2009). Parents who participated in the program experienced higher levels of social capital and increased literacy levels. The principal reported that she was able to interface with challenging parents and that parental involvement increased (S. Auerbach, 2009).

In another program aimed at building relationships with schools, a principal encouraged parents to take collective action with others instead of exerting his organization power. By participating in meetings, frustrated parents were able to express concerns about issues such as graffiti, traffic congestion, and school food. Through conversations, parents were able to work with school administration, describe their academic challenges, and share their hopes and aspirations for their children. Although

the reported issues were unable to be resolved, the school reported higher levels of communication and higher attendance at subsequent parent conferences (S. Auerbach, 2009).

Another principal, whose school was experiencing limited Latino parental involvement, conducted a math workshop, and quickly realized that multiple parents lacked understanding of digits. As a result, he restructured professional development and modified workshops to include parent interests and academic levels. The resulting activities included making baskets and decorating cakes (S. Auerbach, 2009) and were designed to connect with families.

Four schools that had been labeled in need of improvement structured a high stakes accountability academic parent involvement program for Latino students. The program required parents to attend word analysis workshops and was mandatory for families whose children performed below grade level. Throughout the program, teachers and school administrators attempted to create a sense of urgency and encouraged parents to spend more structured time focusing on testing, curriculum, and word analysis. Families who participated in the program reported that they were interested in providing a different type of academic assistance that focused on improving students' reading ability, focus, homework, and comprehension. While the results of the program did not allow the students to move out of the "Program Improvement" category, families of lower-performing students reported that the program was beneficial and that it encouraged them to be academically involved and connected to the school (S. Auerbach & Collier, 2012).

In a fifth grade classroom at an urban elementary school aiming to increase parent engagement, a teacher used math lessons to connect Latino parents to the school and bridge a gap between the school and families (Quintos & Civil, 2008). Quintos and Civil (2008) posit that translating or speaking Spanish to parents or caregivers will not automatically ensure that parents will be able to engage, and suggested that culturally relevant practices and allowing families to make connections to their orientations will bridge relationships.

In the MacArthur Park neighborhood of Los Angeles, the Pueblo Nuevo Development Corporation bridged relationships by collaborating with ten Latino parents who felt marginalized by the Los Angeles United School, to establish a social justice-themed charter school (Jasis & Ordonez-Jasis, 2012). The school hired bilingual teachers, sponsored activities to increase communication by increasing the number of parent workshops, and created newsletters. Additionally, they conducted workshops on the issue of housing challenges and encouraged parents to become progressively involved, by working as paraprofessionals and making opportunities available to them to set school policies.

In a low-income school comprised of mostly Latino students, math educators worked with a community-based organization to provide workshops - five workshops for three parents designed to develop critical thinking skills as well as the ability to work with their children via mathematical tasks. A teacher who wanted to work with families to bridge gaps in knowledge learned complex mathematical tasks by scaffolding support from a culturally responsive educator (Mangram & Solis Metz, 2018). This sustained

project enabled parents to understand how to complete complex tasks while at the same time introducing them to national math standards (Mangram & Solis Metz, 2018).

In a school-based program, a parent engagement effort designed to organize immigrant mothers, increase dialogue with school officials, promote student achievement, increase family involvement, and partner with school officials was initiated by working with chronically underperforming students (Jasis & Ordonez-Jasis, 2012). In this study, ten mothers who participated in three community and school-based parent participation projects were interviewed. Although the program started with a concerned group of five parents, this initial group collaborated with other parents and with the school to address their concerns. At first, school officials were permitted to attend the group meetings by invitation only. As a result of the trusting relationships developed between the parents and school officials, participants created similar steering committees, which eventually expanded to other schools throughout California. (Jasis & Ordonez-Jasis, 2012).

In Chicago, researchers examined the effects of a collective parent engagement effort to influence a school consolidation plan. In a study that included observations and interviews with parents, she described program challenges. Freelon (2018) suggested that school administrators made decisions based on academic performance, student enrollment, and population changes which were used to collapse four separate elementary schools and move them into two buildings. However, the higher-performing school retained its name teachers, administrators, and staff, and structure in the new location (Freelon, 2018). Even though parents protested the plan by attending public meetings, hearings, school officials ignored their concerns (Freelon, 2018).



Other concerned parents in Chicago collaborated with teachers and the school administration. They reported that a high school consolidation plan would be academically harmful and physically unsafe due to ineffective lighting, neglected properties, and sidewalks in need of repair. Although school officials failed to address the parents' academic concerns, school officials did abandon efforts to consolidate high schools. Consequently, the school officials worked with the community to establish safe passage routes that included hiring street monitors (Freelon, 2018). Warren et al. (2009) suggest ways to improve engagement in areas that are victimized by structural inequalities. Based on three case studies in low-income urban schools, they offered strategies such as working with community-based organizations and providing necessities for families as first steps in parental engagement.

In an African American neighborhood that experienced barriers to engagement, families strongly objected to a school reform plan. Four African American parents were interviewed and they discussed how they created a bridge to engage in a relationship with the Urban League, a community-based organization aimed at assisting with housing and early childhood education to monitor and achievement of students. The positive engagement was strategic because the families understood that their social capital had to be validated by members of the school district who maintained dominant forms of capital (Martinez-Cosio, 2010).

### **Summary**

Moderate Parent Participation programs aim to improve academic and non-academic outcomes for low-income urban students. However, there is considerable variance between participation programs, even though most programs are school-based

and exist in Latino schools. These programs typically incorporate activities to build relationships with parents and encourage those who have limited experiences, to participate in school-based and non-school based programs. There are examples of moderate participation in hyper-segregated African American schools. In those schools, stakeholders attempt to address academic and cultural barriers, however, these programs are in flux and are not as established as the vigorous parent participation programs described in the next section.

### **Vigorous Parent Participation**

Vigorous parent participation programs are strong programs that have successfully built and sustained healthy relationships between parents, school officials, and the community. These programs bridge relationships, respect, and build relationships with families and communities. The most vigorous parent participation programs are The Logan Square Neighborhood Association's Parent Mentor Program (Chicago, IL), Villa Victoria (Boston, MA), and the Parent Assistant in the Classroom Program (New Haven CT). Parent Teams and ParentCorps programs are located in multiple urban cities.

The Logan Square Neighborhood Association, (LSNA) a grassroots organization that created a Parent Mentor program in 1995 in thirty low-income neighborhoods to address disconnects between families and parents in Chicago (Hong, 2012). The program aims at promoting a strong relationship between family and community through collaboration with school staff, families, and communities on issues of mutual interest. One key component of LSNA's model is that it attempts to move from an individualistic form of involvement to collective engagement, predicated on community involvement, shared leadership, and participation. The leadership component allows parents to set

personal as well as educational goals, receive access to extensive curriculum, develop leadership, and receive General Education Development degree training (Hong, 2012). Brown (2007) described LSNA as a program that established culturally relevant activities, a literacy ambassadors program and collaborated with families to provide opportunities for them to engage in leadership development, aimed at strengthening collaboration between principals, teachers, and parents. Additionally, parents who often begin as parent mentors have opportunities to increase their involvement in schools and eventually become tutors, school leaders, and some parents have even participated in a local certification program to become bilingual teachers.

Modeled after the Parent Mentor program in Chicago, a district in New York created a Parent Mentor pilot program and hired four parents to work to address racial issues in a school. In this model, parents worked for two hours each week as cultural brokers to bridge gaps between white teachers and African American children (Yull et al., 2018). Before the program launched, parents were critical of the school's disciplinary procedures. After receiving training on issues such as trauma-informed care, engagement, school climate, and understanding complexities that exist in schools, parents were able to provide support to students and teachers for approximately six to eight hours each week. Parents attested to the fact that their experience in the Parent Mentor program enabled them to build a strong community and reduce student disciplinary infractions (Yull et al., 2018).

Another strong example of collective organizing around important issues to increase engagement is what occurred in Villa Victoria, a housing project in Boston (Small, 2004). From 1970 to 1990, residents participated in literacy workshops,

mentoring, and political mobilization that led to increased participation and engagement. As time progressed, participation declined. Small (2004) concluded that the initial threat of neighborhood displacement allowed community members to become more engaged but as time progressed and the threat dissipated, engagement decreased.

Caldwell et al. (2005) described the importance of utilizing community members who have received training to coordinate programs and serves to strengthen literacy skills for urban preschool students. In a study of forty families and forty-nine preschoolers in ParentCorps, a community based nonprofit organization aimed at supporting parents and families, they described that community members who received resources, training, and support were able to build capacity and support children's literacy initiatives such as providing children with thought-provoking activities while concurrently developing job readiness skills.

Comer et al. (2004) described Parent Teams, a program in multiple urban cities that allowed parents and school officials to problem solve and build consensus to reach decisions. Parent Teams collaborated to develop plans, set academic goals, and build strong relationships without placing blame on each other for existing challenges and problems.

Comer's School Development Program began in 1968 and the model has been adopted in over 1000 schools and twenty-six states. It is a comprehensive program aimed at providing general participation, help in the classroom, and sensitive support for schools (Comer, 2005). One component, Parent Assistant in the Classroom, was established to provide eight to ten parents with an opportunity to work as paraprofessionals in classrooms (Comer, 2005). In addition to providing students with academic support,

parents participated in social programs and workshops aimed at improving student lives. This type of comprehensive support was designed to bridge gaps between school, home, and communities.

### **Summary**

It has been found that vigorous parental participation occurs when students, families, and their communities are viewed as assets, respected, and intentional efforts are made to collaborate. In some instances, external validation from school officials is not needed to increase participation and engagement. However, strong programs often have institutional support and leverage relationships with communities, universities, and other educational stakeholders.

### **Improving Patterns of Participation**

Improving patterns of participation requires understanding the nuances that can promote or stifle relationships between low-income families, school officials, and communities. This understanding allows educational stakeholders to engage in meaningful ways that work towards collaborative problem solving, reaching consensus, and the understanding of the importance of creating opportunities that are not disconnected from realities such as historical dysfunction, negative relationships, and constant changes in urban schools (C. Payne, M., 2008). Strategies such as collective parental engagement, contemporary engagement, and transformative parent engagement can strengthen parent participation.

**Collective Parental Engagement.** Collective Parental Engagement can provide low-income parents with opportunities to create bonding relationships with each other to strengthen social capital by creating networks that improve educational outcomes for

their children. In a study of sixteen parents, Alameda-Lawson (2014) determined that groups can mobilize to address issues in their school and broader concerns which can be barriers to success, such as crime and safety. Caldwell et al. (2005) suggest that individuals who share similar cultures and backgrounds may be able to develop trusting bonds better than people from different socio-economic backgrounds.

Researchers suggest that school leaders who attempt to actively bring families into schools by altering rigid school cultures, promoting positive family and school relations, and incorporating relational power, defined as leveraging relationships and promoting collectivity, can bridge gaps between families, communities, and schools (Hong, 2012). These relationships have been shown to promote positive interactions and allow both groups to work collectively to promote and sustain positive change.

Positive interactions between families and school officials, coupled with providing multiple entry points and opportunities for parental engagement while treating parents as equal partners in schools, can also increase involvement. These entry points have been found to encourage parents at varying levels and abilities to become involved in schools. As such, principals who aspire to increase parental engagement should include families in the school's vision, maintain open lines of communication, and support diverse opportunities for engagement including opportunities to participate in activities at school and home (Shirley et al., 2006).

**Contemporary Parent Engagement.** Unlike traditional parent engagement, the Contemporary Parent Engagement Model (CPEM) takes a holistic approach to parental engagement (McKenna & Millen, 2013). This asset-based engagement views parents and the community as needed, potential leaders, and all parents as assets who have the

potential to become change agents and leaders. This strategically broadens participation and promotes shared leadership. CPEM suggests that parental engagement is active, communal, and relational and that parental engagement is comprised of both parent voice and parent presence. Parent voice suggests that caregivers receive opportunities to express themselves, their perspectives, understandings, frustrations, and concerns (McKenna & Millen, 2013). Parent presence suggests that parents participate in traditional forms of engagement as well as unconventional or untraditional forms of engagement such as working behind the scenes and attempting to provide safe living environments for their children and families. This process occurs in two spheres. The home sphere includes parents modeling behavior, teaching students about their culture, and providing children with basic needs. The school sphere includes participating in traditional school spaces, parent advocacy, and relationship building (McKenna & Millen, 2013). This relational approach is holistic and acknowledges that relationships develop over time, and are culturally sensitive.

**Transformative Parent Engagement.** Transformative Parent Engagement (TPE) is a form of parental engagement that occurs when parents, schools, and communities reenvision their relationships and collaborate as allies to organize for change, sustain deep relationships, and address power dynamics to ensure that parents are equal partners (Hong, 2012). TPE as a mutually beneficial process that is rooted in the experiences of both families and schools and attempts to answer the following questions: What can parents do for schools? What can schools do for parents? What can parents and schools do together? (Hong, 2012) This form of engagement makes parents central to the decision-making processes. In these schools, a relational approach, defined as the power

to accomplish goals collectively rather than exerting power over individuals, promotes egalitarianism, views parents as assets, and suggests that effective parental engagement incorporates a holistic view of students, families, and neighborhoods (Hong, 2012). To incorporate a holistic view, Hong suggests that focusing on relationship building, identifying critical community issues, addressing challenges collectively, and strategically partnering to promote positive parental engagement based on the needs of schools and families (Hong, 2012).

Building a relational approach requires school officials to reimagine parent participation in schools. Bryk and Schneider (2003) suggest that relational trust occurs when shared behaviors and role expectations of parents and educators are clear and mutual respect exists. (Warren et al., 2009) recommend that instead of providing parents with opportunities to participate in traditional parental involvement activities such as a family literacy night, information about improving test scores, and other workshops aimed at imposing directives on parents, that a better strategy would be to create shared agendas and mutually beneficial goals by including parents and their concerns. This model views parents as leaders and as an integral part of the school community and part of promoting development (Brown, 2007; Comer, 2005; Hong, 2012; C. Payne, Kaba, M., 2001; Small, 2004).

Using a relational approach to increasing parental engagement is challenging; however, (Hong, 2012) suggests a three-step process that includes induction, integration, and investment. Induction introduces parents to the complexities that exist in schools including staff, expectations, and curriculum. Integration occurs when parents begin to view themselves as a collective unit instead of individuals and become part of the fabric



of the school. Investment is when parents become leaders as they continue to deepen their investment as they insert themselves in other classrooms, obtain additional educational experiences, and increase their skills. Hong (2012) indicates that officials should recognize parents' abilities and allow them to assert themselves, become central figures to the school, build strong bonds, and bridge social capital.

Warren acknowledges that engagement is nuanced and suggests that parents may be providing support to their children that may not be understood by school officials. Warren et al. (2009) reported that most parents participate in supportive engagement, while a few are involved in school decision making. He also suggests that while most parents engage in educational activities with their children, a smaller number of parents are actively involved in school activities. Also, he reported that fewer parents assume leadership roles in key decision-making. Comer and Haynes (1991) describe traditionally vs. collaborate parent participation and suggest that three levels of parental engagement exist: general participation, helping in classrooms, and providing critical and sensitive support to schools through participating in a school planning and management team.

Increasing and sustaining parent engagement in schools requires establishing trust, maintaining positive relationships, and strategic collaboration while managing relationships and challenges that exist within schools and communities. While challenging, Warren maintains that parents and school officials can create and nurture strong relationships by building trust and collective responsibility. In a longitudinal study of 400 schools in Chicago, Bryk and Schneider (2003) researched school improvement and suggested that school representatives attempt to create multiple opportunities to develop mutual understanding and trust despite gaps in power and challenging school

conditions. Warren et al. (2009) suggest that schools and families work together to build mutually beneficial relationships and promote parent leadership. He also suggests that Community Based Organizations have the potential to mitigate the relationship between the school and the community.

This process also promotes collegiality between teachers and parents, suggests that parents be moved from the periphery to central to decision making, and views parents as assets and authority figures. Parents are also encouraged to set goals and strategically target vulnerable families. Using this approach encourages families to engage in activities despite language barriers such as visiting classrooms, and working with the school to provide a safe living environment for their children. This collegiality can engage large groups of parents, trusted decision-makers, and assets to support the needs of their children.

One way which has been suggested by research to improve parental involvement is by making direct and indirect efforts to encourage participation and incorporating culturally relevant strategies. Formal and informal invitations from school personnel and teachers can help reduce barriers to parent participation, such as lack of time and childcare challenges. Practices such as increasing parent knowledge, teacher-counselor invitations, advocating for families; providing support and encouraging participation over time, and parent role construction have been shown to have the ability to change parents' roles from passive to active involvement in school activities.

Having a series of workshops that include targeted strategies to reach students and families, combining academics with the socio-emotional needs of children and adults, being aware of the structural constraints and challenges that families experience and

understanding that parents are often involved in their children's lives outside of school-sponsored activities can lead to higher levels of parental involvement. Harris and Robinson (2016) suggest that parent involvement does not always increase achievement. The researchers suggest that stage setting, including conveying the importance of education and establishing and maintaining home space where learning is maximized and conducive to success. This is counter to traditional parent involvement because this form of involvement focuses on lifestyles instead of engaging in a particular set of activities.

However, these strategies should include identifying community issues, understanding educational policies and practices of newcomers, and bridging relationships. Also, school officials who are responsible for increasing parental involvement should provide recurring workshops and events that are strategically implemented to provide support to families. Lastly, understanding differences in social capital, cultural capital, economic capital, and symbolic capital of parents and school officials is paramount to improving parental involvement.

Warren et al. (2009) suggest that parents who work collectively in a school have the potential to strengthen social capital by bonding, deepening ties that exist among people who have similar backgrounds, experiences, and cultures. Parent presence helps strengthen the social and cultural capital of children in school (McKenna & Millen, 2013). Also, these relationships have allowed parents to build relationships with individuals of higher social class opportunities and have enabled them to activate collective power to promote change in schools.

Understanding the barriers and obstacles that parents face is essential to increase parental engagement with marginalized families (Schueler et al., 2017). However,

measuring and assessing barriers simultaneously is extremely challenging (Schueler et al., 2017) because parents who experience fewer barriers can provide engagement support and interface with school officials, whereas parents who face more barriers may not be able to maintain constant communication with school officials. As such, parents who experience fewer barriers report positive relationships in their learning environments, and also have reported being a protective force with students from low-income communities (McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004).

S. Auerbach and Collier (2012) suggest that educators expand the goals of parental engagement to include concepts beyond academic achievement and allow minority parents to show interest in communicating with teachers about nonacademic forms of engagement (Snell, 2018).

## **Conclusion**

While parent engagement promotes positive relationships and bridges home, school, and communities, establishing and maintaining engagement can be challenging. Issues such as adversarial relationships, historical mistrust, policies, and other barriers can stifle parent engagement. Creating multiple entry points by strategically creating opportunities and spaces for collective empowerment that promote bonding and bridging and working with vulnerable populations can bridge gaps between schools and families.

Community-Based Organizations have attempted to address barriers such as mistrust, deficit-based thinking, and working with African American and Latino schools in urban systems as well as addressing the Ecologies of Parent Engagement, which include issues of space, orientations within urban systems, and culturally relevant practices. Contemporary Parent Engagement, a new form of engagement, looks at holistic

approaches to parent engagement, and transformative parent engagement which is an approach that promotes egalitarianism, relational building, and reimagining parent participation in schools. Transformative Parent Engagement (TPE) is a form of parental engagement that occurs when parents, schools, and communities work collaboratively to improve the educational outcomes of children. When implemented strategically, scholars indicate that mistrust, a common problem in low-income Latino and African American schools, is minimized because the culture and perspectives of the marginalized groups are valued.

The purpose of this literature review was to analyze research focused on parent participation in low-income urban schools. The types of participation are parent involvement, school directed activities that aim to promote academic or educational success, or parent engagement; the encouragement of parents and school officials to work together on shared priorities and based activities collaboratively. One interesting finding was that in the literature, scholars used various definitions to describe parent involvement and parent engagement. Additionally, researchers have thoroughly explored and evaluated barriers to engagement, as well as ineffective, and effective strategies to improve engagement in urban schools that primarily serve Latino students and families.

In conclusion, when school officials shift from a deficit-based approach that views communities as needy recipients who require external individuals to identify and determine gaps that exist within the communities, to a strength-based asset approach, that is optimistic, values culture, and experiences of community members, the result can be a climate of transformative parental engagement, which can lead to improved relationships, increased engagement and positive outcomes for underserved students and their families.

The gap in the literature is found in the actual understanding of the process that parents experience while participating in a parental engagement program in a chronically underperforming school, comprised mostly of African American students. Little research (Caldwell et al., 2005; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Hong, 2012; Small, 2004) exists which explores in depth the understanding of the experiences of unemployed or underemployed parents who participate in a cohort-based intensive parent engagement program aimed at increasing student outcomes, building a strong school, home, and community relationships, while aiming to increase the social capital of program participants. As such, the current research question is, “How do stakeholders experience participation in a multiyear school-based parent engagement program within a school-university-community partnership in a hyper-segregated African American school?”

In conclusion, the Literature Review yielded a wealth of theme-based research for the dissertation topic of School-University-Community Partnerships: Promises and Challenges of a Parent Engagement Program.

## **Methodology**

### **Conceptual Framework and Methods**

#### **Justification of Conceptual Framework**

Qualitative Description (QD), was used to understand the experiences of the Parent Leadership Program (PLP) participants, community-based partners, cooperating teachers, school administrators, and Rutgers program administrators. QD offered the flexibility to be able to describe complex nuances in the two-generation parent engagement program aimed at improving literacy outcomes, decreasing chronic absenteeism, and building a critical mass of highly engaged parent change agents.

This study will add to the literature on parent participation and parent engagement. Currently, little research describes the experiences of underemployed or unemployed caregivers from local communities who work part-time to provide academic and attendance improvement assistance to children in hyper-segregated schools. Programs similar to PLP include The Parent Mentor Program in the Logan Square neighborhood of Chicago, a parent engagement program that pays parents a \$600 stipend after completing one hundred hours of service, and Parent Corps, a fourteen-week program aimed at collaborating with parents and teachers to build healthy social and learning environments for children.

Before selecting a conceptual framework, the area of phenomenology was studied as well as the phenomenologists attempt to get to the subjective essence of an experience. The objective was to learn about parents' experiences in the PLP through multiple frameworks. Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, believed that phenomenologists

should suspend judgments about the natural world, and focus on understanding an individual's experience (Smith, 2009). He also encouraged phenomenologists to use a free imaginative variation, a technique that encourages researchers to explore other possible meanings of words or statements to ultimately allow a researcher to understand an individual's experience (Husserl, 1927). Heidegger added to this approach, asserting that all knowledge is interpretive. He explained that who we are and the world are mutually dependent (Heidegger, 1962/1927).

Given the interest in understanding the experiences of PLP members and individuals who have worked with PLP members, this researcher wanted to explore whether phenomenology would allow the uncovering of their subjective experiences and prioritize PLP members' perspectives. After consulting with the dissertation committee, it was determined that by adopting a critical lens, phenomenology might not fully allow an answer to the research questions sought in order to explore issues of social justice, social capital, and cultural capital. In addition, counterstories from parents or caregivers who may have felt excluded from urban schools were also sought. As such, the Critical Race Theory, social capital, and cultural capital were added to the conceptual framework.

Legal scholars and feminists committed to social justice, eliminating racism, and all forms of oppression created critical Race Theory (CRT) in the 1970s. These scholars were frustrated by the slow progress of racial reform (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT is a methodology that suggests that researchers should be committed to social justice and the elimination of racism. While eliminating racial oppression is the broad goal of CRT, its ultimate goal is to end all forms of oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Critical Race Theory suggests that racism is



ingrained in America. It rejects notions of liberalism and colorblindness and interconnects white privilege and supremacy. It suggests that as a result of racism, historical interpretations of events have been distorted, and the voices of suppressed racial minorities should be reexamined. To foreground these voices, CRT scholars suggest that narratives, oral histories, and counterstories should be used to understand and explain lived experiences and preserve historical accounts drawn from marginalized groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). In this context, there is a further goal in exploring how participants made sense of how the PLP program may have increased their social capital.

Social capital refers to the benefits derived from the networks developed among people who work and live together. Bourdieu refers to social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintances or recognition (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248).” Including social capital in my conceptual framework is important because the PLP provides members with opportunities to build their social networks and thereby increase social capital. Participating in the PLP may increase individual social capital and group social capital. Given the structure of the PLP, participants potentially benefit from individual social capital because anecdotally, the PLP provides them with people and resources to assist them in learning how to advocate for their interests. It seeks to enable them to feel as though they belong to a group and offers them access to a university, job training, employment training, and other educational institutions while concurrently providing support.

According to Bourdieu (2001), group social capital refers to the norms and networks that enable groups who are in trusted networks to promote collective action (Bourdieu, 2001). A trusting network is beneficial to all group members because participants can potentially have greater levels of group efficacy (Bourdieu, 1986). The PLP seeks to build group social capital by creating safe, educational learning environments that provide participants with training which then allows them to advocate for key issues and influence school officials. Through group social capital, participants have the potential to organize effectively and leverage their resources to ensure that students have what they need.

In addition to individual and group social capital, cultural capital among PLP participants was also explored. For Bourdieu (1986), this term indicates the skills that one acquires as a result of living in their social class, allowing one to develop a skill set that will enable him or her to thrive in their living environment. Individuals who have increased levels of cultural capital can navigate social environments more effectively than those who have more limited cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). In low-income urban communities, parents or caregivers must learn how to negotiate effectively for their children. Unfortunately, parents who have children in low-income schools are often from mainstream culture and lack the dispositions needed to navigate challenges in school. Given that the PLP aims to increase cultural capital, it was included in the framework.

The proposed conceptual framework is in alignment with the belief that underserved individuals in parent engagement programs; the PLP can change how they act in the world. By understanding the experiences of people who participate in parent engagement programs like the PLP, parents have the potential to increase their social and

cultural capital and that of their children and families. This study explored the promises and challenges of a parent engagement program. This study also explored whether positive changes in behavior occurred due to participation in the PLP.

## **Methods**

### **Research Question**

How do stakeholders experience participation in a multiyear school-based parent engagement program within a school-university-community partnership in a hyper-segregated African American school?

This study sought to understand the experiences of individuals who participated in the Parent Leadership Program as participants, community-based partners, cooperating teachers, or administrators. The Qualitative Description (QD) was selected as the method of collecting data because it provided the flexibility needed to understand the experiences of all participants and stakeholders. QD also allowed for the use of aspects of multiple qualitative methods to explore my research question. As such, I incorporated elements of phenomenology, focus group interviews, and individual interviews into the approach.

The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach was adopted into the analysis, as it is an extremely systematic and careful system for focusing on individual experience. IPA is a research method that aims to understand the subjective experience of an event. Smith (2009) suggests that individuals have unconscious experiences that occur during the everyday flow of life and that IPA researchers are interested in observing when an event takes on particular meaning and becomes an experience. The experiences include a person being consciously aware of what is happening. As such, IPA researchers explore “an experience” for a particular event, and they attempt to understand what each participant makes of the experience. IPA researchers are concerned with lived experiences and understand that their findings are always subjective, interpretative, perspectival, and situational (Smith, 2009).

IPA is rooted in phenomenology. The ontological question that it addresses is that multiple realities exist, based on factors such as embodied perspectives, defined as lived experiences, and human relationships in the world (Smith, 2009). IPA researchers are encouraged to use multiple researchers to ensure that interpretations are accurate and based on the intended meanings of the author.

Throughout the interview process, it was important to be focused on the fact that participants were attempting to interpret their experiences, and the ultimate goal for the study was to be able to help uncover participants' own experiences. IPA encourages participants to step out of the unconscious everyday experience and focus on when experience takes on a significant meaning (Smith, 2009). IPA allows researchers to use multiple methods to understand the essential qualities of a particular phenomenon from the perspective of a conscious individual. IPA researchers are encouraged to design a study that ultimately gets to the essence of an experience versus attempting to incorporate the perspectives of each theorist (Smith, 2009).

Guided by IPA, the research explored the experiences of individuals who are participants or partners in the PLP. Additionally, attempts were made to understand the participants' awareness of their experience and the interplay between their lived experience and the PLP. The qualitative description and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis were combined as the combination allowed for the flexibility to study the nature of participants' nuanced experiences while not limiting the researcher to closed systems of data collection and analysis or any preexisting philosophical or theoretical commitments (Sandelowski, 2000). Using the guidance of IPA to explore the data while adopting the QD approach allowed the use of the best of the qualitative description and

phenomenological approaches (Sandelowski, 2000). As such, it was possible to study the nature of participants' experiences while having the flexibility needed to pay particular attention to events. This yielded rich data and a detailed description of participants' experiences in a way that answered the research question.

The first question that this researcher asked interviewees was, "Please describe your experiences in the Parent Leadership Program." Understanding that responses to this question might or might not provide a detailed description, Additional questions were utilized to explore issues connected to the theoretical framework.

### **PI Involvement**

For the past two years, this researcher served as the Director of the Parent Leadership Program and supervised program members. The dual role of researcher and the PLP administrator allowed for first-hand observation of parents in the PLP program who participate in academic and non-academic activities at the site, as well as providing leadership for professional development activities, and the close working with partners to provide resources to the members. Throughout the process, program strengths and challenges were observed as well as the further observation that parent perceptions were often different from those of school officials, community members, and university administrators. As such, capturing parent experiences was imperative.

As a result of the researcher's involvement with the participants and the close connection to the program, a graduate fellow who conducted focus group interviews and individual interviews with PLP members assisted in the research. The chair of the committee provided support for the data analysis process. This researcher then conducted the remaining individual interviews and focus group interviews.

