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DEVELOPING COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS TO IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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VINCENT JAY HARPER
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A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

BY

_____
Dr. James E. Martin, Chair

_____
Dr. James E. Gardner

_____
Dr. Joyce A. Brandes

_____
Dr. Sara Beach

_____
Dr. Gregg A. Garn

_____
Dr. Ji Y. Hong

DEDICATION

To God be the glory for the things He has done!

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ABSTRACT

This study employed a three-phase recursive qualitative data collection and analysis approach to examine ways public schools and religious organizations can develop more collaborative partnerships. Seventeen members from schools, religious organizations, and community agencies located in the Southeastern United States served as the key informants. To avoid misinterpretations, I employed participatory action research (PAR) strategies to capture the unique insights of various key informants from different professions and members from differing ethnic and cultural groups faced with the challenge of educating African American learners with special needs. Data was collected via researcher field observations, key informant interviews, and a focus group interview. These data sources enabled the researcher to capture informants' perspectives and viewpoints on key issues they believe impact the quality of learning outcomes for African American learners. Data analysis revealed four key themes: (a) the need for character and moral education, (b) parental apathy and lack of involvement, (c) the need for improvement in school climate, and (d) the need and potential benefit of collaborative partnerships between public schools and religious organizations. There was an overall consensus among informants from each subgroup that collaborative partnerships between public schools and religious organizations provide a viable option to effectively address these and other challenging issues. A researcher designed Three-Tiered Collaborative Model was developed to assist schools and religious organizations engage in a more participatory and collaborative process to better serve learners with special needs.

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Since the birth of our nation, the United States has been deeply influenced by religious ideologies. According to Rippa (1997) many settlers to the early colonies believed that in order to achieve nobility and attain salvation, hard work and education were essential characteristics to be accepted in the eyes of God. As a result, shortly after arriving to America Puritans in the Massachusetts Bay Colony established public elementary schools as an attempt to further promulgate their ideologies of religion. Since the 1700s, U.S. public schools have become increasingly secularized (Vandenberg, 2008). Despite the secularization of public schools, religion and religious ideologies continue to have a major influence on cultural values in American society, as well as in public schooling.

The Random House College Dictionary (1983) defines ideology as a body of doctrine, myth, or symbol of a social movement, institution, or class. According to Stevens, Wood, and Sheehan (2000) ideology represents a system of beliefs that function to shape people's behaviors, to give them direction, and effectively acts to exclude other beliefs. Historically, in America, both public schools and religious organizations have served to instill systems of beliefs and values designed to shape and influence individuals' behavior as members of a democratic society. Unfortunately, implications of the moral, ethical, and legal right to assimilate these organizations have been sharply contested.

The First Amendment and "Separation of Church and State"

Many Americans are confused about the role religion should play in public schools (Passe & Willox, 2009), particularly in regard to the "Establishment Clause" of

the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which in part states, "Congress or *governments* [emphasis added] shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion." The Establishment Clause is commonly referred to as the "*separation of church and state.*" Misunderstanding about the degree to which public schools can interact with religious institutions guide many educators and religious leaders to avoid seeking the possible benefits of collaboration entirely.

According to the Pew Research Forum on Religion and Public Life (2009), participants in the debate on the Establishment Clause fall into two camps, strict separationists who believe government agencies should refrain from any activities with religious institutions. Parties in the opposing camp interpret the Establishment Clause more narrowly. They contend that government interactions with religious institutions do not violate the First Amendment as long as the government remains neutral, not favoring one religion over non-religion or favor a particular faith over others.

Unfortunately, limited research exists on the effect collaboration between public schools and religious organizations could have on improving educational outcomes for African American students who have traditionally and currently academically underperform their peers (Bush, 2004). Exploring the benefit of improved relations between public schools and religious organizations warrants inquiry, particularly within African American communities that evidence high levels of religious involvement (Taylor, Lincoln, & Chatters, 2005), as well as in communities where religion plays an important role in daily life. Although research has acknowledged the importance religion plays in the African American community, Taylor, Lincoln, and Chatters asserted that educators often overlook the potential religious organizations offer in terms of improving

cultural competence and in the development of practical approaches for serving African American learners with special needs. Learners with special needs include students with disabilities who receive special education services, those who are at risk of being identified as needing special education, and those at risk of failure in the educational system for reasons other than a disability (Kochhar-Bryant, 2008).

Research Problem

School districts across the United States face the challenge of serving increasingly diverse student populations (Putnam, 2007). Students enter school with different perceptions about learning, which they derived from parents, kinship, peers, and various organizations within their community (Wenger, 1998). Differences between the school, home, and community cultures have been shown to impact the educational outcomes of students from marginalized cultural and economically disadvantaged groups (Skiba, et al., 2008). Convergence between the cultural values of marginalized groups and dominant cultural values of public schools can erupt in conflict, however if managed properly, this convergence can lead to increased cross-cultural competency and enrich the learning environment for all members of the school community. Unfortunately, the dispositions of some educators toward cultural diversity prevent them from incorporating the social capital inherent in religious organizations into the teaching and learning experience (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008; Trainor, 2008).

Many religious organizations, regardless of their affiliation, provide valuable social support networks and readily accessible family resources. Failing to identify the benefits religious organizations bring to the school community can result in schools exhausting an already deficient quantity of resources. Religious and faith-based

organizations have historically been viewed as a valued social support network for residents in the African American community (Adksion-Bradley, Johnson, Sanders, Duncan, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; Taylor, Thornton, & Chatters, 1987). According to Taylor, Lincoln, and Chatters (2005) religious organizations, specifically, the "Black Church," have historically provided a variety of services for African American families, including basic needs assistance such as food and clothing distribution to families, as well as child care and educational programs.

Importance of the "Black Church." Historically, the Black church has been at the forefront of efforts advocating for improved opportunities for African American youth to receive a quality education. A study conducted by Billingsley and Caldwell (1991) found that Black churches provide programs ranging from child development centers, day care centers, child health, and other programs for children. Many of these programs have an educational component. As a result of these efforts the Black church stands in a unique position to be responsive the needs of African American learners and their families (Taylor, Thornton, & Chatters, 1987).

Possible roadblocks. Consequently, due to the lack of cross-cultural competency, schools and religious organizations rarely see themselves as allies (Joshi, Eberly, & Konzal, 2005; Trigg, 2008). At times, they purposefully avoid interactions with each other in order to avoid perceived violations of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution (Monsma, 2006). These problems are compounded by the fact that very little research exists to inform strategic practices for forging collaborative partnerships between religious organizations and schools, especially in the African American community where the church has plays such a significant role.

Significance of the Study

Do public schools and religious organizations promulgate practices that purposefully exclude their differing ideologies? Does one ideology better serve children than others? Conclusive answers to these questions remain unknown. Regrettably, the current body of educational literature fails to capture perspectives and viewpoints, as well as the essence of lived experiences of African Americans and other marginalized cultural groups. Much of the literature purports to provide objective interpretations, but in reality reflects misperceptions based on dominant cultural ideologies of mainstream scholars and researchers (Banks, 1998; Esterberg, 2002; Stanfield, 1993; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). Banks (1998) believed educational researchers should strive for objectivity, however they should also acknowledge the interconnectedness of subjective and objective components of knowledge-based non-dominant cultural values and beliefs.

My Beliefs. To avoid misinterpretation based on my own biases, I employed participatory action research (PAR) strategies to capture the unique insights of various key informants from different professions and members from differing ethnic and cultural groups faced with the challenge of educating African American learners with special needs. As the researcher, I wanted to relinquish at least some control of the research process over to school, religious, and community informants, in essence to become a catalyst for social change (Esterberg, 2002). Therefore, I designed research procedures that permitted informants to engage in the data analysis phase in an attempt to increase informants' understanding of cross-cultural values, beliefs, and practices.

The institutionalized misrepresentations of marginalized and economically disadvantaged groups, specifically African Americans in America, have been a constant

source of disappointment for me, particularly in regard to my academic experiences. As an African American doctoral student for the past three years, these misrepresentations have never been clearer. As a result of my studies, I have found myself on an epistemological quest to discover why these misrepresentations exist. Since I have begun this journey, the questions and answers I seek have become more complex. Such questions as: Why are African Americans perceived as intellectually inferior? Who has raised these questions and how have they persisted even into the 21st century? Whom do they benefit? Whose values and beliefs do they reflect? In many cases, the researchers who describe the cultural realities of African Americans have very little insider knowledge, and I would dare to say little empathy, respect, or compassion for the population they discuss.

My Voice. With a few exceptions, ethnic minority knowledge producers, especially those of African American descent, have largely been absent from writing new ethical discourses on culture or have been compliant in their uncritical analysis of the hegemonic—dominant cultural knowledge producers (Patton, 1998). According to Patton, the lack of African American writers in the knowledge production process has had a strong impact on the limited insight of knowledge produced in reference to African American populations. It is my hope that findings from this study will effectively challenge institutional canons on race, religion, and cultural epistemology.

Purpose of the Study

This study primarily focused on identifying a meaningful approach public school and religious organizations may utilize to work more collaboratively together to increase the level of student engagement in the educational process to improve educational

outcomes for African American learners with special needs. To accomplish this, I first examined the differences and similarities in viewpoints of educators, religious clergy, and community agency key informants in regard to educating this population and strategies for overcoming existing boundaries to true collaboration. Data was collected via one-on-one interviews with key informants then analyzed through a data reduction process. I selected relevant statements from informant responses in regard to a set of domain questions. Before preceding with data reduction procedures the preliminary list relevant statements underwent validation through juxtaposition of archival data, field observations notes, and member verification by key informants participating in the focus group interview. Informants of the focus group examined the statements to determine the confirmability and plausibility of each statement.

Following focus group validation I sorted similar within subgroup relevant statements into clusters. I then consolidated and classified similar within group clusters into a priori categories. Finally, similar cross group a priori categorical clusters were identified as the key themes.

Based on the key informant recommendations and information from the literature I developed a Three-Tiered Collaborative Model designed to assist public schools and religious organizations to develop more effective collaborative partnerships.

Research Question

The overarching question is how can schools work collaboratively with religious organizations to set educational goals focused on improving in-school and postschool outcomes for African American learners, especially learners with special needs? To answer the overarching question, I answered the following subsidiary questions:

1. What issue(s), if any, did school staff and religious organizations identify in reference to the education of African American learners with and without special needs?
2. How did perceived issues for educating African American learners differ between school staff and clergy of religious organizations serving these students?
3. What perceptions did school staff hold toward religious organizations and *vice versa* in reference to efforts being made to provide educational opportunities and improve postschool outcomes for African American youth?

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

What we think about learning influences where we recognize learning, as well as what we do when we decide that we must do something about it – as individuals, as communities, and as organizations. It may be assumed that because schools focus on learning, students learn more or most deeply there (Wenger, 1998). However, despite innovative scientific developments in curriculum, disciplinary interventions, and teaching and learning strategies, a disproportionate numbers of marginalized and socioeconomically disadvantaged youth continue to experience comparatively poorer in-school and post-school outcomes in relation to their White, middle-class or wealthier peers. Marginalized groups typically refer to non-White (Caucasian) students of African American, Asian, Hispanic, or Native American decent.

As a result of these outcomes the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) have drastically raised learning targets for learners with special needs and students of marginalized groups. The term *learners with special needs* or *special learners* include students in K12 public schools with disabilities who receive special education services, those who are at-risk of being identified as needing special education, and those at-risk of failure in the educational system for reasons other than a disability (i.e., limited English proficiency, economically disadvantaged, or migrant (Kochhar-Bryant, 2008). IDEA 2004 recently broadened its definition of individuals with specific learning disabilities to include students who are at-risk of failure in general education [§300. 307 and §300. 309].

These pieces of legislation require educational agencies to undertake more ambitious attempts to improve the educational environments and outcomes for these youth. A key element in both acts involves increasing parental involvement in the academic lives of their children. Unfortunately, negative perceptions embedded in educational circles about lack of parenting skills of parents in marginalized groups, as well as issues in the level of mistrust by marginalized parents in school staff tend to subvert the attainment of this goal (Shepard & Rose, 1995; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995).

Federal initiatives promoting parental involvement in schools are not new. In the 1960s, President Lyndon Johnson's, 'War on Poverty' led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). These legislations put an end to legalized segregation and provided greater access and increased resources for the integration of marginalized populations, particularly African Americans, into the broader public spectrum. The ESEA called for public schools receiving federal assistance to systematically address the need for increasing parental involvement in the education of their child. At that time, schools based their parental involvement initiatives on a 'deficit' model (Edwards &Warin, 1999; Kochhar-Bryant, 2008; Shepard& Rose, 1995). The deficit model implied that resources should be used to support parents who lack necessary parenting skills. This perspective viewed African Americans and other minorities as lacking characteristics, including behaviors, represented normatively by the majority population (Jones & Palmer, 2004). Many schools based their initiatives on notions that middle-class ideals represent responsible parenting and asserted school values over the values of parents of marginalized groups (Edwards & Warin, 1999).

In the 1970s and 1980s, schools shifted their thinking from the deficit model to that of the 'differentiated' model (Kochhar-Bryant, 2008). Based on the differentiated model, schools acknowledged the differences between the home culture and school culture and emphasized building on the culture of the home community to help children adjust to the culture necessary for school success. Edwards and Warin (1999) argued that shifting from a deficit model to differential model did not shift the efforts of schools to assimilate marginalized groups to values of school. Shepard and Rose (1995) claimed deficit and differential models often encourage a sense of helplessness and incompetence in parents.

Despite the weaknesses of deficit and differential models, they laid the philosophical groundwork for the emergence of the 'empowerment' model (Kellaghan, 1993). In the 1990s, schools entered a more progressive decade of parental involvement efforts through empowerment of parents to engage in their children's education. In the empowerment model, schools viewed parents as vital sources of information and as having the capacity to make meaningful contributions to their children's lives and the school community (Shepard & Rose, 1995). Parent involvement in this context requires more than simply communicating with parents or providing training in some skill; rather it requires an increased sense of trust and enhanced awareness of viable resources.

Some researchers assert that if schools fail to reflect on their perspectives and fundamental assumptions about the nature of learning and proceed with practices based deficit or differential models, they increase the risk of adopting concepts with misleading and detrimental ramifications (Banks, 1998; Smith, 2008; Wenger, 1998). Wenger explained, "a perspective is not a recipe; it does not tell you just what to do. Rather, it

acts as a guide about what to pay attention to, what difficulties to expect, and how to approach problems" (p. 9). Perspectives of school personnel can play a significant role on the efforts schools make to engage in collaborative relationships with marginalized members of the school community.

With greater responsibilities for the learning of special needs and marginalized youth being placed on state and local education agencies (SEA; LEA), implications of our perspectives, theories, and beliefs about these groups become more imperative to the way we reflect on practices that inform our enterprise. In this literature review, I will present in more detail the need for local schools to focus increased effort on developing collaborative relationships with religious organizations that serve African American students with and without special learning needs and their families.

I hope to contribute knowledge to the educational field on how LEAs can develop a more holistic perspective of members of the African American community, dispel misrepresentations and paradigms about this population, and form collaborative partnerships with religious organization that facilitate healing fractured home-school relationships with African American students and their families. Although a variety of conceptual frameworks, models, and categorical system approaches have been developed, the approach of this study uses a "participatory or empowerment" approach as a guiding theoretical perspective.

The Roots of Dominant Culture Ideologies in Public Schools

Many ideologies and events have shaped the history of the United States, enriched its culture, and influenced today's schools (Lutz & Merz, 1992; Wirt & Kirst, 2005). Despite the presence of multiple cultures woven into the American populous, White

(Anglo-Saxon) elite and middle class cultural values have dominated the public school landscape (Cremin, 1970; Katz, 1968; Patton, 1998). To better understand how these values and ideologies have influenced the involvement of marginalized groups in the educational process, we must examine the historical ideologies, values, and norms that have been promulgated through the public school structure.

Stevens, Wood, and Sheehan (2000) reminded us of the importance of remembering that the process of education has always been in a state of change from one ideology to the next, and largely dependent on mainstream societal demands, needs, and pressures. Throughout its history, United States public education has been committed to a particular set of beliefs, norms, and values—ideologies designed to inculcate in youth the ideologies held in the society's dominant societal culture (Katz, 1968; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Stevens, et al., 2000). Molding members of marginalized or socioeconomic disadvantaged cultures at large into 'new' citizens has been one of the major focuses of public education (Katz, 1968). It would be misleading to suggest that all educational reformers accepted this model of schooling.

Dominant culture ideologies and systems of beliefs of the White elite and middle class have been the predominate force guiding United States educational policies since the inception of its public schools in the 1700s (Stevens, et al., 2000). Cremin (1970) pointed out that early occupants of the American colonies represented a heterogeneous society comprising English, French, Dutch, Spanish and Italian immigrants. While the French, Dutch, Spanish, and Italian cultures played a role in developing American culture, states Cremin, none of these played a more dominant role in the development of education than the English culture.

Although a large number of day-to-day decisions (i.e., class scheduling, content instruction, procedural implementation) made in today's schools represent no particular value or ideology; these decisions typically involve routine processes not designed to resolve conflicts between school and community values (Lutz & Merz, 1992). When no underlying cultural conflict of values exists, implementation of these decisions proceeds rather efficiently. However, according to Lutz and Merz (1992), when fundamental differences in values exist and various participants are not allowed to express their differences or participate in the decision-making process, residual conflicts remain that will undoubtedly surface again.

Throughout America's history, we have witnessed a continual conflict of cultures as Americans expanded socially, geographically, and economically. Historically, innovations in education tend to focus politically on either 'equity' or 'equality' (Noblit & Dempsey, 1996). Hughes (2005) suggested educational innovations by default merely represent recycled themes reintroduced by legitimate authorities (e.g., politicians, professors, wealthy influential business owners, etc.) and accepted by a majority of constituents. Foucault (1970) characterized this practice as discursive innovation, which involves the use of words and phrases characterized by relative simplicity, dichotomization, deceiving metamorphosis, and a certain societal familiarity. According to Noblit and Dempsey, discursive innovation has somehow maintained the ability to continually convince a critical mass of citizens that the message they have heard before actually represents a new language reform. Hughes illustrated this idea with the following example:

> the metamorphosis of the Jim Crow era discursive innovation led to Separate but Equal, which was largely refuted by legitimate authorities and a critical mass of people in the U.S., only to reappear in the form of Freedom of Choice (1960s) and School Choice (1980s), there by convincing citizens that school choice was not only an innovative idea but also a good democratic alternative (2005, p. 48).