**Description of Research Setting/Research Role**

Established in 2017, The Parent Leadership Program (PLP) is a joint collaboration with the Fairmount Promise Neighborhood Association, a local research university, and Newark Public Schools. PLP is a two-generation program that supports parents or caregivers and is designed to provide literacy support for struggling readers, while concurrently providing parents with personal and workforce development. Since its inception, participants have served as tutors and attendance improvement specialists. The mission of the program is to build strong relationships between families and schools throughout the West Neighborhood of Springfield. The PLP was modeled after Logan Square Neighborhood Association's Parent Mentor program, a grassroots organization that partners with schools to improve and academic outcomes school climate in Chicago, Illinois.

The research site was an elementary school in the West Section of the Northeastern metropolitan city of Berwick. In Berwick, many of the residents have been victimized by structural violence, defined as having limited access to high-quality services in health, school, and in their environment (Farmer, 2004). Berwick's children are less likely to read or write at grade level than students in other parts of the state. The research site is a traditional urban school with a student population of approximately 700 students in grades Pre Kindergarten to eighth grade. According to the state's Department of Education, the host school is hyper-segregated, with over 99% of the population either of African American or Latino descent. Over 90% of the student population is considered economically disadvantaged, 20% of the students have a learning disability, and approximately 40% of the students were chronically absent during the 2017-2018

academic year.

Focus group interviews and individual interviews took place at Northeastern City University's Douglas Research Center located in Springfield. The Center was selected because it is a neutral location for PLP members. Throughout the 2018-2019 academic year, PLP participants received professional development training at the Center. Members expressed the fact that they were able to speak freely about their experiences there. Cooperating teachers, neighborhood partners, and university administrators who are partners with the Parent Leadership Program participated in individual interviews either at the Center or at Scottwood Elementary School.

### **Study Participants**

The target population was a purposive sample of 30 because the objective was to incorporate perspectives from a diverse group of stakeholders that included PLP members, cooperating teachers, community-based partners, school-based support staff members, and a program administrator. Thirty was chosen as the target number in order to achieve saturation, to allow for the generation of meaningful themes, and the exploration of divergence and convergence among individuals and groups.

The researchers conducted a total of twenty-one individual interviews. Each PLP participant, community-based partner, school administrator, and the program administrator participated in an individual interview. Additionally, PLP members participated in one focus group interview and cooperating teachers participated in three grade-level focus groups. Three focus groups with cooperating teachers ranged from Kindergarten through second grade.



Given that participant perspectives may diverge from the perspectives of those who provided support, it was believed that these narratives provided a detailed description of the perspectives of the PLP program. Community-based partners were included because, during the PLP, members of community-based organizations provided professional development, workforce development, or literacy support to members. Their perspectives of the PLP were useful for this research study.

### **Recruitment**

Phone calls were made and emails and letters were sent to current and past members, community-based partners, cooperating teachers, and university program administrators to invite them to participate in the study. All participants of the Parent Leadership Program were sent emails to inform them of the study. Individuals who were interested in participating were also called and met with the Associate Director of the university's research center to learn more about the study. Two meetings were scheduled during the study participants' professional development sessions to outline the purpose of the study. Consent forms that described the study were mailed to each potential participant. Two days were spent at PLP meetings to answer questions, collect consent forms to obtain approval from each study participant who submitted a completed form. Once participants agreed to take part in the study, they were invited to a meeting, at which the details of their participation such as their involvement in twenty-one individual interviews and four focus group interviews was explained to them.

### **Description of Participants**

The participants in the study were seven unemployed or underemployed parents or caregivers, six of the group were women, five were African American, one was Puerto

Rican, and one was an immigrant. All the parents had a high school diploma or GED equivalency degree, one had an Associate's degree, and three reported that they had taken college classes. Other participants included eleven early education teachers, most with less than five years of teaching in grades kindergarten to second grade. Three were school-based support staff members, two were veteran school administrators, six were community-based partners and one was a program administrator.

Community-based partners, cooperating teachers, and university administrators who provided direct services to PLP were included in the study and were invited to participate in an individual interview. Given that participant perspectives may diverge from those who provided support, this, it was believed would provide a more detailed description of the PLP. Partners were also included because, during the PPLA program, members of community-based organizations provided professional development, workforce development, or literacy support to members. Thus, their perspectives of the PLP would be useful when constructing the Qualitative Description.

### **Parent Profiles**

All program participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identities and to encourage them to participate in the study and discuss sensitive topics.

Taffy Brown is a married mother of a preschool student at Scottwood Elementary School. Before joining the PLP, she worked in customer service and was a supervisor at a home improvement company. Additionally, Taffy participated in a dental assistant training program. Her family is deeply connected to Scottwood and has strong ties to the school. Taffy reported that she and her sister are both graduates of Scottwood Elementary School. She joined PLP's inaugural class and has been an active member of

the organization since its inception. In the summer of 2018, Taffy served as an instructor for the Scottwood Freedom School, a program aimed at preventing summer learning loss and empowering elementary school students. She had participated in community engagement events, helped spearhead a health and wellness fair, participated in a leadership residency program, and is currently working on establishing a food pantry. In 2018, Taffy became secretary of Scottwood's Parent-Teacher Association. In the future, Taffy has a desire to receive Microsoft Outlook training, become a secretary or an administrative assistant, and obtain a Child Development Associate certification.

Maria Bandera is a single mother of four children. Two of her children are students at Scottwood Elementary School. She participated in a nonprofit organization aimed at strengthening urban communities. As a member of the inaugural Parent Leadership Program, Maria was a tutor in a first-grade classroom. She often volunteered as a translator for parents who have limited English proficiency. Maria has participated in training courses and has completed coursework at a community college. She eventually would like to become a social worker or police officer. Maria is currently participating in a Child Development Associate training program that will lead to employment in an early childhood education setting.

Mercedes Carter is a caregiver of one student at Scottwood Elementary School. She worked as a math support specialist in a research program that provided academic support to second-grade students. Before joining the Parent Leadership Program, Mercedes worked as an executive administrative assistant for a for-profit online university. She has participated in family engagement events at Scottwood and as an AmeriCorps member at a nonprofit organization. She is interested in continuing her

education and would like to become an elected official. She is also considering becoming an educator. During the summer of 2018, Ms. Carter worked as a Servant Leader Intern in the Scottwood Freedom School. She is currently interested in exploring ways to include her research project into Scottwood Elementary School and is now the president of Scottwood's Parent-Teacher Association. Additionally, Mercedes is attempting to secure grants to fund a mobile library.

A native of Ghana, Olivia Francis is a mother of five two of whom attend Scottwood Elementary School. In addition to participating in the PLP, Olivia also participated in a leadership program. She joined PLP because she was interested in spending more time with her children as well as improving the school culture and climate. In the future, Olivia would like to become a small business owner and establish a family farming, agriculture, or herbal medicine company program in Ghana.

A father of six, Keon joined PLP in March of 2018. Before joining the PLP, he worked at a grocery store and held various leadership roles. He provided daily operational support for the program and also served as a mentor for several seventh and eighth-grade students who are chronically absent. During the summer of 2018, Keon served as an intern in the Office of University Partnerships. Upon leaving PLP, he expressed interest in mentoring vulnerable youth.

A mother of two, Jackie Howard, is a native of Alabama and has lived in Springfield for two years. Ms. Howard has an extensive amount of experience working with students at Scottwood Elementary School. Before joining the PLP, Jackie provided attendance improvement support and volunteered at the school. She was elected Vice President of the Parent-Teacher Association. Troubled by what she described as a lack of

engagement and minimal resources available in the school, Jackie began collaborating with school administrators, nonprofit organizations, and the West Neighborhood Association as a way to address her concerns. Additionally, she co-coordinated a health fair that raised awareness about services in Springfield. She is also a graduate of a leadership program and is the project coordinator of a local food pantry. Ms. Howard received an Associate's Degree from a local community college and is interested in becoming a social worker or a housing case manager.

Rhonda Upchurch is a mother of four. Three of her children attend Scottwood Elementary School. Ms. Upchurch participated in a leadership program, the local Neighborhood Association, and served as a role model for members of the Parent Leadership Program. Additionally, she is the treasurer for the school's Parent-Teacher Association. During the summer of 2018, Rhonda provided community outreach services as an intern in the Office of Community Partnerships at a local university. She secured a grant that focuses on helping build life skills, promoting hygiene, and offering emotional support for teenage girls. In addition to her school responsibilities, she supports Scottwood's basketball and cheerleading teams. In the future, Rhonda would like to become a family advocate or social worker.

### **Study Design**

The study design included document analysis, focus group interviews, and individual interviews. Since the intervention was conducted at a local university in Springfield with adults who volunteered to participate in both the study and in the same program, the data are not generalizable. Although the results are not generalizable, the advantage of using the QD design is that it would allow multiple perspectives and

experiences from participants and partners to be obtained. Another advantage of this design was that it would be possible to use multiple qualitative methods to describe the complexities that exist while attempting to increase parental engagement in a hyper-segregated school that primarily serves urban African American students.

### **Data Collection**

During the study, each PLP member participated in one focus group. The focus group inquired into experiences in the Parent Leadership Program. Also, each participant participated in one semi-structured individual interview. During both the individual interviews and focus group interviews, PLP participants were encouraged to explain the words and terms that they use to describe their experiences. From these interviews, a deeper understanding of the experiences of those participating in the Parent Leadership Program evolved.

Each focus group interview lasted for approximately sixty minutes, and each interview was approximately 45-60 minutes. Focus group interviews and individual interviews were recorded using an iPad provided by the university. Focus group interviews followed this structure: introductions, followed by questions about experiences in the Parent Leadership Program (See Appendix A).

A university program administrator was contacted in order to obtain email addresses for all potential interviewees and to receive confirmation of their decision to participate in the study. Consent forms were submitted to the research center 24 hours before the scheduled interviews. Interviewees gave verbal assent on the recording. Access to the transcripts was only the research assistant, a research fellow, and me to preserve confidentiality. The interviews followed this organizational structure:

demographic questions, questions related to the study without asking sensitive topics, sensitive questions, revisiting key concepts, and closing the interviews.

The iPad remained in a locked closet, and only researchers had access to the recordings. Names, email addresses, gender, and age of all participants were collected and linked to data.

### **Data Analysis**

After the in-depth semi-structured individual interviews were completed, the interviews were transcribed and each transcript was coded to common themes to understand how each program participant views their experience of participating in the PLP. The focus group interviews were analyzed as well as the individual interview transcripts and connections were made between data collected (Smith, 2009, p. 23).

To effectively analyze transcripts from the focus groups, the transcripts were analyzed to account for group dynamics and individual accounts. Data were coded, and individual and collective themes were generated. Understanding that each research participant has a subjective experience and that each participant has a unique story, open-ended questions were asked in focus group interviews and individual interviews to provide an in-depth narrative about each participant. Based on the data, it was possible to understand convergence and divergence between the participants and also have detailed information about each participant.

The qualitative description data analysis included: Reading and rereading all of the original data, initial noting, developing emergent themes, searching for connections across emergent themes, moving to the next case, and looking at patterns across themes (Smith, 2009). Also, the research fellow who conducted PLP individuals reviewed the

individual interview transcripts as well as the focus group interview transcripts to help get to the essence of the participants' experiences. The narratives were based on themes from the focus group interviews, individual interviews, and journal entries.

The emergent themes were described in detail. Connections were explored between notes taken and the original transcripts to established emerging themes. Then, patterns were explored between emergent themes, and similar themes were consolidated into clusters, thus creating a new category of themes, defined as superordinate themes. If a superordinate theme was presented in over half of the cases, the superordinate theme was classified as a recurrent superordinate theme. For this study, a recurrent superordinate theme was defined as a superordinate theme that was present in over half of the sample, with a minimum of three participants.

### **Trustworthiness, Confirmability, and Dependability**

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is comprised of four components: credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability (Guba, 1985). Credibility was established by triangulating focus group interviews, individual interviews, and document analysis while collecting and analyzing data.

Confirmability suggests that the research is neutral, and responses are not influenced by the researcher (Guba, 1985). Confirmability was established by having a research fellow conduct PLP member individual interviews and the PLP focus group interview. Additionally, all interviews were transcribed by a second researcher. The transcript from each focus group interview and individual interviews with the same research fellow.



Dependability suggests that another researcher could replicate the study (Guba, 1985). Dependability was ensured by providing a detailed transcription of each interview that included initial transcript notes, original transcript quotes, quotes connected to keywords, emergent themes, and superordinate themes. Given that all focus group protocols individual interview protocols and recordings will be available, the research findings will be dependable because an outside person will be able to audit the process.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

An application was submitted to the Rutgers University Institutional Review Board for an Expedited Review. After receiving approval, the PLP participants were informed that participation in the study was voluntary, and all members signed consent forms. Additionally, participants were required to give assent before participating in the study. This researcher met with participants during a professional development meeting at the university and informed them that they could leave the study at any point without being removed from the program.

Confidentiality was preserved by ensuring that identifiable information such as names, mailing addresses, email addresses, phone numbers, etc. was kept in a locked drawer at the university. Additionally, when researchers collected data, assigned codes were used to identify each participant. When documents were submitted, participants were instructed to use their codes on any documents. The codes were stored in a locked safe in another location.

Researchers at the Center had access to the data and interview and focus group answers as well as demographic information about each participant. When documents

were submitted, participants were instructed to use their codes on any documents. The codes were stored in a locked cabinet in another location for five years.

### **Study Procedures**

PLP members were asked questions in a focus group designed to explore issues of mistrust, previous school experiences, social capital, and cultural capital in urban schools. After the participants answered the question, a researcher had a list of semi-structured questions to ask the participants. After the interviews were conducted for PLP program participants, the weekly reflections and the journal document used to allow PLP members to reflect on their experiences while providing academic assistance, attendance improvement support, and working to improve school culture at Scottwood Elementary School were reviewed. Reflections submitted allowed program participants to describe successes, challenges, surprises, and expectations each week throughout the academic year.

Cooperating teachers participated in a focus group interview. The school-based support staff, school administrators, and the university program administrator who provided direct services to PLP members participated in individual interviews. The unit of analysis consisted of program participants, cooperating teachers, program administrators, and school leaders at Scottwood Elementary School.

In the next section, findings from individual interviews and focus group interviews from program participants, cooperating teachers, community partners, school administrators, and the PLP program administrator were reported. The first section is labeled as promises and is defined as positive experiences or qualities. Challenges

indicate perceived deficiencies or areas in need of improvement. The results section also indicates themes from school administrators and the PLP program administrator.

## Results

What follows are results presented according to stakeholder interviews. The stakeholder interviews are organized as follows: PLP participants' individual interviews and PLP participants' focus group interviews. I was both the researcher and the PLP administrator so I did not conduct PLP member interviews. Next interviews are presented from cooperating teachers, non-academic school-based support staff interviews, Scottwood administrators, the PLP program administrator, and community-based partners. In each stakeholder group, results are divided into promises and challenges. Promises indicate stakeholders perceived positive experiences and effective aspects of the PLP. Challenges included stakeholders' perceived deficiencies or difficulties experienced while participating in the PLP.

The results of the stakeholder groups include emergent themes or superordinate themes. Emergent themes were established based on analyzing initial notes and transcripts concurrently, and new themes were created after similar emergent themes were consolidated through reduction and establishing the new cluster of themes, defined as superordinate themes. The results indicate superordinate themes for PLP participants, cooperating teachers, non-academic school-based support staff, school administrators, and PLP administrators. Emergent themes were listed in the results for school administrators, the PLP program administrator, and community-based partners. The results indicated a wide range of experiences that highlighted nuances that existed at Scottwood Elementary School and explored mistrust, negative capital, relationships, and personal challenges. Each theme is nuanced and the descriptions explore each participant's individual experiences.

## PLP Individual Interviews

The PLP individual superordinate themes included the following: transforming self, mistrust, relationships, and implementation issues. Transforming self includes the subcategories of increased confidence, self-control, and advocacy. Mistrust includes the subcategories of unprofessionalism, unwelcoming environment, and negative perceptions of PLP members. Strong bonds include close connections with children and the building of relationships with community members. The implementations of program initiatives include attendance support, academic support, changing initiatives, and institutional barriers.

The table below, titled *Identifying Recurrent Superordinate Themes*, illustrates recurring superordinate themes for each program participant. This table also describes the superordinate themes reported for each person and determines if that theme is present in more than half of the cases.

Table 1

*Identifying Recurrent Superordinate Themes*

Themes	Recurrent Superordinate Themes						
	Taffy	Maria	Mercedes	Olivia	Keon	Jackie	Rhonda
Transforming self	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mistrust	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Strong bonds	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Programmatic challenges	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

### Promises: Transforming Self

Transforming Self in this study is defined as those changes in a person that allow them to positively modify their behaviors, actions, or thoughts, which then results in higher levels of self-confidence or positive beliefs about oneself. The results indicated

that PLP members experienced professional growth, increased self-control, and confidence, and developed both leadership and advocacy.

**Professional Growth.** Professional Growth is described as the development of skills or knowledge aimed at facilitating PLP members to learn how to interact with others and to develop the transferable skills needed to obtain employment in contexts outside of the PLP. Participants indicated that they matured as professionals. Taffy describes instances where she was able to develop professional skills. In the quote below, she describes her experiences participating in impromptu meetings with community leaders, university officials, and nonprofit executives:

They used to just throw us in meetings in front of these big people, and you just got to talk, and it's like, it was one of my biggest fears cause I'm like I tongue-tied, I don't know what the words to say, and he would just throw us out there, so I came accustomed to it. So now it's like it comes naturally now (T. Brown, personal communication, June 30, 2019).

While Taffy described positive professional experiences, dealing with challenges at Scottwood helped develop communication skills, she also mentioned a negative experience which occurred when members of Scottwood's staff accused PLP members of stealing and hoarding supplies during a community engagement activities aimed at providing needed resources for Berwick's residents. She stated: "But we go, we went through a lot like they too, um, we try to help with like events that they have with giving back to the community, and they tell a boss like, oh, they were stealing (T. Brown, personal communication." June 30, 2019).

Taffy was initially frustrated but believed that she learned coping mechanisms that allowed her to remain professional despite working with individuals who had negative perceptions of PLP members. Also, she stated that she experienced

unprofessionalism regularly and, as a result, believed that school officials did not believe that parents wanted to collaborate with PLP members. Taffy admitted that she often reflected about the low morale at Scottwood:

Before I get in this school, I'd be like, oh my God, I, I wish, um, I just wish the school were more, how can I say this? Um, just say assessable. Like, like why I gotta be so mean? Like we're not here to take over, which is here to help (T. Brown, personal communication, June 30, 2019).

Similar to Taffy, Maria described experiencing nervousness as a result of pressure to complete projects: She stated: "Um, it's just the stress and just trying to put all the ideas together at the last minute (M. Bandera, personal communication, July 1, 2019)."

Despite Maria's challenges with trusted staff members, she expressed positive memories. One of Maria's best moments in PLP was when she participated in a health fair campaign. During the campaign, she learned how to work through challenges and figure out how to handle complicated and last-minute changes.

Maria also learned the importance of teamwork. She elaborated: "Um, it taught us to do teamwork, work with one another, hear people's opinions, understand people's point of view of understanding different points of view, working under pressure, coping with stress, and making modifications" (M. Bandera, personal communication, July 1, 2019).

In the same way as Maria, Rhonda valued her increasing professional skills such as conducting research, distributing goods to Berwick's residents, and establishing programs for youth who attend Scottwood Elementary School. Rhonda described that PLP allowed her to work in an afterschool academic program to develop literacy skills for students who performed significantly below grade level.

Rhonda believed that her experiences in PLP allowed her to understand the importance of being able to comprehend multiple perspectives while completing projects. By participating in program initiatives, Rhonda stated that she learned how to "see things from both sides, the board of education, working as a parent and staff and learn how to move, talk, and be understood" (R. Upchurch, personal communication, July 6, 2019). She also stated that her experiences changed her perspective and allowed her to learn grant writing and how to lead a mentoring program designed to provide support to Scottwood's teenage girls:

"It changed me by just opening up my ideas and just going for it. Like with the grant, as I said before, if I didn't do LISC, I would've never been doing, becoming a young lady. I had it in my mind, but I didn't know how to put it and plan it out" (R. Upchurch, personal communication, July 6, 2019).

**Increased self-control.** Increased self-control refers to the ability to manage one's emotions or behaviors. Taffy's experiences in the PLP allowed her to improve her self-control. Before joining the PLP, she mentioned struggling with maintaining her composure and communicating with people. She learned how to manage herself in a professional work environment. One aspect of her professionalism was learning how to control her temper. She stated:

Like I was different. Um, with the job of Home Depot. It kind of changed me in a way cause I was like a real ghetto hoodlum girl. So in certain settings, and um, I can say, um, this program taught me a lot about professionalism (T. Brown, personal communication, June 30, 2019).

This change in professionalism allowed Taffy to exert self-control over her feelings. Taffy explained how she learned self-control, as well as how to communicate with people, and avoid conflicts both at work and in her personal life:



With the professionalism, like, cause that is my biggest thing. And um, you know, how to talk to people. And, uh, how to let things go and learn how to choose your battles. And, um, I work with that outside of work too as well. So it taught me, I mean, 360, a complete 360 (T. Brown, personal communication, June 30, 2019).

In the same way as Taffy, Maria stated that PLP allowed her to modulate her temper, learn patience, and walk away from tense situations. The following quote describes how her temperament improved:

When we first started my temper, I would go from a zero to a thousand real quick. I mean, I still speak my mind, so that doesn't hold me back. But now I just learned to have patience, not every action needs a reaction, and sometimes it's just better to walk away (M. Bandera, personal communication, July 1, 2019).

Also like Taffy, Keon initially had difficulty maintaining self-control. However, he reported that his experiences in the program taught him how to deal with challenging behaviors, how to become an active listener, and how to improve and widen his parenting skills. He stated that despite experiencing challenges at Scottwood, he learned how to maintain calmness and articulate his concerns. Keon described what he learned as "being able to hold my composure and being able to go with situations responsibly, respectfully and professionally" (K. Harvey, personal communication, July 4, 2019). He also stated that he learned professionalism, resilience, and how to build connections with university officials.

**Developing leadership or advocacy.** Developing leadership or advocacy refers to members leading initiatives and advocating for their personal or collective interests. Mercedes mentioned how her experiences in PLP allowed her to become more confident and a stronger advocate. She explained, "When it comes to advocating for everything, I am fierce. I am fearless" (M. Carter, personal communication July 2, 2019). Mercedes expressed that she learned a lot and valued building both strong relationships and her

leadership skills. She described herself as being closely connected to the students and families of Scottwood as expressed in the following quote: "I am a person of Scottwood's streets (M. Carter, personal communication, July 2, 2019).

As a result of Mercedes' engagement, Scottwood's principal encouraged PLP members to become actively involved in the Parent-Teacher Association meetings, and also encouraged them to explore running for PTA executive office positions. She stated: "Um, so we were, in the beginning, we were asked to go to the PTA meetings" (M. Carter, personal communication, July 2, 2019). As a result of attending meetings, Mercedes was able to listen to families and lead professional development aligned with their needs. Mercedes described how she incorporated parent feedback in her workshops. She stated: "So I had a couponing workshop to show people how to save money. At a PTA meeting, we made sensory toys for autistic kids, and I'm wanting to speak, and I spoke to people about autism and in our community" (M. Carter, personal communication, July 2, 2019).

Similarly to Mercedes, Jackie articulated how she was transformed from being quiet to becoming more vocal about addressing school and community issues:

But I can honestly say before being in promise parent I was a mute. I would just observe and just sit quietly the first year, um, the first year prior to being in promise parents I would just observe. They can't shut me up when it's a problem (J. Howard, personal communication, June 5, 2019).

When describing her first year as an observer, Jackie elaborated on how her experiences allowed her to develop into a person who communicates challenges. In the quote below, she describes instances when she exerted advocacy skills to not only improve the quality of the school but also to address food shortages in the neighborhood:

I've advocated for the school lunch, but um, it's like a lot of red tape that you have to go through." Jackie started advocating for issues such as cleanliness, cafeteria food and attempted to identify family resources, establish a food pantry, and learn how to write grants to establishing a community food pantry. I advocated for the cleanliness of the school. Um, it gets clean when state is coming to the school. I've advocated for, um, families needing more resources (J. Howard, personal communication, June 5, 2019).

Jackie describes one fond memory when she established and participated in a health fair, and how those experiences helped "get her calling (J. Howard, personal communication, June 5, 2019)." In addition to the health fair, Jackie stated that participating in PLP allowed her to be more involved in the community. She enjoyed the community aspect of the PLP and expressed gratitude for her experience.

Like Jackie, Olivia mentioned that her experiences also allowed her to become a leader and a strong advocate. When asked about the benefits of the PLP, she stated: "It actually helps parents to realize their potential" (O. Francis, personal communication, July 3, 2019). Olivia discussed how she learned to express her opinions and frustrations: "I'm more vocal about what I like, what I don't like, where I can improve" (O. Francis, personal communication, July 3, 2019). Olivia also asserted that participating in the program motivated her to develop as a person. She stated: "PLP definitely encouraged me to broaden my horizons as a mother educator, you know, um, to learn more myself and read more" (O. Francis, personal communication, July 3, 2019).

Maria also stated that participating in PLP fostered an attitude improvement that she attributes to allowing her to transform into a confident person and to embrace a positive self-image. She described her experience in the PLP as a beautiful journey and described how she changed:

Your inner self, and you know, having a bond with your kids. And I think me being in a messed up situation that I was, I lost myself during the process, and I

lost that bond I have with my kids. So I'm trying to rebuild that bond between me and my kids (M. Bandera, personal communication, July 1, 2019).

Maria had opportunities to learn how to develop strong relationships by attending professional development workshops aimed at promoting a safe, supportive home and school environment, and learning how to work with vulnerable students. She reported that the workshops helped her with her students and children, and she described that she was able to develop a positive image, experience higher self-esteem, and figure out how to create and sustain healthy relationships.

Like Maria, Keon also described positive experiences and how he developed leadership skills that helped him collaborate with his colleagues to establish a neighborhood community health fair. He stated: "I became a part of, you know, getting to know the mayor. Um, getting to know, um, the superintendent (K. Harvey, personal communication, July 4, 2019)."

Just like Keon, Rhonda also learned how to lead projects during her tenure in the PLP. She participated in professional leadership development that then allowed her to collaborate with community members, identify needs, and propose solutions. Rhonda asserted that she learned how to write grants to improve lives for members in her community. Rhonda attributed her success in the PLP to her leadership training. "Um, if I didn't have PLP, I wouldn't be the PTA treasurer. In PTA Jackie is vice president, Mercedes is president, I'm treasurer and Taffy's secretary so it's like we, we, we combined it and no one never did it before" (R. Upchurch, personal communication, July 6, 2019).

Rhonda believed that participating allowed her to build her knowledge base about pressing issues in the community, understand how to leverage relationships to advocate, develop professionalism, and build strategic relationships.

### **Summary**

All participants reported that experiences in the PLP were transformative. PLP members stated that their experiences allowed them to develop both professional and personal skills. Members built professional skills by interfacing with middle-class professionals from various institutions within Springfield. Their experiences allowed them to develop leadership skills, collaborate to create tailored workshops for Scottwood's families, establish trusting work relationships with other PLP members, and interface with seasoned professionals who had the skills, knowledge, and resources to help them complete PLP member-led initiatives. PLP members learned how to work under pressure, maintain self-control, hold their composure, build confidence, and navigate complex work conditions.

### **Challenges: Negative School Environment**

A negative school environment is indicative of schools that aim to keep parents or caregivers on the periphery of schools. Characteristics of a negative environment include toxic relationships, distrust, skepticism, or contentious relationships between school officials and caregivers. The results indicate that mistrust, unprofessionalism, and feelings of inferiority existed for PLP participants.

**Mistrust.** In this section, mistrust refers to PLP members and school officials viewing each others' actions with skepticism or suspicion. Maria believed that some of the challenges PLP members experienced were due to mistrust that was rooted in some

school staff members being apprehensive about parents' dual roles of parents and employees. She stated: "I think they were intimidated because you're a parent, and now your voice could be heard and because we feel a lot, they're scared (M. Bandera, personal communication, July 1, 2019).

Maria also mentioned that she felt that some school-based staff members were intimidated by PLP members. She stated,

I think they were intimidated because you're a parent, and now your voice could be heard, and because we hear a lot, they're scared. We're going to say something that we're not supposed to say. And even though we feel sometimes things are not done properly and we speak on it, we start seeing that things are getting shut down for us (M. Bandera, personal communication, July 1, 2019).

Just as Mercedes, Olivia initially had positive experiences with members of the school community, however, as she deepened her involvement in school activities, the environment became unwelcoming. Olivia stated, "Staff and school officials no longer wanted valued parents presence (O. Francis, personal communication, July 3, 2019). She continued: "there's always some bureaucracy or some politicking involved in making something very good happen, you know, and instead of giving a reasonable explanation, is this either silence (O. Francis, personal communication, July 3, 2019). Olivia pointed out that school officials resisted parent participation from PLP members who wanted to improve the school. She stated that during the first year of the program, she was highly interested in providing academic support to students but felt that she was not valued, so as a result, she stopped going above and beyond. The following quote highlights her feelings of being unwanted at Scottwood:

I'm not going to go above and beyond in certain situations if I know I'm being used. Your intentions are good, but your presence may not always be welcome because, as parents, you have children in the school, which I do. And you see the real need for improvement that should not be complicated. And when you want to

help, you're often met with resistance or a backlash (O. Francis, personal communication, July 3, 2019).

Keon also agreed that his role as a parent and PLP member contributed to having negative relationships with school staff. In addition, Keon reported an inability to discuss his concerns, which resulted in having a negative relationship with Scottwood's administrators. Keon describes how his concerns were silenced after joining PLP:

Once I became part of PLP, I wasn't seen no more as a parent with a child in the school. I was seen more as a parent employee so that it kind of limited to some of the things that we could say (K Harvey, personal communication, July 4, 2019).

Keon did not verbally express concerns. Instead, he attempted to work through challenges until he felt ignored. Keon also described tensions between parents and the school staff and frustration with response times. In the quote below, Keon recalls a time when he attempted to bring a grievance to the building principal but felt ignored and threatened to speak to members of the Board of Education to resolve his concerns.

I'm gonna say something to the, uh, the principal who was aware of what was going on but couldn't find her. So then when I couldn't find her, I say, you know, I'm gonna take this back to the board, and we need to figure out because the kids was coming into the library on a daily basis (K Harvey, personal communication, July 4, 2019).

Like Keon, Jackie also shared the fact that the complicated relationship made it difficult for her and other PLP members to be fully engaged in the school or to build trusting relationships between PLP members and Scottwood's staff. Jackie's described theme of mistrust was not limited to school officials. She recalled a time when she believed that PLP program administrators attempted to avoid compensating members for time worked. She mentioned that they attempted to "pull the wool over her eyes (J. Howard, personal communication, July 5, 2019) and not pay them for training hours.

Like Jackie, Rhonda also mentioned that issues involving communication and miscommunication were prevalent and observed that negative relationships could have been prevented if PLP members had not been excluded from meetings. She also described other negative experiences such as the principal restricting access to the PLP office, losing office space, and feeling resentment at being underappreciated by Scottwood's staff and PLP program administrators. Rhonda described a time when the building principal limited access to the PLP office: "When an incident happened where we told that we have an office space and the principal sent out an email to me, and another coworker say that we're not allowed in our room from such and such time. (R. Upchurch, personal communication, July 6, 2019). She also mentioned negative relationships with members from the previous PTA:

We had a fight with the PTA, like for it to be turned over, and we were surprised that the teachers had our back and elected us. The school-based staff was not welcoming to the parents. Like they wasn't welcoming. At one point, some of the staff members they were not welcoming, and we will stress these issues to them (R. Upchurch, personal communication, July 6, 2019).

**Unprofessionalism.** Unprofessionalism refers to members engaging in actions contrary to a professional code of conduct for interacting in a school environment. PLP members reported experiencing unprofessionalism, not being able to access adequate resources, and working in a toxic environment. Participants also said that they felt unwelcome and not able to utilize their skillsets due to negative relationships.

Taffy had a negative perception of school-based staff when several suggested that she learn how to respond to school officials who she felt exhibited unprofessional behavior. Taffy verbalized frustration because she felt that PLP members were not trusted. She believed that school officials intentionally limited participation in school



directed activities and that school officials wanted to restrict engagement. She stated, "It's just they want us there to do what they want us to do" (T. Brown, personal communication, June 30, 2019).

Maria also dealt with perceived negativity from Scottwood's staff members. She mentioned that it was difficult for her to obtain materials to complete job responsibilities. She stated: "Um, the rooms wouldn't be available. Um, they couldn't give us copies, you know, will have attitudes. Um, some of the staff wouldn't want to talk to us" (M. Bandera, personal communication, July 1, 2019).

Just like Maria, Mercedes continued to discuss her frustrations of being constrained and her desire for significant changes to take place and her strong need to improve: "I understand the shackles that not public school district has on the school itself. I see where it can, the school itself at Scottwood Elementary as a whole and needs customer service relationship" (M. Carter, personal communication, July 2, 2019).

Mercedes also mentioned that school officials were strategic and shrewd about showing PLP members that they were unwanted:

They were the social cues that you get when you're unwanted. We got them all the dismissiveness we'll ask the question, and then I'm like, you know the faces, I'm sorry, the faces they would give us, um, lurking around our office (M. Carter, personal communication, July 2, 2019).

Similarly, Jackie also mentioned a time that exacerbated negative relationships between PLP members and school staff. She recalled an instance when members who provided attendance improvement support to chronically absent students, were informed that their own children were chronically absent, resulting in those members having to meet a court representative for an attendance hearing:

So we have all these steps that we have to go through to reach out to these parents. Um, this year was about non-parents, um, out of the non-seven of us receive papers to for a hearing because our kids were supposedly absent or, or tardy. We were arguing with them because their data is wrong." She continued, "if we have issues with something, we're letting our voices be heard now (J. Howard, personal communication, July 5, 2019).

Like Mercedes, Olivia added: "It seems like as we were pushing and getting these things done, people got jealous" (O. Francis, personal communication, July 3, 2019). She also described a time when she believed an administrator did not effectively communicate what she felt was an asbestos exposure problem:

Even if you inherited that, you didn't put this asbestos is there, but how you handled it was just very and is very inhumane, and you wonder why parents don't want to do things because her attitude is an administrator stinks (O. Francis, personal communication, July 3, 2019).

Just as Olivia, Rhonda pointed out that members from Scottwood school community ignored PLP members:

But it's like we have a school that's not welcoming and you're trying to give your hand, and you're pushing and pushing, and it's always, oh, okay, whatever. Or get brushed off. Instead of having a conversation about an incident that occurred, the principal reached out via email (R. Upchurch, personal communication, July 6, 2019).

At times, the unwelcoming environment was challenging. It was also challenging to understand what PLP members were able to do and not do made her feel like her skills were not utilized.

**Feelings of inferiority.** Parents described that they were treated like second-class citizens while participating in parent engagement activities. Mercedes also mentioned that she experienced unprofessionalism from Scottwood's staff during the first six months of the program. In describing her experiences, she stated: "The only time they invited us to do stuff is when they needed our help, help cleaning up, help serving. Um,

the first year was one of those where I ain't doing nothing after the first year" (M. Carter, personal communication, July 2, 2019).

Mercedes further elaborated about being treated in an inferior way to Scottwood staff members while volunteering to increase parent engagement. During the parent-teacher event, PLP members were tasked with obtaining signatures to recruit non-engaged parents to participate in classroom and school-wide initiatives, in the quote below, she describes a belittling experience that caused her to dissociate from future volunteer opportunities at Scottwood:

You know, um, helping the signatures, getting, signing sheets and all us were there helping everything and someone comes upstairs and says, when all the teachers are finished eating, y'all can come down and eat. I said, fuck that. I ain't shit. You're not going to treat me like a slave. And then say after master eat you could eat (M. Carter, personal communication, July 2, 2019).

Jackie also felt that school-based staff had a negative perspective of PLP members. She believed that the perspective resulted in school personnel viewing parents as workers instead of parents. She mentioned an example, similar to the experience Keon shared, of how PLP members were perceived:

Like they just see us as workers now. They don't see us as parents. Like, um, for instance, last year we had the literacy carnival, we had to go to different tables, um, like to like a book fair or a regular carnival and we received tickets for each table or event, um, exercise workshop that we did. And like they like target, it's like where did y'all get those tickets from? Y'all stole those tickets (J. Howard, personal communication, July 5, 2019).

Jackie stated that she felt PLP members were isolated and that they were not supported or defended.

## **Summary**

Participants expressed that the work environment at Scottwood was toxic, and spoke extensively about negative relationships. PLP members expressed that

Scottwood's environment made it challenging to establish trusting relationships with school personnel. Members also stated that they were initially interested in collaborating with all members of the community, but they were not given adequate access to supplies and space in order to complete initiatives. Members suspected that school personnel was skeptical of the parents' intention because of the parents' dual role as both parents and employees. Nevertheless, members continued working on community engagement activities. , Mistrust, however, prevented true collaboration while they all worked through goals, as school officials resisted participation. Members felt they had to be silent when they witnessed perceived unethical practices. Instead of school officials collaborating to solve the challenges, members were silenced, had to deal with retribution, were treated as second class citizens, and were used primarily to fill in gaps when the school desperately needed support for a school engagement event.

### **Promises: Bonds**

Strong bonds indicate that parents or caregivers were able to established trusting relationships with students or families in their community. Creating bonds requires that parents or caregivers have similar demographics to those students who participated in the PLP. Bonds suggest that trusting relationships are being formed between PLP members, children, and their families. The results indicate that PLP members developed strong bonds with the children and parents of the Berwick community. Developing close relationships was a recurrent superordinate theme described in individual interviews for four PLP members.

**Strong bonds with children.** PLP members reported building trusting relationships with children in Scottwood, or the Berwick community. Members indicated

that they were able to build strong bonds with children, see them smile, work through students' personal challenges, provide academic assistance, mentor students, and lead community events.

Maria had both positive and negative experiences working with children. Her positive experiences included being recognized and appreciated by students which she describes in the following quote: "I think everything we've done, it's been successful with just coming into the school and seeing the kid smiles and just the kids acknowledging you...seeing children smile, improvements in student attendance" (M. Bandera, personal communication (July 1, 2019). She also acknowledged feeling helpless when she could not solve their challenges:

I got attached to two little girls in the school. They was twins and one of them tried to kill themselves. She ended up being on the fourth floor. And, um, she was trying to throw herself like out the window from our school so she had it all planned out. Like one of the security guards was passing and seeing her so they grabbed her (M. Bandera, personal communication (July 1, 2019).

This experience was traumatizing and challenging; however, Maria refused to give up on her students. She mentioned that despite frustration with school policies and personnel, ~~but~~ her love for the children allowed her to persevere.

Like Maria, Keon mentioned building strong bonds with students. He described his experiences in providing attendance support to chronically absent students. He stated, "I created a very good bond because I was going into class, um, pulling the kids out of class for about forty-five minutes each" (K. Harvey, personal communication, July 4, 2019).

Just like Keon, Mercedes described how her love for students sustained her interest in working in a challenging environment. After experiencing high levels of

frustration with the program and school policies, she focused her attention on her students. She stated, "I'm here for those kids. I'm not here for Springfield Public Schools anymore. I'm here for those kids" (M. Carter, personal communication, July 2, 2019).

Similar to Mercedes, Rhonda also acknowledged that she maintained positive relationships with former students: "Even though they went on to another grade they still, I mean I still know the kids. She stated that her former students consistently request her presence in their classroom. She stated: "They're still coming to me. Miss Rhonda. She also mentioned that students ask the following question: "Why you not in my class?" (R. Upchurch, personal communication, July 6, 2019). She stated, "Another thing is the best thing ever is for you see a kid outside of school at a basketball game or just getting on the bus and they be like, Miss Rhonda, and the parents are like, oh hi. How are you?" (R. Upchurch, personal communication, July 6, 2019).

**Parents and Community.** PLP members established trusting relationships with individuals or groups in the Berwick community. Mercedes communicated and built positive relationships with other parents. "I do the attendance for the whole class. I have the phone number of every teacher, every, every single parent, every single parent in that class knows me" (M. Carter, personal communication, July 2, 2019). Mercedes and Keon both described strong and positive relationships with their students. They reported that their relationships allowed their students to reveal sensitive information about themselves.

Keon also described being close to families and also shared the fact that they were not comfortable with sharing personal information with school officials. He believed that

he was able to build trusting relationships with other parents because he has children who attend Scottwood Elementary School.

By the same token as Keon, Rhonda believed that participating in a community leaderships program allowed her to develop close relationships with community members. Rhonda affirmed that she valued learning how to identify needs in her community and how to access resources. Rhonda credited building a positive relationship with her teacher through communication, adjusting her style, and being dedicated to learning how to provide academic support to students.

### **Summary**

PLP members established strong bonds with each other, with targeted students, members of the Scottwood community, and PLP cooperating partners. Some of the bonds that PLP members created resulted from providing academic and attendance improvement support. In addition to bonds with their assigned students, PLP members built strong bonds with other children in their classes. While PLP members established positive bonds, they also reported frustration and disappointment after they established personal relationships.

### **Challenges: Program Initiatives**

Program initiatives include parent participation activities aimed to provide parents opportunities to participate in school-based events, activities, or initiatives aimed at improving educational or social outcomes for members of the school community. The results indicate that PLP members implemented attendance initiatives, academic initiatives but also experienced issues when program priorities shifted between the first and second years of the program.

Challenges in implementing program initiatives were a superordinate theme for five members. Participants reported difficulties such as implementing attendance initiatives for chronically absent students and providing academic support with students who performed significantly behind grade level.

**Implementing attendance initiatives.** The implementation of attendance initiatives included PLP members' participation in activities to decrease chronic absenteeism at Scottwood Elementary School. Taffy mentioned that ineffective systems made obtaining accurate records extremely challenging. “That attendance piece, let me just tell you that it sucked.” (T. Brown, personal communication, June 30, 2019). She further elaborated, “And it was just a disaster because the teachers wasn't doing their part is putting attendance in at the proper time it wasn't getting to where it needed to be (T. Brown, personal communication, June 30, 2019).

Like Taffy, Olivia mentioned other challenges in implementing other initiatives. While participating in an attendance improvement program, she experienced challenges contacting parents and families because PLP members did not have adequate space or a phone to call parents who had chronically absent children. Additionally, Olivia mentioned that she was not able to maximize her ability to provide adequate support in literacy initiatives.

Like Olivia, Jackie mentioned challenges in working to improve student attendance. She stated, "It was a struggle at first because they wanted it done a specific way, but we didn't understand like exactly what to do. We're constantly told like you're not doing the tracking sheet correctly (J. Howard, personal communication, July 5, 2019). She felt frustrated when issues were brought to the program director, as he was often



dismissive of their concerns. Jackie recalled a time when she mentioned a concern and was dismissed with no explanation only the words: "Thanks, but we can't do that" (J. Howard, personal communication, July 5, 2019).

Just like Jackie, Rhonda also pointed out that implementing program initiatives was difficult during the first year of the program because she was unfamiliar with the literacy curriculum. Subsequently, during the second year, when she was able to have a better grasp of the curriculum, she observed multiple students displaying behavioral challenges. Rhonda shared that many students in her class expressed behavioral and academic challenges.

Some of them have, um, a behavior problem, and they haven't even been evaluated yet, and she's like, okay, they have to get evaluated. It is so many things that she's doing the stress, and academic performance made her realize that while the teacher had a parent and paraprofessional in the classroom, additional support was needed. (R. Upchurch, personal communication, July 6, 2019).

Rhonda also believed that expectations were unclear and that the lack of clarity resulted in having to continuously adapt to changes. She felt connected to the children, learned how to motivate students but expressed difficulties in improving attendance. Challenges consisted of both barriers that students faced as well as the difficulty of contacting parents of chronically absent children. Another problem she described as the lack of tools needed to support families who revealed transportation challenges. Rhonda recalled a conversation with a frustrated parent of a chronically absent student: "You said you was going to help me with transportation. I need bus tickets. My kid's been absent three days now. I have no way to get the child there" (R. Upchurch, personal communication, July 6, 2019).

This shows that while Rhonda believed that she was able to identify the reason for the absences, university policies and bureaucratic challenges prevented her from implementing the initiative.

**Implementing academic initiatives.** Implementing academic initiatives is defined as providing literacy support to students who performed at the bottom quartile on benchmark learning assessment, a tool used to determine student's reading levels. Taffy experienced challenges providing academic support to her students. She stated, "Like some of the kids didn't know their alphabets coming into kindergarten and didn't know how to spell their name" (T. Brown, personal communication, June 30, 2019). Taffy also mentioned that behavior challenges, communicating with parents, and obtaining accurate attendance information exacerbated challenges in the classroom. In the quote below, she describes her challenges with attempting to contact parents who had chronically absent students:

So trying to call them and them cussing you out and them, them not answering. We used to go to the office and an of our scholars, what they here today was they late today and every time we go to the office they was like, oh, I can't, I'm busy. I'm busy. I'm busy (T. Brown, personal communication, June 30, 2019).

Similar to Taffy, Olivia stated, "we were trained to be better literacy instructors and have a more well-rounded understanding of how to help our students, but we weren't able to actively do that because I wasn't matched with the right teacher" (O. Francis, personal communication, July 3, 2019). She elaborated further, "If we were involved in the planning process of all things like that, yeah, it would have been more effective" (O. Francis, personal communication, July 3, 2019).

Jackie also described challenges in implementing program initiatives and described the school climate as generally chaotic, resulting in difficulty providing literacy support to struggling students:

We were working in the after school program with the 21st century. That was a chaotic experience. I quit, um, from the after school program. I didn't want to do it. I didn't feel that we had a fifth of the group, um, like the kids, were uncontrolled (J. Howard, personal communication, July 5, 2019).

This suggests that multiple challenges caused Jackie to struggle with providing appropriate academic support to students who performed below grade level. Jackie stated: "I may have had two, two kids last year that were below very below average, but this year all of my kids are below average and uncontrolled" (J. Howard, personal communication, July 5, 2019). One challenge that she faced as a success was trying to figure out appropriate next steps to deal with complex challenges that students faced.

**Shifting program priorities.** This describes differences in program structure between the first and second year of PLP. Taffy expressed concern that changing program initiatives caused problems. She mentioned an example of just one of the many changes she experienced while participating in a PLP led literacy initiative:

Changes we have them reading essays and timing them for a minute and things like that. Like they just kept throwing new stuff into the mix when it was just whenever, just whatever. In the program, everything is always unsure is like all we doing tutoring this day, are we doing enrichment? Everything was changing (T. Brown, personal communication, June 30, 2019).

Taffy mentioned that during the first year of the PLP, participants had more flexibility to participate in community engagement events. However, during the second year, the focus shifted to Scottwood's priorities, such as collecting data and focusing on students. Instead of having more opportunities to participate in community outreach activities and additional job training, this resulted in neglecting parent development.

## Summary

PLP members expressed challenges in working on program initiatives. Members described difficulties in providing attendance improvement. Some of the challenges mentioned included connecting with parents who had chronically absent children, obtaining accurate attendance information from school personnel and the online attendance database, organizational issues, unclear attendance tracking expectations, as well as barriers such as not having access to phones or a consistent space to call parents. Additionally, members shared their disappointment that families expressed their needs, but university procedures and bureaucratic challenges complicated the initiative. Also, PLP members were not able to utilize their literacy skills due to classroom issues such as chaos, behavioral challenges, and constant changes with assigned students.

## Focus Group Interviews Results

The PLP focus groups included the following superordinate themes: growth and development, negative school environment, and organizational challenges. Growth and development include individual growth and group growth, negative school environment includes unprofessionalism and mistrust, and organizational challenges include changing program initiatives, neglecting parent interests, and inadequate support.

The table below titled *Identifying Recurrent Superordinate Themes* illustrates recurring superordinate themes for the focus group interview. This table describes the superordinate themes which were reported and determines if it is present in more than half of the cases.

Table 2

### *Identifying Recurrent Superordinate Themes*

Themes	Recurrent Superordinate Themes						
	Taffy	Maria	Mercedes	Olivia	Keon	Jackie	Rhonda
Growth and development	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Negative school environment	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Organizational issues	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No

### **Promises: Individual and Group Growth**

Participants indicated personal growth as a superordinate theme. PLP participants reported individual and collective growth, including becoming active listeners, gaining confidence, developing as professionals, working collectively, and learning how to advocate for their interests.

**Individual growth.** Individual growth refers to PLP members believing that they were capable of completing tasks. Taffy mentioned that her experiences in PLP allowed her to develop professional skills and collaborate with professionals who had diverse backgrounds and experiences, "I can say that, um, I grew a lot in this program. I think we all would agree, but I'm just, my biggest thing that I, that, and I'm grateful for learning than just being professional (T. Brown, personal communication, May 24, 2019).

Just like Taffy, Keon also mentioned that PLP allowed him to grow as a parent. He stated, "It made me understand, you know, sometimes when you're teaching your own child, you're parents, but going through a program called the PLP and doing different, um, professional developments" (K. Henry, personal communication, May 24, 2019). He continued, "and made me understand my kids in a different way as far as, um, there are difficulties in school, um, disciplining them, stuff like that" (K. Henry, personal communication, May 24, 2019). He went on to say, "I mean, it's, it's so many things that

we could go on as parents and say, this should have been better, but it's so many things that we could say parents that helped us to grow" (K. Harvey, personal communication, May 24, 2019).

Jackie echoed Keon and stated, "PLP opened opportunities for me to grow professionally from where I began as a part of the Greater Springfield Leadership Council. ELA training gave you the opportunity to grow as a community leader and advocate within my neighborhood" (J. Howard, personal communication, May 24, 2019). Other PLP graduates shared the personal growth described by Keon and Jackie.

**Group growth.** Group growth refers to PLP members' belief that they can work collaboratively to accomplish their goals. Olivia discussed how the program allowed members to grow collectively: She described her feelings of growing empowerment despite interfacing with challenging school personnel.

Even in situations or instances where we were made to try to feel devalued collectively or personally. I think this helped to empower us more as parents to see really that your job as a parent really stretches further than even your own kids (O. Francis, personal communication, May 24, 2019).

Like Olivia, Mercedes also mentioned personal and group growth. Despite having a negative perception of program administrators, she believed that PLP members experienced growth. She stated: "We are better people than we were last year, but the program itself is not a better program" (M. Carter, personal communication, May 24, 2019). She described how participating in the PLP allowed her to develop strong community relationships. Mercedes stated, "Before I started with PLP, I was in my own silo. I just pretty much stayed in my lane when it came to dealing with schools and dealing with the community" (M. Carter, personal communication, May 24, 2019) Olivia also mentioned how PLP helped the group to understand their value and potential. She

continued, "This program kind of helped us to even think collectively where before you might've thought before yourself or just for your children, but we started to think how does it affect my colleagues" (O. Francis, personal communication, May 24, 2019).

Rhonda also explained how PLP members were able to grow and collaborate to improve their lives. She stated, "Um, how we became a team and it formed a family and a unity to actually go out there and do these workshops and understand how the staff work in the community work and help us uplift each other good and bad" (R. Upchurch, personal communication, May 24, 2019). Olivia attributes PLP program success to group members "our own self-determination in our own will and fire that this works" (O. Francis, personal communication, May 24, 2019). She continued: "You know, because of our love and interest for our children, for the school. But you know, I don't feel that our value and our worth is really appreciated aside from the statistics that we may provide" (O. Francis, personal communication, May 24, 2019). These statements suggest that while PLP members had negative perspectives of the members of the Scottwood community, they collaborated and provided support to each other and were able to experience growth.

### **Summary**

Participants indicated that the PLP allowed them to grow as individuals and as a collective group. Members learned how to act like professionals, understand the importance of being actively involved in their communities, and develop organizational and advocacy skills. Members stated that while they experienced multiple challenges as members of the program, they grew without help from the PLP program. Members also learned the importance of connecting to others in their community, maintain positive

relationships, learn systems, and remain determined to accomplish their goals.

Additionally, they were able to grow as a collective group by engaging in multiple projects that required them to interface with people with different backgrounds. This interaction eventually helped them become strong community leaders and advocates committed to improving their neighborhood.

### **Challenges: Negative School Environment|**

A deficit-based approach to parent participation is one that aims to keep parents or caregivers on the periphery of schools. Characteristics of a negative environment include toxic relationships, distrust, skepticism, or contentious relationships between school officials and caregivers. My results indicate that PLP participants reported experiencing unprofessionalism and mistrust.

**Unprofessionalism.** Unprofessionalism refers to engaging in actions or activities contrary to the norms of a healthy school environment. Taffy mentioned multiple unprofessional encounters with Scottwood's staff and admitted to reverting to using unprofessional language when she communicated with ignorant staff members. She stated,

For me to think that you're a professional and a vice principal if they act like you, somebody on around them chicken on the street, it's like, okay, this is what you want. Let me give it to this cause I'm not playing with you (T. Brown, personal communication, May 24, 2019).

The quote above suggests that Taffy assumed that school officials maintained a sense of professionalism.

Similarly to Taffy, Olivia also suggested that PLP administrators experienced challenges with school officials. She stated, "Like even when Malik or Aaron would try to advocate for certain things, they're met with such backlash" (O. Francis, personal



communication, May 24, 2019). In addition, she also discussed challenges implementing a new program and how the unprofessional environment at Scottwood stifled progress:

It's a pilot program, so they have to do the go along to get along for the long term interest of seeing this, you know, seeing it through and knowing that at the end of it, right at this first half that certain things didn't come into full fruition. Not because they didn't try, but because of the environment it was in the school administration that they had to deal with (O. Francis, personal communication, May 24, 2019).

Like Olivia, Maria also believed that other school community members had bad intentions and deliberately attempted to provoke PLP members. She stated, "I don't let get the best of me, so that gets most of the staff knows how to trigger to get us to that point" (M. Bandera, personal communication, May 24, 2019).

**Mistrust.** Mistrust refers to treating PLP members with suspicion because of their dual roles as parents and employees. Maria also mentioned experiencing challenges due to the dual roles as parents and employees of members. She stated: "I guess because to a certain extent they see us workers, but at the end of the day, they see us as parents and we know a little bit too much, and they don't want us to talk" (M. Bandera, personal communication, May 24, 2019).

Like Maria, Rhonda observed that school officials attempted to utilize PLP members to participate in activities when short staffed or needing last-minute support. She stated:

First, they didn't want us involved. They didn't want to help. They said, no, no, no, no, no. We got all the volunteers. Then at the last minute they volunteer, they come through, they asked for our help to help. I got bags and tons of donations of clothes. I mean with tags, brand name, and everything. Um, so our parents, we helped, and they accused us of taking food and stuff and coats (R. Upchurch, personal communication, May 24, 2019).

## Summary

Participants indicated that they interfaced with school-based staff members who were unprofessional and who expressed a high level of mistrust. Members attributed mistrust as arising from their dual roles of parents of children at Scottwood as well as being university employees. The competing responsibilities made it difficult for them to navigate challenging circumstances. Participants also mentioned that PLP administrators did not provide them with adequate support to handle challenges and that the overall negative environment at Scottwood made it difficult for them to complete initiatives.

### **Challenges: Organizational Issues**

Organizational issues include communication, PLP member development, PLP member accountability, and establishing and implementing program priorities with fidelity. The results indicate that changing program initiatives, neglecting parent interests, and inadequate support were challenges.

PLP members reported organizational challenges with program initiatives. During the 2017-2018 academic year, members reported that they were able to participate in community engagement efforts and believed that PLP program administrators provided support. However, during the 2018-2019 academic year, PLP participants reported changing program initiatives, neglecting parent interests, and inadequate support.

**Changing program initiatives.** Changing program initiatives refers to the shift of program priorities from being parent focused on community engagement activities to the school's priorities in the second year of the PLP. Taffy mentioned issues with starting program initiatives saying, "Many challenges, not only with our things but with, you know, the program itself and a lot of things we couldn't get, you know, situated" (T.

Brown, personal communication, May 24, 2019) Jackie described changes between Year I and Year II: "The first year we did more in the community and in this school, but, um, it wasn't organized or structured. This second year they changed the program all-around" (J. Howard, personal communication, May 24, 2019). She continued,

Basically this year it was really all of what the school needed, and the focus was on what the school would want it and need it and not per se, uh, the parents like this is supposed to be a program to help the parents grow professionally and within your family and everything like that. But basically to me, it was just on what the school wanted (J. Howard, personal communication, May 24, 2019).

Olivia echoed Jackie's discontent with the program's shift stating, "The Center is fighting for numbers because if they don't get the numbers, they don't get the grants" (O. Francis, personal communication, May 24 2019).

Just like Olivia, Taffy also expressed disappointment with the program restructuring during the second year. She reminisced about providing academic support to students in Booster, an afterschool program aimed at improving literacy skills for low performing students at Scottwood Elementary School and shared, "I felt with that Booster, we were able to really give some progress done and track progress that way. Jackie also agreed that the Booster program was beneficial (J. Howard, personal communication, May 24, 2019).

Jackie and Taffy maintained that the afterschool tutoring program should have continued to be an integral component of the PLP. Taffy expressed frustration when she learned that PLP members were not able to provide afterschool academic support. She also expressed discontent that the tutoring program was not a component of the program during the second year. She stated: "We were just hoping that they were going to incorporate the Booster program this year, but it didn't work (T. Brown, personal

communication, May 24, 2019). "I felt like we should have been working with the kids more academically than even dealing with attendance" (T. Brown, personal communication, May 24, 2019)

After Taffy revisited the challenges she experienced with the Booster tutoring program, she felt that more academic support should have been provided to students. She also believed that providing attendance support should have been a high priority. In the following quote, Mercedes discussed working with students who demonstrated behavioral challenges:

With the afterschool program, I have five very hard kids. Like they were like if I was a mom was, they wouldn't get beat everyday kids, and they went from, from their teacher hearing, they went from turning in no homework to him to give him homework every day (M. Carter, personal communication, May 24, 2019).

Mercedes mentioned a strong objection to the PLP structure during the second year. In the following quote, she describes the change: "This year it was about numbers. It was research. It was we needed to prove, and really need data" (M. Carter, personal communication, May 24, 2019). Mercedes continued, "They said what we did last year, we failed, and they will say they didn't say it and they set it in a meeting that we failed last year and it became about data and so when it did that, most of this I'm done, I disconnected" (M. Carter, personal communication, May 24, 2019). Mercedes mentioning that during the second year, everything became about data suggests that she believed that program administrators did not value member contributions or student academic progress.

**Neglecting parent interests.** Neglecting parent interests refers to parents believing that they were no longer able to pursue their personal and career interests. Olivia also expressed disappointment with program changes: She described the change

from focusing on parents to neglecting their interests: "We first started as to helping parents really reach their professional or educational goals. We thought it was directly tied into what we were doing with the school this year. It was more focused on the school's needs" (O. Francis, personal communication, May 24, 2019).