Colonial America: Gaining stability as a nation. The early establishment of United States public education served an important role in developing a democratic society. However this did not epitomize the primary concern of the colonists (Lutz & Merz, 1992). The colonist's primary concern centered on religion and Bible reading (Cremin, 1970). Although colonists differed profoundly in their religious beliefs, all sects agreed that the Bible held the ultimate source of God's revelation and provided the most effective path to salvation (Rippa, 1997). Educational statutes in the colonies emphasized the prevention of Satan's influence on children. For example, the "ould deluder Satan" Act of 1647, which established Massachusetts public schools, expressed the primary concern of the colonist by mandating reading and writing schools in towns of fifty or more, and grammar schools in towns of one hundred or more persons (Callahan, 1962; Lutz & Merz, 1992; Stevens, et al., 2000). According to Stevens, et al., Massachusetts' curriculum focused on teaching students to read in order to aid individual salvation and the religious well-being of the colony.

The major theme of U.S. public schooling throughout the late 1700s focused primarily on religious or moral education. Spring (1986) indicated, "many Americans began to believe that public education was needed to build nationalism" (p. 28). Spring

wrote that nationalism emerged as the second major theme of U.S. public education following the American Revolutionary War.

Shortly after the War, Thomas Jefferson proposed a three-tiered educational system that reduced the number of students through a selecting and sorting process based on student achievement (Rippa, 1997; Stevens, et al., 2000). Unlike earlier colonel schooling, Jefferson's proposed an educational system that separated religion and education. However, his system maintained emphasis on teaching moral concepts of citizenship and "democratic principles." Jefferson believed that through attrition, common schools would create a natural aristocracy that would further educate and prepare youth to assume political leadership (Rippa, 1997; Stevens, et al., 2000). Despite Jefferson's strong stance for 'equal and exact justice for all men,' his proposed educational system provided only limited opportunities for girls and completely excluded African Americans.

The industrial revolution and immigration. By the 1800s, the relatively young United States faced new challenges brought on by industrialization and urbanization. Along with this, a second wave of immigrants from European countries began flooding the nation's urban areas (Lutz & Merz, 1992; Stevens, et al., 2000). Rippa (1997) estimated that between 1815 and 1855 four million Irish, German, English and Scandinavian immigrants arrived in the United States. Economic growth and population expansion in the Northeast initiated the first major push for mass public schooling.

Educational reformers in the 1800s, much like earlier reformers, experienced a changing society. By this time, the U.S. began transforming from an agrarian society to an industrialized nation (Rippa, 1997). Under the impact of the Industrial Revolution in

the Northeastern United States, domestic manufacturing moved from homes and villages to factory towns. Inventions such as the cotton-mill machinery, the sewing machine, the electromagnetic telegraph, steam engine, and new modes of transportation, helped complete the industrial revolution (Rippa, 1997). Industrial development in the North and other Costal cities led to great economic wealth. In fact, by 1860 industrial investments in the United States' Northeast had exceeded the monetary value of all the South's farms and cotton plantations (Rippa, 1997).

In the Northeast, corporate America had become a dominant force and corporate leaders exercised an increased level of control in government affairs and public education (Lutz & Merz, 1992). Lutz and Merz believed that the search for a pool of capable workers led U.S. industrial corporations to take a greater interest in the business of public schooling. Rippa (1997) concurred that corporate interest in public education resulted from the need for skilled labor to meet the demand for a readily available workforce. By the 1900s, the aim of schooling shifted from the Jeffersonian emphasis of preparing the democratic citizen to a new ideological task of preparing students to accept their place in an emerging industrial society (Rippa, 1997; Stevens, et al., 2000).

Despite the increased wealth created through industrialization, a majority of the indigenous and immigrant factory workers experienced disparate lifestyles of disenfranchisement, poverty, and a lack of educational opportunity (Katz, 1968). While many educational reformers espoused values of equality, opportunity, and freedom, many remained undaunted by the desperate work and living conditions of immigrant workers in Northeastern United States (Lutz & Merz, 1992).

Besides the growth in poverty, slums in the cities, and the manufacturing plant's deplorable working conditions, the mass influx of European immigrants had an identifiable effect on the public school movement in the 1800s. One of the affects included a call for free public schools. Labor leaders and humanitarians advocated for free public schools as a sensible approach toward changing the conditions of the working poor and ending factory system abuses (Rippa, 1997). Selection of state superintendents emerged as another effect the mass immigration bore on public schooling. By 1861, every state in the union had a chief school officer and a basic K-12 school system (Lutz & Merz, 1992). The appointment of a primary state superintendent illustrated state efforts to ensure the development and implementation of quality educational programs. Curriculum of the public schools during this era became increasing geared towards preparing students for industrial work (Stevens, et al., 2000).

Appalled by the disparate conditions in the industrial Northeast, Horace Mann, one of the premier state school superintendents in the history of public education led the humanitarian charge against the economic oppression and lack of educational opportunities for immigrants (Lutz & Merz, 1992). Mann petitioned for the universal taxation for nonsectarian public schools (Lutz & Merz, 1992; Stevens, et al., 2000). He believed education beyond all other devices could be the "great equalizer," and the key to solving the problems of persons in poverty. Mann's system of universal schooling held that schools simultaneously increased the worker's store of knowledge and instilled proper values and behaviors.

Stevens et al. (2000) proclaimed that Mann's universal or common-school movement promoted a curriculum embedded in U.S. ideologies that stressed hard work,

perseverance, self-denial, and promptness. They also said that Mann believed that public education could serve as a mean to overcome poverty and establish good work habits in the growing number of immigrant children. Katz (1968), however, questioned Mann's motives and offered a different interpretation of his common-school movement. Mann, argued Katz, tried to develop a common-school system focused on developing a workforce for new factories while instilling the moral and ethical values of the ruling class. Mann's idea of universal taxation also fell under sharp criticism from educational reformers who contended that educating children of the poor at taxpayer's expense would contribute to laziness and a lack of initiative (Rippa, 1997).

Equal rights and meritocracy. The meritocratic ideology picked up momentum as both educators and political leaders looked to education to resolve major social issues created by the urbanization and industrialization in the early 1900s. In a meritocratic society, members receive rewards based on effort and achievement. According to Stevens et al. (2000), meritocracy evolved from aristocratic theories and practices, which assumed that rewards should be based on inherited status and wealth.

During this period, U.S citizens witnessed the increased growth and productivity of industrial capitalism, while simultaneously observing an increase of large-scale poverty never before witnessed in U.S. history (Katz, 1968; Rippa, 1997). Mann's ideology of education, as the "great equalizer," did not become apparent for many marginalized immigrant youth. Under Mann's system, immigrant children did not receive an education, and many were forced to work long hours in unsafe conditions in order to supplement meager family incomes (Katz, 1968; Stevens, et al., 2000).

Despite the conflicts between political democracy and the economics of capitalism, many educational reforms focused on changing individuals rather than changing the system and continued to promote the meritocratic ideology of "equal educational opportunity" for children as a means to lift them out of poverty (de Long, 1979; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). Supporters of the meritocratic ideology believed that the system worked, particularly for individuals with the requisite skills and willingness to take advantage of opportunities.

Equal educational opportunity had replaced the broader notion of equality, which seemed unattainable in light of the growing disparity between wealthy and poorer U.S. citizens. Even with the growing political and economic inequalities, educational reforms remained focused on children's role, while overlooking the barriers posed by political and economic inequalities. Schools held to the ideal of fairness based on a system of just rewards. Consistent with reforms of that period, the mission of public schools was not to solve inequalities or poverty, but to equalize opportunity (deLong, 1979).

It would be misleading to suggest that all educational reformers accepted or promoted the meritocratic ideology of schooling. As the U.S. progressed deeper into the Industrial Revolution, social reconstructivists focused on democratizing schools in order to enable students to gain a genuine sense of personal and political empowerment (Steven et al., 2000). Increasing contradictions between political democracy and economics of capitalism attracted the attention of leading educators during this period, educational reformers like George Counts and John Dewey. Counts proposed that teachers become active agents for social change and lead the campaign for economic democracy through teaching and community activism. He strongly criticized the U.S. industrial system for

injustices committed against children. Counts, said Steven et al. (2000), believed industrialization led to concentrated economic and political power and posed an economic threat to democracy.

John Dewey, a leading member of a group of educators known as the "progressives," stood in direct opposition to those who favored the factory or industrial model of schooling. Dewey, said Rippa (1997) recognized the importance of schools assisting students to orienting themselves vocationally; however, both he and Counts believed the highest calling of public schools should be the preparation of democratic citizens (Rippa, 1997).

Although well intended, these liberal ideologies of Counts and Dewey rested on the same logical premise of meritocratic ideologies. De Long (1979) purported that power of democratizing citizens gave a false illusion that every individual had the same freedoms as any other and the opportunity to capitalize on his or her talents to the best of his or her ability. He believes that political theory of democracy assumes that reasoning individuals have the power to form social contracts with the government to preserve their self-interest and protect their inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness and that these individuals have a vote, no greater or lesser than any other.

In spite of advancements in educational theory and practice during the 1700s and 1800s, the plight of African American youth went virtually unnoticed or intentionally ignored by most educational reformers. The fact that many communities in America were ethnically homogeneous could have been a contributing factor. Not until the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s, almost 150 years into the nation's public school movement, did the education of African American youth become a priority in U.S.

public schooling. Prior to the Supreme Court decision in the 1954, Brown v Topeka School Board, there existed minimal compulsory requirements for African American youth to attend school. Through Brown and a variety of other legislative and judicial actions, African Americans, as well as other marginalized groups (linguistic minorities, women, and persons with disabilities) gained access to public schooling.

Unto this point, African Americans did not attend school or largely attended segregated schools, which provided inadequate educational opportunities and received resources far less than white schools (Ogbu, 1978). Even in non-segregated public schools African Americans continued to receive unequal treatment (Patton, 1998). Under both segregated and non-segregated schooling, African American students experienced a lack of educational opportunities and were usually not encouraged to aspire to higher achievement such as going to college or pursing professional careers (Lutz & Merz, 1992).

The dominant culture ideologies perpetuated throughout the history of U.S. public education significantly contributed to the limited access of African Americans and other marginalized groups to adequate educational opportunities. The democratic principles of equality, opportunity, and freedom represent a democratic society's utopian ideal of education but do not represent past or present educational realities for many African American and marginalized youth.

Current Problems Facing Public Schooling

Putnam (2007) declared that most certain prediction we can be make about almost any modern society is that it will be more diverse a generation from now than it is today. With the end of legal segregation in U.S. public schools in 1954, schools assumed greater

responsibility for a broader, more heterogeneous population of students. Since that time, serving cultural and linguistically diverse students and closing achievement gaps between ethic groups have become two of the most unrelenting challenges confronting U.S. public schools.

Changes in the demographic landscape. The U.S. population has become more diverse over the past two decades as marginalized populations have rapidly increased in number. According to the U. S. Department of Commerce (2004), from 1980 to 2005, the resident population of Asian Americans grew by 260 %; the Hispanic population grew by 192 %. African Americans had a growth rate of 39 %, the slowest growth among marginalized groups during this period. In comparison, the White population grew by only 10 %. In 2005, the overall marginalized group population increased to 33%. Hispanics represented the largest marginalized group (14%), surpassing African Americans. The Census Bureau estimates by the year 2020, marginalized groups will represent 39 % of the total U.S. population, and 54 % by the year 2050.

Students with disabilities represent another subgroup within the marginalized population inclusive of members from all ethnicities. In 1975, when Congress authorized the Education of Handicap Children Act (EHCA), local education agencies became responsible for providing all students with disabilities a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). Prior to the 1975, school districts had the right to refuse enrollment to any student they considered to be uneducable (Abeson & Trudeau, 1970).

In the 1976, an estimated 3.8 million students received special education services, increasing drastically in comparison to the estimated 2 million prior to passage of EHCA (Lewit & Baker 1996; Committee on Education and Workforce, 1997). As shown in

Table 2-1, between 1995 through 2004, the total number of students ages 6 through 21 receiving special education and related services under IDEA increased from almost 5.1 million to more than 6.1 million.

Table 2-1

Number & Percent of Children Served Under IDEA, Part B, Age 6-21

School Year	***Total Number of Children Served***	***Percentage of 6 through 21 population receiving services under the IDEA****
1995	5,078,841	8.4
1996	5,230,663	8.5
1997	5,396,889	8.5
1998	5,539,688	8.6
1999	5,677,883	8.7
2000	5,773,863	8.7
2001	5,861,369	8.8
2002	5,959,122	8.9
2003	6,045,053	9.1
2004	6,118,437	9.2

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs, *25th Annual (2005) Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act,* vol. 1, Washington, D.C.

Closing achievement gaps. Disparities or "gaps" in the achievement levels of marginalized groups of students have concerned political and educational leaders for decades (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008). Groups most affected by achievement gaps include African American, Hispanic, Native American, some Asian Americans (specifically, Vietnamese and Pacific Islanders), and students with disabilities. A major portion of the literature highlights African American and Hispanic American students, while a less pervasive portion of the literature address Native American and Pacific Islander students (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008). Low representation of Native American students in research studies and the lack of differentiation between Asian American subgroups (such as, Japanese and Korean) contribute to the limited quantity of

educational research for these groups (Marshall, 2002). Patton (1978) cautioned that ethnic status alone cannot account for group differences; marginalized groups may differ from one another just as much as they differ from the dominant White group. For example, Japanese and Korean students out perform Vietnamese and Pacific Islanders and perform as well or better than Whites.

In the 1960s, President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty" emphasized attention to inequities in the educational achievement gaps between marginalized and economically disadvantaged students and their White advantaged peers. The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 established the Head Start program and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, which created the Title I and Follow Through programs, were specific attempts to address the achievement gaps in educational attainment (Guskey, 2007). Although these legislations benefited all minorities and economically disadvantaged citizens, these social reforms primarily sought to improve the social and economic conditions for African Americans.

Many Americans believed that African Americans experienced poverty because they lacked formal education or the skills necessary to attain better paying jobs (Patton, 1978), overlooking the harmful impact of *de facto* (in reality) and *de jure* (by law) segregation. This perception led the development of compensatory educational programs to improve the cognitive skills and academic achievement of African American children. Cholewa and West-Olatunji (2008) declared programs growing out of this undertaking did not prove particularly successful.

More recently, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA; 2004) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB formerly the Elementary and Secondary

Education Act; 2001) legislation revived these concerns. These laws require schools to report achievement results for various economic, ethnicity, language, and disability subgroups. As a result, schools must take specific steps to close identified achievement gaps among these different subgroups of students (Guskey, 2007). NCLB require schools to report annual yearly progress of student performance on statewide assessment results in core content subject matter (reading, math, and science) across thirteen various categorical groups (for example, gender, race/ethnicity, disability, socioeconomic status). IDEA require that states report outcomes annually on performance indicators such as graduation and dropout rates, student participation in high stakes testing, parental involvement, and postschool outcomes (percent of previously on IEPs employed, enrolled in some type of post secondary education, or both one year after exiting high school) for students with disabilities.

Programs designed to reduce or close the achievement gaps between marginalized groups and their White counterparts have remained dismal. For example, since 1972 dropout rates between Whites and African Americans have narrowed marginally. However, since 1990, there has been no relative change in the gap of dropout rates.

Cultural competence: Problems with current research. There are important reasons why the underlying values and beliefs influencing educational research on culture needs to be uncovered. Foremost, historically in the United States the cultural perspectives developed by many of the mainstream researchers and research institutions have promulgated culturally biased institutionalized beliefs and practices (Banks, 1998; Stanfield, 1993). Second, institutionalized concepts, theories, and paradigms considered neutral often privileged mainstream students over disadvantage low-socioeconomic

students, students of color, and female students (Patton, 1998; Smith, 2009). Finally, mainstream or dominate culture values and beliefs, paradigms, and perspectives tend to disempower low socioeconomic groups and groups of color (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). Traditionally, these practices have been used to justify the educational neglect of marginalized groups and to legitimize discriminatory educational policies and practices in public schooling (Banks, 1998).

Methodological approaches in social science and educational research on culture have been influenced in complex ways by the life experiences, values, and personal biographies of the researcher (Banks, 1998; Esterberg, 2002; Stanfield, 1993; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). How individuals interpret culture can be mediated by the interaction of a complex set of status variables, such as gender, social class, age, political affiliation, religion, and the individual scholar's ideological commitments and knowledge claims (Banks, 1998; Mertens, 2005; Stevens, Wood, & Sheehan, 2000; Smith, 2008). Many of the major knowledge producers, argued Patton (1998) have played a major role in the maintenance of injustices toward marginalized groups, particularly African Americans.

This does not mean in order for the researcher to understand differing cultures he or she must walk in another's shoes, not that this experience would hurt. However, it does mean that researchers examining the influence of cultural values and beliefs on behavior must develop cultural competence and *'insider status'* to attain informant's perspectives and viewpoints that enable them to best understand the lived experience of the community being studied (Oscar-Sanchez, Lesser, and Kelly, 2008; Rogers-Dulan & Blacher, 1995; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). Oscar-Sanchez, et al. (2008) in

their community-based participation action research project with low-income Mexican-American populations, found that the lack of cultural competence can present an '*impenetrable*' barrier between researcher and the study population. Banks defines four types of cultural researchers the indigenous-insider, the indigenous-outsider, the external-insider, and the external-outsider (see Table 2-2).

Table 2-2

A Typology of Cross Cultural Researchers

Type of researcher	*Description*
The indigenous-insider	This individual endorses the unique values, perspectives, behaviors, beliefs, and knowledge of his or her indigenous community and culture and is perceived by people within the community as a legitimate community member who can speak with authority about it.
The indigenous-outsider	This individual was socialized within his or her indigenous community but has experienced high levels of cultural assimilation into an outsider or oppositional culture. The values, beliefs, perspectives, and knowledge of this individual are identical to those of the outside community. The indigenous-outsider is perceived by indigenous people in the community as an outsider.
The external-insider	This individual was socialized with another culture and acquires its beliefs, values, behaviors, attitudes, and knowledge. However, because of his or her unique experiences, the individual rejects many of the values, beliefs, and knowledge claims within his or her indigenous community and endorses those of the studied community. The external-insider is viewed by the new community as an "adopted" insider.
The external-outsider	The external-outsider is socialized within a community different from the one in which he or she is doing research. The external-outsider has a partial understanding of and little appreciation for the values, perspective, and knowledge of the community he or she is studying and consequently often misunderstands and misinterprets the behaviors within the studied community.