Like Olivia, Keon also stated that PLP program administrators neglected their interests and were irresponsible. He pointed out: "They lose our paperwork like welfare, they don't listen, and they go with the numbers for, they listen to us" (K Harvey, personal communication, May 24, 2019) Rhonda blamed organizational challenges in Year II on gaps in parenting "It's not clicking. It was just because they're not in our situation and our fact, we are parents, and they're not" (R. Upchurch, personal communication, May 24, 2019). Jackie mentioned that during Year II, PLP members did not receive adequate support. She stated: "This year here definitely have to lock in a neglected job. I felt like they should, should've been hands-on more" (J. Howard, personal communication, May 24, 2019). These organizational challenges made PLP members believe that their personal development was no longer a priority, and as such, their behaviors changed.

**Inadequate support.** Inadequate support refers to insufficient support needed for PLP members to complete their literacy and attendance improvement initiatives. Keon shared that during the second year of the program, he did not receive adequate support, and as a result, he created his own program to improve middle school attendance for chronically absent students. He stated:

I built my own blueprint of the seventh and eighth-graders. That's my biggest disappointment with Malik, and Mr. Williams is because everybody else had that support system. They had teachers to go to...they had everything. I didn't have none of that on the higher grades (K. Harvey, personal communication, May 24, 2019).

Keon's sentiment of not receiving adequate support from program administrators was shared by Mercedes: She stated:

This year they let us down because they didn't support us. Yes, last year they supported us. They were here for us. They said they would help us. They did. The only thing they did was give us a job. That's basically last year, and it was a little bit more about building us as parents (M. Carter, personal communication, May 24, 2019).

Mercedes' belief that parents were no longer supported contributed to her being less involved in volunteering at Scottwood. She believed that program administrators were not committed to members' personal growth. Like Mercedes, Maria stopped performing tasks that were unrelated to her job responsibilities because she felt exploited. She stated that during the first year of the program, PLP members typically accepted members' requests to volunteer for activities. She stated, "Last year it was like yes, yes, yes, no problem. This year we know boundaries. I know. So basically, one hand washes another one" (M. Bandera, personal communication, May 24, 2019).

Maria's perspective on volunteering shifted as she became acclimated to the school. She stated: "one hand washes another." Maria expressed that she was willing to volunteer and provide extra support, however, the group wanted reciprocity and respect.

### **Summary**

PLP members reported that the shift in the program between Year I and Year II, made them feel that program officials were not concerned with providing professional development training or the level of adequate support needed to complete initiatives successfully. Instead, the shift was away from parents' priorities and toward school priorities such as confining parents to classrooms. This caused members to mentally

disassociate from multiple program components because they felt that PLP became narrowly focused on research.

Changes to the literacy and attendance initiatives between Year I and Year II also caused parents to detach from the program. As a result of parents providing support earlier in the academic day, they were not able to participate in a parent-led after school literacy initiative. Also, they objected to maintaining accurate attendance data for chronically absent students and submitting their paperwork consistently. As such, they felt that the PLP was too structured and did not incorporate their definition of success. This resulted in parents strongly objecting to the quality of the program and expressing dissatisfaction and a desire to restructure the program in order to incorporate their educational goals, career goals, and community engagement projects.

### **Cooperating Teachers**

Cooperating teachers included the following themes: PLP members as assets and organizational challenges. PLP as assets included members creating strong bonds with children and PLP members as valuable resources. Organizational challenges included the PLP structure and inconsistencies with member attendance.

The table below illustrates recurring superordinate themes for the teacher interviews. This table describes the superordinate themes reported and determines if they are present in more than half of the cases.

Table 3

*Identifying Recurrent Superordinate Themes*

	Recurrent Superordinate Themes										
	Badger	Anderson	Carpenter	Mickens	Cooper	Martin	Nelson	Radcliff	Peters	Nichols	Harvey
Organizational issues	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Assets	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

**Promises: PLP Members as Assets**

PLP members have the required dispositions, knowledge, and skills to be valuable resources in their classroom. The results indicate that members as assets include strong bonds with children, as well as showcasing members as valuable resources

**Strong bonds with children.** PLP members established trusting relationships with children at Scottwood or in the Berwick community. Ms. Martin, a participating teacher who worked with Rhonda for two years, said that Rhonda provided extensive support to children and their families. She believed that Rhonda was an invaluable asset. She stated: "Like, um, you know, Ms. Rhonda is a part of this classroom. Um, Ms. Rhonda, was really sweet. She would bring up things to the classroom like if we were having a holiday party, she would come in to have little bags to them." Um, she would sometimes stop by for like fun Friday, and she also like had relationships with some of the parents" (M. Martin, personal communication, September 18, 2019). Ms. Martin pointed out that in addition to Rhonda completing required tasks, she often volunteered and extended herself to the greater community



Ms. Cooper also valued the PLP members. She stated that Ms. Olivia's presence was welcomed, however, she also pointed out that Olivia's late transition to the class made it difficult for Ms. Cooper to have an orderly class. Ms. Cooper also stated that Olivia built bonds with students and provided them with incentives. She stated: "So like, and it'll be a child that was disrespecting her, and because they spell cat, which was nice of her, she would give them like a piece of chocolate" (M. Cooper, personal communication, September 18, 2019). This suggests that Ms. Cooper and Olivia had inconsistent student management strategies.

Ms. Cooper also mentioned that other parents had strong bonds with students. She mentioned Rhonda and Keon who she observed being actively involved. She stated: "you know, I actually still to this day have a relationship with the Upchurch's and stuff like that. So I will say like I do, I did see them actively engaged in the school culture and the community" (M. Cooper, personal communication, September 18, 2019).

Ms. Badger also agreed that her PLP member was an asset to her students and the Scottwood community. She stated: "Um, it was a pretty positive experience. I liked the fact that there was another set of hands in my room, and I liked the fact that my kids developed such a relationship with the parent that was in my room" (M. Badger, personal communication, September 19, 2019). She also mentioned a challenge: "I mean, I think the biggest challenge was her transitioning out of the room because my kids got attached" (M. Badger, personal communication, September 19, 2019). These statements suggest that teachers had an overwhelmingly positive perspective of the parents providing support in their classrooms.

**PLP members as valuable resources.** PLP members were valuable members of the classroom community. Cooperating teachers mentioned that PLP members were assets who provided not only academic but also attendance improvement support for their students. They stated that the parents successfully completed tasks, were dedicated to the program, and that some parents also provided strong academic support to students. Additionally, cooperating teachers reported that parents were accountable, helpful and that several were self-starters.

Ms. Carpenter mentioned that Taffy was able to complete tasks:

The competency level like I literally would explain the task or what I wanted to Taffy one time an old she was off and running like okay I tested this kid, they got this, and I'm like, wow. Like, I didn't expect her to be like so good on point (M. Carpenter, personal communication, September 19, 2018).

Ms. Carpenter's statement described Taffy as having high aptitude and noticeable dedication. Ms. Badger stated that Mercedes provided strong academic support to her students. She said: "Having Mercedes in my classroom every afternoon was like, you can trust somebody else with your babies, and they're gonna do a good job (M. Badger, personal communication, September 19, 2018)." She continued: "So to see her thinking like a teacher was awesome because it wasn't like I was having to hold her hand" (M. Badger, personal communication, September 19, 2018).

Ms. Cooper also stated that Olivia was able to provide adequate academic support to her students. In describing Olivia Ms. Cooper said, "She was very responsible, you know, she held herself accountable. She was, you know, very competent in what she was supposed to do" (M. Cooper personal communication, September 18, 2019). Ms. Nelson affirmed that Jackie was an asset to her classroom. "My parent was on time. She was reliable. She was well qualified to help me out in that small group. She knows

exactly what to do with that." "Sometimes, we stay a little late. So we can discuss what we're planning for the next day" (M. Nelson personal communication, September 18, 2019). As such, cooperating teachers believed that PLP members had the capacity to provide meaningful support to students.

Ms. Nelson also described Jackie's commitment and patience with children. She stated: "Oh, she never got frustrated even with the low ones, but sometimes, I be like, I'm walking away." She continued, "She even came back this year even though she's not working. The parents, you know, communicated but probably better with her because she was a parent and the teacher and believed her more than I guess me" (M. Nelson, personal communication, September 18, 2019). This shows that Ms. Nelson believed that Jackie's status as a parent allowed her to exhibit dispositions needed to connect to students and families.

### **Challenges: Organizational Issues**

Organizational challenges include communication, PLP member development, PLP member accountability, and establishing and implementing program priorities with fidelity. The results indicate two themes: organizational challenges and inconsistencies with member attendance.

**PLP structure.** Cooperating teachers were unaware of structures, features, and scheduling activities for PLP members. They observed that PLP members needed additional literacy training and that they did not have sufficient time for joint collaboration with parents to strategically plan before delivering instruction to students.

Ms. Cooper mentioned an issue with the structure of the PLP program because parents reported to the classroom after the beginning of the school day. "The only

negative aspect of the program, not Ms. Francis, is that it was a distraction in the classroom because of inconsistency, like in the sense that you're coming in later than the start" (M. Cooper, personal communication, September 18, 2018). She also stated, "I would say for me was, um, for me, I had a large class last year and just having her again, kids outside of the ones that had the attendance issues and want it to work with her" (M. Cooper, personal communication, September 18, 2018).

Ms. Peters also expressed challenges with the PLP program structure. She pointed out that PLP did not provide parents with enough training to improve literacy outcomes for struggling students and stated: "Some parents have difficulty with the actual content and performing the activities (M. Peters, personal communication, September 18, 2018). She continued, "I think they were being pulled in too many directions" (M. Peters, personal communication, September 18, 2018).

Like Ms. Cooper, Ms. Radcliff mentioned program challenges. She admitted that she did not understand the objectives of the program and stated:

I don't know what the goal of ELA for them was. I thought they were in here to learn techniques, to work with the students intimately, to develop relationships, and there was no consistent presence of our particular parents both times in the classroom (M. Radcliff, personal communication, September 18, 2019).

In the same manner, as Ms. Radcliff, Ms. Peters also felt that parents did not have time to collaborate with teachers in advance and observed, "They're not part of a prep period or even a five or ten minutes later we're like, hey, this is the breakdown of our day" (M. Peters, personal communication, September 18, 2018). Mr. Harvey also believed that PLP members were not able to provide adequate literacy support because the program schedule was not aligned with the literacy schedule. He stated:

The wasted time last year is different than this year. We went to lunch, and then we came back to math where for the majority of it we, they just sat and watched us cause we do work doing group work and then they were gone. So we didn't exploit that resource as much as we could (M. Harvey, personal communication, September 18, 2018).

Mr. Harvey's observations suggested that during the first year of the PLP, members were not effectively utilized because parents were not in the classes while students were engaged in literacy small group activities. He further elaborated, "and kind of you have to be able to really tune into the class because we don't, and were not meeting them at eight in the morning to discuss the plan" (M. Harvey, personal communication, September 18, 2018). While he underscored the importance, he acknowledged that getting a parent to report early and tune into the classroom can be challenging.

Like Mr. Harvey, Ms. Badger, who spoke highly of the PLP also pointed out that her PLP members' schedule was not in alignment with her classroom needs. Ms. Badger stated:

She was only in my room in the afternoon. Whereas everybody else who had a parent last year, they were there in the morning, and that was the time where I really could've use that person to pull these kids back to do certain skills (M. Badger, personal communication, September 19, 2019).

Ms. Badger also described an organizational challenge that occurred because a parent assigned to her classroom worked for approximately two weeks left abruptly without an explanation. She stated:

"I had a parent for about two weeks, and then she left the program, then I didn't have a parent anymore. So that was kind of hard too cause it was like my kids had already kind of gotten to know her, and it was like, it would've been just having a little consistency (M. Badger, personal communication, September 19, 2019).

**Inconsistencies with member attendance.** Mismatches in cultural capital between parents and teachers were sometimes reflected in expectation gaps between the two. In certain instances, parents believed that they were exempt from classroom responsibilities while they performed community engagement activities. However, teachers expected that these parents would fulfill their original parental responsibilities while involved in new community engagement activities. In this case, the teachers' expectations were motivated by more middle-class notions of adult responsibility. This did not necessarily, make sense to parents, who were more influenced by their personal and professional interests. Parents felt that if they fulfilled their community engagement responsibilities, they were adhering to reasonable expectations about professionalism.

The second example of mismatch in cultural capital could be found in parents who believed that they met their professional responsibilities by notifying their cooperating teacher that they would be late or absent. While teachers reported that they appreciated the notification, they articulated the opinion that PLP members were not always reliable because they were chronically late. In their worldview, it was not enough to explain when one was going to be late. It was necessary to consistently arrive on time, no matter what was happening in one's personal life. PLP members' deviation from this middle-class norm was considered unreasonable and highly problematic. However, PLP members did not believe that their attendance issues hindered them from providing adequate academic and attendance support to students. In their view, it made sense to attend to personal emergencies quickly in order to keep problems from getting worse.

PLP members were often absent or tardy. Ms. Carpenter also expressed inconsistencies. She believed that Taffy performed well at the beginning of the program, but her attendance dwindled:

"It started out amazing, and I think I kind of started out on a very high note with PLP and then kind of just dwindled down Taffy started to fall off in the end because she's like, well, none of these are parents show up cause she was the only one who was showing up with fidelity" (M. Carpenter, personal communication, September 19, 2019)."

Ms. Carpenter also believed that Taffy began to make excuses for missing work, "So she would tell me, okay, I have an appointment today and the next day it was I have this, so I couldn't even be mad at her cause I'm just like, well if nobody else she was, she was literally like the last woman standing" (M. Carpenter, personal communication, September 19, 2019).

Like Ms. Carpenter, Ms. Martin expressed a challenge with her cooperating PLP parent. She mentioned that while Rhonda had positive relationships with students and families, her attendance was sporadic which presented challenges. She stated,

I do think they've benefited from working with her. Only thing was we couldn't really plan for her to be there because I wasn't sure if she was going to come. I plan something for Tuesday and Thursday, I have no, you know, there was some of there, it's kind of guide them along the way. So it was just kind of uncertainty, you know. So I kind of stopped planning. (M. Martin, personal communication, September 18, 2019).

Ms. Martin, who was a cooperating teacher with Ms. Nelson expressed similar sentiments about Rhonda's attendance. She stated,

It's like, you know, she's coming here after ten, so do you plan some time so we can't really plan anything for them. The only problem was that she wasn't in the classroom every day. I can't even tell the kids that Ms. Rhonda's going to be here. Like don't get up and go to or you know what I mean? How can you schedule when she's coming (M. Nelson, personal communication, September 19, 2018).

In the same manner, like Ms. Nelson and Ms. Martin, Ms. Mickens believed that Maria's presence was inconsistent and that her presence was not valuable. She stated,

"Like I don't even really remember having her that much just because I don't really have that many experiences with her being here for a long time. We didn't really have a relationship, but I kind of felt like it could have been more my fault because of me feeling like almost like resentful that she didn't show up all the time for the kids and for work. I mean, I knew she had a lot of personal issues and stuff. I think consistency was, was a big thing. I really didn't see any to be honest." (M. Mickens, personal communication, September 18, 2019).

While Ms. Mickens expressed that Maria's presence was not valuable, Ms. Radcliff mentioned consistency challenges with her parents during the first year of the PLP. She stated: "The first year she wasn't here on a regular basis just because there were meetings and we were working out the kinks programs. It wasn't a reliable presence, and yeah, it wasn't a consistent presence in the room." As a result, she believed that they were unable to effectively plan, "We couldn't effectively plan for something for them to do" So, we eventually stopped just planning" (M. Radcliff, personal communication, September 18, 2019).

Not having parents as a reliable presence in both years of the program was a factor described by most cooperating teachers. During the first year of the PLP, they reported that parents' involvement in school-wide initiatives and other community-based programs took reliable time from classrooms, and during the second year of the program, modifications were made to the program structure. Also, PLP member presence in classes was unreliable.

## **Summary**

All cooperating teachers mentioned that PLP members were positive assets to their classrooms. They mentioned that PLP members supported them with program



initiatives, provided support to their targeted students and the overall classroom. Additionally, parents were viewed as assets and were able and competent to provide academic assistance to struggling students. Also, they stated that parents had high expectations for the students and exceeded their expectations when they provided support. However, while teachers believed that teachers were assets, they reported that organizational challenges such as not knowing members' schedules were problematic. Also, inconsistencies with PLP members reporting to work on time posed significant challenges.

Cooperating teachers indicated additional challenges such as needing to change the program start time to better align with the school schedule, issues with having parents assigned to provide academic support to students who are chronically absent, but instead, believing that non-chronically absent students who performed below grade level needed support. Other issues reported included parents not understanding how to provide adequate classroom support, parents not receiving enough professional development, and parents engaging in too many community activities.

### **Non-Academic School-Based Support Staff**

Scottwood's non-academic support staff mentioned that PLP members were supportive of non-academic school-based family engagement initiatives. They indicated that members were helpful, volunteered in school-sponsored community events, attended professional development workshops, identified problems, and worked collectively to decrease the number of chronically absent students.

The results indicate that non-academic school-based support staff indicated the following themes: literacy and attendance initiatives increased expectations and

difficulty completing tasks, members needing guidance, and members as needy recipients.

The table below illustrates recurring superordinate themes for the interviews.

This table describes the superordinate themes reported and determines if they are present in more than half of the cases.

Table 4

*Identifying Recurrent Superordinate Themes*

Superordinate Themes	Recurrent Superordinate Themes			Present in over half simple?
	Destiny Harrison	Mariah Hampton	Sharonda Lewis	
Parent Engagement	YES	YES	NO	YES
Personal Challenges	YES	YES	YES	YES
Attendance Support	YES	NO	NO	NO
Increased expectations	YES	YES	N/A	YES
Mistrust	NO	NO	YES	NO

**Promises: Parent Engagement**

**Parent engagement activities.** Parent engagement programs aim to increase the number of PLP members in academic and non-academic activities to promote student success in school. Parent engagement suggests that PLP members work collectively with school officials to increase educational or social outcomes for students or families.

Sharonda stated that while members were helpful, some PLP members could not be trusted to provide resources for Scottwood's parents. She mentioned interactions with parents: "I did have some positive experiences (S. Lewis, personal communication, September 16, 2019). They did come down and volunteer." She also stated, "They assisted with the Christmas giveaway that I gave for Pre-k through third grade" (S. Lewis, personal communication, September 16, 2019).

Sharonda mentioned one parent who she described as exceptional. She stated:

She was awesome. Um, any type of involvement around those schools that we asked for her, she did, whether it was just, um, doing bulletin boards or having a one on one interaction with a child because the child is going through some hardship" (S. Lewis, personal communication, September 16, 2019).

Sharonda believed that allowing parents to participate in tasks that were outside of the scope of providing attendance and academic support was helpful to Scottwood's students and families.

**Literacy and attendance initiatives.** Literacy and attendance initiatives include PLP members providing targeted support to low performing or chronically absent students. Destiny, a Social Worker, also had positive memories working with PLP participants who provided attendance improvement support to program members:

Parents were able to identify those students is particularly with attendance, identify those students, find out what the problem was. The students who are referred in kindergarten through second grade had academic and attendance issues. So the parents were able to foster those small group settings for half an hour, half an hour, maybe two to three times per week, and provide that additional guided instruction (D. Harrison, personal communication, September 16, 2019).

Destiny's remarks suggest that parents provided valuable support by providing literacy support to groups of students needing extensive support.

### **Challenges: Increased Expectations**

**Increased Expectations.** Increased expectations refer to challenges PLP members experienced while attempting to implement program initiatives. School-based support staff members indicated that PLP members experienced increased expectations during the second year of the program. They reported that PLP members experienced difficulty completing tasks, struggled to meet demands of increased expectations, and that members did not have adequate supervision. Destiny mentioned that while parents

were able to provide attendance improvement support, they often struggled to fully complete challenging tasks. She stated:

The parents were, um, enthusiastic about helping the students initially as well as the staff, but I think as the time progressed and they realized, uh, the intensity of what was expected of them, their motivation to kind of dwindled (D. Harrison, personal communication, September 16, 2019).

Like Destiny, Mariah mentioned that PLP members were initially excited about providing academic support to students. She stated:

When this program first started, it was without the mayor, and then they went to the mayor's event, they go to their CDA, they went to the Urban League." We have this great program that you started at Scottwood, and you do great things, and we're getting all this publicity and, and we were getting props. And that was boosting up the parents' self-esteem. Okay. You know, and we're going to do great things (M. Hampton, personal communication, September 12, 2019).

Mariah's quote suggests that members were excited to receive positive reinforcement after getting positive attention. This positive attention was temporary and she indicated a negative change in behavior when PLP members were required to provide additional academic support to students. In the following quote, Mariah spoke about the parents' perspectives in the third person. She stated: "We came back to reality and saying, now the program started out as being a program to bring in more parents to be a help in the classroom" (M. Hampton, personal communication, September 12, 2019).

**Difficulty completing tasks.** This refers to an inability for members to complete required work responsibilities. Scottwood's support staff indicated that although parents struggled to complete tasks, they were enthusiastic about their roles, about working in challenging environments, did not submit required documents, had positive intentions even though they struggled with completing tasks, were unaware of members' daily schedules, and were not adequately supervised.

She mentioned an example of this when discussing specifics about the attendance improvement initiative, "If there was an issue with finding the parent's telephone numbers, where they live, or documentation. Uh, some of them weren't able or didn't feel comfortable doing that. So either they would express their discomfort, or they would just drop the ball." She described Mr. Henry's role as and talked about how he conducted home visits:

So he did that, but he did. He never did give me the paperwork. And I think that some of them may have been maybe embarrassed because they didn't know how to articulate it in writing, and all I needed was just the paperwork (D. Harrison, personal communication, September 16, 2019).

While the PLP members struggled to complete tasks, Destiny believed that all members had positive intentions, "But yet they really truly wanted to help, but they didn't realize the magnitude of this" (D. Harrison, personal communication, September 16, 2019). Destiny also described other inconsistencies with PLP members that instead of reporting to classrooms, she observed them retreating to their office rather than providing support in the classroom or completing job responsibilities:

They would go to the library and then when the students come back, you know, it was just a lot of going back and forth to the library. They were good people. They just need supervision. You have to start off small because they're almost like children. This is a new experience for them. No one has really set expectations for them" (D. Harrison, personal communication, September 16, 2019).

Similar to Destiny, Mariah believed that at times, PLP members isolated themselves from the Scottwood school community and remained in the PLP office instead of completing their job responsibilities. She mentioned, "Um, if they needed reflection forms, they were in there, they had refrigerator, microwave, uh, this is where they ate. This is where they let their hair down" (M. Hampton, personal communication,

September 12, 2019). Mariah mentioned instances when PLP members used the space to complete their activities and stated:

A lot of times when they should have been in the classroom, they were in that space, then when I would approach the parents about it, and they needed my, their business cause they don't know what we have going on with Rutgers and what Rutgers is telling us what we're supposed to be doing (M. Hampton, personal communication, September 12, 2019).

The quote suggests that PLP members believed that they did not need to report to classrooms and maintained that members from the Scottwood community did not have the authority to provide oversight or hold them accountable to complete their tasks.

By the same token as Mariah, Destiny mentioned that parents struggled with their roles as parents and professionals. She mentioned that a PLP member had a child with special needs and often neglected her job responsibilities to advocate for her child throughout the school day. She stated, "We were able to get that all squared away, but in the midst of getting that squared, that took a week's time in the classroom" (D. Harrison, personal communication, September 16, 2019). By Destiny stating that it took a week's time away from the classroom, she referred to a challenge with the parent providing inconsistent support to her targeted students.

**Members needing guidance.** Members lacked skills, and dispositions needed to be able to complete their professional responsibilities. Sharonda mentioned initial difficulties working with PLP members. She stated: "When I first came in, and they were really close-minded because they were so stuck, so used to their own whatever they were subjected to growing up" (S. Lewis, personal communication, September 16, 2019).

Despite the challenges, Sharonda stated that she taught members coping skills, how to

manage emotions, how to navigate complicated relationships, and how to maintain self-control.

Like Sharonda, Destiny also described that PLP, while parents were able to receive free school-based counseling services to support their individual challenges, their attendance was inconsistent, and most did not report to her until they experienced significant personal circumstances. She stated:

Although they had scheduled times, they often stated that they had community engagement activities that prevented them from attending their sessions, or they would often miss sessions. I think that they probably didn't know what to expect, um, from counseling, uh, and then thinking about the taboo of counseling (D. Harrison, personal communication, September 16, 2019).

Although Destiny mentioned that PLP members often neglected their duties, she believed that all parents believed they were committed to providing support to Scottwood. She stated, "I think I really think all of them had good intentions, but they just needed a lot of guidance. They really truly did. Like you really have to work with them, one-on-one like you needed somebody to hold their hands" (D. Harrison, personal communication, September 16, 2019). Her statement suggested that PLP members did not have adequate support, training, experience, and management needed to complete their tasks successfully.

**Parents as needy recipients.** PLP members were responsible for allocating resources but struggled with their roles as PLP members concurrently with requiring the services which they were responsible for providing to Scottwood's families. An example of mismatched expectations involved differences in assessing the rights of those parents who were also university employees. Some PLP parents believed that their dual status as university employees and parents in need afforded them first access to goods that had

been donated for distribution to local needy families. As local parents with limited incomes and high levels of unmet need, they reasoned that they had a right to donated items earmarked for parents in their community. And as university employees who had already committed time and energy to a range of community engagement activities, they saw no reason to bypass the opportunity to claim donations for themselves when they had the opportunity to do so. Yet school officials saw this as hoarding or stealing, and the resulting mismatch in cultural capital led to hard feelings and anger in both groups.

Like Sharonda, Mariah believed that PLP members felt entitled to resources earmarked for other parents and caregivers in the Scottwood community. She stated: "We're supposed to choose some families that really needed it and a lot of times they felt they were more needy than other people" (M. Hampton, personal communication, September 12, 2019). Mariah also mentioned that parents often discussed housing and economic challenges and stated: "sometimes they couldn't separate the parent from the volunteer" (M. Hampton, personal communication, September 12, 2019).

She also stated that PLP members believed that they were entitled to have priority over donated resources:

If it came from the university, or in, um, that was a Christmas adopt a tree, when there was a Thanksgiving, um, food giveaway when there were coat drives, anything that went on, they felt they should be a part of it. Not help to give out, but to, you know, hands out." Having parents provide resources to others while they were experiencing hardships themselves was a learning experience (M. Hampton, personal communication, September 12, 2019).

Just like Mariah, Sharonda expressed that PLP members they were unable to separate their roles from needy recipients to individuals who leveraged their training to provide goods and services to Scottwood's needy families. She recalled a time when PLP participated in a Thanksgiving community event. She stated:



I had people from city hall come in, bring turkeys, uh, organization came in and brought coats and different things "they were taking things, and they were asked to stop taking things. Stealing? Um, that, that just looked bad on my partners (S. Lewis, personal communication, September 16, 2019).

She mentioned another example of PLP members hoarding supplies:

Um, one day I had about a donation from, uh, girls helping girls with periods. I had about, uh, ten, two dozens, uh, uh, Maxi pads. Um, I know, they did help me bring it and a couple of days later, boxes were missing. And I'm not talking about one box, I mean, ten boxes were missing. It was like they came in, eyes got big, and things just started disappearing (S. Lewis, personal communication, September 16, 2019).

These experiences caused Sharonda to lose trust in members of the PLP because she felt that community partners would no longer be interested in the Scottwood collaboration.

### **Summary**

Non-academic school-based support staff reported that PLP members supported school-based parental engagement activities and they were helpful to the Scottwood community. Activities PLP members conducted working to chronic absenteeism and improving school-community relations. One challenge members had was completing job responsibilities. This issue was exacerbated because members did not disclose their challenges and as a result, they often failed in their duties and responsibilities. Another issue mentioned was that members dealt with significant personal challenges that prevented them from being consistent. Additionally, they had difficulty negotiating their roles as parents and people in need and they viewed themselves as university employees who were entitled to receive goods provided for Scottwood's community, had difficulty separating their roles as parents and employees, and needed adequate support from school and PLP program administrators.

### **Scottwood Elementary School: Administrators**

School administrators mentioned the promises and challenges of collaborating with the PLP. Promises included PLP members providing non-academic support to students. Challenges included identifying ways to leverage parents at varying levels, effective communication between PLP administration and Scottwood Staff, understanding classroom culture, and personal issues.

#### **Promises: Providing Nonacademic Support to Students**

Providing nonacademic support refers to PLP members assisting parents with non-instructional responsibilities. Latoya Green, an assistant principal at Scottwood, believed that PLP members were valuable and provided nonacademic support to classroom teachers. She stated, "It felt good to have a key parent reaching out around attendance. Um, the classroom teachers really did need that support, especially in my first and second-grade teachers who don't have a paraprofessional" (L. Green, personal communication, September 16, 2019). Latoya believed that parents were effective when they were providing nonacademic assistance. She stated: "They were more like a hands-on person, not dealing with the instruction" (L. Green, personal communication, September 16, 2019).

She continued:

I personally enjoyed the attendance initiative because I think it's such a struggle and to have our parents in the class that's in charge of calling parents every day whose kids are not in school. It's just something that teachers often say they didn't have time to do" (L. Green, personal communication, September 16, 2019).

While the PLP attempted to utilize parents to provide primarily academic support to students, Latoya describes utilizing parents to serve in nonacademic capacities such as

providing social support, serving as an extra set of hands in the classroom, and helping to increase student attendance.

### **Challenges: Understanding Classroom Culture**

Understanding classroom culture refers to PLP members experiencing unanticipated gaps in understanding how to handle student sensitive information.

Throughout the program, Latoya mentioned that parents struggled with understanding classroom culture:

I was surprised about how much they didn't know about school life and interesting. Yeah. What is appropriate versus not appropriate. I don't know that we were prepared for parents being in the classroom and the access to student information that they do receive (L. Green, personal communication, September 16, 2019).

Latoya suggests that PLP members did not receive adequate information about accessing student records or understanding how to handle sensitive or confidential information. She stated: "Some of the chatter allows students and families to know what's happening in this class versus that class. Um, you know, they're certain things that as a school community you don't really discuss" (L. Green, personal communication, September 16, 2019). Despite the challenges, Latoya remained optimistic about wanting to continue to have parents engaged in the program. She stated: "I do think that there is a strong alliance between home and school, and bridging them together when done effectively can yield some positive results (L. Green, personal communication, September 16, 2019). By working through challenges, Latoya believes that the PLP program has the potential to be an integral part of Scottwood's community.

**Challenge: Leveraging PLP Members Skillset**

Leveraging PLP members' skill sets referred to allowing PLP members to utilize their strengths to support classroom initiatives. Latoya explained that challenges such as exploring how to utilize parents in a meaningful way. She mentioned that all parents were not academically prepared to provide academic support. Latoya stated: "So you need to have a certain level of skills for second grade as opposed to first grade that we needed assistance with people who could actually read a writing piece. (L. Green, personal communication, September 16, 2019)."

Latoya also observed that individual classroom teachers had confidentially informed her that some of the parents lacked the necessary literacy skills. She recalled a conversation that she had with cooperating teacher regarding a PLP member: "They actually tried to do some of the work, and it was hard for them to do, yeah, and so that's when they brought it to me" (L. Green, personal communication, September 16, 2019). Latoya shared what a cooperating teacher told her, "I don't think this person can read" (L. Green, personal communication, September 16, 2019).-Latoya also believed that the teachers had gotten the idea that that is a "good um, initiative, and it's one that they do want to see work" (L. Green, personal communication, September 16, 2019).

Latoya mentioned that cooperating teachers "liked having the extra help, liked having the small groups, and liked having that attendance person" (L. Green, personal communication, September 16, 2019). Latoya also stated that she believes the hiring process should be changed and "wants to be able to assess it in the screening process, that there's a good marriage between this classroom teacher and this parent" (L. Green, personal communication, September 16, 2019).

Similar to Latoya, Robin Smith, the principal of Scottwood Elementary, expressed concern that PLP members did not have the educational background needed to provide appropriate academic support to children. She stated: "The biggest challenge I saw as it pertains to the purpose of this program, which is to develop literacy in young children. I'm concerned with the level of literacy of the parents" (R. Smith, personal communication, September 16, 2019). She mentioned other challenges: "I do not know that the parents had enough experience, knowledge, and skill level to really be a support to teachers (R. Smith, personal communication, September 16, 2019).

She further elaborated,

I don't know that trust is possible without those people being, um, trained, experienced and skilled in that, so it just becomes hard to pair the parent with the students and with the teacher because everybody has to do their part and we don't want it to be a burden to the teachers. And so I think the biggest challenge is finding parents that come equipped with a certain, um, skill level. Is it really helpful to just have a body there, or is it more important to have a body that's really adding to it more so than just kind of waiting for direction. And maybe that's too much to ask for this particular program (R. Smith, personal communication, September 16, 2019).

Robin's statement suggests that she believed that PLP did not have the skills to provide appropriate support to struggling students. She also expressed a desire to have parents who already had skills needed to support students in developing literacy skills.

### **Challenges: PLP Scheduling and Organizational Issues**

PLP scheduling and organizing issues refer to not having a clear direction and experiencing gaps in communication between PLP administrators and Scottwood's administration regarding PLP members' schedules, training, and professional development.

Organizational issues existed between the PLP administration and Scottwood's administrators. Latoya mentioned a lack of constant communication and described challenges. She stated: "Oftentimes, parents will be in training, going to workshops, um, learning new things so that they could be a better assistance to us, however, we wouldn't necessarily know that they are going to be out" (L. Green, personal communication, September 16, 2019). This communication challenge made it difficult for students to receive consistent support.

She also mentioned other programmatic issues:

Just a lack of, um, communication around scheduling, um, absenteeism, or people they leave and in the middle of the program. So we have some of them that stopped working in the program. It took forever for them to get placed, and so we just need to, they needed to be communication around who was going to do lunch duty is their rotation schedule. Who's going to be down at, that's a big part of the day. Um, who's coming in today, who won't be here today, who's not working here anymore, who, when are they gonna get a placement, things like that (L. Green, personal communication, September 16, 2019).

The organizational challenges made it more difficult for Latoya to hold PLP members accountable to complete their tasks or have a structured program. Robin believed that parents did not spend adequate time in their classrooms. She stated that parents "were not being where they're supposed to be." and further elaborated:

I very rarely saw any of them in any rooms. Now I'm not going to call myself the person who knows these things, so you would have asked the teachers or how good their attendance is. I don't know where they were. Maybe they were in the office. I didn't go looking for them. Um, and again, you don't want to use me because I'm only talking about my pop-ins here and their classrooms and I just don't, it never felt consistent to me, but I could be wrong (R. Smith, personal communication, September 16, 2019).

In like manner to Latoya, Robin's perspective indicates that she did not view the PLP members as a constant and integral part of Scottwood Elementary School because she believed that they avoided completing classroom-related tasks.

The PLP program provided parent members with opportunities to expand their social and cultural capital. The knowledge they obtained allowed these members to build a sense of confidence and increase their expectations regarding the responsiveness of school officials to their needs. But the increased expectations of these parents meant that they expected school officials to value and implement their suggestions, including recommendations that PLP members be able to expand their use of in-school office space and that their grievances and concerns be welcomed, even outside of approved channels. School administrators, however, were shocked when PLP members insisted on more access to office space, and they were nonplussed when PLP members expressed their grievances openly and in unexpected ways. This mismatch exacerbated tension between PLP members and members of the Scottwood school community: school administrators saw PLP members as continuously overstepping their boundaries, while PLP members reported that their concerns were being ignored.

Another challenge that Robin mentioned was the fact that PLP members became focused on participating in community engagement projects. She described instances of PLP members confronting Scottwood's staff members:

Let's say they had a project, and they needed something done for their project. They felt like they could just come and get it done, like, and if they didn't get it done, they're asking for meetings and come into the office and bothering people to move garbage cans and get a cart to move their items. They would come to the main office and demand things. They would go to the custodians and demand things they would go to. Um, they would, would not be able to separate themselves. Some of them separate themselves from being parents. Because they were here every day, they felt like they should have access to all of the resources of the building, including the people and our time (R. Smith, personal communication, September 16, 2019).

This observation demonstrates Robin's frustration with PLP members who preferred to spend time preparing for community events instead of providing adequate

academic support. Robin believed that PLP needed a narrower focus. She stated: "I think it was a mistake to put so much on their plate where if our goal is to develop their ability to work with students in their early literacy, I'm giving them all of these, giving them the ability to develop projects (R. Smith, personal communication, September 16, 2019).

### **Challenges: Personal Issues**

Personal issues refer to an individual's challenges that negatively influenced their ability to complete their PLP responsibilities. Robin mentioned that personal challenges prevented PLP members from completing their job responsibilities and serving as leaders at Scottwood. She recalled examples of parents engaging in nonproductive behaviors: She stated: "One person was fighting her mother in the street, another person in multiple incidents with other parents in the building." Robin mentioned that another parent had to be restrained because she was attempting to fight another parent. She also mentioned an example of parents attempting to hoard resources. She stated, "Um, so that was one, another one, um, stealing. So accusations of them hoarding school resources that were donated, um, for families and they, and they're not able to separate themselves from, am I a needy parent right now or am I a PLP person right now?" (R. Smith, personal communication, September 16, 2019).

Despite experiencing significant challenges with PLP members, Robin continued to support the program because she felt that parents in the Berwick community required extra support and services. She stated: "I think that they do need resources, which would lead to all the stealing. Um, so I let it continue because I do have a level of tolerance and patience for people who make wrong choices" (R. Smith, personal communication,



September 16, 2019). Robin believes that PLP members had personal and professional challenges that complicated their relationship in the school; however, she expressed a desire to continue the program.

### **Summary**

Parents provided non-academic support to students and were able to provide teachers who did not have a teacher's aide but needed additional support. They provided attendance improvement support to students and socialized with the children. At times, parents did not understand school culture or confidentiality issues. Also, administrators felt that parents were not able to provide adequate support because they had limited academic skills themselves. It was difficult for the administrators to understand how to provide support because they were not aware of the professional development schedule, which impacted their ability to determine the best way to utilize parents. Also, instead of being a consistent presence in classrooms parents were distracted by community engagement activities, attempting to hold Scottwood's staff accountable while dealing with personal challenges that affected their professional responsibilities.

### **Aaron Walker PLP Program Coordinator**

Aaron Walker mentioned the challenges of collaborating with the PLP. Challenges included personal issues, program expectations versus school expectations, demanding parents, and mistrust between school staff and PLP members.

### **Challenges: Personal Issues**

Personal issues refer to personal challenges that negatively influenced an individual's ability to complete PLP responsibilities. Aaron believed that PLP members did not adequately represent themselves during interviews or were not as forthright as

they could be when they entered the PLP. He stated, "There were a lot of lies that were uncovered that the parents were telling and just also additional information that the parents weren't giving us" (A. Walker, personal communication, September 5, 2019). Aaron believed that pride and embarrassment exacerbated parents' challenges. He mentioned that parents were not completely honest because their job responsibilities required them to also provide services to other families. He stated: "parents wanted to come off as if they had it together, meaning they weren't suffering as bad as other parents in the community whom they were planning to service" (A. Walker, personal communication, September 5, 2019). He continued: "parents withheld information from us that can help us support" (A. Walker, personal communication, September 5, 2019).

Aaron described challenges in uncovering these issues. He stated: "We had parents who were experiencing transportation issues, other parents who were experiencing domestic violence, and parents who were experiencing housing issues" (A. Walker, personal communication, September 5, 2019). These personal challenges were significant distractions. Aaron continued, "Initially, this program we expected parents to provide support for students as well as other parents, but they didn't have certain support themselves. So, I do believe, and I understand the importance of people's basic needs being met to serve others" (A. Walker, personal communication, September 5, 2019). This quote suggests that PLP officials were not prepared to provide extra support to help parents obtain personal resources.

### **Challenges: Program Expectations vs. School Expectations**

Program expectations versus school expectations refer to conflicting expectations. PLP wanted to improve literacy attendance and decrease chronic absenteeism, whereas

school officials initially utilized the parents to complete nonacademic tasks. Aaron stated that implementing a pilot parent engagement program at Scottwood presented unique challenges due to changing expectations. He stated: "Our first year of the program was parents focusing on being change agents in the community rather than focusing on the, um, children" (A. Walker, personal communication, September 5, 2019). He explained how this was problematic because they spent less time providing academic support to students.

Another mismatch in the worldview that translated into different expectations involved contrasting understandings of the value of the PLP itself. PLP members believed that the program's critical components (and their own responsibilities) should be based on helping PLP parents grow into empowered change agents. However, teachers and school administrators believed that the program's value (and its core elements) should focus on teaching PLP parents to support and improve students' academic performance. As such, PLP members expressed frustration when community engagement was reduced and student attendance and classroom support were emphasized. Teachers and administrators, however, expressed frustration with PLP parents who did not fully participate in a school-based attendance improvement project that aimed to decrease chronic absenteeism.

Aaron continued, "A lot of the support that the parents actually ended up providing was managing students. A lot of the teachers had some parents just hanging out, hanging up on things, on a bulletin board, or decorating" (A. Walker, personal communication, September 5, 2019). He continued, "I believe it was flawed and our point, uh, on our end to think that we can have parents confidently provide academic

support to students without providing them with adequate training" (A. Walker, personal communication, September 5, 2019). He stated, "many of them would be in the backroom for more time than they were supposed to because they, they knew that there wasn't adequate supervision" (A. Walker, personal communication, September 5, 2019).

Aaron's statements suggest that parents were not able to provide academic training, and therefore, teachers ended up utilizing parents to complete menial tasks instead of allowing them to significantly assist students. Also, organizational challenges allowed parents to spend time in the PLP office.

In addition to parents not having adequate training or receiving appropriate supervision from PLP officials, Aaron suggested that parents were not able to get additional assistance from school staff to receive support. He stated:

The principal isn't available or would barely make herself available. When they were dealing with challenges with the school staff, they expected me to fix the problem rather than them being able to voice, um, their issues because they didn't think that they would be heard. They thought I was kind of the buffer in between, um, this Rutgers administration as well as school staff (A. Walker, personal communication, September 5, 2019).

Aaron mentioned a shift in expectations during the second year of the program that contributed to parents expressing negative attitudes. Instead of allowing them to focus on community engagement events, PLP members reported to their classes daily and focused their efforts on improving literacy outcomes and providing attendance improvement support. He stated, "The second year, we decided to primarily focus on the students and have a secondary focus being the parents" (A. Walker, personal communication, September 5, 2019). The change caused tension with members.

### **Challenges: Demanding Parents**

Demanding parents are PLP members who believed that they had decision-making authority equal to that of school officials. Aaron stated that as a result of parents participating in community engagement activities, they began working collectively to address their issues and became demanding:

The community engagement events really did make the parents feel as if they were actually doing something as if they were change agents. They were adamant about being at our leadership team meetings and being a part of the decision making at the school on a higher level. Um, because they did feel empowered (A. Walker, personal communication, September 5, 2019).

Aaron suggested that this increased tensions between parents and school officials. He stated, "So I think the parents definitely became very empowered and entitled" (A. Walker, personal communication, September 5, 2019). He described that parents had unrealistic expectations about making decisions and stated that PLP members "got to the point where they believe they should have certain decision-making abilities as the vice-principal (A. Walker, personal communication, September 5, 2019). Aaron believed that as they became empowered, parents spent less time providing academic support to students and refocused their intention on themselves instead of the students. He stated that PLP members "weren't too concerned with the primary goal of the program, which is to provide academic support to students" (A. Walker, personal communication, September 5, 2019).

Aaron also mentioned that PLP members had unrealistic expectations and did not fully take advantage of the opportunities provided by the PLP. Also, they struggled with trying to figure out how to utilize skills, complete their job responsibilities, and remain professional.

### **Challenges: Mistrust between school staff and PLP members**

Mistrust between school staff and PLP members existed because both regarded each other's actions with suspicion. Mistrust between school officials and PLP members existed at Scottwood. Aaron suggested that Scottwood's office environment was unwelcoming, and school staff members and PLP members lacked professionalism. He stated:

The office staff was really unfriendly. It was just an unwelcoming environment for all. So I definitely believe that was a major challenge for the parents. Um, so I think a lot of the school staff were at, they were at odds, meaning, um, the school had a negative perspective of the parents and the parents had a negative perspective of the school. There was mistrust on the um, school administration, the school staff side, or school administration side as well as on the parents' side (A. Walker, personal communication, September 5, 2019).

Aaron stated that parents were often frustrated because "they believe that people at the school, they didn't like them and didn't want them there" (A. Walker, personal communication, September 5, 2019). When the parents complained about their challenges, "they felt as if the program director for the, um, program didn't really listen to them and wasn't tending to their needs" (A. Walker, personal communication, September 5, 2019).

Aaron also suggested that parents often struggled with understanding their roles while participating in community activities with school officials. He stated:

Many of them didn't want to work with parents, given the issues surrounding the parents. PLP program members were helping to pass out coats and pass out turkeys to families in need...Um, but while they were doing that, certain PLP members were actually taking coats and taking other, uh, food, and Turkeys and stashing them away so that they can have them for themselves. Um, and while doing that, they were actually caught (A. Walker, personal communication, September 5, 2019).

The community engagement event was a significant turning point in the relationship because issues of trust already existed, but being observed hoarding resources exacerbated mistrust between PLP members and other educational stakeholders and community partners at Scottwood. He stated,

That was a key point and the damage in the relationship between school staff and the parents because the school staff already didn't trust the parents and that I think that just kind of validated it. Based on the conversations that I've, had, um, with school staff. I don't think anyone fully trusted the parents, but there were more staff who were willing to work with the parents, given that they understand their demographic (A. Walker, personal communication, September 5, 2019).

Aaron mentioned that while community partners and school administration experienced mistrust, cooperating teachers had positive relationships with PLP members and did not express issues of mistrust:

"Parents came to the classroom and they weren't doing anything to damage the relationship between the teachers and the parents and some of the parents would come in and sign in, but then they would not go to the classrooms" (A. Walker, personal communication, September 5, 2019).

As such, PLP members and cooperating teachers were able to establish productive relationships despite negative relationships with other members of the Scottwood community.

## **Summary**

Throughout Aaron's interview, he mentioned challenges that the program participants and Scottwood's school community faced while working with PLP members. One significant challenge he described was that program members concealed significant personal challenges that ultimately affected their ability to complete the initiatives. As time elapsed, program members, PLP administrators, school personnel, and community-based partners learned that PLP members desperately needed assistance and basic

resources. As a result, there were gaps in understanding why members were not able to complete all of their responsibilities, which resulted in communication issues. Also, during a community engagement activity, members were observed hoarding resources. One interesting finding that Aaron mentioned is that while cooperating teachers mentioned program inconsistencies, most reported having positive relationships with PLP members. Despite the challenges, school officials, community-based partners, and program administrators continued to work with PLP members; however, issues of mistrust were still prevalent.

### **Community-Based Partners**

PLP administrators partnered with community-based organizations who had established trusting relationships with residents in Springfield. Each partner provided supports aimed at strengthening families and the community. The following describes the promises and challenges the community experienced while collaborating with PLP members. Promises include members being supportive, creating strong bonds, supporting PLP initiatives, and providing strong support for PLP members. Challenges include tense relationships with administrators, PLP members suffering from personal issues, unrealistic expectations of gaps, and not taking advantage of opportunities.

#### **Promises: Positive Relationships**

Positive relationships with the community-based partners and PLP members allowed for authentic and trusting relationships. Community-based partners indicated positive relationships with PLP members. Tanya described a close relationship with PLP members. She stated: "There are things that I probably know that you all didn't know, but whatever the reason, I don't know if it's because I'm a mother or a woman, a wife,



whatever" (T. Martin, personal communication, September 5, 2019). Monica, who leads education initiatives in the Berwick community, also stated that she maintained good relationships with PLP members: While discussing her interactions, she stated:

"Everything was positive. It was positive. I saw no drama, no acting out" (M. Madison, personal communication, September 10, 2019). Yvette defined her relationship with PLP members as authentic and described positive experiences while conducting professional development sessions. She stated:

Um, well, I, uh, shared one, um, that role-playing was, very good. Um, I just really love their honesty. I mean, they just really said it like it was, um, they didn't necessarily agree with everything that I said. Um, and so I really appreciated that (Y. Griffin, personal communication, September 19, 2019)

Like Monica, Yvette described her interactions with members as positive. She valued PLP members' honesty and pointed out that they were open-minded and willing to alter parenting and student management styles. She elaborated:

I appreciate the fact that they were willing to learn and they were open, um, to consider things a different way than maybe they had been considering forever...I really didn't have any complaints and "it was a pleasant surprise, and they were really eager (Y. Griffin, personal communication, September 19, 2019).

In all instances, community-based partners who provided support to PLP members indicated that they were able to establish positive and trusting relationships. Community-based partners mentioned that members were open-minded, respectful, and willing to learn how to incorporate new ideas and concepts in their lives.

### **Promises: PLP Members Were Supportive**

PLP members provided support for each other while completing PLP initiatives. They created strong bonds and trusting relationships and supporting each other while they completed initiatives.

**Strong bonds and trusting relationships.** Ines, who worked closely with Debra on PLP program initiatives, stated that PLP members created strong bonds with each other. She stated: "I guess one of the things that I remember is the bond that was created amongst the group" (I. Batista, personal communication, September 18, 2019). She further elaborated, "Okay. I think that that was instrumental in their advancing." Ines mentioned that even though the parents had positive relationships, they held each other accountable, "Yeah. I think that they encouraged each other. I think that they held each other accountable" (I. Batista, personal communication, September 18, 2019). Ines mentioned diversity within the group: "Some of them were more versed in others, some we could rely on to deliver our message if we needed it delivered. She stated, "So some of them had those skill sets, some of them have fantastic organization skills. You know, they were on Google docs creating the project plan and forwarding it to everyone and everybody was on the same page."

In addition to Ines discussing PLP members working together in professional development sessions and community meetings, Keisha mentioned that parents maintained positive relationships with each other and that community-based partners expressed interest in her workshops. She stated: "Over time, I saw where they really leaned on each other for things that we don't see a lot in our community anymore" (K. Johnson, personal communication, September 6, 2019). She reiterated her feeling of support, "Um, and, and they were hugely supportive of one another" (K. Johnson, personal communication, September 6, 2019).

**Supportive implementing PLP initiatives.** PLP members assisted each other with completing tasks. Tanya described working with PLP members as they completed program initiatives:

My best memories were just seeing the joy they would find when something that they organized, um, came to fruition and was successful. They had a health and wellness fair. Um, and just the process of which they went through (T. Martin, personal communication, September 5, 2019)

Tanya believed that PLP members were able to complete projects because of the governance structure. Tanya mentioned: "they had protocols in which they would follow up with votes" (T. Martin, personal communication, September 5, 2019). She also stated that members had an interest in expanding their networks and often "engaged other stakeholders and community partners" (T. Martin, personal communication, September 5, 2019) to get assistance and support needed to complete their initiatives successfully. Tanya described the excitement as she recalls her experiences while observing members completing tasks. She stated: "I remember the level of enthusiasm and eagerness that many of the parents brought to the work. Um, a willingness to kind of just be self-starters" (T. Martin, personal communication, September 5, 2019).

Like Tanya, Debra also described enthusiasm working with PLP members and recalled positive experiences while collaborating with the PLP. She stated: "I remember that, um, my experiences with them were pretty positive" (D. Harper, personal communication, September 18, 2019). She described members of needing support to complete initiatives. She mentioned: "When you put them in a structured situation, they were able to do that because you're there with them and you're helping them to go through it" (D. Harper, personal communication, September 18, 2019).

Debra also mentioned that parents were eager to perform their duties and that PLP members had a "sense of pride in there, a willingness to do something. She continued, "Um, um, when it was an activity that they like doing. Um, I don't know because all the things that I did, they seem to be very pleased in wanting to do it" (D. Harper, personal communication, September 18, 2019). Debra mentioned two initiatives that yielded positive results:

Certain things were in place at that big fair, you know, when, and you saw it, and people were accountable to certain areas, but it was a project plan. It wasn't an event plan and holding them accountable and having meetings with them and making sure back and forth that they understood what your role is (D. Harper, personal communication, September 18, 2019).

The quote reiterates Debra's belief that PLP members could complete tasks when they had support. She also mentioned that PLP members were excited when they completely completed an initiative. Debra remembers parents' excitement after completing a book drive. She stated, "I saw the pride of we did it. We did it with the book thing. Uh, we got books and we did this. So I did see a sense of pride" (D. Harper, personal communication, September 18, 2019).

Ines also believed that parents utilized their skill sets strategically to promote positive relationships, complete program tasks, and to become leaders in Scottwood's Parent Teacher Organization. She stated: "Yeah, and that was apparent when they took over, you know, the parent, um, the PTA, or the PTO at the school." (I. Batista, personal communication, September 18, 2019). She had a strong belief that PLP members were committed to improving the Berwick community. She stated:

We can genuinely and honestly say is that each parent involved and engage their focus, and their attention was to that school in that community. They were, they were committed. They understand that it affects the community as a whole. And

so I think that you know, those were some of the pieces that were driving forces (I. Batista, personal communication, September 18, 2019).

She also observed, "They had the opportunity to work on a grassroots effort starting right there with their kids in their school" (I. Batista, personal communication, September 18, 2019). Ines spoke about a positive parent-led initiative:

We were able to accommodate well over 200 people at the resource fair. We were able to bring a van that provided jobs for people. I remember them coming in with those big old smiles in those grey PLP shirts. They were representing, and they were just happy to be there and engaged in dialogue and you know, not being afraid to ask the questions. Um, taking, you know, apart and, you know, taken, taken advantage of what belongs to them (I. Batista, personal communication, September 18, 2019).

By participating in community events, parents were empowered to believe that they had the skills needed to improve conditions at Scottwood Elementary school and become advocates and change agents in their community.

### **Promises: PLP Program provided strong support for parents**

PLP members received professional development, social supports, and educational support. Keisha mentioned that the PLP program provided extensive support to members when they realized that member lacked basic resources:

I think what really surprised me is when the leaders and the coordinators of the program saw that the parents needed more, that you guys took action with no additional funds, I should say, um, to get everything you could for the parents (K. Jones, personal communication, September 6, 2019)

Just like Keisha, Monica also referenced the fact that members received extensive support from the PLP. She believed that the participants received useful information and mentioned that members received extensive support. Monica stated: "I don't know if they recognize, because I always tell them you provided a foundation for them (M. Madison, personal communication, September 10, 2019). She continued: "When they

came to you, they were all unemployed, they don't know their potential and just need that little support” (M. Madison, personal communication, September 10, 2019). Monica also expressed that parents received described the PLP as "the greatest opportunity you could have had at that point of time in your life” (M. Madison, personal communication, September 10, 2019) and suggested that members “got the skills, they got a lot of the skills that they just have to identify what those skills are now and put them in a resume” (M. Madison, personal communication, September 10, 2019).

In addition to obtaining skills, Monica described how PLP members participated in neighborhood association meetings and community programs. She describes two PLP members became active change agents in the Berwick community:

Rhonda and Ms. Jackie, they are on my education committee. Oh. So they come, they help me out with my program and Ms. Rhonda, she do all the arts and crafts and Ms. Jackie and she do, she works with the younger kids, six, seven and eight years (M. Madison, personal communication, September 10, 2019).

This quote shows that PLP members utilized skills that they learned in the program to provide support and lead projects for students who reside in Berwick and that members were interested in being promoting strong community relationships.

### **Challenges: Tense Relationships with School Administrators**

Tense relationships describe the distrust between PLP members and school administrators. Yvette described her professional development sessions as challenging and mentioned that members talked about tense relationships with school officials at Scottwood. During professional development sessions, Yvette taught members how to promote positive relationships as well as how to manage their emotions. Yvette stated that she wanted to allow parents to “become aware of their feelings and their, um,

emotions, how to deal with it, how to make better decisions" (Y. Griffin, personal communication, September 19, 2019)

Yvette also reported that during the sessions, parents were outspoken about challenges at their homes and at Scottwood Elementary School. She attributed this to the challenges in establishing positive relationships with PLP members and parents stating, "Sometimes administrators may be intimidated by informed, powerful parents because they want to challenge you. Um, you're not going to necessarily just be able to do whatever you want and make whatever decisions you want" (Y. Griffin, personal communication, September 19, 2019). She believed that her honest advice allowed PLP members to understand the importance of managing their emotions before attempting to voice their concerns to school officials.

Like Yvette, Tanya believed that school officials might have had negative perspectives about the parents and admitted: "I'm not sure that they felt that school administrators, um, had a level of admiration or respect" (T. Martin, personal communication, September 5, 2019). Yvette pointed out that "informed parents understand the power of their voice, they're going to push back. They're going to question you, and they're going to challenge." Despite the challenges, she is still optimistic that the two groups can come together (Y. Griffin, personal communication, September 19, 2019).

Tanya described tense relationships between PLP members and the school administration. She stated, "I'm kind of concerned about, um, the school administration and how much value they see in this program and "It's not that I don't think they're not

invested. I think they are invested" (T. Martin, personal communication, September 5, 2019). She further elaborated on her perspective:

I think they question some of the intentions of the parents, and sadly the actions of some parents, I think, impacted the entire group. An example of that was a Thanksgiving dinner that they did. There was, you know, the assumption or allegation that someone was taking stuff and hoarding it. Um, and it could be because that person was in need and that one incident kind of impacted the entire body, and they weren't all if that one person did it, so be it (T. Martin, personal communication, September 5, 2019).

In addition to hearing parents expressing discontent with school officials after the Thanksgiving dinner, she mentioned that some parents believed that the school administration did not provide participants with the support needed to establish a community food pantry. Monica recounted a conversation with a frustrated PLP member who informed her that Scottwood's principal was no longer interested in supporting the initiative. According to Monica, Jackie shared her experience saying, that she "recently got a message back that they cannot do the pantry because um, the school does not have the staff to help run it and they don't want it, and I don't understand that" (M. Madison, personal communication, September 10, 2019). PLP members also discussed their concern with Yvette. While relating the conversation with the PLP, she stated: "to be frank, um, was the challenge that I think they had with the school administration" (Y. Griffin, personal communication, September 19, 2019). Throughout the sessions, Yvette mentioned that it was difficult for parents to focus on prevalent issues and strategically planned meetings and she reiterated that she worked with the parents and attempted to get them to plan and set goals: She stated:

Having a goal, knowing what it is that you wanna accomplish before you go into that meeting. Um, and being focused on that, not allowing the, um, or learning how to get past the emotion of the situation and deal with the issue, uh, which is,



which is very important (Y. Griffin, personal communication, September 19, 2019).

Yvette also stressed the importance of building strong relationships between schools and parents and stated, "I just wish, um, administrators would see the importance of it and see the importance of not only informed parent is a better parent for you and your school and helps your school" (Y. Griffin, personal communication, September 19, 2019).

### **Challenges: Parents Suffered from Personal Challenges**

This refers to parent-specific issues negatively influencing parents' ability to complete PLP responsibilities. Parents in the PLP were responsible for providing support to other families, however, community members indicated that parents also struggled with personal issues. Keisha described member challenges such as: "struggles, um, relocation, you know, moving for a better environment, education for their children" (K. Jones, personal communication, September 6, 2019). Although she mentioned that parents attempted to work through their personal challenges, she also pointed out that participating in the program allowed parents to understand the importance of applying PLP initiatives to their families "by them taking more of a leadership role in the school with the parents and also dealing with themselves because sometimes they realized, hey, I'm that parent that gets my kids to school late (K. Jones, personal communication, September 6, 2019)."