Source: Banks, J. A. (1998). The lives and values of researchers: Implications for educating citizens in a multicultural society. *Educational Researcher, 27*, 4-17.

Developing cultural competence can be a complex, costly, and time-consuming effort. Traditionally, technical coding and categorical classifications based on race and ethnicity have been used to describe cultural differences in populations. Davis (1992) wrote that researchers use of scientific (experimental and quasi-experimental) approaches serve as a means to avoid these complexities. For instance, in the absence of cultural competence, categorizing individuals into homogeneous groups and randomization can serve as less complex way dealing with threats of internal validity (Mertens, 2005).

Stanfield (1993) cautioned against the over simplification and uncritical use of categorizations based solely on race or ethnicity. For example, use of comparative analysis strategies, such as analysis of variance (ANOVA) and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) assumes homogeneity within-groups, and that treatment or interventions will have homogenous effects. Outcomes of these analytical approaches can be given too much weight when used in providing information on how to think about race and cultural variations when examining differences in performance outcomes (Davis, 1992). Such practices, states Davis, "rule out environmental or economic explanations of cultural differences such as income, trust in program personnel, and program delivery" (p. 58). Unfortunately, studies on cultural differences that utilized racial categorizations infer cultural homogeneity and their findings often make inappropriate generalizations based on similar racial categories (Mertens, 2005).

This does not imply that experimental and quasi-experimental (scientific-based) approaches in data collection and analysis should not be used. On the contrary, these approaches provide a wealth of information that when coupled with "insider"

experiential- and case-based knowledge can inform best practice (Cook, Tankersley, & Landrum, 2009). Husserl cited in Crotty, (1998) pointed out a key problem with utilizing scientific-based approaches as a sole means of developing cultural competency

> . . . the scientific is an abstraction from the 'lived' world; it has been distilled from the world of our everyday experiences, distances us from the world of our everyday experiences, and takes us further still from the world of immediate experience. The world perceived through the scientific grid is a highly systematic, well-organized world. It is a world of regularities, constancies, uniformities, iron-clad laws, absolute principles. As such, it stands in stark contrast with the uncertain, ambiguous, idiosyncratic, changeful world we know first hand. (p. 28)

Too often discourses based on scientific approaches lead to developing or re-enforcing stereotypical ideologies about marginalized groups. The reliance on scientific-based knowledge often eliminates truly objective reflection in the day-to-day decision-making by local school educators. Stanfield (1993) warned that, "… gathering and interpreting statistical data in racial and ethnic research frequently lend a professional gloss to what are in reality nothing more than cultural and social stereotypes and presumptions." (p. 4)

Collings (1995) and Harding (1993) argued that the most objective truths [knowledge] on culture result when diverse groups representing broad perspectives participate in validating ideas. Banks (1998) concluded that the most important ethical responsibility of cultural researchers involves the inclusion or empowerment of

marginalized communities and incorporates the views, beliefs, concepts, and values of the communities they study.

Awareness of the underlying theoretical perspectives becomes important when determining the validity of knowledge claims derived from scientific-based studies on culture. Research efforts in scientific studies on culture are linked closely with the positivistic theoretical perspective (Cook, Tankersley, & Landrum, 2009). A positivistic theoretical perspective relies on logical, cause-and-effect orientations and determinations based on priori justifications, which draw their authority from preexisting prescriptions apart from natural or cultural experiences of the persons being studied (Creswell, 2007).

Positivistic grounded research typically excludes the metaphysical viewpoints, ethical values, aesthetic judgments, and religious beliefs, which may influence behaviors or be of great importance to the persons being studied (Crotty, 1998). According to Crotty (1998) and Stanfield and Dennis (1993) a positivistic approach asserts that in order to create valid human knowledge, the researcher must be aware of 'cognitive meaninglessness' such as values and beliefs and must disjunction themselves from such theories (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Paugach, & Richardson, 2005; Creswell, 2007). The positivist stance holds that the use of sound scientific approaches leads to accurate and objective knowledge of the truth; utilizing probability samples provides statistical results generalizable across populations (Koppelman, 1983). Richardson (1990) argued that evaluations of programs that serve culturally diverse populations should not be developed on inherent positivist evaluation frameworks.

Indentifying the Religious Landscape

The increasing diversity of the American population and the pervasive presence of religion in the American public arena underscore the need for up-to-date and reliable information on the type of religious groups, their beliefs and practices, and the influence of such religions on culture. From the beginning of the Colonial period, religion has been a major factor in shaping the identity and values of American people (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008). Despite recent legal actions of the courts in favor of secularization (separation of church and state), religion continues to play a prominent role in American public life.

Prior to 1950, the U.S. Census Bureau represented the authoritative source of basic information on the religious affiliation of citizens through the decennial consensus (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008; Stark, 1992). In 1850, census takers began collecting general information on the respective denominations and seating capacity of houses of worship (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2002). However, census takers did not interview individual worshipers about their religious affiliations. Instead, collectors of this information relied on clergy and other religious leaders to supply the information (Stark, 1992). The 1850 census found that eighteen principal denominations existed in the U.S (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008).

No significant changes in data collection on religious groups occurred until 1902, when Congress established the U.S. Census Bureau, in the Department of Interior, as an official government agency (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2002). This led to the creation of the Census of Religious Bodies, which began as a stand-alone mid-decade census in 1906 (Stark, 1992). As in the past, officials of the census relied on denominational clergymen to supply information. According to the Pew Forum on

Religion & Public Life (2008), census takers collected religion affiliation information through questionnaires mailed to religious leaders and asked such questions as the year the congregations were established; the number of ministers and their salaries; the number of congregation operated schools, teachers, scholars and officers; and demographic characteristics of congregational members. The 1906 Census of Religious Bodies reported a total of 186 denominations a significant increase from the 1850 census, which officials attributed the influx of immigrants to America.

The Census of Religious Bodies conducted surveys every ten years until 1946, when Congress failed to appropriate money to tabulate or to publish the information collected. By 1956, Congress had discontinued funding for the census altogether. The ultimate demise of the census stemmed in part from a growing public debate over the merit and feasibility of the Census Bureau asking questions about religion. The inclusion of questions on religion led to strong debate between members of religious organizations, civil liberty groups, social scientist, and even government officials who differed sharply on both sides of the issue. Those who opposed the inclusion of religious questions had concerns about the protection of religious liberty and privacy rights, and whether the government had overstepped the constitutional boundaries of church-state separation.

In October 1976, Congress enacted an amendment to the census law prohibiting any mandatory questions concerning a person's "religious beliefs or to membership in a religious body," laying to rest the issue of including religious questions in the Census. Although the law permits the Census Bureau to ask questions about religious practices on a voluntary basis in some population and household surveys, it has not opted to do so. Information published by the Census Bureau about religious bodies and religious

affiliations provide information derived and reprinted from nongovernmental survey organizations, such as The American Religious Identification Survey, The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, and The Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches.

To date, it has been estimated some 216 distinct Christian denominations with nearly 350,000 congregations exist in the United States. According to American Religious Identity Survey (ARIS; 2001), an estimated 159 million Americans profess to be Christians, constituting approximately 76% of the U.S. population (Table 2-3). Although the number of non-Christians (Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and other faiths) have shown significant growth they still make up no more than ten percent of the population (Monsma, 2006). A growing number of Americans (13%) self-conscientiously profess to be non-religious or secular.

Table 2-3

Top Twenty Religions and Their Estimated Populations in the United States, 2001

Religion	*1990 Est. Adult Population*	*2001 Est. ADULT Population*	*2004 Est. Total Population*	*% of U.S. Population 2000*	*% Change 1990 – 2000*
Christianity	151,225,000	159,030,000	224,437,959	76.5%	+5%
Nonreligious/Secular	13,116,000	27,539,000	38,865,604	13.2%	+110%
Judaism	3,137,000	2,831,000	3,995,371	1.3%	-10%
Islam	527,000	1,104,000	1,558,068	0.5%	+109%
Buddhism	401,000	1,082,000	1,527,019	0.5%	+170%
Agnostic	1,186,000	991,000	1,398,592	0.5%	-16%
Atheist		902,000	1,272,986	0.4%	
Hinduism	227,000	766,000	1,081,051	0.4%	+237%
Unitarian Universalist	502,000	629,000	887,703	0.3%	+25%
Wiccan/Pagan/Druid		307,000	433,267	0.1%	
Spiritualist		116,000	163,710	0.05%	
Native American Religion	47,000	103,000	145,363	0.05%	+119%
Baha'i	28,000	84,000	118,549	0.04%	+200%
New Age	20,000	68,000	95,968	0.03%	+240%
Sikhism	13,000	57,000	80,444	0.03%	+338%
Scientology	45,000	55,000	77,621	0.02%	+22%
Humanist	29,000	49,000	69,153	0.02%	+69%
Deity (Deist)	6,000	49,000	69,153	0.02%	+717%

Taoist	23,000	40,000	56,452	0.02%	+74%
Eckankar	18,000	26,000	36,694	0.01%	+44%

Source: Kosmin, B. A. & Lachman, S. P. (1990). *The National Survey of Religious Identification* (NSRI). City University of New York, NY.

Religion has and continues to serve as a uniting and dividing force in the United States on issues of public policy (Monsma, 2006). Today issues like prayer in school, school vouchers, funding for faith-based initiatives, sex education, and religious free speech have lead to divisive clashes in interpretations of public policy and the role and relationship religion in public education.

Religion in Public Schools

In 1791, Congress ratified the First Amendment as a part of the first 10 amendments of the U.S. Constitution, known as the Bill of Rights. Details in this First Amendment, also referred to as the 'Religious Clause', laid the foundation of religious liberty in America. The First Amendment states, in part, "Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Early interpretations of the Religious Clause held that the First Amendment only prohibited actions by the federal government to sanction a national church or religion. Laws prohibiting the states from establishing or promoting government sponsored religious activities did not come until after the passage of the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution in July 1868. The 14th Amendment's Due Process Clause prohibited the states from depriving citizens of certain unspecified liberties, including free exercise of religion. Thus, expanding the guarantees of the Bill of Rights to the state, as well as, the federal government.

Legal analysis of the First Amendment has historically been divided in two separate parts known as the establishment clause and the free-exercise clause (Rossow &

Stefkovich, 2005). The establishment clause, commonly referred to as the "separation of church and state," requires that the government not participate in the promoting or sanctioning of religion. The "free exercise" clause holds that the government shall not prohibit an individual or groups from excising sincerely held religious beliefs.

Not until 1940, nearly a century since the passage of the 14th Amendment, would the U.S. Supreme Court enter into the controversy of religion in public schools. The Court ruled in *Minersville School District v. Gobitis* that the 'Free Exercise' clause did not give students the right to opt out of a compulsory flag-salute due to religious convictions (the Court would latter overturn this ruling in *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette, 1943)*. Before that time, federal courts had applied the religious clauses only to actions of the federal government (Pew, 2007). Since that time the Court has repeatedly held that the Constitution prohibits public schools from indoctrinating children in religion or sponsoring religious activities.

Following the landmark Supreme Court ruling in *Engel v. Vitale* (1962), striking down school-sponsored prayer, Americans have continually fought over the place of religion in public schools. In *Engel* the court emphasized what it saw as the wrongs of having the government create and sponsor religious activities. Despite federal court rulings prohibiting state sponsorship of prayer and other religious activities in public schools, research has shown that a large percentage of Americans favor looser, not tighter, limits on religious activities in public schools. According to a survey by the Pew Research Center (2006), over two-thirds of the respondents (69%) agreed with the notion that liberals have gone to far in trying to keep religion out of schools and the government.

While a majority (58%) of survey participants favored teaching biblical creationism along with evolution.

Determining what constitutes government sponsorship of religion or prohibits the freedom of religious expression has not been an easy task. Appendix A illustrates the court's extreme inconsistency in decisions over the last century. Increased religious pluralism in the United States has intensified the debate on the limits of government support of religion and the conditions under which the government should permit exercise of religion.

The Establishment Clause. Some of the strongest debate over the relationship between religion and public schools stems from the '*Establishment Clause*.' Participants in the debate on the Establishment Clause fall roughly into two camps (Pew, 2009): the separationists, who broadly interpret the Establishment Clause to require the government to refrain from any activities that aid or promote religion or religious institutions. Parties on the other side of the debate interpret the Establishment Clause more narrowly, contending that government support of religion is constitutional as long as the support is neutral, meaning it does not favor religion over non-religion or favor a particular faith over other faiths (Pew, 2009).

Strict separationists declare that most or all government support of religion is unconstitutional and favor a 'wall of separation between Church and State.' Thomas Jefferson first popularized the phrase, 'a wall of separation between Church and State' in the early 1800s. However, not until 1947, in the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *Everson v Board of Education* (*Everson*), would the phrase influence understanding of the Establishment Clause.

The controversy in *Everson* involved a New Jersey statute that allowed local school boards to reimburse parents for the cost of busing their children to public and private schools, including religious organizations. The plaintiff argued that the New Jersey Constitution, as well as the U.S. Constitution, prohibited reimbursement to parents sending their children to religious schools. The plaintiff argued that such a policy subsidized religious instruction, thus violating the Establishment Clause. Although the Court unanimously agreed that the Establishment Clause created a "wall of separation between church and state," they disagreed sharply on how this concept applied to the facts in the case. In a 5-4 split, the Court ruled that the reimbursements were indeed constitutional.

In the opinion, for the five-justice majority written by Justice Hugo Black, they held that the New Jersey bus subsidies did not violate the Establishment Clause because the subsidies primarily benefited the parents and school children, not the religious schools. The majority concluded that the subsidies afforded parents sending their children to religious schools represented generally available benefits to all parents and students, just as religious groups and individuals are afforded government funded police and fire protection services. Writing for the minority, Justice Wiley Rutledge and Robert Jackson, argued that subsidies were unconstitutional because the Establishment Clause prohibits government funding of religious instruction, whether indirectly through parent reimbursement, or to direct funding.

The majority opinion in *Everson* helped to outline permissible government support of religious schools, which concluded government could provide aid to religious schools as long as aid: (a) was secular in nature; (b) generally available to students in

both public and private schools; and (c) primarily directed toward students rather than toward religious schools. However, in the 1971 ruling of *Lemon v. Kurtzman* the Court outlined new criteria to determine when a law violates the Establishment Clause, phrased the '*Lemon* Test.'

In *Lemon v. Kurtzman,* the Court concluded for a law to comply with the Establishment Clause it must: (a) have a secular purpose; (b) have a predominantly secular effect; and (c) not foster excessive entanglement between government and religion. In the 1970s and 1980s the '*Lemon Test*' became an extremely influential doctrine supporting strict separationism. Despite the Courts adherence to the '*Lemon Test*' in the 70s and 80s, a minority of justices, such as Justice Sandra Day O'Connor and Justice Rehnquist, criticized the test because it necessitated a strict separation between church and state. In 1985, Justice O'Connor would write a dissenting opinion in *Aguilar v. Felton* that would lead to the dismantling of the strict separationist perspective of the '*Lemon Test*.'

The size and scope of the 'wall of separation' continues to be a centerpiece of debate. An examination of the cases involving religion in public schools disclosed that a majority of those cases involved efforts to expand not restrict the relationship between religious organizations and public schools. The separationist stance suggests that public schools exercise strict neutrality towards religion, holding that the exercise of religion should be a purely private matter. However, parties on the other side of the debate believe that government agencies such as public schools should not go to extreme of excluding the exercise of religious beliefs and values from public life. Trigg (2008) warns that if educators collude in the separationist approach, some of the strongest roots

of democracy may be threatened. Monsma (2006) believes that a lack of an appropriate understanding of church and state relationships can lead to either acknowledgement and value the role of religion in society, or can ignore and stifle what religion has to contribute to diversity and the development of a democratic society.

Monsma (2006) held that the separationist stance taken by government agencies through neutrality excludes religion from the public realm. He states the following reason for his contention; first exclusion of religion from public life favors secular systems of belief over religious belief systems. Such actions by government, says Monsma, would put religion in a disfavorable or disadvantaged position and place secular organizations and points of view in a position favored over religious viewpoints (p. 47). He believed a society without religion would suggest that religion has nothing of real value to contribute to relevant issues that impact our way of life.

Non-separationists do not disfavor government neutrality; however they favor what Monsma (2006) termed 'positive' neutrality. Positive neutrality seeks ways government can acknowledge and make room for religion without violating the norm of religious neutrality. In this manner, government would not recognize, accommodate, or support any one particular religion, but instead recognize and honor them all.

The "Black Church": Advocate for African American Youth and Their Families

Cultural communities in which students are socialized also represent epistemological communities that share beliefs, perspectives, and knowledge (Nelson, 1993; Wenger, 1998). The extended family, the school, community organizations (such as, Boy Scouts, religion, recreation parks, etc.), and peers represent the most important social spheres for children (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Cholewa & West-

Olatunji, 2008). Gutierrrez and Rogoff (2003) agree that an individual's cultural community influences the way they approach learning. Developing quality-interwoven networks between agents in these spheres can contribute to healthy human development, school success, and social [economic] mobility for children (Super & Harkness, 1997). Unfortunately, for marginalized children, Stanton-Salazar (1997) contended:

> structural problems are not unfortunate quirks in the system that have yet to be fully resolved; rather, they are mechanisms intrinsic to the inner workings of mainstream institutions that function both to problematize the social development of working-class minority youth to engineer their failure in school. (p.8)

For many African Americans the legacy of slavery and the serried workings of institutional racism and prejudice have hindered even the most optimistic African Americans from forging such relationships (Fabre & O'Meally, 1994; Rogers-Dulan & Blacher, 1995). In spite of these forces that have operated to debase and degrade African Americans the support of extended family and community religious organizations have served as stabilizing agents for African American families through volatile periods in U.S. History (Franklin & Moss, 2006). According to Rogers-Dulan and Blacher (1995) stated, African American churches and families have a binding relation and refer to these two aggregates as "enduring institutions." Franklin and Moss write, aunts and grandmothers assumed the role of homemakers and keepers of family traditions while husbands and wives worked. African American religious organizations became involved in activities such as day-care for working parents, established clubs (for example, Boys and Girls scouts) for young people in order to keep them from getting involved in immoral or illegal behaviors; clergyman became politically active and in some instances

ran for political offices. Harding (1990) stated, no institution in the history of America has played a more significant role than the African American church in establishing human rights for all U.S. citizens.