**Economic challenges.** PLP members experienced economic challenges that made it difficult for them to report to work on time. While describing these challenges that PLP members faced, Keisha mentioned,

They still suffer from the same things that their peers do, you know, of housing concerns, um, low or no income. Um, A lot of them just did not have stable housing, and we as the practitioners just didn't know until, you know, there's the tail end, maybe like the last five or six months (K. Jones, personal communication, September 6, 2019).

She elaborated further, “and most importantly, um, what I saw initially was like a hunger to be better and do better but not necessarily understand the process to getting there (K. Jones, personal communication, September 6, 2019). She mentioned other challenges, “the confidence that some of them have in themselves, um, and their ability to, to understand that you don't have to have everything right now (K. Jones, personal communication, September 6, 2019). Despite challenges, Keisha stated that she saw improvement that could not be quantified. “I would say one hundred percent, um, saw progress, even if it wasn't on paper, something that you can track, their minds that sets started to change” (K. Jones, personal communication, September 6, 2019). Tanya expressed other challenges:

I think they were faced with some life challenges, and I think they felt like the program didn't always address those life challenges, whether they be financial situations or housing insecurity challenges or even employment, not being able to secure employment, um, and even the relocation of some parents out of state and out of the city because they are unable to attain, um, jobs that are paying them wages that make it affordable for them to maintain their household (T. Martin, personal communication, September 5, 2019)

Tanya also described how parents dealing with challenges contributed to the added stress that exacerbated the apathy that occurred towards the end of the second year of the PLP for some members:

Um, another probably not so great experiences with seeing the lack of interest from some parents and the drop-off. I think their personal challenges, um, played heavily on their participation or would have played heavily on our participation because their personal circumstances take priority over anything else...folks had to relocate and still be committed to the school, but, um, had some whole

residents insecurity issues (T. Martin, personal communication, September 5, 2019).

**Needing social supports.** PLP members needed additional assistance to help them navigate their challenges. Tanya mentioned that the insecurities that parents faced made them vulnerable and she suggested that PLP members should have regular check-ins and a comprehensive intake process that would address issues in housing, access to health services, jobs, parental supports, mental health services, trauma, domestic violence services, drugs, and alcohol abuse. She also believed that PLP should connect members with additional information about community-based organizations. Tanya stated:

I think there could be a little bit more emphasis on how to connect a program such as this to more community-based initiatives outside of the school and maybe just taking a little bit more of a holistic approach (T. Martin, personal communication, September 5, 2019).

Monica also observed that parents should be connected to community organizations. She observed that multiple PLP members were eager to improve their community but that obstacles often prevented them from reaching their goals: She stated: "So, there were all those little issues that come up with life skills that would have given to them for free" (M. Madison, personal communication, September 10, 2019). Monica mentioned that she had a strong desire to provide support to members because she "saw a need, but there was no format to sit down with them in a group situation to work, anything out like that (M. Madison, personal communication, September 10, 2019). One challenge that she mentioned was that some of the PLP members, "Lack boundaries, you know what I'm saying?" She continued, Just, know when to, um, like, you know, people just cut people off, you know, no boundaries, no sets of boundaries (M. Madison, personal communication, September 10, 2019).

Like Monica, Ines also spoke about issues working with PLP members. She stated: "So, um, I think bringing a group of people together, not knowing what they all are, who they all are in a sense and the sense that sometimes they don't even know who they are" (I. Batista, personal communication, September 18, 2019). Ines also discussed other issues: "I think those are some, you know, some of the big challenges where you're not even touching upon what, um, the reality that some people have some mental challenges or the fact that everybody may not be the smartest (I. Batista, personal communication, September 18, 2019). The interview with Inez suggests the importance of establishing tailored programs.

### **Challenges: Unrealistic Expectations or Gaps**

PLP members were not aware that they lacked the requisite skills needed to obtain a job in their preferred field. Community-based partners stated that PLP members had unrealistic expectations about their future employment. Debra felt that parents also had unrealistic job expectations and attributed that factor to members being unemployed or unemployable. She suggested that one challenge was "bringing them back to the realm of work and acclimating them into a professional environment (D. Harper, personal communication, September 18, 2019). She also stated:

Members of PLP assume that they are going to get a \$25 an hour job and walk into there, and you are being compared with others that are a little bit more prepared and have taken the time to prepare themselves. And even when we're trying to prepare you, you are still not understanding there's a gap (D. Harper, personal communication, September 18, 2019).

Debra continued,

I remember that um, that there was a yearning to learn and a need, and I saw a gap in, uh, them understanding what their roles were and how they get to where the expectation is for them, and I saw that as a gap (D. Harper, personal communication, September 18, 2019).

Just like Debra, Monica stated that PLP members often had unrealistic expectations. She stated: "I saw all of them with great potential, all got dreams and aspirations...so they have dreams and aspirations, you know, along with their professional development, but they don't know how to access this stuff" (M. Madison, personal communication, September 10, 2019). Keisha also described unrealistic expectations and stated: "some of the other struggles, wanting to, having ideas and wanting to start a big, you know, a business but not necessarily knowing how even though they may have a great idea" (K. Jones, personal communication, September 6, 2019). These comments suggest that PLP members had expectations that were not aligned with their skills or professional experiences or their readiness to enter the workforce.

### **Challenges: Not Taking Advantages of Opportunities**

PLP members did not understand the value of the opportunities provided by the PLP and partner organizations. Throughout their participation in the PLP members received professional development support from community partners. Yvette recalled that while she included literacy training for PLP members they did not complete the prerequisite activities. She stated: "This year, we incorporated a literacy component." She continued, Okay, and so I don't think that most of the parents read the reading assignment prior to, um, the activity" (Y. Griffin, personal communication, September 19, 2019).

Like Yvette, Debra mentioned that PLP members did not utilize community resources: She recounted an experience where she hired a PLP member to serve as a community support specialist responsible for connecting Berwick residents to resources.

Debra expressed frustration with a member who did not take advantage of the resources and services that her office provided. She stated:

If I'm training you and you've been in my office in the summer, and your job is to help others, with resources and find them and match them up and follow them through and provide guidance to them. You're not taking your own advice that you're giving. That to me I thought was, wow, this is something (D. Harper, personal communication, September 18, 2019).

Debra discussed the need for PLP administrators to identify their areas of focus and determine what additional services were needed. She also understood that the program might not have the infrastructure needed to address member challenges.” Diane stated, "these are some things we can refer you to and everything, but there are things that we're not, we're not really addressing it, or should there be a more comprehensive program" (D. Harper, personal communication, September 18, 2019). She also stated that PLP members had challenges expressing future goals after leaving the PLP:

I don't think that they were thinking through what you need to accomplish your goals in life and what activities connected to that long term to get you to that. I thought that some of them wanted immediate gratification, and I thought that was interesting because um if you've been off track, you know because part of this was how do you help your community and your kids? Yes. But I think that it became, how do I just help, it's about me and helping myself too and then helping myself (D. Harper, personal communication, September 18, 2019).

Like Debra, Ines mentioned that she was disappointed that PLP members did not understand the value of seizing opportunities:

It's always disheartening when we discover that we provide opportunities, and you know, they're not willing to take advantage of them. I think one of the things that was created was a partnership with Program for Parents where students had the opportunity had the opportunity to sign on to a cohort where they could become, what was it certified? So we knew that they could do the work. We knew that they had the hours, but the fact that only four of the eight demonstrated an interest and only I think two, um, actually sought through that can be disheartening because these opportunities don't exist all the time (I. Batista, personal communication, September 18, 2019).

Ines' perspective suggests that while her office provided multiple opportunities for parents to receive services, PLP members either did not show interest or their conditions prevented them from being able to participate or even understand the value of increasing their networks and working to obtain services needed to improve their conditions.

### **Summary**

Community-based partners expressed both positive as well as challenging experiences with PLP members. All mentioned that they were able to build trusting relationships, valued their honesty, and agreed that members were willing to provide support for each other. PLP members were also enthusiastic about participating in grassroots projects. Community-based partners also mentioned that the PLP program extensive support to members. They mentioned challenges such as PLP members expressing tense relationships with school officials, balancing their challenges in life, handling stress, and managing emotions. Other challenges that existed included the fact that parents needed social support to cope with their personal and family challenges, the need for economic support, the difficulty of providing support for their children while dealing with economic hardships - a combination that made it difficult for them to have stability and to understand that they did not necessarily have the credentials needed to obtain jobs and careers in their desired profession. As such, members did not understand the value or importance of recognizing and seizing opportunities provided by the PLP. Below are summaries of results from PLP participants, Scottwood's staff, and community-based partners, and the PLP program administrator.

## **Summary of Results**

### **PLP Participants**

PLP members reported multiple examples of bonding and bridging social capital in individual interviews and focus group interviews, with classroom-based teachers, program administrators, non-school based staff members, and community partners. Members also described creating strong bonds and bridging with people who had higher levels of social capital. As a result of bonding and bridging, they were able to launch a successful campaign to remove the previous Parent Teacher Association, establish an annual community health fair, learn how to identify prominent issues, and successfully win a grant that yielded them the resources to lead program initiatives.

### **Scottwood's School-Based Staff**

School-based staff members were comprised of cooperating teachers, support staff, and school administrators. Cooperating teachers mentioned that PLP members had strong bonds with children and families; however, their presence was inconsistent due to personal and organization challenges. Scottwood's school-based support staff described PLP members as supporting school engagement initiatives; however, they mentioned challenges with parents' dual roles as both parents and employees and described challenges from increased expectations. School administrators and the PLP program administrator described PLP members providing nonacademic assistance to students, communication as well as organizational challenges, issues with member capacity, and working through member challenges.



### **Community-Based Partners**

Community-based partners described their experiences with PLP members as generally positive. They mentioned that PLP members were supportive and worked diligently to complete initiatives. Community-based partners also described PLP members' eagerness, enthusiasm, pride, and commitment to improving conditions for themselves, their children, students, and families who attended Scottwood Elementary School and the greater Berwick community. Despite their desires, they reported that PLP members faced significant economic, transportation, housing, and personal challenges that prevented them from being able to complete their professional obligations successfully. Community-based partners also believed that PLP members had dreams and aspirations for future employment; however, those expectations were unrealistic because they lacked appropriate educational credentials and work experiences to enter into their desired fields. This was evident because members often did not follow through in taking advantage of opportunities provided by the PLP or partner organizations that did not align with their aspirational employment goals.

The next section is a speculation on the meaning of these results and how this research study fits within the existing body of research, and suggest recommendations for future studies.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of this qualitative description was to understand what sense stakeholders make of their experiences in a parent engagement program located in a low-income, hyper-segregated school that serves low-income African American students. Before my study, parent engagement was looked at as asset-based or deficit-based. Now, we understand nuances about parental engagement that we did not understand before. This understanding comes from a particular context, but also has more general applicability.

What follows are major findings of the study, the significance of the study, consistencies, and inconsistencies with extant theoretical positions and the literature review. The next section describes new findings, suggests recommendations for future studies. Then, recommendations for future studies and future parent engagement programs are presented. Lastly, the discussion closes with limitations.

The major findings of the study include promises and challenges and superordinate themes. The following themes emerged from PLP members' individual interviews: transforming self, mistrust or negative work environment, developing close relationships with children and families, and challenges implementing program initiatives. Focus group results were generally similar to PLP member interviews, however, members described individual growth, collective growth, a negative school environment, and discontent with changes between the first and second year of the PLP.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it shows that parental engagement programs are complex and include a dynamic interplay between schools, families, and communities.

Also, the study suggests that parent engagement programs can include asset-based and deficit-based components. Also, parent engagement is an active, community, relational, and multifaceted process that is comprised of promises and challenges.

Furthermore, this study explores a complex phenomenon where multiple stakeholders attempted and continued to promote parent engagement despite challenges. This finding is significant because the literature suggests that schools either promote parent involvement or parental engagement. However, school officials legitimately questioned parents' ability to provide sufficient support, however, parents were viewed as being able to build strong relationships with the school community. This is also significant because it shows that mistrust does not necessarily prevent schools from promoting parental engagement.

### **Consistencies and Inconsistencies with Literature Review**

The results were consistent with Bourdieu's Social Capital Theory, which suggests that individuals are affected by social capital, cultural capital, symbolic capital, and economic capital. Findings support the theoretical position on Social Capital Theory (P. Bourdieu, 2016). PLP members expressed gaps in social, cultural, symbolic, and economic capital. Also, PLP participants had different capital than cooperating teachers, school-based support staff, community-based organization leaders, and university officials. These differences seemingly contributed to some of the challenges that participants faced which prevented PLP members from completing job responsibilities or some initiatives. Also, PLP members were often late or absent due to economic hardships, childcare issues, inconsistent transportation, housing challenges, or competing personal responsibilities.

Despite challenges, PLP members were able to work collaboratively, and build trusting relationships with each other, create positive networks, with cooperating teachers, children, and families in the Berwick community. Warren et al. (2009) suggest that parents can develop ties with those who have similar backgrounds, and with the results of cooperating teachers who suggested that at times, parents were able to connect better to students and their families. These findings are consistent with McKenna and Millen (2013) who suggest that parent presence strengthens the social and cultural capital of children in school.

The results were also in alignment with Critical Race Theory because it suggests that as a result of racism and inequalities, voices of marginalized minorities are often suppressed. Given that PLP members expressed personal challenges and community challenges in interviews and focus groups, a reasonable explanation is that participants were victims of structural violence, defined as being excluded from having access to basic resources in education, housing, transportation, or social services (Farmer, 2004).

Results were also consistent with Noguera (2001) theory on negative capital that occurs due to mistrust. As PLP members progressed in the program, their advocacy efforts intensified as individuals and a collective group. As a result, relationships between parents and school officials often intensified. One interesting finding is that while negative capital existed at Scottwood, multiple stakeholders indicated a willingness to collaborate on certain projects with PLP members. This finding is promising because it suggests that issues of negative capital or mistrust are nuanced and can be improved. Also, results indicate that at times, PLP members engaged in what Yosso (2005) refers to as resistant capital as they attempted to secure rights. The results differed from extant

theoretical positions because in this case, PLP members were seemingly interested in collaborating with school officials, school stakeholders, and community-based partners continued to improve Scottwood Elementary School despite issues of mistrust and negative capital.

### **New Findings**

This study suggests that parent participation is nuanced and is comprised of deficit-based and asset-based components. Also, parent engagement should not be viewed as a single lens phenomenon. Instead, the notion is multifaceted and multivocal because stakeholders' interactions and experiences cannot be understood by exploring parent or school officials' experiences. Exploring experiences and interactions between individuals, activities, relationships, and actions that parents participate in while working in a school including orientations, situations, and other activity networks in their communities is important to understanding parent engagement.

Multifaceted and multivocal parent engagement may be missing in previous literature because previous scholars indicate that mistrust is prevalent in low-income hyper-segregated schools. As such, exploring experiences of multiple stakeholders is challenging because school officials may not promote parental engagement. Another challenge that may exist is difficulty establishing trusting relationships with stakeholders who may have nuanced relationships. These nuances may complicate their willingness to describe their experiences in recorded individual or focus group interviews.

### **Meaning of results**

The results indicate a need to understand the nuances of parental engagement. For example, mistrust and negative relationships were prevalent at Scottwood amongst

PLP members, school administrators, and school-based support staff. While members described Scottwood as unwelcoming, they did not seemingly understand how their actions may have exacerbated negative relationships. At times, members were observed hoarding resources, arriving late to class, conducting personal business during their shift, and failing to complete professional responsibilities. Despite their actions, they were quite critical of others and seemingly internalized themselves as victims who were entitled to resources and other opportunities.

Also, while mistrust existed at Scottwood, PLP members were able to build strong relationships with children, families, and cooperating teachers. Moreover, the relationships between PLP and children allowed stakeholders to value members' contributions, and teachers expressed a strong desire to strengthen the program and have more parents in the school. One interesting finding is those cooperating teachers were seemingly unaware of the tension between parents, school administrators, and other school-based staff. This may be the case because teachers in low-income hyper-segregated schools are also left out of the decision-making process. I speculate this occurred because in the classrooms, PLP members had specific responsibilities and while their presence was not reliable, cooperating teachers and PLP members spent hours together each day and as such, built strong relationships.

In addition to establishing strong relationships with teachers, program administrators, school administrators, and community partners collaborated to explore how to provide PLP members with job training, internships, or job placement with partner organizations. However, PLP members did not take advantage of opportunities. This may have occurred because they had unrealistic expectations and believed that they

were going to be able to automatically get fulltime jobs in their desired professions after they completed the program. Also, PLP members seemed complacent with the program and expressed frustration that they would not continue to participate in a paid capacity despite being constantly reminded of the mission of the program. Additionally, while PLP members were seemingly grateful for participating in the program, they eventually developed feelings of entitlement and wanted to be compensated for all of their engagement efforts, even when engagement included attending events such as Back to School night or parent-teacher conferences. Lastly, while the program aimed to utilize parents to participate in parent engagement programs, members did not focus on recruiting parents to participate in activities, but instead, became focused on their individual interests instead of the collective interests of Scottwood's students.

### **Recommendations for Future Studies**

Additional studies that explore experiences of university-school-community partnerships at hyper-segregated schools that primarily serve African American students is needed. Given that mistrust and negative capital often exist in low-income urban communities was prevalent in the existing literature and a major superordinate theme that emerged from multiple stakeholders, I believe that other researchers should explore experiences of school stakeholders who participate in parental engagement programs in other hyper-segregated schools.

Future qualitative studies that explore stakeholder experiences in newly created parent engagement programs in low-income hyper-segregated are needed. These studies will provide additional perspectives on establishing and sustaining parental engagement programs. Also, exploring how school-university-community partnerships work

collaboratively and embrace a relational approach that encourages stakeholders to accomplish goals collectively will provide additional knowledge. Moreover, studies that aim to document the process of moving parents central to decision-making progress are likely to be beneficial.

The results of this study indicate that establishing sustainable parental engagement programs in hyper-segregated African American urban schools is complex and has promises and challenges to be further explored by future researchers. The results offer additional insights into the promises and challenges of a parent engagement program. I recommend further exploring the following themes: mistrust, parents as empowered, social conditions, workforce development, school support, and future employment:

**Mistrust.** Mistrust arose as a significant barrier to parental engagement. Individual interviews from community-based partners and the PLP program administrator suggests that mistrust occurred because parents were viewed as needy recipients, lacked literacy skills, or were not consistent in classrooms.

It can be speculated that Scottwood's initial unwelcomed environment occurred because parental engagement is not prevalent in hyper-segregated African American schools. This may have occurred because organizational challenges prevented parents from being introduced to the school staff and school personnel did not seemingly understand the goal of the program.

Also, other school employees may have felt threatened by the PLP members because there often were no clear lines of demarcation between PLP members' responsibilities and teacher's aides. Further, other caregivers and other parents who



volunteered or advocated at Scottwood before PLP did not seemingly understand the value of establishing a parent engagement program with parents who were tasked with participating in a structured engagement program.

These conclusions arose because paraprofessionals were initially responsible for building connections with PLP members; however, they were not given access to materials needed to complete tasks, ignored, and treated unprofessionally. The research supports the observation that perceived mistreatment by Scottwood's staff fostered a bond between PLP members and helped to create a strong PLP identity that was separate from the Scottwood community. As time progressed and PLP members become informed and integrated into schools, the tension between PLP members and non-cooperating teachers intensified as PLP members obtained firsthand knowledge of challenges at Scottwood Elementary School. As PLP members began raising awareness about issues and wanted immediate change. When PLP believed that their requests were ignored they became demanding, photographed, and recorded evidence to substantiate their positions and used their titles as PLP members and university employees to promote their voices.

Mistrust was a theme of all interviews and focus groups. Cooperating teachers had an overall positive view of the PLP and overwhelmingly supported the PLP program, but described a nuanced definition of mistrust. Cooperating teachers never used the word mistrust; however, they reported that PLP members were not a reliable presence, due to inconsistent attendance, competing responsibilities, and varying skill sets. School-based partners who attempted to provide support to parents also mentioned mistrust, which generally occurred because members struggled to complete tasks and would give up

when they felt their responsibilities were too demanding. Moreover, because PLP members were often in crisis mode, it was challenging to trust them to provide goods to needy families, because they hoarded resources and seemingly were unable to separate their roles as parents, and employees.

**Parents as empowered advocates.** Although parents received extensive professional development and workforce development training, they seemingly utilized their skills to advocate for their personal and professional interests. However, this eventually became a challenge because as time progressed, parents were more interested in advocating for change to collectively organize instead of attempting to collaborate to solve problems. I experienced this firsthand while working with members who often expressed that they would no longer remain silent about perceived issues at Scottwood. As a result, it became increasingly difficult to manage the relationship between school officials and the PLP members. Throughout the second year of the PLP, the program became more structured and parents began to identify challenges that were not in alignment with school priorities. As such, they began to demand change outwardly and utilized their leadership skills learned in a community based organizing program to fight for their interests. Also, PLP members were seemingly not as concerned with providing academic support to students and instead, expressed a stronger interest in participating in school board meetings, conducting community engagement events, and participating in leadership programs aimed at becoming community leaders and change agents.

**Social supports.** Given social conditions that exist in low-income urban neighborhoods, establishing parental engagement programs that build a strong home, school, and community relationships should be comprehensive. Based on the challenges

presented in the study, it may be beneficial to assume that participants in a parental engagement program may not initially reveal personal or family issues, but as time progresses, parents or caregivers who are interested in participating in parent engagement programs may be experiencing significant personal challenges. As such, program administrators should build relationships with individuals from local community-based organizations.

Furthermore, structuring a program that encourages parents to lead community service events to improve the community may not be the best way to utilize parents when they too are in need and experiencing significant economic challenges. Instead, it may be beneficial to include a component that provides parents with strong social service support rather than expecting them to provide services to others.

**Parent capacity.** Parents who are interested in participating in intensive parent engagement programs have varying skill levels and abilities. Consequently, having a program that encourages all parents to provide academic support may be lofty. Instead, creating multiple entry points for parents to become engaged which may include parents initially participating in school-directed involvement activities. Additionally, it may be beneficial to allow parents who are not ready to provide academic support to assist classroom teachers with nonacademic tasks. As parents demonstrate an ability to complete academic tasks, they can have increased responsibilities that include providing academic support.

**Workforce development.** While program supports are provided, members may not understand the value of building workforce development skills and may prefer to participate in advocacy or non-academic based activities that are not in alignment with

the school's priorities. Additionally, members may have a false sense of future expectations or express resentment if their lofty plans do not come to fruition. As such it is important to understand that individuals who are interested in participating in parent engagement programs may have limited work experiences. As such, parents must receive constant support and supervision while they develop professional skills if the goal of a parent engagement program is to ensure that members are able to enter the workforce. Caution is recommended against providing a separate office space because PLP members developed a sense of entitlement with their assigned room, developed a sense of ownership, and became more interested in their initiatives instead of providing direct support to students. This caused a significant conflict that was not initially anticipated by PLP administrators or community partners.

**University-school-community collaborations.** University-School-Community collaborations can be difficult. Future researchers who explore parental engagement should understand that navigating school district policies is extremely challenging. Challenges such as receiving approval from the school board, obtaining access to the school district's curricular resources, obtaining timely and accurate data, coordinating professional development, having access to resources for members to complete required tasks, and getting from school-based support staff to help facilitate recruitment, and joint accountability for shared goals and initiatives.

Moreover, researchers who are interested in parental engagement work should understand that the school's priorities may diverge from the university's definition of parental engagement. They may believe that parental involvement is similar to parental engagement. Also, when challenges persist, school officials may initially place blame on

the university, instead of adopting a collaborative approach that is welcoming and supportive and patient with parents.

### **Future Parent Engagement Programs**

Despite complexities that exist in urban schools, promises and challenges may inhibit or prevent strong university-school-community relationships for future parent engagement programs. To improve relationships and develop trusting bonds, creating networks that are mutually beneficial for students, caregivers, and members of the school community may lead to transformative parental engagement (Hong, 2012). Establishing these relationships and may allow parents to mobilize behind collective issues and continue to develop trusting bonds (Caldwell et al., 2005).

Having clear expectations for PLP members may be challenging but it is imperative for newly established parental engagement programs. Based on results from this study, shifting priorities between Year I and Year II posed a significant challenge for members. This can be attributed to program restructuring that required parents to provide daily academic and attendance support to students, versus being able to work on their perceived priorities, which may or may not have been aligned with the goals and mission of the program. As such, members expressed frustration with the structure and believed that too much emphasis was placed on data.

Another frustration that individuals who are interested in establishing parental engagement programs should understand is that members may blame program administrators for their inability to obtain fulltime employment or express that they did not receive adequate support or job training. This was unanticipated because prior to PLP members joining the program, all were unemployed and mentioned an interest in

securing fulltime employment at Scottwood Elementary School. It is believed, that as time progressed, members received increased attention and exposure, and as a result, developed unrealistic expectations, a sense of entitlement, and a belief that they could obtain fulltime employment in their desired areas of interest.

Being excluded from the workforce may be why future participants in parent engagement programs may reject what seems like an opportunity to obtain fulltime employment as school-based classroom aide or paraprofessionals because they are interested in exploring careers in areas where they lack credentials, experience, or both. Program officials and other stakeholders were surprised that members from the study did not take advantage of opportunities presented such as completing workforce development programs, obtaining free early childhood certificates, or leveraging their relationships to obtain full-time positions as classroom paraprofessionals.

Albeit challenging, school officials who want to build strong parent engagement programs may also consider altering rigid school cultures that alienate parents, and allow them to participate in school governance. Additionally, school officials should anticipate that parents may have experienced mistrust, resentment, fear, or are intimidated by past school experiences. To improve relationships and develop trusting bonds, these officials may strategically create networks that are mutually beneficial for students, caregivers, and members of the school community. Establishing these relationships may allow parents to mobilize behind collective issues and build trusting bonds.

These supportive relationships include scaffolding, patience, reconciliation, establishing trust, and working collectively to improve educational outcomes for children. Also, parents should be given multiple entry points and opportunities to participate in

school-based engagement activities and be treated as equal partners despite cultural and social differences between families and school officials (Shirley et al., 2006). If parents are equal partners, it is likely to move schools and families closer to developing relational trust and strong collaborations and shared expectations (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). It is also important to understand that parents who participate in parental engagement activities may experience significant hardships, so building strong collaborations with community stakeholders who have resources to provide support for parents may increase engagement.

Establishing clear expectations for PLP members and minimizing changes may be beneficial for those who are interested in developing parent engagement programs. This recommendation is included because between the first and second year of the PLP, program members struggled with adapting to increased expectations because they were seemingly complacent. This tension may be attributed to program restructuring that required parents to provide additional academic and attendance support to students, versus being able to work on their perceived priorities. As such, members expressed frustration with the structure and believed that too much emphasis was placed on data.

Another recommendation for future parent engagement programs is to consider establishing workforce development training. This is recommended because members often expressed unreasonable expectations for future employment opportunities. This was unanticipated because prior to PLP members joining the program, all were unemployed and mentioned an interest in securing fulltime employment at Scottwood Elementary School. It is believed, that as time progressed, members received increased attention and exposure, and as a result, developed unrealistic expectations, a sense of

entitlement, and a belief that they could obtain fulltime employment in their desired areas of interest.

### **Limitations**

This study has several limitations worth noting. In the program, I was both the researcher and program director of the PLP. Second, the study was a purposive sample of parents who successfully graduated from a parent engagement program in a hyper-segregated African American school. This was a limitation because participants who did not successfully complete the program were not included in the study. As such, conducting individual interviews or focus group interviews to explore attrition may have provided additional insights. Additionally, data collected and analyzed was self-reported data and sought to understand experiences so participants may have forgotten exaggerated, or embellished experiences. Also, conducting research that attempts to explore mistrust may be difficult to replicate because it is likely that stakeholders may not feel comfortable expressing honest perspectives around parent participation. As such, findings from this study may be difficult to replicate.

Additionally, the PLP program was under an initiative that allowed the university to allocate significant resources to the neighborhood through a university investment, private foundations, government grants, and human capital so finding another existing university-school-community partnership of this nature may not be realistic. Replicating a study that explores a multi-year parent engagement program that includes paying parents, as university employees during the study may also be difficult. PLP members were paid university employees and worked at Scottwood for approximately twenty



hours per week. Given limited resources from other institutions, I am not sure that this cohort was reflective of a typical parent engagement program.

Another feature of this program is that a former teacher and school administrator had experience and established relationships with members of Scottwood Elementary School. Prior to conducting the study, the researcher worked with two of the administrators at another school. Additionally, the PLP liaison who later became the PLP program coordinator worked in a part-time capacity to support the initiative before he became the program coordinator.

Lastly, the Scottwood's administrative team had a long-standing relationship with the university, so as a result, a trusting relationship already existed so while school officials were seemingly ready for members of the PLP to depart, all expressed an interest in an idea of the program and a continued desire to collaborate with a subsequent cohort of parents.

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## **Appendix A – Individual Interview Protocol**

Thank you for participating in today's individual interview. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss your experiences that you've had while participating in the Parent Leadership Program.

This session will take approximately 45-60 minutes, and questions will be asked about your experiences in the Parent Leadership Program. I encourage you to share your honest experiences. Also, sensitive information will be discussed during the session, so it is imperative that information discussed during the interview is confidential. You have completed a confidentiality form, so please understand that you should feel comfortable speaking freely during the interview. Although the session is going to be taped, no one will have access to the recordings other than the researcher. Information given will help me to understand your experiences in the Parent Leadership Program.

- 1) How long have you been a participant in the Parent Leadership Program?
- 2) Prior to participating in PLP, did you participate in any parent engagement activities? If so, please explain.
- 3) Prior to participating in PLP, did you advocate for other types of inequalities? Please explain.
- 4) What do you remember about your experiences in PLP?
- 5) What challenges persist for PLP members who provided academic support for students at your school?
- 6) What challenges persist for PLP members who provided attendance improvement support for students at your school?
- 7) Please describe your experiences in participating campaign or project as a member of PLP?
- 8) What do you remember about other experiences in the Parent Leadership Program?
- 9) What were your best memories when participating in PLP?
- 10) What were your worst memories when participating in PLP?
- 11) How have you changed by participating in PLP?
- 12) What about your experiences in PLP surprised you?
- 13) Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experiences in PLP?

## **Appendix B – Cooperating Teacher Interview Protocol**

Thank you for participating in today's individual interview. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss your experiences that you've had while working with the Parent Leadership Program.

This session will take approximately 45-60 minutes, and questions will be asked about your experiences working with participants in the Parent Leadership Program. I encourage you to share your honest experiences. Also, sensitive information will be discussed during the session, so it is imperative that information discussed during the interview is confidential. You have completed a confidentiality form, so please understand that you should feel comfortable speaking freely during the interview. Although the session is going to be taped, no one will have access to the recordings other than the researcher. Information given will help me to understand your experiences working with members of the Parent Leadership Program.

- 1) How long have you worked with participants in the Parent Leadership Program?
- 2) What do you remember about your experiences working with PLP members?
- 3) What challenges initially persisted for PLP members?
- 4) What challenges persist for PLP members?
- 5) Please describe your experiences working with PLP members?
- 6) What were your best memories when collaborating with parents in the PLP?
- 7) What were your worst memories when collaborating with parents in the PLP?
- 8) How have you changed by collaborating with PLP parents?
- 9) What about your experiences with PLP parents surprised you?
- 10) Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experiences with PLP?

### **Appendix C – School-Based Support Team, Program Administrator & Community-Based Partners Protocol**

Thank you for participating in today's individual interview. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss your experiences that you've had while working with the Parent Leadership Program.

This session will take approximately 45-60 minutes, and questions will be asked about your experiences working with participants in the Parent Leadership Program. I encourage you to share your honest experiences. Also, sensitive information will be discussed during the session, so it is imperative that information discussed during the interview is confidential. You have completed a confidentiality form, so please understand that you should feel comfortable speaking freely during the interview. Although the session is going to be taped, no one will have access to the recordings other than the researcher. Information given will help me to understand your experiences working with members of the Parent Leadership Program.

- 1) How long have you worked with participants in the Parent Leadership Program?
- 2) What do you remember about your experiences working with PLP members?
- 3) What challenges initially persisted for PLP members?
- 4) What challenges persist for PLP members?
- 5) Please describe your experiences in participating in a campaign or a project with PLP members?
- 6) What do you remember about other experiences working with the Parent Leadership Program?
- 7) What were your best memories when collaborating with PLP?
- 8) What were your worst memories when collaborating with PLP?
- 9) How have you changed by collaborating with PLP members?
- 10) What about your experiences with PLP surprised you?
- 11) Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experiences with PLP?

### Appendix D – PLP Members Table of Superordinate Themes

<b>Taffy Brown: Table of Superordinate themes</b>	
Superordinate Theme	Time Stamp
<p><b>Transforming of personal self as a professional</b></p> <p>It kinda changed me in a way cause I was like a real ghetto hoodlum girl And depending on the situation, I would definitely let you have it in a professional way This program taught me a lot about professionalism I know I'm here for the kids, but I don't want her to come crazy at me. And then my old self, like what bitch, you know, so I'm like, you know, how do I do this but Mr. Walker to help me with that I will cuss somebody out, and I've raised black, somebody wrote and Malik like no girl, this, you can't, no, no Like me getting out of character is not going to help me continue my success. It's just going to take me back. So I've learned that even outside of work settings You know, and I'm loving the change Like I feel like now you can't be this way and then when you somewhere else be this way Mr. Walker definitely helped me learn how to cope with things like when you're upset to think of different perspectives Like the overall experience was a real learning experiment. Like guys, no end to what we're learning, like every day we learn something new</p>	<p>(05:31) (06:16) (06:31) (25:25) (41:18) (42:11) (43:07) (43:58) (45:30) (51:16)</p>
<p><b>Challenging Relationships With Staff</b></p> <p>They'd be doing stuff. They got no business doing monitor people business. So if you're telling us to sit in a lounge where it's public, everybody's coming in and out, that's just not, you know acceptable We try to help with like events that they have with giving back to the community, and they tell a boss like, oh, they were stealing It'd be so much with that school. It's just they want us there to do what they want us to do I go to Ms. Harrison, and she would have that information for us, but it was a struggle just to get that. It's like they really don't want us there, but they know Ms. Smith needs us. I wish, um, I just wish the school were more, how can I say this? Um, say assessable I Love Scottwood itself, but the people in there as Shitty, shitty, they're terrible with the professionalism, like, cause that's my biggest thing. And um, you know, how to talk to people. And, uh, how to let things go and learn how to choose your battles. And, um, I work with that outside of work too as well. So it taught me, I mean, 360, they complete 360</p>	<p>(08:16) (08:22)) (8:31) (8:45) (23:05) (33:45) (37:12) (40:40)</p>

<p><b>Difficulty managing program initiatives</b></p> <p>But as far as trying to really make a difference is we felt like we need to be with, uh, our group one on one and couldn't make it happen. (11:03)</p> <p>Like some of the kids didn't know their alphabets coming into kindergarten, didn't know how to spell their name. (11:40)</p> <p>The kids have a lot of behavior issues (12:57)</p> <p>I have played a little part, but to me, it was such big or like I can't believe that. (15:49)</p> <p>Like they were so behind. (19:25)</p> <p>And it was just a disaster because the teachers wasn't doing their part is putting attendance in at the proper time (21:38)</p> <p>So we throw a lot of behavior, different behaviors, you know. So usually when I come in, there's really no time to really talk with the teacher. (22:36)</p> <p>We used to go to the office and a of our scholars, what they hear today was they late today, and every time we go to the office, they was like, oh, I can't, I'm busy. I'm busy. I'm busy. (23:05)</p> <p>I go to Ms. Harrison, and she would have that information for us, but it was a struggle just to get that. It's like they really don't want us there, but they know Ms. the principal needs us. (24:17)</p> <p>So trying to call them and they cussing you out and they, they not answering.</p>	
<p><b>Programmatic Changes</b></p> <p>You've got to learn how to adjust and keep it moving. (2:41)</p> <p>They used to just throw us in meetings in front of these big people (6:44)</p> <p>But this year they swapped me out to the second-grade class and a teacher, oh it's an inclusive class. (12:01)</p> <p>I felt like I can't track progress this way, and I told Malik October Walker and reflections and this and all that, but nothing really changed. (12:26)</p> <p>That attendance piece, let me just tell you that it stuck because there was no one wants Walker. (19:01)</p>	

<b>Maria Bandera: Table of Superordinate themes</b>	
Superordinate Themes	Time Stamp
<p><b>Transforming self</b>  When we first started my temper, I would go from a zero to a thousand real quick, I mean I still speak my mind, so that doesn't hold me back. But now I just learned to have patience, not every action needs a reaction  I decided to speak my mind. And before you know it now me and the lady we face to face, and it almost went, you know, start to hitting each other  Even though it's a workshop, it has to do a lot with, in your inner self and you know, having a bond with your kids</p>	<p>(13:35)  (14:54)  (18:08)</p>
<p><b>Developing bonds/connections to children</b>  I think everything we've done, it's been successful with just coming into the school and seeing the kid smiles and just the kids acknowledging you  I got attached to two little girls in the school. They was twins, and one of them tried to kill themselves.  Um, even though at times we wanted to quit, I think because of the kids, the students we never did quit. So I think that's what makes us go to work every day is our students.  How would it look like it was quitting in the kids are going to look at us like we failed them too</p>	<p>(08:24)  (09:36) (22:18)  (23:23)</p>
<p><b>Negative relationships</b>  Um, the rooms wouldn't be available. Um, they couldn't give us copies, you know, we'll have attitudes. Um, some of the staff wouldn't want to talk to us.  I think that's where we, we need to know our limits and at the end of the day we are going to be parents before anything  I think they were intimidated because you're a parent, and now your voice could be heard. And because we feel a lot, they're scared.  We're going to say something that we're not supposed to say. And even though we feel sometimes things are not done properly and we speak on it, we start seeing that things are getting shut down for us.</p>	<p>(02:20)  (05:49)  (06:39)  (06:46)</p>
<p><b>Working through Challenges</b>  Um, one thing I have noticed with the team, we work under pressure, so if they throw a last-minute project. We could come together. Um, it's just the stress and just trying to put all the ideas together at the last minute.  So we just have to take the punches as they come to us.  Mother wasn't responding. It was because she was incarcerated, but you know, but she had been having attendance issues since last year.  And at the last minute, he just threw us in the mix. And, um, we didn't have no idea what to do, how to start. We didn't have no clue. And at the last minute, we put it all together.</p>	<p>(01:28)  (01:53) (03:13)  (04:16)  (04:38)</p>

They just throw it on us, and we didn't know where to start	(06:59)
Complicated, but still with that we still find another way to maneuver	(07:18)
These classes are overpopulated and understand as a teacher could get stressful and overwhelmed	(10:37)
She was trying to throw herself like out the window from our school, so she had it all planned out. Like one of the security guards was passing and seeing her so they grabbed her, so she had it all planned out.	

<b>Mercedes Carter: Table of Superordinate themes</b>	
Superordinate Theme	Time Stamp
<p><b>Transformed who she was to a leader</b></p> <p>Ms. Smith came to me, the principal, because at every meet and I was getting them every meeting and I was, I was taking up for the school, I was producing facts</p> <p>I'm happy being it because it's, it's, it's a way for me to, to, to, to go forth and get more things into the school</p> <p>So I had a couponing workshop to show people how to save money.</p> <p>I spoke to people about autism, and in our community, you know, and how one on every four child is being bought at our community, you know, um,</p> <p>I'm trying to get and have a job fair in June</p> <p>So last year we did a lot of community stuff. We did community cleanups; we did the health, mind, body, and soul. Oh, that was the best thing we ever did</p> <p>Some of us joined the neighborhood association</p> <p>I'm more fierce when it comes to advocate and fit everything. When it comes to advocating for everything, I am fierce. I am fearless</p>	<p>(43:55)</p> <p>(45:42)</p> <p>(46:30)</p> <p>(46:43)</p> <p>(48:50)</p> <p>(49:56)</p> <p>(58:20)</p>
<p><b>Positive relationships with children and families</b></p> <p>When they got a math, got a math problem and they figured out how to do it and them, you'll see them</p> <p>I was the classroom mom and my, my classroom listen to play with me.</p> <p>Don't make me, cause I walked the streets with these kids</p> <p>But if I didn't have that relationship with that parent, and again, that parent is not my, not one of my five. And then what, you know, you do, you gotta you do more</p> <p>The best memory or the hugs I get every day, every single day and surround me and hugged me and squeeze me</p>	<p>(19:24)</p> <p>(24:57)</p> <p>(40:55)</p> <p>(55:18)</p>
<p><b>Changes between year 1 and year 2</b></p> <p>After December, um, Malik wanted to focus a lot of our time on tutoring because no, in February, because report cards came out in our kids in third grade and second grade and it was like, oh my God, what is going on</p> <p>Everything's always unsure is like all we doing tutoring this day, are we doing enrichment? Everything was changing</p> <p>We have them reading essays and timing them for a minute and things like that. Like they just kept throwing new stuff into the mix when it was just whenever, just whatever.</p> <p>The first year was like throw everything against the wall and see what sticks.</p> <p>That's how I felt. They were throwing everything against the wall and seeing how it stuck</p> <p>If you read any of our reflections or if they were totally different than the</p>	<p>(23:52)</p> <p>(29:38)</p> <p>(30:20)</p> <p>(32:14)</p> <p>(33:06)</p> <p>(34:26)</p> <p>(56:10)</p> <p>(56:47)</p>



<p>reflections you get this year  And so at first, it was kind of like all over the place, like in understanding exactly how they wanted  The indecisiveness, the war. My worst memory or my worst thing that, that, that made me not want to be a part of this program this year  Everything is, we need data, but you gotta have some type of heart in it. I'm sorry. You got to have some type of heart in it. It feels like they don't</p>	
<p><b>Challenges with initiatives</b>  So there was no attendance coordinator  I track my five students attendance, but I'm here for the whole class because I can't have a kid across the, let's not much</p>	<p>(35:17)  (36:55)</p>
<p><b>Unwelcoming School Environment</b>  I think the first year we were there, the first six months maybe for me the first six months they did not want us  They were the social cue cues that you get when you're unwanted. We got them all the dismissiveness we'll ask the question, and then I'm like, you know the faces, I'm sorry, the faces they would give us, um, lurking around our office  It's been a couple of times where I've caught principal Smith standing over there. I've called security guard standing over there, and they're not doing nothing  The only time they invited us to do stuff is when they needed our help. Help clean up, help serving  We're there helping with teacher, guiding the students and their parents, you know, um, helping the signatures, getting, getting, signing sheets, and all that were there helping everything. And someone comes upstairs and says, when all the teachers are finish eating, y'all can come down and eat  I said, fuck that. I ain't shit. You're not going to treat me like a slave. And then say after Master eat you could eat  Forget where, but it was around this time because we had a career day here and had a career day this year here, just passed and they said, y'all can eat lunch after we finished serving everybody else  While the program leads set, when they butt and barked orders, and we jumped from table to table to table, helping kids with homework  I understand the shackles that not public school district has on the school itself. I see where it can, the school itself as Scottwood Avenue as a whole needs customer service relationship  Literally no outreach. No, no, no, no Kumbaya, no holding hands with the parents  So Malik doesn't know how to communicate. Aaron doesn't know how to communicate their communication sucked</p>	<p>(11:40)  (11:58)  (12:34)  (13:06)  (13:48)  (14:20)  (14:57)  (20:59)  (59:41)  (01:02:30)  (01:07:25)</p>
<p><b>Challenges working with students</b>  You had three days off. What's going on, man? I'm tired. I'm tired. Why are</p>	<p>(26:20)</p>

you, tired man? Cause I, I had to protect my mom. I had to call the cops on my mom because her boyfriend was beating up third grade I had the screenshot that listen to the teacher because she was going off and I had, and I calmed her down	(40:22)
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<b>Keon Henry: Table of Superordinate themes</b>	
Superordinate Theme	Time Stamp
<p><b>PLP allowed him to build strong relationships</b></p> <p>Created a very good bond because I was going into class, um, pulling the kids out of class for about 45 minutes each (04:37)</p> <p>Another thing that teachers did allow me to do was sit in the classroom (05:49)</p> <p>Just different organizations that I reached out to or reached out to me and I became a part of, you know, getting to know the mayor. Um, getting to know, um, the superintendent. (34:05)</p>	
<p><b>PLP program leaders did not address his concerns</b></p> <p>It was more of a, you see things, but you tell us it was more like you're threatening, our job positions or us saying, oh well you'll go to the district (03:59)</p> <p>I do remember is not communicating from our superiors as far as if we're doing something in the school (08:02)</p> <p>But a lot of the communication between Malik in the parent group, if I would say, um, being empathetic as far as parents, we are a parent group, so (11:38)</p> <p>therefore we think more as a parent (18:19)</p> <p>We had, we had uh, we had some hiccups as far as um, communication</p>	
<p><b>Issues in implementing PLP attendance initiatives (or initiatives in general)</b></p> <p>Created the whole success mentor piece for the sixth, seventh, and eighth-graders. I came up with the whole blueprint (06:52)</p> <p>Addresses within confidentiality because some parents are displaced (09:09)</p> <p>Uhm...The biggest challenge we have was really. Ummm. Throughout (15:03)</p> <p>tracking the attendance, I would say really meet and greet in with the parents (23:08)</p> <p>Our community fair last year, and we just had a community fair this year.</p> <p>Um, struggle putting projects together</p>	
<p><b>Negative relationship with school staff</b></p> <p>I was seen more as a parent employee so that it kind of limited to some of the things that we could say versus what we've seen going on that was wrong in the school (02:12)</p> <p>I say, you know, I'm gonna take this back to the board, and we need to figure out because the kids was coming into the library (03:26)</p> <p>Some of the kids' parents did not deal with the school because of the environment and the staff (08:52)</p> <p>Getting frustrated with um. Response times, uhm. I would say {inaudible} the main issue that I said to the principal about, um, going to the district about (24:55)</p> <p>how she was handling the situation in the library</p>	

<b>Ability to grow</b> More professionalism, being able to hold my composure, um, and deal with situations, being able to hold my composure and being able to go with situations responsibly, respectfully and professional	(28:16)
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<b>Jackie Howard: Table of Superordinate themes</b>	
Superordinate Theme	Time Stamp
<p><b>PLP allowed her to advocate for food inequalities</b></p> <p>I have a medium if more so than before.</p> <p>I've advocated for the school lunch, but um, it's like a lot of red tape that you have to go through.</p> <p>And even though that we wanted, um, fixed and fast, um, it seems like it's taken a lot because it seems like it's still, uh, discuss the lunch and breakfast.</p> <p>I advocated for the cleanliness of the school. Um, it gets clean when state is coming to the school.</p> <p>We, um, the promise pants came up with the idea for the food pantry and, um, it should have been started by last summer, but we're still waiting, um, to get that up and running.</p>	<p>(05:49)</p> <p>(06:11)</p> <p>(06:11)</p> <p>(06:11)</p> <p>(07:30)</p>
<p><b>Struggled with getting chronically absent students to attend school</b></p> <p>I had one student say, no, my Momma told me not to share her business. Do not be telling y'all business</p> <p>We're constantly was told like, you're not doing the tracking sheet correctly</p> <p>Once we got contact information, um, from the parents, we will reach out to them, but either they would hang up the phone or, um, say, well they'd get there when they get there</p> <p>The struggles that they have if they're riding transportation</p> <p>Like they're telling us their business as a wiser, they're late or if they're, you know, um, if they stay in another town or city, they didn't want to disclose that to us at first</p> <p>And speaking with his mom and dad, um, for a whole month straight, he was on time. He was in school and never missed a day.</p> <p>Um, well, we were in like 50 days of school. She had missed 38 days already, and she was late 31 days.</p> <p>His mom drops him off to school on time. He just decides to not come into that the school, and maybe he just started eight. Uh, so he just hangs outside of the school and um, for Rita mom, that's like talking to a brick wall.</p> <p>So we have all these steps that we have to go through to reach out to these parents</p>	<p>(29:04)</p> <p>(30:27)</p> <p>(30:51)</p> <p>(30:51)</p> <p>(31:29)</p> <p>(32:10)</p> <p>(32:41)</p> <p>(37:15)</p> <p>(39:20)</p>
<p><b>PLP allowed her to build confidence and leadership skills</b></p> <p>I'm the PTA vice president now. I didn't want to be the president</p> <p>We had enrolled into the resident leadership academies and, um, we went through all the workshops there to get acclimated with the community and advocating</p> <p>During the change project and the change project, we, it was so many ideas.</p> <p>We went from um, revamping the community engagement room</p>	<p>(03:30)</p> <p>(08:10)</p> <p>(08:10)</p> <p>(08:10)</p>

<p>We came up with the food pantry, and we had got a \$2,000 grant  It began a long process and everything, um, we decided to work under, um, Spirit community corporation  Because we're able to see more in of what's going on inside the school, like, um, and if we have issues with something, we're letting our voices be heard now  They didn't really understand that, um, we're real parents and we're going to speak up about if our child or other children are going through  Like for me, that was a real big, um, push to myself esteem because  This has been the only job that I've actually was happy about.  I'm happy for, I've been chosen for promise parents, even with all the hiccups, all the BS, everything  I've become more of, become more known in the community.  But being involved in the community, it opened my eyes to don't just look out for yourself, look out for the other people that's dealing with these same issues  But I can honestly say being in promising parent I was a mute. I would just observe and just sit quietly the first year, um, the first year prior to being in PLP I would just observe.  They can't shut me up when it's a problem.</p>	<p>(08:56)  (43:31)  (45:22)  (54:22)  (59:34)  (1:02:19)  (1:12:22)  (1:13:29)  (1:13:55)  (1:14:13)</p>
<p><b>Constant programmatic changes/problems</b>  We sent them the paperwork to the principal gave her I, our plan for the pantry. She said it was a good idea. She approved, and she allowed it. But now I don't know what the holdup is, but now it's the end of the year again, and we're still waiting in district approval.  Prior to doing the booster program, we were working in after school program with 21st century. That was a chaotic experience.  I didn't feel that we had a of a fifth group. Um, like with kids, were uncontrolled.  We had some very behavior kids, and by the time boosters, um, ended, their teachers would say, wow. Like they will literally come and get us from our, our classes that we were doing class support and, and say, Hey, can you talk to such and such?  At the beginning, we, um, like the pickup, it was like an extra shift for us, and we were told that we would get paid for the extra shifts, but after a lot, it was going good. But then a few months later, that's when he said, oh no, we can't pay you for these hours.  Success mentor attendance mindset, it was a struggle at first because they wanted it done a specific way, but we didn't understand like exactly what to do  His year I'm like, we had to follow up with parents and parent contact started out. I'm not so good. We were unable to reach parents. We were unable to get contact information or like Cornwall,  Like, no, we're not NPS, um, staff, so we can't have that information.  Mr. Walker was the attendance, um, prison when he was employed by in</p>	<p>(10:00)  (11:34)  (11:34)  (14:33)  (16:49)  (28:03)  (28:03)  (28:03)  (29:52)  (35:07)  (00:00)  (49:29)</p>

Springfield public schools. But once he left and went over the Cornwall, they didn't have a Springfield public schools, and it has attendance person	(50:08)
The data was conflicting because when, and the, um, power school system that they would have more actresses or more, um, tardies than there actually was with our data.	(51:14)
We were reaching out to people, um, to attend, and they did attend, but at the last minute, um, they changed the date.	(56:09)
The pantry was our second project. Um, as we were starting that everything was going good. But um, with the whole dope, with the principal and everything and with the paperwork, I started getting, um, like, fuck it, I'm tired of it. They don't want us to do, they want us to do it, but they don't want us to do it.	(57:58)
I have to, I have to keep pushing and remind myself like, this is what the families need. Um, so whatever you got to go through with, with the school and the district just go through it	(1:07:53)
With the first event we would, so they, we had a certain budget and then at the last minute I budget was drastically cut. Uh, um, that was a downfall too	(1:09:14)
is like always at the, like we're told one thing, and that was the biggest thing with being a part of the problem and spirit. Like we're told one thing, but at the last minute things change	(1:09:44)
More community things being done. Um, last year compared to this year and last year	(1:11:41)
We was told to do like a vision board or goals that we want to complete or certifications that we wanted to take, and they will assist us and taking the certifications. Um, these two years that we've been in promise parents, we don't really have anything like certifications or anything.	(1:19:28)
Not being consistent. And when I say not being consistent is, um, like our role. Like last year we had the booster program. That was a good thing. I felt, well we all felt, um, with the booster appropriate, it was good but based off of what Marcus and them said, like with the data	
He up and down of what our role or what we were to do with their problems. Parent leadership. Last year we did education, we did after school, we did during the school day we did community work and like I understand it's a pilot program, and it's going to be a lot of changes, but it's like they took away what we felt were good.	
If this program is based off of the viewpoint of parents in the school and what parents see is good, then don't take everything away that we say is good, or that is working	
If we say this is the issue, then try to find a solution to that issue. Don't try to say, okay, well, we can't help with that. Thank you for telling us, but we can do something else.	
I think the biggest issue is that they have so many partners that they want us to be acquainted with, but they don't schedule it correctly	
<b>Change Agent</b> We helped with homework, um, prior to the booster program that ever kids	(13:24)

that never turns in her homework, but afterward, um, they would turn their homework	
<p><b>Negative Relationship with school staff</b></p> <p>were arguing with them because their data is wrong. Um, and we feed that their data is wrong because majority of our parents, all of our parents, and the only reason I out of the non seven of us, um, received the hearing papers is because two of the parents don't even have kids in the school</p> <p>Like they just see us as workers now. They don't see us as parents. Like, um, for instance, last year we had the literacy carnival, we had to go to different tables, um, like to like a book fair or a regular carnival and we received tickets for each table or event, um, exercise workshop that we did. And like they like target, it's like where did y'all get those tickets from? Y'all stole those tickets</p> <p>Ms. Hampton, she, she bats for us. I can say that's the only person, um, like between Scottwood and with us in this program, it's hard to always best for us, but the rest of the administration is like, we're not parents anymore. We just working...</p> <p>After being inside the school, working in the school, and seeing like from a different viewpoint, um, I see what the previous PTA was talking about. They wanted us to be yes men and we're not. So I guess that's where the problem was. They wanted us to keep our mouth closed.</p> <p>I believe they just wanted us to stay hush on the problems.</p>	<p>(39:55)</p> <p>(41:47)</p> <p>(00:00)</p> <p>(44:07)</p> <p>(44:48)</p> <p>(45:22)</p>



<b>Olivia Francis: Table of Superordinate themes and themes</b>	
Superordinate Theme	Time Stamp
<p><b>Inability to use training to work with students</b>  We were trained to be better literacy instructors and have a more well rounded understanding of how to help our students. But we weren't able to actively do that  It was very distracting depending on the class, depending on the given day  The literacy training with Miss Scott, we did after school, the booster program that helped me to help my children become better readers</p>	<p>(9:28)  (12:42)  (36:48)</p>
<p><b>Bureaucratic challenges to accomplish projects</b>  There's always some bureaucracy or some politicking involved in making something very good happen, you know, and instead of giving a reasonable explanation  Um, contacting the parents, uh, at, for even up to now, uh, getting in contact with them or the means of getting in contact. Uh, for me personally, I don't want to use my cell phone for that  One of the projects that I started was to try to get the court yard reestablished and the community garden across the street that unfortunately didn't happen again because of unnecessary red tape  And when I say that upper administration at all, something was always some hiccups  Just the reason why a lot of things can't get fixed and I don't see in the foreseeable future, them getting taken care of in terms of the facilities, the infrastructure, the general environment of the school is if the leadership principal, the head administrator doesn't see the need for us  His is a great idea, it is a great idea, but some of the kinks should've been worked out. And if you, if we were involved in the planning process of all things</p>	<p>(7:13)  (15:49)  (18:32)  (19:26)  (21:05)  (42:46)</p>
<p><b>Mistrust/Negative work environment</b>  Your intentions are good, but your presence may not always be welcome  When you want to help, you're often met with resistance or a backlash  Maybe they feel threatened because if parents see things they're not doing, they might get reported. But that, that was never our intention  Because when you go into the school, it's depressing. That even affects the staff. You find that the teachers are going to be very short-tempered or always irritated or always annoyed when you come in  The amount of free time and volunteer time we put in when we first started working there is ridiculous. And we stopped because every time we really tried to do something good that was visible and would have a significant impact is actually feet kicked in the mouth  Cleaned that library got it looking right. That happened. That was a Monday.</p>	<p>(05:36)  (05:36)  (08:40)  (22:09)  (23:27)  (25:51)  (31:16)</p>

<p>The Wednesday, the principal sends out an email to Malik telling the parents that we can't be in the media space or the library space and during work hours Even it, you inherited that, you didn't put this asbestos is there, but how you handled it was just very and is very inhumane, and you wonder why parents don't want to do things because her attitude is an administrator stinks Change that can expand into the community. And it starts with really being honest about the skeletons in the closet I'm not going to go above and beyond in certain situations if I know I'm being used This whole meet and greet was planned, but we as the parents weren't asked what was the best day or anything like that</p>	<p>(33:10) (40:29) (42:04)</p>
<p><b>Materializing potential</b> PLP definitely encouraged me to broaden my horizons as a mother educator, you know, um, to learn more myself and read more I'm more vocal about what I like, what I don't like, where I can improve You have a lot of wiggle room, gosh, it gives you wiggle and not wiggle room to be idle, but actually, to improve your life, It actually helps parents to realize their potential</p>	<p>(13:52) (43:07) (46:01) (47:07)</p>

<b>Rhonda Upchurch: Table of Superordinate themes</b>	
Superordinate Theme	Time Stamp
<p><b>Was left out of the decision-making process</b></p> <p>Not giving the correct list of how to educate because We took professional developments and stuff like that to go and be able to tutor kids</p> <p>We understand that y'all meeting and y'all supposed to be going to [Inaudible], but we don't know what was discussed</p> <p>What's going to be done cause we are told something else</p> <p>They will go on and have a meeting without us</p>	<p>(08:35)</p> <p>(09:57)</p> <p>(09:57)</p> <p>(44:53)</p>
<p><b>Challenges Implementing program initiatives</b></p> <p>But the board, we were like, okay, well they can't do this and they can't do that. But then at the beginning of it, we could now that we can't</p> <p>They'll come in and mid and then to find out that uhm, they're not even up to par in first grade, and we have to, from the teacher's point of view, she has to continue on with her curriculum</p> <p>But the kid can't tell time or the child can't, can't distinguish N from m or T it just frust it just frustrates her.</p> <p>And then some of them have, um, a behavioral problem and they haven't even been evaluated yet, and she's like, okay, they have to get evaluated.</p> <p>The challenges, well, is the expectation of what they wanted us to do? Like they really don't understand that even though we have, um, a report with the parents or guardians, sometimes it's hard</p> <p>But go through the process because now the parents waiting and relying on us.</p> <p>You said you was going to help me with transportation. I need bus tickets. My kid's been absent three days now I have no way to get the child there. Oh, it's a process. There's nothing else we can tell this Parent</p> <p>They say the university had to go through a process</p> <p>We had this amount of money, and as you start to do the planning, the money just got smaller and smaller and smaller and smaller and smaller</p> <p>The budget kept getting cut. And the funny thing was it was no communication about why the budget was cut.</p> <p>We was helping them. They, they cut a lot of out that we did. They just yeah it's sad because we wanted it back</p>	<p>(11:13)</p> <p>(13:53)</p> <p>(14:31)</p> <p>(16:44)</p> <p>(21:31)</p> <p>(23:19)</p> <p>(24:59)</p> <p>(27:04)</p> <p>(38:29)</p> <p>(00:00)</p>
<p><b>PLP allowed her to lead multiple parent-led projects/advocacy</b></p> <p>It just inspired me to be a family advocate</p> <p>Graduated from LISC, it just gave us another level of understanding our community and what's basically needed in our community that we're living in</p> <p>We came up; our group came up with a pantry in the school, so we're doing a food pantry</p>	<p>(06:17)</p> <p>(06:52)</p> <p>(30:28)</p> <p>(00:00)</p>

<p>We will have a pantry in the school, and it's going to be for the community and for the kids in the school because we noticed kids go hungry</p> <p>Um, and we also did another, um, backpack, um, like food. We send the, bring the kids down that needed it.</p> <p>I have learned how to do grants. Yeah. That was hilarious, um, we're doing, um, I'm doing a specific grant for the kids at Scottwood</p> <p>Um, we did, it was a GoFundMe page that we did for our own fellow coworker</p> <p>It changed me by just opening up my ideas and just going for it.</p> <p>If I didn't have PTA, I wouldn't be the PTA treasurer</p> <p>It makes me more professional. Um, and it also opened me up to talk to people to see what my plans are to help the community</p> <p>We had a fight with the PTA, like for it to be turned over and we were surprised that the teachers had our back and elected us in Rutgers, um, behind it, they will support you all the way. If it's good and it's right, they will support you even when it's somewhat wrong, they will correct help you correct it and continue to support you.</p>	<p>(00:00)</p> <p>(31:36)</p> <p>(35:29)</p> <p>(45:46)</p> <p>(45:46)</p> <p>(47:05)</p> <p>(48:03)</p> <p>(50:02)</p>
<p><b>Communication challenges between PLP members and program administrators</b></p> <p>Miscommunication, not being appreciated</p> <p>A miscommunication, that's the biggest thing</p> <p>Communication and the understanding that we're not against. We're here to help.</p> <p>Can't do this, and they can't do that. But then at the beginning of it, we could now that we can't, so it's just that the communication part of what we can't do and what we are able to do</p> <p>The challenges, well, is the expectation of what they wanted us to do? Like they really don't understand that even though we have, um, a report with the parents or guardians, sometimes it's hard</p> <p>It seems like every single time I say you're going to have a meeting, no one out of our group is there, and we don't feel like we're being heard</p>	<p>(08:35)</p> <p>(08:35)</p> <p>(10:32)</p> <p>(11:13)</p> <p>(21:31)</p> <p>(44:53)</p>
<p><b>Unwelcoming school environment</b></p> <p>But it's like we have a school that's not welcoming and you're trying to give your hand, and you're pushing and pushing, and it's always, oh, okay, whatever. Or get brushed off.</p> <p>The lack of miscommunication. When an incident happened where we told that we have an office space and the principal sent out an email to me, and another coworker say that we're not allowed in our room from such such such such time</p> <p>Not even being appreciated? Like they wasn't welcoming. At one point some of the staff members they were not welcoming, and we will stress these issues to them</p>	<p>(08:35)</p> <p>(42:43)</p> <p>(00:00)</p>

<b>PLP allowed her to establish meaningful relationships with children and families</b>	(06:17)
We found out about certain things in college for your kids in college	(12:32)
I'm with the same teacher, and we just learned how to adjust and communicate with, with, with each other	(18:08)
Even though they went on to another grade, they still, I mean, I still know the kids. They're still coming to me. Miss Rhonda. Why you not in my class.	(42:00)
And another thing is the best thing ever is for you see a kid outside of school at a basketball game or just getting on the bus and they be like, Miss Rhonda, and the parents are like, oh hi. How are you?	