Aspects of African American culture like communication, social interactions, values, and attitudes have been influenced significant by their relationship to community religious organizations (Adksion-Bradley et al., 2005). African American religious organizations—the "Black Church"—represent many different denominations, including Baptist, African Methodist, Church of God in Christ, Seventh-Day Adventist, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, an Episcopalian (Franklin & Moss, 2006; Harding, 1990). The term *Black Church* encompasses any predominantly African American congregation, even if it represents part of a predominately White American religious denomination (Adksion-Bradley et. al., 2005). For example, a number of predominately African American Roman Catholics churches exist within Southern states, however, Roman Catholicism represents a predominately White religious orientation.

Although attendance to religious services may be less prevalent today than in the past (Taylor, Lincoln, & Chatters, 2005), religious principles remain a strong influence in cultural values and beliefs and integrated into family values and strengths of African Americans (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). According to Lincoln and Mamiya the Black church holds the potential to become an agent for building bridges between African American families and schools that lead to the development of more accurate insights into each other's world. Taylor, Thornton, & Chatters (1987) noted the Black church, "is in a position of being uniquely responsive to the needs of the community it serves" (p. 124). Rogers-Dulan and Blacher (1995) concluded service delivery systems for African

American families should involve the formation of alliances among various agencies that include professionals from health, education, social services, and religious organizations.

Unfortunately, many schools overlook the potential benefit of these relationships. For example, Joshi et al., (2005) surveyed teachers on six categories of cultural on student learning patterns of communication, social values, ways of learning, child rearing practices, outward displays, and religious values. Teachers overwhelmingly (85%) reported having little awareness of religious values that influence student learning. They also found that only one-third (37%) of teachers sought information on these values. They believed teacher discomfort with discussions related to religious values in the public school setting might have contributed to their low level of response. This response may not be uncommon for a number of U.S. public schools given the confusion in schools about permissible interactions between schools and religious organizations.

Researchers studying issues related to African American families should give special significance to the major contributions of religion on the cultural heritage and basic values of the African American family (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Rogers-Dulan & Blacher, 1995). Adksion-Bradley et. al., (2005) asserted that although various helping professions recognize the influence of the Black church in the lives of African Americans, very little information exist on how these help organizations can collaborate with the Black church to meet the needs of African American clients. Being knowledgeable about and sensitive to the unique experiences of the Black church can give educators a necessary connection to improve collaboration with African American families.

Participatory Action Research

Unlike traditional educational research, Participatory Action Research (PAR) sets out to democratize the research process by allowing participants to be involved in defining the problem and seeking solutions (Stinger, 1996). In PAR, the professional researcher serves as the facilitator or catalyst in the research process. PAR emphasizes the creation of knowledge based on life experiences and perspectives of ordinary people directed towards progressive social change (Esterberg, 2002).

Traditionally, educational research involved specialized researchers connected with colleges or universities or educational institutions that develop research agendas based on their interest (Stanfield, 1993). The research typically viewed participants as "subjects," whose sole responsibility involved providing the information sought by the researcher. Participants had no voice in how to conduct the research or in the interpretation or use of the data.

Hall (1975) asserted that standard [research] methods bring with them an oppressive ideology, do not describe the social reality of indigenous people, fail to get community involvement, and lack the qualities of good science. Typically, special trained researchers and research institutions have been viewed as the only viable source of research methods. Williams (2007) declared that despite recognition of increasingly diverse cultural make-ups, many contemporary societies remain permeated by sets of knowledge, institutional and identity-power relations that privilege particular worldviews and cultural systems over others. In other words, indigenous people, particularly those with no specialized training, essentially become disempowered from taking action or solving their own problems.

The theory of Participatory Action Research first emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in third world countries within Latin America, Asia, and Africa (Williams, 2007). PAR has many of its roots in social psychology and based upon the critical pedagogy put forward by educator Paulo Freire (Woodard & Hetley, 2007). Freire's philosophy of emancipation through interactive participation guided his educational efforts in working with the rural poor in Brazil (Smith, 2002).

Plainly stated, PAR involves research techniques that involve affected community members as agents in the research process, not merely as sources for data collection. Wadsworth (1998) described PAR based on 'what it is' and 'what it is not':

> It is…research, which involves all relevant parties in actively examining together current action, which they experience as problematic in order to change and improve it. It is not…a process used by one group of people to another to do what is thought best for them.

Table 2-4 lists Woodward and Hetley's (2007) principles of PAR.

Table 2-4
Woodward and Hetley's Principles of Participatory Action Research

- The problem originates in the community or workplace itself.
- The ultimate goal of the research is fundamental structural transformation and the improvement of the lives of those involved. The beneficiaries are the workers or people concerned.
- PAR involves the people in the workplace or the community in the control of the entire process.
- Focus of PAR is on working with a wide range of exploited or oppressed groups: immigrants, labor, indigenous peoples, and women.
- Central to PAR is its role of strengthening the awareness in people of their own abilities and resources and its support t mobilizing or organizing.
- The term "researcher" can refer to both the community or workplace persons involved as well as those with specialized training.
- Although those with specialized knowledge/training often come from outside the situation, they are committed participants and learners in a process that leads to militancy rather than detachment.

Source: Woodward, W. R., & Hetley, R. S. (2007). Diffusion, decolonializing, and participatory action research. *Integrative Psychological & Behavioral Science, 41*, 97-105.

Participatory Action Research has evolved as both a research method and an intervention for self-determination. While not directly stated, both NCLB and IDEA legislations now require schools to engage in more participatory and shared decision-making activities with marginalized groups and various community organizations within the school community. For example, prior to 1990 schools had the option of inviting students to their IEP meeting. Typically, teachers, parents, or adult caregivers made those decisions for them. As a result, students had little opportunity to voice their opinions on the type of educational program or related services they received.

The Individuals with Disabilities Educational Improvement Act (IDEIA) require that no later than a student with disability's 16th birthday, local educational agencies must actively involve him or her in the IEP transition planning. If the student cannot attend,

other steps must be taken to ensure that the students preferences and interest are considered. Research has shown that increasing students' participation in the transition process can improve their self-determination skills, and more importantly, improve their postschool outcomes (Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Luecking, & Mack, 2002; Martin, Mithaug, Cox, Peterson, Van Dycke, & Cash, 2003; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997).

I concur with Patton (1998), Mertens, (2005), and Standfield, (1985) who argued that knowledge, meanings, and understandings of the African American culture have typical derived from a positivistic tradition. Patton (1998) stipulated, these historical explanations often lack social, political, and economic considerations. Stanfield (1985) called for knowledge producers to replace positivistic paradigms with methods that express relevant cultural "insider" knowledge, epistemologies, and that express multi-emic social, political, cultural, and economic perspectives that guide research design, data analysis, and interpretation. This paradigm shift, states Patton, serves as a challenge to African American knowledge producers, as well as caring non-African American knowledge producers to develop a vast reservoir of cultural knowledge and experience of African Americans.

Towards this end I have conceptualized a multiphase process with the ultimate goal of identifying perceptions and viewpoints school staff and religious organizations. The process aims to broaden the understanding school personnel on the values and beliefs that influence religious organizational practices, while simultaneously facilitating religious organizations capacity to understand the school's values, beliefs, and practices so that collaborative relationships can be forged so that in-school and educational outcomes can improve not just for African American students, but all students.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

Following a constructivist tradition (Guba & Lincoln, 1983), I designed a three-phase recursive qualitative data collection and analysis model to answer my overarching research question: How can schools work collaboratively with religious organizations to set educational goals focused on improving in-school and postschool outcomes for African American youth, especially learners with special needs? Social constructivism claims that there is no 'true' or 'objective' knowledge; instead human beings construct meanings as they engage with the world they are interpreting (Creswell, 2007; Crotty, 1998).

Based on the social constructivist epistemology, I utilized an ethnographic qualitative approach to (a) collect data as it occurred in its natural setting, (b) engage with people and places under study, (c) develop a more holistic perspective of the community that incorporates the viewpoints of participants, and (d) identify patterns and themes based on inductive reasoning that may signal future action. An ethnographic researcher describes and interprets the values, behaviors, beliefs, and language of a culture-sharing group (Crotty, 1998; Hammersly, 1985). An ethnographic approach best matched this study because it allowed me to inductively develop a theory or pattern of meaning as I collected and analyzed data, rather than starting with an a priori theory. The social constructivist paradigm allowed me to take into account the subjective viewpoints and perspectives of the informants when making my interpretations (Geotz, 1984).

In order to derive meaning from the beliefs and values that influence the interactions between public schools and religious organizations, I immersed myself in the day-to-day activities of members in this shared community (Mertens, 2005). As stated

earlier, I employed a three-phase recursive data collection and analysis model for this study. The term *recursive* refers to the development of overall interpretations generated through a systematic unfolding method of inquiry, built as successive pieces of data are gathered and analyzed (Patton, 2002).

This process, also referred to as triangulation, provided justification for the validity and trustworthiness of my and informant interpretations. The recursivity involved an unrolling inquiry process beginning in Phase I with the collection of archival data and field observations. This was followed by one-on-one interviews with key informants in Phase II. Then, concluded with a focus group interview in Phase III. Analysis of the data consisted of three concurrent flows of activity in each phase of the study: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stainback & Stainback, 1998).

One of the study's goals focused on empowerment of participants. To do this, I embedded Participatory Action Research (PAR) activities throughout the research process to allow the key informants an opportunity to actively participate in each phase of the study. Participants engaged in both defining historical and current issues that have improved or impeded the development of collaborative partnerships between schools and religious organizations, and in the analysis of data and validation of the findings. According to Hall (1981), participants in PAR benefit most by being taught how to engage in research and being given the tools to learn about themselves and their society (*empowerment*), rather than just being educated to become additional minds in the institutionalized world of research.

Setting

Community. The study took place in a county located in the Southeast region of the United States. In 2000, the U.S. Census Bureau reported the county's population as 43,000 persons. The population consisted of 54.5% African Americans, 41.7% Caucasian, and 3.8% other. The county's population has recorded a positive percentage growth. Between 1960 and 1990 when the county grew between 24% and 34% each decade. In 2003, the number of residents increased due to a large influx of Hurricane Katrina evacuees. Commercially, the county has a mixture of industry, small towns, and rural farms. Industries in the region provided the major source of employment for county residents.

Diverse influences of European and African cultures contributed to the rich cultural heritage of the county. Customs and traditions from family, community, and religious groups remain a part of the community's diverse cultures. Kinship networks, churches, and community organizations provided a sense of community and belonging to many of its residents. At the same time, ethnic and religious factions existed within the community and many residents remained isolated by issues of poverty that limited their ability to participate in social and community activities.

Public schools. The student population of the public schools primarily consisted of African American and Caucasian students. African Americans made up 80% (79.2) of students in public schools compared to 55% (54.5) of the county's population; Caucasians comprised only 16% (16.5) of the students in public schools compared to 42% (41.7) of the county's population. Others, such as Asians, Hispanics, and Native

Americans, collectively comprised only four percent (4.3) of the student population. The average household income earned $53,005, with 55% of resident households below that average. However, 83.7% of the students who attended public schools received free or reduced lunch.

Selection of Key Informants

I used multistage snowball sampling process to select the key informants for the study (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). Interactions with members of the community, as well as analysis of my field observations informed my development of selection criteria for possible informants from each subgroup. Based on this information I purposely selected the initial group of informants for one-on-one informant interviews. For the second stage of informant selection, I asked one-on-one informants for recommendations of individuals they believed could best serve the purpose of the focus group interview.

I selected school personnel based on two criteria: time in service and their role in the school district. To capture a holistic perspective of school personnel perceptions and viewpoints of educating African American learners with special needs I solicited informant with varying roles including elementary school and secondary school teachers, school counselors, school and district administrators, and a school board member.

Based on my observations of religious services and informal discussions with clergy, I selected clergy who met at least on of the following criteria: (1) does the congregation currently engage in educational outreach activities for school age youth? (2) has the congregation developed future organizational plans (vision or mission) for educational outreach? or (3) does the congregation currently work with a public school to support or assist learners with special needs? Educational outreach activities did not

include traditional religious instruction, such as Sunday school, catechism, and Bible study.

Informal conversations with members of the community provided opportunities for me to meet with key officials with various community and governmental agencies, such as the Department of Mental Health Youth division, Families in Need of Services, Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), and the United Way. I discovered that three community organizations—Juvenile Justice System, Sheriff's Department, and YMCA —each actively pursued and participated in developing school and religious community-based partnerships. Therefore, members from these agencies were sought to participate as key informants.

Informants

Overall, I selected 18 possible key informants, nine for one-on-one interviews and nine for the focus group discussions. I approached each informant personally to seek his or her consent. All agreed to participate. However, on the date of the focus group interview one informant, the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E) program coordinator was called away on a family emergency. I assigned informants pseudonyms and subsequently removed all actual names from documents and reports to ensure confidentiality. Table 3-1 overviews of the number of participants and their related occupations.

Many of the informants held interconnected across various organizations. For example, the director of the YMCA also served as an associate minister in a local church; the sheriff's deputy in charge of the youth outreach program taught the D.A.R.E program

classes in the public schools and served as a deacon in a local church; and a member of the religious clergy serves regularly as a volunteer in the public schools.

Table 3-1

Public School, Religious Organization, and Community Organization Study Informants

Public School Personnel	*Religious Clergy*	*Community Agency Officials*
David, *high school teacher*	Casey, *co-pastor* Non-Denominational Church	Anthony, regional director YMCA
Donna, *high school counselor*	Corey, *co-pastor* Non-Denominational	Chip, parole officer Juvenile Justice System
Kelly, *school board member*	John, *pastor* Baptist church	Mitch, *public relations officer* Sheriff's Department
Karen, *elementary school teacher*	Paul, *pastor* Non-denominational church	
Lilly, *high school counselor*	Peter, *pastor* Non-denominational	
Marsha, *district administrator*	Shannon, *pastor* Lutheran church	
Sally, *high school teacher*		
Sherry, *elementary school principal*		

One-on-One Interviewees. One-on-one interviewees included four members from the school district. *Kelly*, a school board member, has served over 40 years with school district as a teacher, principal, district superintendent, and now as school board president.

Sherry, an elementary school principal has over 25 years experience in the school district. She served as an elementary school teacher prior to being selected for her current role as a principal. She also shared with me that she active in outreach efforts at a local Baptist.

Lillie, a high school counselor with over 25 years experience, began teaching business courses in the high school before becoming a high school counselor. She also served as the superintendent of Sunday school at the local Baptist church she attends.

Sally served as a second year secondary school teacher who commuted daily from the nearby metropolitan city were she resided. Sally worked with learners with special needs transitioning from middle school to high school. She was not only new to the school district, but also new to the community. Sally described some of the difficulties in her own transition to the district as a new teacher this way

> Out here kids have very little respect for you; you don't count because you are White and don't understand. New teachers here who are White and not from the community are the ones who are considered to be the rule makers or the "man." It happens to African American teachers who are outsiders too, but I think it is almost a xenophobic type thing, any type of foreigner from outside the area is seen as coming in and trying to change the way we [*indigenous members*] are and we like it just the way it is.

I selected three clergy from county religious organizations for one-on-one interviews. *Paul*, a Caucasian clergy, pastored a non-denominational congregation comprised of approximately 50% African American and Caucasian with a relatively small number of Hispanic congregants. His church was the only fully integrated congregation I observed in the county. When asked what was different about this congregation that led to such a integrated membership Paul (clergy non-denominational church) explained,

> God had given me a vision for a mixed church since the beginning of my ministry. The first six years of my ministry we experienced no growth, despite many attempts to reach the community. We went door-to-door and even offered transportation to and from church. Nothing seemed to work. But we remained faithful and God honored our continued commitment to the vision.

He has pastored in this community for 13 years. Although the congregation began with six members, it has grown to just under 300 members. Their congregation has attempted on several occasions to establish outreach programs to support local schools, but have been unsuccessful. Their most recent effort included the addition of a minister of education to develop outreach programs for school age children and develop strategies to work more closely with families and schools serving learners with special needs.

Peter, an African American clergy, served as a full-time pastor of a predominately African American non-denomination congregation. He is one of only three African American clergy in the county whose sole vocation is full-time ministry. His congregation offered summer camp for students' grades three through eight and offers employment opportunities for high school students to serve as camp counselors. Each spring of the school-year, the congregation provided tutoring sessions prior to statewide high stakes testing.

John, an African American clergy, pastors a small Baptist congregation of less than 300 members. He recently retired from a local plant and now serves as a substitute teacher at the local high school.

The final two of my selectees for one-on-one interviewees worked at local community agencies. *Mitch* serves as the Community Relations Officer for the Sheriff's

Department. One of his tasks is assisting a group of local area African American clergy with developing educational outreach programs targeting African American school-age youth. He also has served 10 years as a school board member and participated as a deacon of a Baptist church.

Chip, a parole officer with the Juvenile Justice System, works closely with parents, school officials, and other community organizations to prevent youth crime and reduce recidivism of infractions within the juvenile justice system. He also serves as a coach and commissioner for a local recreation organization for African American youth.

Focus group interviewees. The focus interview comprised one group of eight key informants. Four are school personnel: *Donna,* a counselor and graduation coach at the high school, has worked with the school district for two years. She has also assisted with planning monthly district-level ministerial meetings with local area religious clergy.

Mark was a second year high school social studies teacher. He, like Sally, was new to the community and has only resided in the county since being employed as a teacher with the district.

Marsha is district administrator who has been a lifelong resident of the county with over 25 years experience with the district. She began her career as a high school teacher and currently served as the director of Adult Education.

Karen has worked as a first grade teacher for the past five years. Prior to being a teacher, she served as special education paraeducator working with students with specific learning disabilities and students with severe emotional disabilities. She served as a choir member and Sunday school teacher at a local non-denomination church.

Three religious clergy participated in the focus group interview. *Casey* and *Corey* are an African American husband and wife co-pastor team who founded a non-denominational African American church where they pastor a congregation of less than 30 active members. Despite its relatively small size, the church operates an alternative school for grades six through 12, with a current enrollment of approximately 20 students. Casey has worked as a teacher in the school district and as an assessment specialist with Sylvan Learning Centers prior to founding the church and opening the church school, where she served as director. Corey works full-time at a local chemical refinery in the county.