### Appendix E – PLP Focus Group Table of Superordinate Themes

<b>Taffy Brown: Focus Group Table of Superordinate Themes</b>	
Superordinate Themes	
<b>Related better to parents than school officials</b> They don't really like parents inside the school.	
<b>Preferred one-on-one tutoring or afterschool tutoring</b> I felt with that boost the program; we were able to really give some progress done and track progress that way And we were just hoping that they were going to incorporate the booster, the program this year. But it didn't work. And in us, like to me, I felt like we should have been working with the kids more academically than even dealing with attendance	
<b>Toxic school environment</b> I know all the challenges and the negativity from the staff of the school that I know I can deal with that if I run across it again So even when you get, like, when you need that extra support, it's like when you go inside, you dealing with the nastiest person, when you first walk in by of the office, you're telling them you need some support on what it is that they need support with their child and you're getting the run around because it plenty of times I had to go to the vice principal because she unprofessional But then when you see them and, even in a school setting, acting so unprofessional	
<b>PLP program was unorganized</b> Many challenges, not only with our things but with, you know, the program itself and a lot of things we couldn't get, you know, situated	
<b>PLP members feeling disconnected (year 2)</b> They want it to be about us and our careers and what we need. But during this year, it wasn't really based on what we wanted	

<b>Maria Bandera – Focus Group Table of Superordinate Themes</b>	
<b>Parents as workers</b> I guess because to a certain extent they see us workers, but at the end of the day, they see us as parents I don't think they give us enough credit	
<b>Mistrust between staff and PLP members</b> We know a little bit too much, and they don't want us to talk. I don't let get the best of me, so that gets most of the staff knows how to trigger to get us to that point	
<b>Motivated by children</b> We don't want to go to work. But um, I think just seeing our children at the school, that's our motivation to go to school When we see those students come to us running and give us the good morning or a hug that makes our day better	

<b>Mercedes Carter: Focus Group Table of Superordinate Themes</b>	
Superordinate Themes	
<p><b>Communication challenges</b></p> <p>The first thing they did was take Mr. Walker away from out of the school. And when they did that, the disconnect, he was our buffer</p> <p>You cannot come from Wall Street to try to teach these parents that live on 17th street</p>	
<p><b>Decreased motivation for program participants during year 2</b></p> <p>This year they let us down because they didn't support us.</p> <p>The disconnect was okay. You, if all you want me to do it is to track their attendance, be in the classroom, do with my five kids, then that's what I'm gonna do because in my mind, you told me I failed from doing this and now you're going to ask you to do it again. No, I'm going to track my attendance. I'm going to help my classroom in any other thing else. You can kiss my ass. I'm here from one 30 to five 30.</p>	
<p><b>Program shift between year one and year 2</b></p> <p>This year they let us down because they didn't support us. Yes. Last year they supported us. They were here for us. They said they would help us. They did. The only thing they did was give us a job. That's basically last year; it was a little bit more about building us as parents. Yeah. This year it was about numbers. It was research. It was a, we need to prove, really need data</p> <p>They said it in a meeting that we failed last year and it became about data and so when it did that, most of this I'm done, I disconnected</p> <p>One week's worth reflections from last year and the one week's worth of question from this year, just that alone will tell you how much this program has changed</p> <p>We are better people than we were last year, but the program itself is not a better program</p>	
<p><b>Leadership and growth</b></p> <p>Before I started with PLP, I was in my own silo. I just pretty much stayed in my lane when it came to dealing with schools and dealing with the community</p> <p>Since then I think I spend more time in the community doing things that I do at home</p> <p>I'm part of the neighborhood association. I'm part of the safety roundtables and now go to any and everything that has to do with community. You know, I'm at that event, um, on the phone search and Facebook for community-building events.</p> <p>PLP in dealing with last year's stuff shifted my career path</p> <p>I wasn't beat for nobody else's kid. I was like, listen, I barely could teach my own kid at home. Like I would have to have a drink after help with homework</p> <p>I'm a little bit more trained</p> <p>PLP helped me in that fashion by giving me the opportunity to interact with its Ms. Sanders and to interact with um, with Cassie Jones, you know, to enter, go to in that already training to learn how to be an advocate for my community</p>	
<b>Bureaucratic challenges</b>	

<p>The research center should not be in charge of a public relation project. This is, this here is a project and a research center shouldn't be in charge of it pushed back on us as politics</p>	
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<p>This thing we do on Friday like she said, we didn't have a choice in the matter. It was sign this paper and then the week, the day before we were supposed to be there.</p>	
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<p>The only thing I think whenever I'm frustrated or annoyed with this program is it's a pilot program. It will get better. They will learn from their mistakes, and we will learn from our mistakes and hopefully when it does happen in another school or another district</p>	
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<b>Olivia Francis – Focus Group Table of Superordinate Themes</b>	
Superordinate Themes	
<p><b>PLP allowed Olivia to see her value</b></p> <p>It helped us to really see our value more</p> <p>I think this helped to empower us more as parents to see really that your, your job as a parent really stretches further than even your own kids</p> <p>But you know, I don't feel that our value and our worth is really appreciated aside from the statistics that we may provide, but we could have been utilized a whole lot better if we were involved in the planning process of certain things</p> <p>This program kind of helped us to even think collectively where before you might've thought before your self or just for your children, but we started to think how does it affect my colleagues</p>	
<p><b>Programmatic changes between year one and year 2</b></p> <p>I think it was just a way to keep tabs on us because we had too much freedom. I, we removed very much more freely yet last year. Um, and because of that we got to see and hear a lot of things that maybe they didn't want us to see or hear</p> <p>We thought it was directly tied into what we were doing with the school this year. It was more focused on the school's needs</p>	
<p><b>Staff focused on research</b></p> <p>The research center is just the intellect. They're based on the numbers we think tank</p> <p>The Center is fighting for numbers because if they don't get the numbers, they don't want to get the grants.</p> <p>They don't get the data on the way, which I feel that they tried to measure and get that data was just flawed. It was two stories. It was, it was too intellectual</p>	
<p><b>Professional development was limited to “teacher” or “social work” profession</b></p> <p>Could have been tied into tracking us and making sure we got some sort of certification or recognition based on what we really like doing</p> <p>If something pertaining to self-reliance entrepreneurship because not everyone wants to do a nine to five</p>	
<p><b>Unwelcoming environment</b></p> <p>Not because they didn't try, but because of the environment it was in the school administration that they had to deal with</p> <p>I had to pull my three boys out of the school and transfer them, transfer them to east orange</p> <p>The lack of acute attention in the disciplinary areas, the lack of acute support for teachers who really want to help the students, it's too rigid when you make suggestions that honestly, but not violate any policy or go against any curriculum</p> <p>But the cultural culture and the climate of the school is very poor.</p> <p>You get treated kind of weird by a teacher when you say something in a reflection that we before and then you turn up to work the next day.</p> <p>That stuff should be enforced or reinforced. It's not simple hygiene. Make sure</p>	

<p>the bathrooms are clean, check-up, and make sure maintenance is really maintaining the building</p> <p>They're not welcoming, and then they know that their temper because not everyone is going to respond in that nice diplomatic. Okay, wait, so some parents are disconnected because you know what if might get violent.</p> <p>When we as parents push and make an effort and show initiative to do things, there's always the backlash because again, we shine the light on a lot of incompetence</p>	
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<b>Keon Henry – Focus Group Table of Superordinate Themes</b>	
Superordinate Themes	
<p><b>Grew from participating in the program</b>  My experience at the PLP, it gave me a lot of growth on parenting side, professional side, working as a group  We first started it made me understand, you know, sometimes when you teaching your own child, your parents, but going through a program called the PLP and doing different, um, professional developments and made me understand my, my kids in a different way as far as, um, there are difficulties in school, um, disciplining them, stuff like that  Help me as far as professionalism because I'm able to walk in and talk to different people and in the field of education and not only talk, but listen now before I just talked and didn't want to hear what other people had to say and give their opinion  I mean, it's, it's so many things that we could go on as parents and say, this should have been better, but it's so many things that we could say parents that helped us to grow</p>	
<p><b>Communication challenges</b>  I built my own blueprint of the seventh and eighth-graders. That's my biggest disappointment with Malik, and Mr. Walker is because everybody else had that support system. They had teachers to go to, they had everything. I didn't have none of that on the higher grades  I basically did that on my own by talking to a lot of the teachers, introducing myself, sitting in the back of the classrooms, and kind of learning as I go on my own. There was no instruction of them showing me or guiding me any type of way around the board.  They wasn't in tuned to the school  Our voice wasn't being heard not only in the school but as in Malik and Mr. Walker  But yeah, it still didn't listen to our voices when it came to trying to do things for the community  But if y'all gonna get it right, you got to get it right to the point where you got to listen to the parents too  The school, um, the way the staff run, the communication between the staff, the school outside partners, because that's basically what the university is. We are outside the partnership of Springfield Public Schools. So if SPS staff or does have a meeting and they don't want outside partners to know, hey, you ain't go down. That's why we wasn't allowed to attend any SPS meetings  A lot of the resistance was because we have told them we don't want to keep telling our issues to different people  That is the biggest issue that I've seen throughout the whole time communication  I've exposed them to supplying my kids bus tickets from cause since we came back from spring break I ain't heard not an email.  They don't listen, and they go with the numbers for, they listen to us</p>	

<b>PLP allowed him to build relationships</b> I love the part that I was able to connect with a lot of younger males.	
<b>PLP parents' strengths were not fully utilized</b> They didn't utilize nobody strengths. They utilized all of us for what they wanted The principal wanted to use the university salary for SPS work How am I been in this program for two years and ya'll ain't help nothing Most of us is confused in our career because they screwed us all up in this project that they got going on in the research center	

<b>Jackie Howard – Focus Group Table of Superordinate Themes</b>	
Superordinate Themes	
<b>Program focus shift</b> This year here definitely have to lock in getting a job First year we did more in the community and in this school, but, um, it wasn't organized or structured. This second year they changed the program all around Basically this year it was really all of what the school needed and the focus was on what the school would want it and need it and not per se, uh, the parents like this is supposed to be a program to help the parents grow professionally and within your family and everything like that.	
<b>Confidence</b> I didn't feel like my voice was really being heard or like how to take off the role of the mom and um, the role of a PLP parent. Um, I struggle with that	
<b>Benefitted from training</b> LISC and our ELA training gave you the opportunity to grow as a community leader and advocate within my neighborhood.	
<b>Professional development</b> When we initially started, they asked us what we were interested in and what we would like to have career in, like a lot of us, their social work, um, education, um, administration, but they really didn't follow up, and from my perspective, they didn't follow up and really like offer certifications and things in the field	
<b>Organizational challenges</b> If they were more structured and it kept that component of life, the booster program or um, like us being involved in the community, like the NRL aid things, um, for myself, it would have helped with my ex, um, gain the experience in the field Like we had bits and pieces, but it wasn't structured and um	
<b>Unwelcoming staff</b> Um, at the beginning of PLP like to beyond is like everybody was like, yeah, great job. We love you. We had one job in the school. But I feel like as though they really wanted us there because they thought we were going to be yes people I felt like his principal, um, at Scottwood school, uh, was a bully to him The administration is the biggest problem Don't nobody just, and they don't want to come to Scottwood that all of us set	

up partners to come into Scottwood or bring initiatives to start, we always getting pulled back from administration	
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Rhonda Upchurch – Focus Group Table of Superordinate Themes	
<b>PLP was supportive of parents</b> It even helped us experience things that Rutgers university does pass and what they had to offer us and our children	
<b>Mistrust between PLP members and school staff</b> Um, so our parents, we helped, and they accused us of taking food and stuff and coats	
<b>Disconnect between PLP administrative staff</b> And I believe what they don't, it's not clicking. It was just because they're not in our situation and our fact, we are parents, and they're not We have more support from the community office partnership department at the university Dr. Harper had to really get on Malik; these are parents. You're talking about jobs, and you want them to go do, what are the kids going to go? They were getting like, we weren't seen as parents in need I don't care if it's the headache of um, branch and meetings, and going into the state. Okay. But if it's, this is my interest, and it's something that I want to know and learn, and you have the knowledge of it, give me that knowledge so I can carry it on so I can take it to another school	

### Appendix F – Cooperating Teacher Tables of Superordinate Theme

Teacher – Ms. Badger	
<b>PLP member developed strong bonds with children</b> I mean, I think the biggest challenge was her transitioning out of the room cause my kids got attached	
<b>Organizational challenges with PLP members</b> I would say I think the biggest challenge I had was not even with Mercedes herself when she was not a challenge at all. The challenge was the fact that her time to come in because she was also doing the fractions study. She was only in my room in the afternoon. Whereas everybody else who had a parent last year, they were there in the morning. And that was the time where I really could've use that person to pull these kids back to do certain skills cause I can't Um, I would say just the first year when I had a parent then I didn't have a parent anymore with no real explanation why	
<b>Parent was able to provide academic support to students</b> Just the fact that Mercedes just jumped in, she saw where the need was and jumped in and just started on something. She is such a good, and it was good to have another person was a self-starter	

Teacher – Ms. Anderson	
<b>PLP member was kind</b>	
<b>PLP member was helpful and would do anything for the children</b> She actually went out of her way to buy like letters. So they would actually like practicing She was helpful. I'll take said helpful. Uh, I remember kind, she was uh, right there for the kids. She would do anything that she could for the kids	
<b>PLP was professional</b> She was really good, you know, she, uh, she was always on time.	

Teacher – Ms. Carpenter	
<b>PLP member started strong, but performance dwindled towards the end of the program</b> For me, it started out amazing, and I think I kind of started out on a very high note with PLP and then kind of just dwindled down Taffy started to fall off in the end because she's like, well, none of these are parents show up. Cause she was the only one who was showing up with fidelity	
<b>Teacher was distracted by PLP member while teaching</b> Just the challenge that I was faced with the whole PLP or if another person or entity coming in the classroom, which isn't understanding the noise level I just say, please be mindful that I'm like leading the full group for the most part. Yeah. If you're doing something on the side, let's not have full conversation or you like every kid is talking in your group	
<b>PLP member exhibited a high competency level to complete tasks</b> The competency level, like I literally would explain the task or what I wanted to	

Taffy one time an old she was off and running like okay, I tested this kid, they got this, and I'm like, wow. Like, I didn't expect her to be like so good on point. I literally would give her more tasks when she came, and she just did it. She was amazing.	
<b>PLP member was highly invested in the program</b> So she was definitely one of those people where I'm like, okay, I can totally tell you're totally invested in this	
<b>PLP member provided academic support</b> She came in, she helped out, she didn't interrupt, she did her small groups. It was very, very effective	

Teacher – Ms. Mickens	
<b>PLP member was not consistent</b> I think consistency was, was a big thing. I really didn't see any to be honest. Growth from the children So it was in and out, and I don't know when I expect her back or whatever the case maybe	
<b>Teacher did not have a positive relationship with the parent mentor</b> I don't even really remember having her that much just because I don't really have that many experiences with her being here for a long time We didn't really have a relationship, but I kind of felt like it could have been more my fault because of me feeling like almost like resentful that she didn't show up all the time for the kids and for work. I mean, I knew she had a lot of personal issues and stuff	
<b>PLP member had a positive rapport with the children</b> When they did go with her, it was like almost more like playing I mean, I think she was a kind person, and she was kind to the kids when she was here. Um, she, well if I asked her to do something she would do it	

Teacher – Ms. Cooper	
<b>Parent was a valuable asset to the class</b> She was very responsible, you know, she held herself accountable. She was, you know, very competent in what she was supposed to do.	
<b>Inconsistencies with the program</b> The only thing that negative aspects of the program, not Ms. Frazier, is that it was a distraction in the classroom because of inconsistency, like in the sense that you're coming in later than the start.	
<b>Teacher had to limit herself as a disciplinarian</b> I had a large class last year and just having her again, kids outside of the ones that had the attendance issues and want it to work with her. Yeah. So again, it was the distraction. But then even when she would still try to help me with the other kids again, it was like fighting for her attention. So I would say that was my challenge. I felt like if I raised my voice, I'm like, even though I had a good working relationship with Ms. Francis, I felt bad. Like, wow, she is a parent, you know? So I'm like now limiting myself to discipline the rest of the class cause I'm like	



So it's like I was almost limited when she was in there too to discipline for the same way	
Teacher – Ms. Martin	
<b>Positives relationships with students</b> I do think they've benefited from working with her. And I really think it made a connection with the students	
<b>PLP member was inconsistent</b> Only thing was we couldn't really plan for her to be there because I wasn't sure if she was going to come I plan something for Tuesday and Thursday, I have no, you know, there was some of there, it's kind of guide them along the way. So it was just kind of uncertainty, you know. So I kind of stopped planning. Having another adult in the class and just if she came in, I would, you know, give her like, oh, these kids need help, these not them. And she would, and she would do an awesome job. It was just the consistency I agree with both the consistency and just accountability. Like if they show up, it's great	
<b>PLP member built positive relationships with parents and teacher</b> Ms. Rhonda was really sweet. She would bring up things to the classroom. Like if we were having a holiday party, she would come in to have little bags to them. And she also like had relationships with some of the parents So that was helpful. You know, having another parent say, Oh, I'm going to talk to their parents	

Teacher – Ms. Nelson	
<b>PLP parent was a valuable asset to the team</b> She used to be very useful.	
<b>Bonds with children</b> Ms. Rhonda was like, and she was part of the classroom. She was very nice to the kids	
<b>Hard to plan because the parent was inconsistent</b> We knew like she's coming every Tuesday, but the fact that we didn't know we didn't, we didn't really have anything planned for her It's like, you know, she's coming to her after ten so do you plan some time so we can't really plan anything for them The only problem was that she wasn't in the classroom every day Very consistent time I can't even tell the kids that Ms. Rhonda's going to be here How can you schedule when she's coming	
<b>PLP parent was an effective disciplinarian</b> She would discipline the kids just like we would	

Teacher – Ms. Radcliff	
<b>Organizational challenges with PLP</b> We, we had a challenge of consistency and presentation at both parents last year	

<p>You're getting pulled in. Yeah. It's hard. Even [inaudible] expectations placed on that from within the program</p> <p>So at the beginning of you, they were here to make sure that those students with attendance issues and so then they will pull it out to make phone calls for attendance person</p>	
<p><b>Inconsistencies with PLP member reporting to the classroom</b></p> <p>We, we had a challenge of consistency and presentation at both parents last year</p> <p>The first year she wasn't here on a regular basis just because there were meetings and were working out the kinks programs</p> <p>It wasn't a reliable presence, and yeah, it wasn't a consistent presence in the room</p> <p>We couldn't effectively plan for something for them to do</p> <p>There was no consistent presence of, of our particular parents both times in the classroom. So our kids miss that.</p>	
<p><b>Having the presence of PLP members in the school made children feel special</b></p> <p>I thought they were in here to learn techniques, to work with the students intimately, to develop relationships</p>	

Teacher – Ms. Peters	
<p><b>PLP members always had smiles on their faces</b></p> <p>I mean, our parent always had a smile on her face when she came in to actually work with the kids too. So she really enjoyed that aspect</p>	
<p><b>PLP member worked hard and wanted to be in the classroom</b></p> <p><b>And so they were really, they really wanted to be here, but they were pulled in other directions that, you know, limited their time here.</b></p>	
<p><b>PLP organizational challenges</b></p> <p>I think they were being pulled in too many directions</p> <p>Yeah. Like I know there was supposed to be doing something with us and then they were also learning about how to be [inaudible], and they were doing some community service aspect of it</p> <p>So I know that when the parents came in, they're like, oh, we're also working on this. And then we're also working on this</p>	

Teacher – Ms. Nelson	
<p><b>PLP member was a valuable asset to the classroom teacher</b></p> <p>My parent was on time. She was reliable. She was well qualified to help me out in that small group. She know exactly what to do with that</p> <p>Sometimes we stay a little late. So we can discuss what we're planning for the next day.</p> <p>She was really hands on it. She didn't mind coming. Uh, she was very eager to learning classroom, very eager to work with the kids</p> <p>Yeah. And help keeping the data and stuff like that. She was good with notes and stuff.</p>	
<p><b>PLP member established positive relationships with other parents</b></p> <p>She knew a lot of the parents.</p> <p>The parents, you know, communicated but probably better with her because she</p>	

was a parent and the teacher and, I believed her more than me I guess me	
<b>PLP member communicated well with students</b> Oh, she never got frustrated even with the low ones, but sometimes, I be like, I'm walking away She never got frustrated, and she was like no, let's do it all over. She was really good. Really good patient	

Teacher – Mr. Harvey	
<b>Inconsistency with PLP parents</b> In terms of the hours that they came to help us and how overlapping about curriculum	
<b>Organizational challenges with time in classroom</b> Sometimes they were not either, they were not perfectly on time or sometimes even if they were on time, they went to a meeting before they got to us It would become occasionally frustrating because if we planned before, uh, this group of kids to meet with Miss [inaudible] and she wasn't there	
<b>Interest faded towards the end of the program</b> I think it might've faded out and ended a few weeks before the end	

### Appendix G – School-Based Support Staff Table of Superordinate Themes

Mariah Hampton	
<p><b>Parents did not respond well to more structure/demanding expectations</b>  A lot of times when they should have been in the classroom, they were in that space  Sometimes they couldn't separate the parent from the volunteer  When they were exposed to something new, and they exposed to people with different views from theirs, Oh, maybe I'm not so smart. Perhaps then that's when you see a lot of insecurities coming in, and then you see a lot of complaints  We are already doing our reflections and we have to type that up, and sometimes we can't, we don't have access to the computer, and now we have to make phone calls, and we don't have access to the phone call.</p>	
<p><b>Parents complained about completing paperwork</b>  We are already doing our reflections, and we have to type that up, and sometimes we can't, we don't have access to the computer and now we have to make phone calls, and we don't have access to the phone call.</p>	
<p><b>Personal Challenges such as financial, housing, and food made it difficult for parents to remain focused on providing support to non-PLP parents</b>  Housing problems. And one particular parent, she always said, I need food. I don't get food stamps. You know, and I think, um, the challenge was that they would think it, I'm going to get a little more money  If you on public assistance, and you started making any kind of money, then that's gonna take away from the public assistance  We're supposed to choose some families that really needed it and a lot of times they felt they were more needy than other people  Anything that went on, they felt they should be a part of it. Not help to give out, but to, you know, hands out  Oh, I need some shoes. Oh I need a coat  We learned that we learned about how their issues can affect their performance</p>	
<p><b>Parents were supportive of each other</b>  I'm going to tell you, the parent that died past [inaudible], we just had a crying session</p>	
Destiny Harrison	
<p><b>Parents were eager to help students</b>  The parents were, um, enthusiastic about helping the students initially as well as the staff.  They really wanted to help. They really entirely did.  But yet they really truly wanted to help, but they didn't realize the magnitude of this</p>	
<p><b>Personal challenges made it difficult for parents to perform job responsibilities</b>  Uh, some of them weren't able or didn't feel comfortable doing that. So either they would express their discomfort, or they would just drop the ball</p>	

<p>Any type of issues that you notice, it can be personal, professional challenge, see the attendance, they wouldn't come</p> <p>The issue was with her daughter in school trying to get transportation and her IEP</p> <p>I think that some of them may have been maybe embarrassed because they didn't know how to articulate it.</p>	
<p><b>Parents need “concerted cultivation”</b></p> <p>They needed more guidance</p> <p>I was doing the solutions focus, counseling with the parents</p> <p>They have good intentions but, but good intentions. Sometimes it's just not enough. And then they have to learn how to set clear cut boundaries</p> <p>They were good people. They just need supervision.</p> <p>I think it's an amazing program, and y'all can do a lot with what you have to start off small because they're almost like children. This is a new experience for them</p>	
<p><b>Parents were helpful with providing the social worker information for students who went through the I&amp;RS process</b></p> <p>The parent partners were able to do was identify those students is particularly with attendance, identify those students, find out what the problem was and trying to get students to school every day on time</p> <p>Some of the parents knew how to reach out to them and find out what was going on while others did. If there was an issue with finding the parent's telephone numbers where they live documentation,</p> <p>The students who are referred in kindergarten through second grade had academic and attendance issues. So the parents were able to foster those small group settings for half an hour, half an hour, maybe two to three times per week, and provide that additional guided instruction.</p>	

Sharonda Lewis	
<p><b>Mistrust with PLP parents</b></p> <p>A lot of things that were unethical that was happening</p> <p>And he said that he noticed that they were taking things and they was asked to stop taking things</p> <p>Stealing? Um, that, that just looked bad on my partners</p> <p>Um, so the partners that they come in, they recently, when I reached out to them over the summer, they asked was that group going to be there and I voice that they vote to be here because they said it was a relief that they're not going to be here</p> <p>Um, one day, I had about a donation from, uh, girls helping girls with periods. I had about, uh, 10, two dozens, uh, uh, Maxi pads. Um, I know PLP did help me bring it, and a couple of days later, boxes were missing. And I'm talking about one box. I mean, boxes were missing.</p> <p>It was like they came in, eyes got big, and things just started disappearing</p>	
<p><b>Certain PLP members were helpful supporting Pre-K initiatives</b></p> <p>Did have some positive experience for maybe one or two of them. They did come down and volunteer. They assisted with the Christmas giveaway that I</p>	

gave for pre k through third grade, which was really good. They did donate, um, hot chocolate.	
<b>Seemed like experiences were overall negative and saw</b> He came down here and tried to take over our dad's network program She's very aggressive. Language usage is absurd. It's just not professional You should be able to trust the people you guys partner with us. Um, I should be able to leave my office without things walking out. Um, the gossiping, I should not go around and hear other people gossiping about what's going on with PLP. This was just something totally different because I never really encountered someone stealing or putting a bad name out there Certain PLP members was trying to take over their classroom They tried to basically run the classroom like it was their class	