Shannon served as a full-time pastor of a predominately White Lutheran Church. He partnered with a nearby Methodist church that sponsors Kids Hope USA, a program that provides mentors for economically disadvantaged youth. Also, several members of his congregation served voluntarily in leadership capacities at a local non-profit ecumenical Ministry of Care, funded by the local United Way and other local businesses. The organization provided various supports (assistance with utilities, groceries, referrals to agencies, etc.) to families in need.

Anthony, the final member of the focus group, served as regional director for the YMCA youth afterschool program. He also sat on several interagency collaborations in the county that address youth and family needs. He also served an associate pastor of a local church.

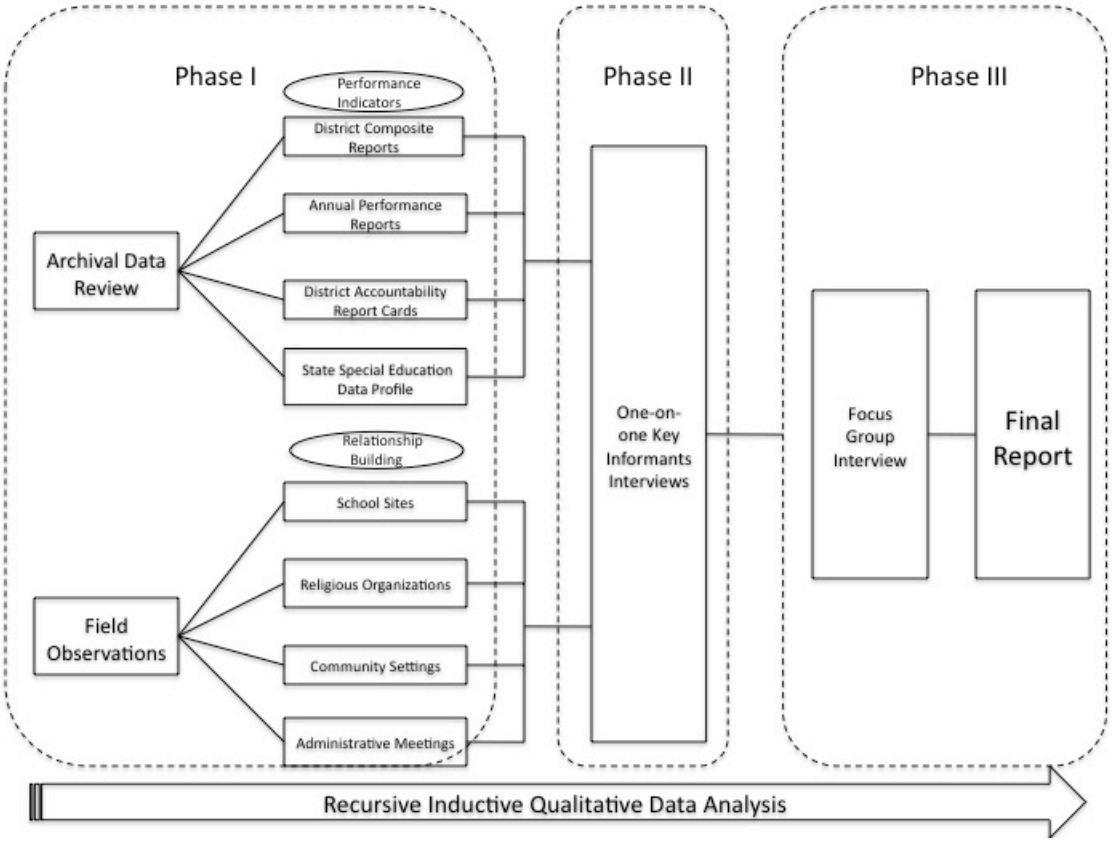
Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

To develop an understanding of the current relationship and identify strategies for developing more collaborative partnerships between public schools and religious

organizations, multiple sources of data captured a wide range of viewpoints from members of this shared community. Figure 3-1 illustrates the recursive qualitative data collection and analysis model that I developed and used in this study. Four sources of data provided the necessary information to answer the research questions: (a) archival document review, (b) field observations, (c) one-on-one unstructured interviews, and (d) a focus group interview discussions.

I drew conclusions and verifications throughout the data collection process; however, conclusions were held loosely despite how explicit or grounded they may have appeared. Specific care and attention was given to maintain openness and skepticism until all data collection activities had ended. Miles and Huberman (1994) described this three-stream process—data reduction, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions as an interwoven process that occurs before, during, and after data collection. To gain a fresh perspective on the nature of the data, a minimum two-week waiting period was built in between each phase of the study allowed adequate reflections of findings and time for data analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Stainback & Stainback, 1998).

Figure 3-1. My Recursive Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis Model.



Phase I - Archival and Field Observation Data Collection

During Phase I, I reviewed archival data and conducted field observations concurrently for the first six weeks (May 14 through June 25, 2009) of the study to: (a) identify academic and postschool outcomes for African American students, (b) transition from a role of an indigenous-outsider to an indigenous-insider by the end of this period, and (c) identify and make contact with possible key informants in the school district and religious organizations.

Archival data collection. I conducted an Internet search of the state department of education and school district websites to locate demographic and descriptive statistical data on the historical and current learning outcomes of African American youth. Making

use of Kochhar-Bryant's (2008) definition of learners with special needs, I utilized the following special needs learner characteristics to focus the scope of my inquiry: (a) K12 public school students at risk of failure in the educational system, (b) students with disabilities who received special education services, (c) students at risk of being identified as needing special education, and (d) students who were economically disadvantaged, or migrant.

The selected data sources provided relevant information in one or more of the aforementioned special needs learner categories. Those reports included District Annual Progress Reports, District Accountability Report Cards, District Composite Reports, State Special Education Data Profiles, and the Educational and Facilities Master Plan. Data from these reports provided information from 2003 through 2008. Table 3-2 gives a brief description of the content and source of each of these reports. Data from some of the reports did not begin until the 2003 school year, due to changes in state reporting procedures and revisions to statewide assessments. The most recent data reports ended with the 2007-2008 school year.

Table 3-2

Archival Data Sources for Phase I

Document	*Description*	*Source*
District Composite Report	This document provided longitudinal data on district performance scores, school characteristics, student participation, student achievement, and college readiness	State Department of Education
Annual Performance Report	This document provided annual progress being made with providing free appropriate public education to all students with disabilities on specified state performance plan indicators 1 - 20.	State Department of Education
District Accountability Report Card	This document provided longitudinal data on annual performance scores, teacher certification indicators, and disaggregated AYP outcomes by grade level and content area, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, including dropout and graduation rates.	State Department of Education
Educational and Facilities Master Plan	This document provided an in-depth description of the district's demographic clientele, strategic goals and initiatives for improving academic learning, organizational effectiveness and efficiency, and for creating a system of community input and support for schools.	County School Board and Superintendent Report
State Special Education Data Profile	This document reported on the performance of local education agencies on academic achievement and postschool outcomes for youth with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004.	State Department of Education

Field observations. The targeted outcomes for my field observations centered on developing a more holistic perspective of the shared culture, building an 'insider status' within the community, and identifying possible key informants to participate in the study. Examination of the school district's Internet event calendar and invitations from the district's superintendent informed the selection of my initial school observation sites. Likewise, an Internet search of the White Pages assisted me identify the location, contact information, and service times for local religious organizations. Knowledge of community events occurred indirectly through conversations with members in the community and occasionally reading the local newspaper published twice weekly.

Using Creswell's (2007) recommendations, I employed the following field observation protocol: (a) select and gain the necessary permission to conduct observations at the site, (b) identify an insider to assist me with making initial introductions, (c) clarify the observer's role, (d) utilize an observational protocol (Appendix B) for recording my observation notes, and (e) immediately following each field observation, transcribe my brief notes into expanded field notes.

Formal and informal field observations took place over a two-month period at various school sites, religious institutions, and community settings within the county. For example, informal observations included attendance at public school board meetings, religious worship services, and various community events. Following these events I engaged in more formal one-on-one or small group discussions with participants to obtain clarification or gather more in-depth information about the events or interactions I observed. This process created a snowballing effect that expanded my access to other informants knowledgeable about the history and culture of the community. It also

expanded the pool of possible key informants of whom I could request to participate in one-on-one and focus group interviews.

School sites. Field observations took place at various school functions and district level meetings. These observations included school board meetings, curriculum and instruction meetings, professional development activities, back-to-school rallies, school open-house, and other school-sponsored parent, student, and community events. Attendance at these meeting helped me identify influential persons in the school district and solicit individuals to participate as key informants.

My observations at the various school sites and events ranged from 30 minutes to two hours. I recorded condensed field notes during each observation and wrote expanded field notes immediately following the observation. In all, I recorded 15 field observations. I revised expanded notes as necessary following subsequent observations to sites or similar events.

Formal introductions by the district's superintendent at a principals meeting, school district board meeting, and at several school assembly meetings helped me gain access and expedited my acceptance within the school community as an 'insider.' For example, after being formally introduced by the superintendant at the school board meeting, the board president invited me to briefly discuss my study with the board. Several of the board members asked follow-up questions such as, "How will the results be used?" and "What are the presumed benefits of the study?" The board's president asked that I report to the board at the completion of the study. I assured him I would.

In addition, relationships I developed in my past teaching experiences in the district proved beneficial. Those previous relationships led to numerous informal and

formal discussions with personnel, ranging from custodial staff to school principals, from beginning teachers to veterans with over 30 years experience, and from bus drivers to board members. I opened my discussions by sharing a brief summary of the study topic and the overarching question.

Private and parochial schools. Private and parochial schools played a significant role in the county's history, as well as the racial and socioeconomic make-up of the public schools. A total of nine private or parochial schools founded by religious organizations existed in the county. Of the seven, the Catholic Archdiocese operated five and two non-denominational Christian organizations operate separate private schools. I also discovered two small alternative schools operated by non-denominational Christian organizations, each serving less than 35 students.

According to informants, beginning in the 1960s, private and parochial schools became viable options for White residents to maintain *de facto* racial segregation in schools. Today, this custom may not be true in theory; however, based on my observations, the custom remains evident in practice. For example, the Archdiocese has two K-8 schools within five miles of each other, one educated predominately White students, the other educated predominately African American students.

As a result of this information, I scheduled visits with both a predominately White and a predominately African American school operated by the Archdiocese. I met with priests from each of these schools and the school principal of the predominately White school. The meetings lasted approximately 30 minutes. I drafted condensed field notes at each of these meetings, but did not transcribe them to expanded notes.

They each disclosed that due to low enrollment, their schools faced the possibility of closure. When I asked if there were discussions about consolidation of the schools, they each gave a consistent one-word answer, "No," period, the end! I chose to postpone any further questions to avoid unnecessary contentions that could negatively impact my study or impede my ability to obtain insider status.

Based on data from the school district's Master Plan, I concluded that the demographics of the school district comprised a homogeneous student body predominately made up of low-socioeconomic, African American students. African Americans and low socioeconomic students disproportionately represent the population of students being educated by the school district, particularly in relation to the county's demographics. For example, according to the District's Master Plan, approximately 45% of the county's residents earned a household average income of $53,005 annually. However, approximately 84% percent of students attending the public schools received free or reduced lunch. African Americans comprised 54.5% of the county's population compared to 79.2% of public school students, while Caucasians, who comprised 41.7% of the county's population compared to only 16.5% of the public school student population. Other(s) comprises 3.8% of the county's population compared to 4.3% of the public school student population. While it would be over-reaching to label private and parochial schools as the cause of the racial and socioeconomic divide, it appeared that they have served as a means to maintain it.

Religious organizations. I conducted an Internet search of the White Pages website to locate religious organizations in the county using the key terms 'churches,' 'religious organizations,' and 'religious agencies.' To ensure I had acquired a

comprehensive list, I juxtaposed the Internet search results against a list provided by the school district. The outcome resulted in the identification of 65 religious organizations in the county. Denominational or sectarian organizations included Baha'i Faith (1), Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (1), Episcopal (1), Jehovah's Witnesses (1), Lutheran (1), Presbyterian (1), Church of God in Christ (2), Methodist (2), Roman Catholic (6), Baptist (28), Non-denominational Christian/Pentecostal (18), and other religious social organizations (4). Five of the 65 religious organizations had no denominational affiliation. These five groups provide social services and counseling for county residents regardless of their religious affiliation.

Overall, I met informally with 45 of the 65 religious organizations' clergy (70%) and attended worship services at 26 (42%) of the denominational religious organizations. When possible, I met the clergy immediately after worship services or Bible studies. When time permitted, I briefly described the nature of my study and inquired about the outreach activities of their congregation. If time did not allow for discussion, I asked if I could schedule a time to visit at a later date. I wrote condensed field notes for all 26 of the worship services and expanded field notes for 14 of the 26 services.

Community settings. Initially, I planned to conduct field observations at school sites and religious organizations. However, informal discussion with members of the community from police officers to stay home moms to shop owners, brought to my attention the potential value of including community agencies into the scope of my field observations. These discussions became apart of my daily routine while visiting the local coffee shop and various locally owned mom-and-pop eateries. In my interactions with persons who frequented these establishments, I learned of various public and private

agencies in the community that provided targeted assistance to African American youth and their families. With help of these persons I gained access to officials who oversee such programs, as well as knowledge of various events that helped me to achieve the targeted outcomes of my field observations.

For example, as a result of my discussions with several program officials and administrators, I discovered that five community-based partnerships existed in the county. Government agencies, such as law enforcement, the school district, and the juvenile justice court system, sponsored three partnerships, while private and religious organizations, such as the United Way and Catholic Charities, sponsored the others. Based on informant accounts, coalitions typically meet monthly and focus on issues such as school attendance and truancy, developing mentee-mentor relationships for youth considered at risk, providing aid to at-risk families, and praying for the community. Of the five known community-based partnerships, I learned only three remain active.

This information led me to expand the scope of my observations to include meetings of two of the three active community-based partnerships and follow-up discussions with program officials at the Department of Mental Health Youth division, Families in Need of Services, Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), and the United Way.

Analysis of Archival Data and Field Observations

During this phase of data analysis, I employed a recursive inductive qualitative analysis process. I kept in mind that the quality of my interpretations during this phase of data analysis hinged on the corroboration of informants and further data collection.

Therefore, I was careful to remain open-minded and flexible in terms of my interpretations.

Analysis of archival data. After careful examination of District Annual Progress Reports, District Accountability Report Cards, District Composite Reports, State Special Education Data Profiles, and the Educational and Facilities Master Plan, I employed data reduction strategies to eliminate unnecessary data and extract relevant information. This included selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the collected data. This form of data analysis sharpens, sorts, discards, and organizes data in a way that 'final' conclusions can be drawn and verified (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The selected special needs learner characteristics—K12 public school students at risk of failure in the educational system, students with disabilities who receive special education services, students at risk of being identified as needing special education, and students who are economically disadvantaged, or migrant—provided the criteria necessary to conduct data analysis and reduction activities. These criteria enabled me to select or discard data, as well as how to format the data displays to be used in Phase III of the study. Before presenting archival data displays to Phase III informants, I submitted drafts to members of my university dissertation committee and several district administrators for peer review. Having adequate data displays played an essential role in the third stream of analysis—conclusion drawing and verification.

Analysis of field observations. I began the analysis process of my expanded field notes by first re-reading all the notes and reflections from my field observations. I then employed a qualitative inductive approach to identify distinct similarities and differences in interactions and relationships that occur within and between members of schools,

religious organizations, and community agencies. These processes helped me gain a fresh perspective of the shared culture where I had once lived as an insider.

After re-reading my field notes, I sorted through various observation and reflection notes several times until I felt confident that the appropriate characteristics between the subgroups had been identified. Based on my interpretations, I generated a set of seven guiding questions for one-on-one key informant interviews (see Appendix D). My interpretations also served as the basis for the selection criteria I used to identify possible key informants for Phase II and Phase III data collection. To form a more descriptive picture of the culture, validate emergent themes from one-on-one informant interviews, and to assist me with answering the research questions, I synthesized the collected data and analyses from this phase with collected data and analysis from phases two and three.

Phase II – Key Informant Interview Data Collection and Analysis

Informant interviews. After obtaining informant consent to participate in the interview, I scheduled an interview date, time, and location with each informant. I interviewed each of the informants using an unstructured interview protocol. Unstructured interview protocol in the ethnographic sense involve interactions and exchanges in the interview where the interviewer can freely answer questions asked by the respondent and freely express his or her feelings during the interview (Adler and Adler, 1994). I provided all informants with copies of the interview protocol and consent form prior to the date of the interview.

In order to capture broad perspectives of the perceptions and viewpoints of informants, I asked all interviewees a similar set of domain topic questions. However,

some questions had to be worded differently to align with the subgroups' role. For example, I asked school personnel, "What impact do you believe activities of religious organizations have on the schools' ability to provide African American youth with a quality education? How do their activities impede school efforts?" For clergy the corresponding question read, "What impact do you believe the quality of public education has on the church's ability to pass down their legacy of your faith? Likewise, for community agency officials, the question read, "What impact does the quality of public education have on outcomes for African American youth in the community? What impact do the activities of religious organizations have on their outcomes?

I designed the interview protocol to obtain holistic perspectives of informants' perceptions and viewpoints in regard to the benefits and barriers associated with partnering between public schools and religious organizations and the potential benefit or harm for African American learners with special needs. I conducted the interviews at the respective school, church, or office of the interviewee. Interviews ranged from 15 minutes to 2 ½ hours in length based on interviewee responses. I audiotaped eight interviews and transcribed one interview by hand at the requested of one informant not to be audiotaped.

All audiotaped interviews were transcribed verbatim. Once completed, I sent written copies of the transcripts to each of the informants for member checks. I allowed informants two weeks to review their transcripts for accuracy of meaning as translated from their oral presentations and to offer suggestions for necessary changes. The member checks enhanced the trustworthiness of researchers findings by triangulating the data (Mertens, 2005).

Analyses of informant responses. The analyses of informant interviews involved a three-step inductive data reduction process beginning with descriptive coding of informants' statements (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the initial step of analysis, I closely examined informants' responses to each of the domain questions and highlighted all statements deemed relevant to the topic. This process of open coding involved evaluation of the data to identify conceptual categories implicit or explicit in the data (Punch, 2005). The domain questions served as the provisional codes used to stage the identified relevant statements for future analysis.

After completing multiple readings of each informant's transcript, I felt confident that I had reached saturation in identifying relevant statements (Mertens, 2005). In all, I identified a total of 160 relevant statements. Subsequently, I created a table of relevant statements (Appendix D) sorted by group, by question, and by informant.

Before completing the next step in my comparative analysis of the data, I distributed subgroup sections of Appendix E to informants participating in the focus group interview for peer review and member verification. Informants only received a copy of the subgroup section of Appendix E of which they were members. I asked the informants to complete the following task prior to the focus group interview: (a) carefully review informant statements to each of the domain topic questions, (b) note the statement(s) to which they disagreed and provide supporting evidence why they believed the statement should not be validated, and (c) list any other statements they believed relevant to the questions that had not been identified.

Phase III – Focus Group Interview Data Collection.

Prior to starting the next wave of data analyses, I held a focus group interview in order to determine the 'plausibility' and 'confirmability' of the archival data analysis and the identified relevant statements from one-on-one informant interview responses. Punch (2005) labeled this process as 'member checking,' where people being studied provide confirmation, validation, and verification of developing products of research. Unlike a typical question-and-answer interview format, focus group interviews elicit more participant interactions and sharing of informants' points of view (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

The focus group interview data collection involved an eight-member panel—four school district personnel, three religious organization clergy, one community agency official—which participated in a two-hour focus group interview. I purposefully selected focus group informants based on my field observations and recommendations from participants in the one-on-one interviews.

One week prior to the focus group interview I distributed copies of the following documents to each of the selected informants:

- Table 4-1 *Students At Risk Of Failure In The Educational System from 2003 through 2007*;
- Table 4-2 *Percent Of Top Ranked Disability Categories By Age Group in the County's Public Schools*;
- Table 4-3 *Reason for Exiting Special Education, Students Ages 14 Through 21, 2006–2007 School Year in the County's Public Schools*; and

- Appendix D, Table of Relevant Statements from their respective groups (for example, school staff only received the relevant statements from the school staff group).

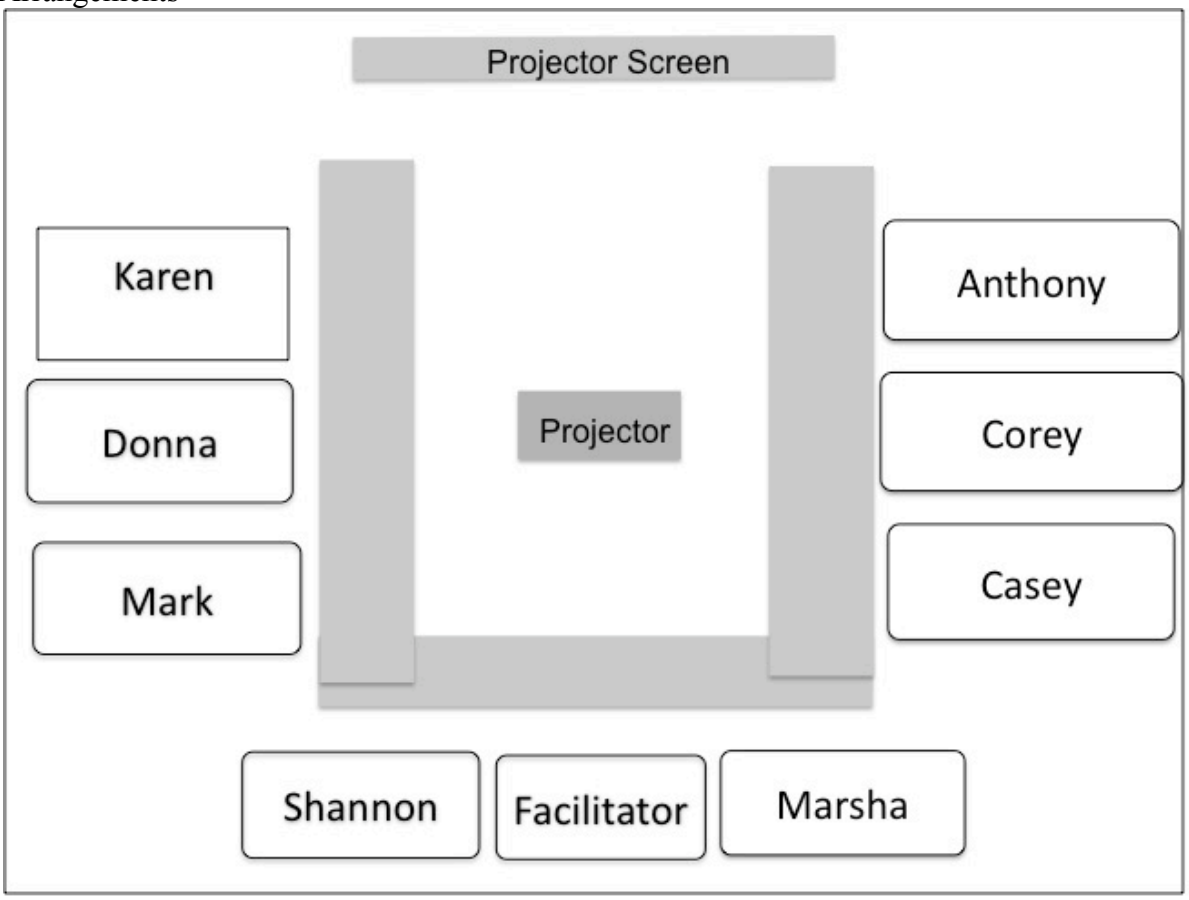
As aforementioned, I tasked the focus group with three task: (a) carefully review the table of relevant statements for their subgroup, (b) identify relevant statements they believed 'not' to be plausibility or confirmable and provide supporting evidence why they believed the statement should not be validated; and (c) suggest possible relevant statements to the domain questions not identified in their subgroup's table of relevant statements.

My goal for this process was to relinquish at least some control of the research process over to school, religious, and community informants (Esterberg, 2002). Therefore, I the focus group interview procedures to permitted informants to engage in the data analysis in order to increase informants' cross-cultural understanding and awareness of differing beliefs and practices held by other subgroups.

The interview took place in the conference room at the county's main public library. As mentioned earlier, one community agency leader was unable to attend due to a family emergency. I divided the interview into two sessions. For the first 30-minute, we reviewed archival data displays and summarized field observation notes. For the remaining 90 minutes, informants discussed the plausibility and confirmability of the indentified relevant statements and conversed on possible strategies or courses of action the school district and religious organizations could take to build collaborative partnerships.

As the facilitator, I ensured that all informants had an opportunity to express their viewpoints and that interaction remained orderly throughout the interview process. I took written notes, as well as audiotaped the entire interview for later review. I arranged the tables in a horseshoe fashion so the informants could best view the projector screen and see and hear each other without having to turn in their chairs (see Figure 3.2).

Figure 3-2. Diagram of Focus Group Interview Meeting Room and Informants Seating Arrangements



I utilized an informal meeting protocol implementing an open-ended questioning format based on Krueger's (2003) recommendations for focus group interviews. Following my PowerPoint presentation of archival data and field observation notes I opened the floor for informant questions. Then, based on the discussions, I carefully

framed subsequent questions to capture the context of desired informant responses. I avoided causation statements that could set off defensive reactions by informants. Finally, at best, I followed a logical order to make the most efficient use of time and to enhance the richness of discussions. These recommendations enabled me to guide the focus group in meaningful discussions throughout the interview and conclude the interview within the time allotted. Based on informant feedback I made the necessary edits to the table of relevant statements.

The group validated all but one relevant statement. Based on feedback from Marsha, I revised one relevant statement from school staff. A statement from Sally, a one-on-one interviewee claimed,

> The outsiders are criticized for differing perspectives of what the learning environment and academic expectations should be.

Marsha (district administrator) commented,

> I have been in the district for over 25 years and when I offer differing opinions I get criticized and talked about. So I don't think this applies to outsiders.

Donna (high school counselor) and Karen (elementary teacher) affirmed Marsha's comments as valid based on their experiences. As a result of this discussion, I revised the statement to read: Outsiders, as well as insiders with differing perspectives of what the learning and academic expectations should be they are criticized by those accepting of the way things are. The group was in consensus that this wording was acceptable.

As a result of the group's discussion, I made one addition to the list of relevant statements, concerns about the law involving separation of church and state. When asked

for recommendation for developing collaborative partnerships between schools and religious organizations Shannon (clergy Lutheran church) commented,

> We would love to come to the schools and assist kids with their academic skills, but we must leave our faith at the door.

To which Marsha (district administrator) replied,

> Separation of church and state is the law of the land!

Drawing and Verifying Conclusions

The remaining steps of the inductive data reduction process involved drawing and verifying conclusions. After re-evaluating the edited table of relevant statements, I used a general inductive approach to compare and cluster similar within group (school district personnel, religious clergy, community agency officials) relevant statements. I selected all statements made by two or more members within each group to advance to the next step of data analysis.

Next, I cross-examined the remaining relevant statements with the archival data in an attempt to validate and advance a statement to the next level of analysis. Through this process I reduced the 161 relevant statements to 53 clusters. I then paraphrased the clusters to best match the informants' meaning.

Utilizing information I gained through interactions with the data, I developed a provisional set of categories to sorting the clusters into groups that would assist me with identifying emergent themes and to best answer the subsidiary research questions:

1. What issue(s), if any, do school staff and community religious organizations identify in reference to the education of African American learners with and without special needs?

2. How do perceived issues for educating African American learners differ between school staff and clergy of religious organizations serving these students? How are they similar?
3. What perceptions do school staff hold toward religious organizations and *vice-versa* in reference to efforts being made to provide educational opportunities and improve postschool outcomes for African American youth?

I grouped the 53 clusters in one of the following four categories:

- *Category 1* - Perceptions of the need for collaboration between public schools and religious organizations (questions one and two);
- *Category 2* - Issues impacting learning outcomes for African American Youth and their attitudes towards learning (questions one and two);
- *Category 3* - Perceptions and viewpoints of organizational effectiveness and areas of needed improvement (question three); and
- *Category 4* – Recommended strategies for improving collaboration between public schools and religious organizations (overarching research question).

After sorting the clusters by category, my final step of data reduction involved the integration or synthesis of the data to identify core themes. After sorting the clusters into their respective categories, I conducted a cross group comparison by category to identify similar cross group clusters. I then selected similar cross group clusters as the final list of emergent key themes. In all, I identified a list of four key themes.

Credibility

Guba and Lincoln (1989) identified credibility as the criterion in qualitative research that tests if correspondence exists between the way informants actually respond

to or perceive a social construct and the way the researcher portrays their viewpoints. Mertens (2005) suggested the use of triangulation—checking for the consistency of information through multiple sources of data (interviews, observations, and document review). To enhance credibility of the study findings, Mertens' strategy of divergent triangulation was utilized. The process included: (a) the use of multiple data sources, (b) coding checks and peer debriefing, (c) verbatim interview transcriptions, and (d) member checks at the end of informant interviews. Triangulation afforded the opportunity to enhance readers' confidence in the research findings.

Following each phase of data analysis, I engaged in extended discussions with advisory committee members regarding my findings, analysis, and conclusions. I gave careful attention throughout the study to bracket my preconceived ideas and viewpoints from those of the informants. To do this, I shared my personal stories and experiences with advisors to ensure that my viewpoints were clearly distinguished from that of the key informants prior to the data reduction activities.

About the Researcher

As researcher and the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, it is important the reader knows to what extent my past experiences might influenced data collection and interpretation. While I grew up in the neighboring county, I also lived in the county for three years and taught in the county public school system for two years before moving out of state. In my time, there I became friends with a number of residents and school district employees. These interactions had the potential to affect my ability, at times, to remain objective and unbiased in my interpretations. Therefore, I

purposefully avoided collecting data from possible informants with whom I had close personal or professional relationships.

A second concern was in the presentation of findings. I recognized that some of the findings could reflect negatively on individuals, the school district, religious organizations, and community organizations. To minimize this outcome, I affixed descriptive codes to informant responses to protect confidentiality. Additionally, I held peer debriefings following each data analysis phase, conducted member checks of transcribed documents to validate accuracy of informants, responses, as well as member checks with focus group informants to verify the confirmability and plausibility of my data interpretations.

Gaining access as a community insider. Although I grew-up in the neighboring county and subsequently resided three-years in the county and taught in the school district for two years, my travel and education abroad over the past 17 years resulted in my change of status from an indigenous-insider to an indigenous-outsider. Banks (1998) defines the indigenous-outsider as:

> An individual socialized within his or her indigenous community but has experienced high levels of cultural assimilation into an outsider or oppositional culture. The values, beliefs, perspectives, and knowledge of this individual are identical to those of the outside community. The indigenous-outsider is perceived by indigenous people in the community as an outsider. (p. 8)

Case in point, during one of my first school site visits, I introduced myself to the school's principal and explained the purpose of my study. Although she was aware that I worked at the school where she previously served as principal, she informed me, " before I can

discuss issues about students or school operations, I will need to see your written authorization from the district to be on the school site." I made the assumption that my previous experiences as a practicum student, elementary teacher, and resident of the county would expedite my acceptance as an insider.

However, before our conversation ended, three teachers with whom I had previously worked successively came into the office, each enthusiastically greeted me and spoke positively of our past experiences working together. Their affirmations set the principal at ease and facilitated an open dialog. As a result of this incident, I utilized Creswell's (2007) recommendations for conducting field observations as an outsider. Creswell suggested the following steps: (a) gain permission needed to conduct observations; and (b) have an insider make initial introductions to members at the site.

Thereafter, I checked staff listings at the sites prior to my visit to identify staff members I knew in order to request that they formally introduce me to key persons at the school site. If there were none, I contacted one of my former supervising administrators to request their input on whom I should speak to, and that they informally introduce me prior to my visit. This process created a snowballing effect that aided me in gaining access to key school personnel, as well as key informants of religious and community organizations.

Ethical Issues

A number of ethical issues were taken into consideration during the course of the study. Lipson (1994) and Mertens (2005) identified informed consent, deception or covert activities, confidentiality toward informants, sponsors, and colleges, and benefits of research to informants over risk as ethical issues to be examined by the researcher.

Although risks to informants were minimal, Cassell (1982) cites the most serious harms to informants result not to the manipulation of people, but result from manipulation of data and occur at a later date when research finding are disseminated. Many or all of these risks are avoidable by taking them into account during the research planning and implementation phases of the study, not as an afterthought.

To counter these risk factors I took the following steps:

1. Obtained University of Oklahoma, *Institutional Review Board* approval of the study.
2. *Informed consent* – I notified all informants that their participation in the study is strictly on a voluntary basis and that they have the freedom to withdraw at any time with no adverse consequences. The purpose and nature of the study was explained explicitly in advance.
3. *Guarding privacy and confidentiality of informants* – To protect privacy and confidentiality, I coded or assigned pseudo names to informants. I kept the actual names of informants in a secured file separated from the original interview documents and transcripts.
4. *Misinterpretations* – Throughout data collection and analyses, I held peer debriefings with advisory committee members and informants knowledgeable about the community. I also conducted member checks of transcribed interviews.

Given the level of personal interactions between myself and informants and my previous history growing up and teaching in this community, the possibility of "off the record" comments posed a potential problem. However, all such comments were deleted

from the record. No comments were made that disclosed illegal or harmful actions or that would be a breach of good faith with informants.

However, there were a number of benefits that go beyond just adding to the knowledge base. For example, the research process provided opportunities for school and community engagement, increased opportunities for the development of cross-cultural competency among members of the shared culture, and provided additional educational opportunities for collaborative practices and access to data informants can use to improve practice or influence policy (Sieber, 1998).

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

In this study, I employed an ethnographic qualitative approach to answer the overarching question: How can public schools work collaboratively with religious organizations to set educational goals focused on improving in-school and postschool outcomes for African American youth including those with special needs? I conducted a three-phase recursive data collection and analysis process to guide my inquiry and validate my interpretations of the perceptions and viewpoints of key informants in this Southeastern community.

The first phase of data collection and analysis involved an examination of archival data and field observations of various activities sponsored by school district, religious organizations, and community agencies within the county. These activities helped me identify learners with special needs characteristics, develop selection criteria for key informants, and craft guiding domain questions for one-on-one interviews. Extended interactions within the community members enabled me to re-establish an insider status.

In the second phase, I conducted one-on-one interviews with purposefully selected key informants from each of the aforementioned subgroups. After carefully examining informant interview transcripts, I employed an inductive approach to identify relevant informants statements related to the domain questions. During the third phase, peer members from each of the subgroups participated in a focus group interview to validate the confirmability and plausibility of the relevant statements identified. I also solicited focus group informants' input to identify any issues that may not have been captured by respondents in one-on-one interviews.

Utilizing a general inductive approach, I compared and grouped similar relevant statements into clusters, sorted clusters into provisional categories, and lastly, I grouped similar categorical clusters into key themes (Punch, 2005). Following each data reduction step, I paraphrased or renamed similar groupings of relevant statements, clusters, and themes to best match the informants' meaning.

I triangulated findings from each stream of data collection to identify answers to subsidiary research questions:

1. What issue(s), if any, did school staff and community religious organizations identify in reference to the education of African American learners with and without special needs?
2. How did perceived issues for educating African American learners differ between school staff and clergy of religious organizations serving these students?
3. What perceptions did school staff hold toward religious organizations and *vice versa* in reference to efforts being made to provide educational opportunities and improve postschool outcomes for African American youth?

After completing the final phase of data analysis I identified four key themes informants perceived as having a significant impact on learning outcomes for African American learners:

1. The lack of character and moral education significantly impacts the academic performance of African American youth.

2. Apathy or lack of involvement in education by parents of African American youth.
3. The need for a more positive and conducive school climate in regard to the needs of African American learners.
4. Collaborative partnerships between schools and religious organizations represent a viable source to address issues effecting African American learner with and without special needs.

These findings provided the answer for subsidiary research question one, What issue(s), if any, did school staff and community religious organizations identify in reference to the education of African American learners with and without special needs? The perceived lack of moral character in African American youth appeared to be the most significant theme identified by informants. Many believed the lack of character and moral education impacted students' level of attentiveness in school, respect for authority, and their ability to succeed in society as productive citizens.

Although no shared meaning of character and moral behaviors became apparent, each informant provided comprehensive description for their perceptions. In following sections, I describe their description in detail. The need for greater access to cross cultural interactions was identified as a key factor needed to improve character and moral development.

The lack of concern or apathy shown by parents of African American youth towards education represented the second key theme. Many of the informants believed students' poor attitude and the lack of engagement towards learning hinged on the low level of priority African American parents place on education. Although this perception

conjured a general consensus across each of the subgroups, several informants dissented with the opinion that the lack of parental involvement was the result of apathy. For example, Peter (clergy non-denomination church) attributed the overwhelming demands of single parenting to the lack of parental involvement. Chip (parole officer) contributed low parental involvement to low educational attainment of African American parents.

Informants cited three factors supporting the third key theme, the need for a more positive school climate. Those factors included, cohesiveness among school staff, student discipline, and the lack of cultural competence. According to informants, developing a positive school climate provide not only the opportunity for improved student outcomes, but also provided a means to increased teacher efficacy.

Collaboration between schools and religious organizations represented the fourth key theme. Despite failed efforts in the past, all the informants viewed partnering between schools and religious organizations as a viable means for improving educational outcomes for African American learners with and without special needs. Informants offered a number of strategies they believed could improve the development of effective collaborative partnerships.

Identification of African American Learners with Special Needs

Before delving into my interpretations of the four key themes, I want to first define the specific characteristics of learners with special needs. Learners with special needs included students with disabilities who receive special education services, those who are at risk of being identified as needing special education services, and those at risk of failure in the educational system for reasons other than a disability (Kochhar-Bryant, 2008). To develop a conceptual understanding of African American learner who met

these criteria, I examined five online archival data sources. Those sources included District Annual Progress Reports, District Accountability Report Cards, District Composite Reports, State Special Education Data Profiles, and the Educational and Facilities Master Plan.

Review of Archival Data.

My review of the documents disclosed that the most prevalent characteristics among African American youth included students at risk of failure, students at risk of being identified as needing special education, students with disabilities, and students who are economically disadvantaged.

Students at risk of failure and at risk of being identified as needing special education. The district assessed all students grade three through 11 annually in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, science, and social studies (see Table 4-1). Data for all grade levels and content was not available prior to 2003. Students received one of the five achievement ratings: Advanced, Mastery, Basic, Approaching Basic, and Unsatisfactory. Students must attain achievement level rankings of *Mastery or Advanced* to be considered grade level proficient. However, for fourth and eighth grade students to advance to fifth or ninth grade they need only score a minimum of *Basic* on ELA and mathematics content assessments.

Beginning in 10th grade, students complete a Graduate Exit Exam (GEE). The district only requires a minimum score of *Approaching Basic* in ELA and mathematics to be eligible to receive a regular high school diploma. Less than 20% of fourth through ninth grade and less than 10% of 10^{th} and 11^{th} grade African American students scored at or above grade level proficiency on the districts' statewide tests. Persistent levels of poor

academic achievement in core content subjects over time placed a large percent of African American students at risk of school failure or need for special education services, as well as subjected them to limited opportunities for post secondary school transition opportunities.

Table 4-1

African American Students At Risk of Failure in the Educational System from 2003 through 2007

Grade Level	*Test Type*	*High Stakes Testing Results Grade 3 thru 11*
4 & 8 (Students must score basic or above to advance to 5th and 9th grades)	CRT ELA and Mathematics Science and Social Studies	• 80% of students grade 4 through 9 scored at or below basic grade proficiency in math and reading.
3, 5, 6, 7, & 9 (Data for these grade levels only date back to 2006 when the current statewide assessments were first administered)	CRT ELA and Mathematics Science and Social Studies	• 90% of students grade level 4 through 9 scored at or below basic grade level proficiency in science and social studies.
10 & 11 Graduate Exit Exam – for students to graduate with a high school diploma they must score a minimum of *Approaching Basic* in ELA and mathematics	CRT ELA and Mathematics Science and Social Studies	• 90% of high school students taking the GEE score below grade level proficiency in reading, math, science, and social studies.
4 through 11	Alternative Performance-Based Assessment for students with persistent cognitive and academic disabilities	No data reported (Data collection began in 2006)

Source: *District Composite Report (2008).* Louisiana Department of Education

Students with disabilities. Students with disabilities comprised 14.2% of the district's population—2% higher than the state or national average—and over 90% of students with disabilities ages three to five are identified with developmental or speech/language impairment disabilities. Over 75% of students with disabilities ages six to 21 are identified in what is termed the "judgment" disability categories of specific

learning disabilities, speech/language impairments, developmentally delayed, or mental disabilities (Table 4-2). African American males are twice as likely as African American females to be identified as developmentally delayed, as students with specific learning disabilities, or as speech/language impaired. They are four times more likely than African American females and twice as likely than their White male peers to be identified as emotionally disturbed.

Table 4-2

Percent of Top Ranked Disability Categories By Age Group in the County's Public Schools

Students Ages 3 – 5	
Disability Category	*Percent of Students*
Developmentally Delayed	51%
Cognitive skills	
Communication Skills	
Social and Emotional Skills	
Fine and Gross Motor Skills	
Speech/Language Impairment	41%
Articulation	
Fluency	
Language skills	
Voice	
Total	**92%**
Students Ages 6 – 21	
Disability Category	Percent of Students
Specific Learning Disabilities	34%
Speech/Language Impairment	20.4%
Articulation (57.7%)	
Fluency (8.5%)	
Language skills (33.3%)	
Voice (.5%)	
Developmentally Delayed	13.2%
Mental Disabilities	8.9%
Mild (50.6%)	
Moderate (43.4%)	
Severe/Profound (6%)	
Total	**76.5%**

Source: *State Special Education Data Profile* (2008). State Department of Education.

Eighty-five percent of students with disabilities ages 14 through 21 in the county received instruction in regular education settings. However, only 14.5% received a regular high school diploma in 2007 compared to 77% of their non-disabled peers (see

Table 4-3). Among this age group, students with disabilities recorded a dropout rate five times higher than their non-disabled peers—47% vs. 8.9%.

Table 4-3

Reason for Exiting Special Education, Students age 14 through 21, 2006–2007 School-Year in the County's Public Schools

Reason for Exiting	*Percent of Students*
High School Diploma	14.5%
No longer receiving services	10.8%
Certificate of Achievement	4.8%
Moved	14.5%
Dropped Out	47.0%
Locally designed skills certificate	8.4%
General Education Diploma	0.0%

Source: *State Special Education Data Profile* (2008). State Department of Education.

African American students who are economically disadvantaged. African American economically disadvantaged students comprised the majority of students in the public schools. According to county and district demographic reports, African Americans made up 54.5% of the county's population, while the overall population of public school students consisted of 80% African Americans. Over 45% of resident households in the county earned an annual income of approximately $53,005, while over 80 % of public school students received free or reduced lunch.

Theme 1: The Need for Character and Moral Education

Perceptions And Views Of Community Agency Officials

When asked about their perceptions and viewpoints on the need for character and moral development among African American youth, both Mitch and Chip identified the need for character and moral education as a top priority. Mitch, a community relations officer for the sheriff department, identified a lack of leadership and mentorship opportunities as major contributors to the lack of character and morals among African

American youth, particularly males. He attributes the large percentage African American youth being incarcerated to the absence of these opportunities. Mitch explained,

> We've got about 300 young people next door, that's our jail. I'd say they're ranging from the age of 17 to 35, 95% Black males. And none of them, I am going to use the word, are dumb. They just did the stupid things and they did stupid things because they had no direction, no positive direction.
>
> From time to time I pull one of those young men aside and I said, "Why are you here?" And they say selling drugs. "Well, that's not my question, that's the result. So why are you here?" He says, "Well, where I came from we had nothing to do. We sat around all day, thought evil thoughts, we were broke." And I said, "Yeah, yeah, that's what got you here, that's what you were a part of." He says, "and when I stole, I sold drugs."
>
> Here is what some brilliant executive said, "you cannot make an honest person steal, and you cannot make a dishonest person not steal," it has nothing to do with how many dollars you've got in your pocket, it has everything to do with what you've got in your heart. And, I'm going to make this broad statement; black folks have been poor since the beginning of time. If a majority of blacks [*youth*] did not steal, then a majority of folks in jail would not be black. But, they're not stealing because they're black, they're stealing because that segment has had poor moral guidance or poor leadership, that's why they're there, they have nothing else to do. "What do you mean?" I asked. "Well, we can't play basketball, we had nobody to take us on a fishing trip." All of these things played a part in why they end up at somebody's house stealing.

Chip, a parole officer with the Juvenile Justice System believed the lack of school instruction addressing social issues such as divorce, sex education, and relationship building contributes to the lack of character and moral development in African American youth.

> You can say education starts at home, learning starts at home, and that is true. Learning does start at home, but it doesn't end at home, I mean, when you talk about morals, you know, of students, the impact from home is so great if they're not getting anything, from the total education [home, church, and school]. We're not talking about, you know, relationships anymore at school, there's no sex education going on at the schools.
>
> Schools are not dealing with issues like divorce and other social issues that impact kids learning capabilities – it's not being talked about anymore because it's being pushed back to the home, and the schools are saying that we're here to simply teach math, social studies, science, reading, and that's it, physical education, after that, nothing. So, when we look at the school's impact or when you talk about parents, or when you talk about morals, it has to start at the home but education has to be the total education, it has to deal with, you know, relationships, it has to deal with separation, it has to deal with sex education, it has to deal with these things because all that impacts learning. So, if you're not dealing with it, are you really teaching the kids that total aspect of growing up and being productive in America, work skills, life skills?

Perceptions And Views Of School Personnel

Perceptions and viewpoints of school personnel resonated with the importance of character and moral education to students' development of a positive self-perception, success in school, and respect for authority. For instance, during a one-on-one interviews Kelly, a long-standing educator and current school board member with the district stated,

> I had religious instruction and, you know, we addressed adults as yes sir, and no ma'am, and all that stuff, and that's sort of slipped, and I believe that's something students need to really work on because character and moral education has a strong influence in developing you as an individual.
>
> There are a lot of students that come to our schools from hostile situations in their home life and stuff like that, you know. We try to address this through character education in schools. I think it should be done across the board [home, school, and church] in order to basically help students feel good about themselves so that they can be successful.

Lilly, a high school counselor explained,

> Character and moral education is essential. It's a connection. If students can connect to the reason why they need to be honest, to be punctual at school, to get to class on time, to listen, and to, well, you know, make good decisions and know that if you make a good decision you're gonna get rewarded, if you make a bad decision, there is a consequence.
>
> A prime example of that was, I went into a classroom; there was a nice picture on the wall that said, "Live to Your Dreams". And the kids were in the detention hall. And I turned around and I said, "What does that mean, live to your

dreams?" And one of them said, "Oh, that's just a pretty picture on the wall," and another guy said, "No, I can't live to my dream if I'm gonna sit in detention hall because I'm not in the classroom getting my education so that I can live to my dream."

If you get a child that says, "Yes, I'm wrong." Okay, let's look into how you could have handled this differently. And they'd come up with the right solution so that they don't go out of the office and say that Johnny made me do this, and throw a five year old temper tantrum, or say to the teacher, you blah/blah get out of my face, you can't tell me anything. I recognize this as character, this is growth.

Sherry, an elementary school principal concurred,

Oh, I believe moral education is essential. That's the piece significantly missing right now as many of our younger children are growing up and developing their sense of morality, what is considered right and wrong. Many times they might know that something's wrong but not have the moral evidence to convince them to do what is right. Many of them look up to individuals or groups with high influences that participate in activities that are morally wrong.

When asked her viewpoint on the need for character and moral education with African American youth, Sally, a secondary English teacher exclaimed,

I can answer that 100%, I think that it is crucial! If character and moral values are not in place for students they are not being productive members in their class or in society. You know what I mean? If teachers aren't taking time to speak and discuss and establish character and moral values or to support those positive

ones then they're [students] really missing out on that fundamental basis for respecting themselves and other human beings, you know. It is the school's responsibility to try and provide morals and character education as best as possible.

Perceptions And Views Of Religious Clergy

Members of the clergy identified interconnectedness between quality character education and student academic instruction. According to Paul, pastor of an integrated non-denominational church, "You can't have one without the other." Peter and John, pastors of African American congregations, provided the following illustrations. Peter explained,

> Character and moral education is essential because children, as you know, are more than just mind, they live in a society that is governed by laws and so that if those children are going to succeed they must do more than just get an education.
>
> We must impart character, morals and values in order for them to succeed in this society. Unfortunately, this is where we are missing it because we have sometimes educated fools. Kids today can score high on tests and certain standardized tests but because they don't have ethics, they don't have values and certain morals, when they enter the workplace they begin to fail. What I am saying is if a child goes through the school system and he has no values, I mean if he goes into the workplace and there are no values, ultimately no matter how much education he has if he steals, which is a moral issue, if he cooks the books, like what has been happening in some of our companies. They could have gotten

> a great education in the world's eyes, however if they didn't get a moral education they will ultimately fail in life.

John (clergy Baptist church), a regular volunteer at the high school made these assenting remarks,

> Character and moral education is important. Students with good character experience fewer problems yielding and respecting authority. However, simply providing moral education does not ensure that students will act in good moral character. I think it is important that we teach youth good character and moral values. I believe that good moral character will increase the attentiveness of students in school and increase their respect for those in authority.

He also added,

> I think it is important to emphasize that it's not just low socioeconomic and single parent homes whose children need this education. Two parent homes and the well to do are equally guilty of failing to train and instilling positive character and moral skills in their children.

By and large, the need for character and moral education appeared to be the most significant issue impacting African American learners educational outcomes. There was an overall consensus that parents should bear the primary responsibility for developing character and morals in youth. Character and moral education starts at home, in the family, declared Lilly (high school counselor). Character is developed through one's parents, asserted Mitch (public relations officer). Kelly (school board member) stated, "I believe it should be done at home." John (clergy Baptist church) affirmed, that parents should shoulder the responsibility for teaching children good character and morals.

Sherry (elementary school principal) commented,

> We have always believed that the family should be the first person to provide that moral and character education, however today it has become the responsibility of the church and school.

Chip (parole officer) acknowledged the shared role each of the subgroups must take developing character and morals in youth. He stated,

> It has to start at home, however it does not end at home. Providing kids with character and moral education must be a shared role between families, school and the church.

Shouldering The Responsibility For Character And Moral Development

Although informants identified parents as the primary agents in teaching character and morals, the perceptions of who should shoulder the next level of responsibility for character and moral education varied. For instance, Peter (clergy non-denomination church) placed the greater responsibility on schools. He stated,

> Schools also carry a large part of the responsibility since kids spend more time with teachers than with parents. The church also bears some of the responsibility. But we can't underestimate the fact that schools today have a greater influence and time in the lives of children than do churches and parents.
>
> I am only speaking into the child's life for about thirty to forty-five minutes a week. Who can have the greatest influence in their lives? Me or the teacher who speaks to the student thirty to forty hours a week. Now I say the teacher.

Sally (second year high school teacher) concurred

> It should be the done at home, but we know it's not. To me it begins at home and if it is not beginning at home it is the school's responsibility to try and provide it as best as possible since they spend the most hours a day with the kids.
>
> Next, would be the church, not because it's least important, but because the time spent at home and school exceed the number of hours a student spends at church. Often times you see a correlation between kids who are very much involved in their church.

Sally (second year high school teacher) comments inferred that a positive correlation exists between kids' involvement in church and the development of character and morals. Sherry (elementary school principal) differed with this opinion. She stated,

> Although churches can play a significant role in promoting a positive intrinsic message and improve the level of student engagement in school there appears to be little carryover from what is being preached on Sunday to what is exercised on Monday and Tuesday. Though some students and their families are very involved in church on Sunday there is little evidence of it on Monday.

She concluded,

> Schools have to provide character and moral education to help level the playing field for those students not receiving character and moral education in the home.

Several informants felt the primary responsibility of the church was to equip parents so they could teach their children. Paul (clergy non-denominational church) believed churches must empower parents to impact the morals and values in their

children's lives. John (clergy Baptist church) stated, "the church serves as a support to parents in training their children."

Chip (parole officer) and Lilly (high school counselor) reverberated the importance of the church assuming an active family support role. Chip (parole officer) declared,

> The church has an obligation to reach out to every family. I talked to pastors all the time about coming from behind the pulpit, going out into the community, and reaching out to families.

Lilly (high school counselor) commented likewise,

> The church is made up of families, the community is made of families, and the schools are made up of these families. If the church were doing what it was suppose to do, reaching out and building character, morals and values then our schools would benefit from the by-products of these activities.

Each subgroup agreed that parents should shoulder the primary responsibility for the character and moral education in youth. However, they also acknowledge that many African American youth do not receive this instruction at home. As a result religious clergy believe that schools should increase courses and curriculum to teach these skills. School personnel on the other hand felt clergy should and could do a better job reaching out to students and families in need of support.

The Importance Of Greater Community Access and Cross-Cultural Interactions

The overwhelming experiences of overt and covert racism I experienced as an African American growing up in this community contributed to my moving away. Whether actual or perceived, my observations of social and racial segregation in schools,

religious organizations, and community settings gave evidence that firm boundaries of racial and socioeconomic segregation still exist. For example, African American low-socioeconomic students represent an extremely disproportionate number of public school students, strict racial lines even within common denominational affiliations still exist in religious organizations, and even government funded parks and recreation facilities remained racially divided.

These factors, in my opinion have significant implications on the development of character and morals in African American youth, especially as it relates to their attitudes toward education. Whether perceived or real, injustices and inequalities promoted through *de facto* segregation contributed to cultural misperceptions, negative stereotyping, and limited access to quality educational opportunities, particularly for African Americans. However, to ensure that my biases did not influence informants' responses I asked no questions directly related to perceptions or realities of race relations. Not to my surprise, issues of racial and socioeconomic segregation came to the forefront. For example, Chip (parole officer) commented, "As much as I don't like to say everything is Black and White, realistically, everything is Black and White."

John (clergy Baptist church) linked racial and socioeconomic segregation to the lack of character and morals. He believed improving character and morals in school age youth, particularly African Americans, depend on increased access to park and recreational facilities, availability of family oriented activities, and increased interactions between diverse members in the community. Education and knowledge is transferred through socialization of persons with diverse backgrounds, not just racial, but differing

socioeconomic backgrounds and life experiences as well, declared Mitch (public relations officer).

According to Chip (parole officer), public officials and community leaders alike are not unaware of the beneficial outcomes of John's suggestions. However, stated Chip (parole officer), with visible frustration:

> Let me tell you something, here is the thing, nobody wants to, realistically talk about what the real problem is and it goes back to race. It comes back to family structure. It comes back to community perception about young African-American men that are at risk of failure, period.
>
> Nobody wants to have that discussion. I've tried to initiate, in the black community. However, in the African-American community we typically sit among ourselves and discuss it, but it often stops there. When I go out, I do it, I do it in front of the judges, I do it in the courts, and I do it at our public meetings. They say well hey, but nobody wants to talk about it because when you get into a black and white discussion people become sensitive. They don't want to open their mouth because they're afraid of what might come out, that true deep-rooted feelings about race may be exposed. I'll give you a prime example, recreation is a big thing in helping keep kids in school, stay out of trouble in the communities, or what have you. I have sat in the parish council meeting where they talk about creating one recreation system. Well, if you want to talk about one recreation then where are your [White] kids participating in recreation, and where are our [Black] kids participating in recreation. And, do you want your kids participating in

recreation with our kids, if not, why are you sitting here talking about one recreation system? One recreation for who?

Those are the kinds of discussions that stop right there abruptly, when I bring it to mind. If you're talking about one recreation, who are you talking about it for? If your kids are participating at one park, where there are majority white, 99.9%. Then you come to the other youth organization where you have 98% African-Americans, is that creating one recreation? You're not talking about creating one, because creating one is combining.

So, when we talk about these kinds of influences on character and morals in the neighbourhood, in our communities, yes, community leaders could have a greater impact on the character development of African American youth. It's good for yours [White], but it isn't good for yours and mine.

He concluded,

If we're going to talk about cultural influences on African American youth, we have got to talk about what's good for all and how race affects us all. And that's something political leaders, that's something church members, and administrators at schools, are not willing to sit down and have one general discussion. And that's a part of the trouble.

Paul (clergy non-denominational church) expressed the need for increased cross-cultural interactions in order to overcoming the traditional walls of segregation. He stated,

There is a lot that needs to be done; a lot of walls need to come down. There's so much separation here, there's such a division that I don't think that you

see too much mixing of the classes socially. The social contact, and again, we mentioned the churches but the social contact between the Whites and Blacks is mostly just in the church. And you don't have that much of it. We [the church] are trying to break some of these walls down in this area. But, we really have two social classes, you've got two different cultures that are side-by-side, and really one doesn't know the other.

During field observations discussions with officials at schools, religious organizations, and community agencies, as well as in informant interviews, only Paul and his church explicitly illustrated actions or expressed goals to address the concerns of segregation.

There's not very much social contact. There's a great need for that, and I'd like to see some of those things open up, you know. I believe, it's my focus, that it going to be done in the church, that's where the children are going to meet on level ground, and worship of the Lord together. This is how it works in this church, you know, we all worship the Lord together and that's the place that we come together, you know. And, from that we've had some social contact outside the church and has led to visitations to each other's homes and going out to restaurants to eat together or something of that nature, small things, but at least some contact because we meet at the church but it would be outside the church.

The issue of segregation went beyond the implication of race – Black and White. When I asked Paul for the reason his church prioritized interracial interactions, he explained to me that it had been an assignment place on his heart by God.

John (clergy Baptist church), Chip (parole officer), Mitch (public relations officer), and Sherry (elementary school principal) brought to my attention that issues of segregation do not solely address interactions between Blacks and Whites. Sherry concluded,

> I think we have recognized that the issue is not necessarily racial, but economical; one of social class versus skin color or ethnicity.

John (clergy Baptist church) explained,

> We have segregation that existed within the Black community, between those who are well off financially and those who are not well off.

Mitch (public relations officer) alluded to the lack of leadership or reciprocation by well-off Blacks that grew up in some of the impoverished communities. He explained,

> Things have changed financially in our community in the past 20 years. We have folk with good jobs, with good degrees… but we haven't really advanced that much, because we have not bridged the gap. We do not promote leadership. We do not tell Johnny and Sue that tomorrow is yours, only if you grab for it today. We believe that, and this is my own personal opinion from my experiences, that if we've got a house and a job we're doing great. Our position is, well, let them fend for themselves.

Chip (parole officer) provided similar sentiments,

> We have a lot of great community leaders that have went on, and finished high school and went on to college, those are the ones that have to reach back, those are the ones that have to become the role models, those are the ones that have to reach out, and until we see that many kids won't break away from some

> of the negative vices in these neighbourhoods. We have to see that these [community leaders] are the ones that are staying in these neighbourhoods or re-visiting these neighbourhoods to say to kids, "Come on, you can do it. I believe in you."

Although many of informants' responses stressed the importance of exposing African American youth to more integrated settings, I discovered that actions and misperceptions of African Americans played an equal role in maintaining barriers of racial segregation. For example, I herd comments like "You can't trust White folks," or "That's what White people do," referencing studying or hanging out in the library. During my field observations members of the community, Black and White made inconspicuous comments to me in regard to race, both in social and religious settings.

Theme 2: Parental Apathy Towards Education

The American Heritage dictionary (1982) defines apathy as a lack of interest in anything, or the absence of any wish to do anything. A strong cross group consensus existed among many informants in reference to the apathy of parents of African American youth towards education. Mitch's statement summarizes the overall perception of informants.

> We [African American parents] are the least active participants in the educational system because we believe that the total experience should come from the schoolhouse, and that's not so.

Lilly (high school counselor) proclaimed,

> When education is at the bottom of parents' priority list students don't take an interest in it or give their best efforts.

Sally (second year high school teacher) believed,

> The lack of priority on education at home gives students a false concept of how we get things in life. The correlation is that they always get what they want somehow, "I'm wanting for nothing." For example, I'm going to get the latest iPod, it doesn't matter that I'm on free lunch. I still get the material things I want so how does getting an education matter.

Sherry (elementary school principal) comments aligned with Sally's. She responded,

> The [lack of] emphasis at home for many of the parents particularly those from low-socioeconomic backgrounds tend to be focused more on physical appearance versus improvement in learning.

Differing Perspectives of Parental Apathy

I must caution the reader to avoid making generalizations or attaching negative stereotypes to African American parents who are socioeconomically disadvantaged based on these viewpoints. Based on my field observations, I found informants' perceptions of apathy on behalf of African American parents inconsistent with my interpretations of them. I discovered that many of these parents possessed a genuine concern for the educational outcomes of their children. In my opinion, many parents lacked the social capital or advocacy to negotiate across cultural boundaries associated with socioeconomics, education, or governmental agency interactions (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Trainor, 2008). Trainor described social capital as a network of people and relationships that enable individuals acquire other forms of capital (e.g., financial assistance and employment).

Being a parent of a learner with special needs, I can empathize with the frustrations many of these parents face while attempting to help their child. When I experienced similar conditions, I recall the sense of isolation I felt. As a result, I aimed my frustrations towards school personnel, as well as the church that in my opinion offered me a sense of hope that never transpired. How would you respond if you had to endure prolonged or unforseen periods in that situation? However, being an educator I also empathize with school personnel who invest inordinate amounts of time and resources to assist learners with special needs and their parents. Connecting well meaning, caring, and compassionate parents and professionals to better serve the learning needs of all students almost appears to be an oxymoron.

Despite the strong consensus in regard to parental apathy toward education, several of the informants believed factors other than apathy contributed to the lack of parental involvement. Peter (clergy non-denomination church) provided this insightful perspective,

> In the home we are going to teach either by default, by not teaching or we are going to teach intentionally. Sadly today, for example, in our school system there are 70% or more children growing up in a single-parent household. The average parents are teaching by default by not being involved in their children's lives, by not showing up at teacher's meetings, by not participating in their schools. They've shown by default that education is not very important.
>
> However, in reality that may not be their stance. For example, I just have talked with a single mother who has four children, she is having to work two jobs to make ends meet, how can she give much attention and time to her child's

schooling, homework and extracurricular activities. It's impossible. So sadly again, too many African-American homes because the parent is absent, they're teaching by default that education's not important, that homework is not important because they're not there to reinforce those values.

Chip (parole officer) attributed the lack of parental involvement to the fact that many parents lack formal education attainment.

> Unfortunately, we have a lot of families, you know, parents that didn't finish high school, that weren't fortunate to go to college So, you know, they are unable to help their kids, you know, they're not pushing education.

Theme 3: Factors Influencing School Climate

Cohesiveness Among School Staff

While informants acknowledged the importance of having a positive school climate, their perspectives of what key factors influence the development of a positive school climate differed. Sally (second year high school teacher) believed teachers and administrators working cohesively together represent one of the key factors in developing a positive school climate. She explained,

> This year at our school, improving the culture and climate is our focus, but nothing in education is ever done overnight. It takes years. However, it is in our best interest as teachers and administrators to have a cohesive, positive culture and climate in schools for ourselves as well as students to work in, because if we are not happy, how are they [students] going to be happy.

> By this time last year I was drained because of the negativity in school and many of the teachers myself included had called in for sick or took personal leave days. By May many of us were in tears.

Although a long time resident of the county Lilly (high school counselor) witnessed,

> New staff or outsiders as they are called get criticized for differing perspectives of what the learning environment and academic expectations should be.
>
> The issue of differing expectations has been raised, but if teachers who are not from here raise the question or attempt to act on it they are treated indifferently, solely because they are from the outside. As a result new staff members don't stay long. This may contribute to students' lack of respect for new teachers. They [students] see the teachers who have been there for longer periods of time as ones that really care.

Chip (parole officer) described how race negatively impacts school climate.

> When White teachers question or addressed poor performance of Black kids they are often labeled as racist.
>
> Kids have a disregard for white teachers who come from outside the community. They know many of the Black teachers because they live in their neighborhoods. These teachers tend to tolerate inappropriate behavior, set low expectations, or show a low regard for educational setting.

The Need For Cultural Competence

Sherry (elementary school principal) accredited school climate, positive or negative, to the level of relationship established between culturally diverse members of the school community, especially between teachers and students.

> I think the culture and climate is affected mainly by the fact that many of our teachers come from middle-class and the children they teach are from poverty or from lower income families. So they [teachers and student] don't always understand or relate to cultures different from their own.
>
> Having different cultural backgrounds can be a good thing because it reflects real life experiences and can help students and teachers discover common ground. However, it can also be fertile ground for miscommunication between students and teachers, school and family. The question is how do we overcome this problem?
>
> Building relationships with kids is most critical thing schools can do to help students so they can feel the climate is supportive and that they can take risk in learning without fear of being ostracized.

Community officials Mitch (public relations officer) and Chip (parole officer) attributed the lack of cultural competency and sensitivity on the behalf of educators as a key factor negatively influencing the school climate. Mitch stated,

> Although school integration brought increased access and resources for African American students, it also brought greater insensitivity and misunderstanding into their educational experience.

> A lot of the students suffer because of teachers' lack of sensitivity and understanding of their individual needs as students.

Chip (parole officer) shared a similar perspective.

> That climate in schools impacts how our kids feel. Many feel that they are stereotyped, they are labeled, and they are targeted. They feel that they are not going to be given a fair opportunity.

The Need For Student Discipline

Several members of the clergy cited the need for student discipline as a key factor influencing school climate. The views expressed by the informants reflected a negative perception of the current school climate. At the same time, the informants expressed empathy for the challenges school personnel faced in this area. John (clergy Baptist church) contributed the negative climate of schools to the lack of consistency in applying discipline rules. He proclaimed:

> The lack of cohesiveness in the way teachers apply the rules affects how students respond to the rules. Teachers should model respecting authority by their attitudes about the authority they are under and how they follow their directives. However, schools are doing a better job at getting students involved through offering a variety of career options in high school, but they must continue involving them in the learning process.

Sally (second year high school teacher) made a similar reference in regards to discipline at her school. She stated,

> Although the school is trying to address the problem teachers are not on the same page. There is a lack of social cohesion between teachers from the community and those outside the community.

Paul (clergy non-denominational church) stated,

> The schools need a little more discipline and more control. At times the school's hands are tied, and they are not able to bring the discipline they want. I don't believe it is the teachers fault, I believe it's the rules of the society now.

When asked about the climate in schools, Peter (clergy non-denomination church) remarked,

> First of all, the teaching of social skills has to be restored if we want to see a turnaround. We must reinforce the importance of marriage, family, the way a man treats women, the way a husband interacts with a wife, the way a wife interacts with her husband. The tragedy of it is that far too many of our kids do not have examples either in their homes, often times in their community.
>
> I applaud every dedicated educator who's committed to making a difference. I will say that there are teachers who could be doing something better with their time. They could get more money out there, but yet they are committed to be what I call missionaries in the school system and they make up a difference.

Theme 4: The Need For Collaborative Partnerships

> To be successful, churches and schools must establish common goals; determine what resources each organization has to bring to the table. They must develop a level of respect for each other and put aside their personal agendas. I feel like you have two strong organizations that can see to those things happening.

Sally, *second year high school teacher*

Sherry (elementary school principal) describes in general why informants' believed there exist a need for developing collaborative partnerships between schools and religious organizations.

> Positive collaborative involvement by its nature shows students that caring adults take an interest in their success and increases students' level of motivation towards learning.
>
> In this community collaboration between schools and religious organizations can play a vital role in pulling kids out of poverty and broaden their perspectives of what's important in life.

After attending several interagency collaboration meetings, I learned that schools, religious organizations, and community agencies traditionally participated collectively in partnerships. These interagency groups typically meet monthly and focus on issues such as decreasing student absenteeism and truancy, developing mentee-mentor relationships with youth socioeconomically disadvantaged, and providing after school tutoring. However, when asked, "Does the group documented the specific targets and collected data to evidence the group's outcomes?" Several participants expressed uncertainty of the group's specific purposes, as well as uncertainty of the group's outcomes. A attendee at one of the meetings responded, "I feel our efforts are well intended, but a waste of time."

Perceptions of School and Religious Organization Effectiveness

Perceptions of public schools. Data on key indicators such as core content proficiency and graduation rates evidenced that only a small percentage of African

American learners with special needs in the public schools attained desired outcomes. Despite the despaired picture illustrated by the data, most informants held a sense of optimism and praise in regard to the efforts the public schools put forth to reach this population of students. Informant perceptions of school effectiveness encompassed broader objectives than just academic outcomes. For example, Paul (clergy non-denominational church) declared,

> The schools are constantly adjusting trying to find a model that's good for developing positive attitudes of the children and the atmosphere in the schools.

Chip (parole officer) commended the schools efforts, particularly in offering alternate certificated programs to non-college bound students.

> I think schools are doing more to reach out to kids who are not college bound, offering options for high school graduation such as vocational education where kids can learn a trade.
>
> The accelerated program to help kids who are two or three years behind in school is another thing I think the schools are doing well.

Mitch (public relations officer), however, cited the lack of career options for students as an area the school district needs to improve. He stated,

> Schools are trying really hard to meet the demands placed on them by society, but you don't treat individuals with varied backgrounds by applying one solution through the same pathway.
>
> We have a high dropout rate. Kids drop out because they're not interested anymore, not because they're not smart, they're just not excited anymore, it [school] doesn't stimulate their mind. We've got to have more stimulus to keep

more kids in school. We worked with local industries to offer kids greater access to vocational and technical experiences to make sure that our academics are diverse enough to gather all the kids.

Perceptions of Religious Organizations

Understanding the religious culture. Before discussing my interpretations of informant responses regarding the effectiveness of religious organizations, I want to give readers a brief summary of the community's religious culture. During my field observations, I met with 45 of the 65 identified religious organization clergy (70%) and attended worship services at 26 (42%) religious organizations. I learned that typically only the main-line denominations, such as Roman Catholic and Baptist denominations, with congregations larger than 300 members employed a full-time clergy. In a majority of smaller congregations, particularly predominately African American congregations with less than 300 members, clergy held or had retired from other full-time occupations. When I asked these clergy if their church salary could sustain them financially without income from other occupations, each responded "no." Also, the practice of pastoring two community churches appeared to be an acceptable and common practice among African American clergy.

I discovered that factors such as the number of congregants, their racial make-up, their socioeconomic status, or denominational affiliation conversely influenced the type of youth outreach activities offered by a church. For example, a congregation of less than 30 active members operated an alternative school for students who had been expelled or suspended from school. Likewise, a predominately White middle-class congregation

hosted an on-site lunch club for disadvantaged and at risk students at two of the public schools.

A majority of the county residents attend Roman Catholic churches. Roman Catholic churches focus their youth outreach efforts primarily on catechism for congregant youth and on religious instruction in the Catholic schools. Youth involvement in Catholic catechism—the education of youth of the Catholic doctrine and Sacraments—embodies a strong tradition in this predominately Catholic community.

The significance of religion, specifically of the Christian faith, became increasingly apparent throughout my observations of both school and civic events. Exercising one's faith was widely acceptable in the public circle. The presumed wall of separation between church and state was virtually non-existent. Many of the government sponsored meetings and events I attended began with overtly Christian prayers by clergy or agency staff who prayed openly "in the name of Jesus Christ." Even in my one-on-one conversations with government agency staff, many members openly shared their faith and its relation to performance of their work responsibilities. These observations helped me conceptualize and interpret informants' responses to the question about the effectiveness of religious organizations.

Perceptions of the effectiveness of religious organizations. Unlike public schools, state and federal agencies do not establish measure to determine religious organization effectiveness. Instead, religious organization effectiveness appears to be measured by their level of philanthropic or benevolent actions. Informants from school and community agency officials perceived religious organizations as ineffective because of their lack of involvement with schools and school age youth.

School personnel and community leaders believed religious clergy have the potential to effectively and positively impact African American learner outcomes. However, many of the informants cite indifference, lack of involvement, and lack of competency in educational matters as factors hindering many African American clergy and the congregations they oversee from having a greater influence on the educational outcomes of African American youth.

"There are a small number of churches who are doing some wonderful things, such as tutoring and assisting with issues of discipline at schools," explained Sherry (elementary school principal), however,

> I think the impact they could have is tremendous, but many churches have lay pastors who work outside the church to take care of their families and cannot focus full-time as pastors addressing the mission of the church or issues in the community.

Several informants viewed religious organizations as a valuable communication link between schools and the African American community. They acknowledged that churches possess the potential to promote a positive message to African American learners and their families about the importance of education. At the same time, they expressed disappointment with the lack of interest and follow-through on the part of African American clergy.

Kelly (school board member) explained,

> We in the school community need to be able to call upon preachers and pastors and ask them to help us out. For example, making home visits because they may have a greater influence upon some families. I also think they could

have a greater role by promoting the importance of staying in school in their sermons.

Sally (second year high school teacher) commented,

> The church is a vessel of communication. I believe they have the ability to promote a positive message about the importance of school. However, I have not seen one religious organization taking an active role in the school.

On several occasions during my field observations, members of the school staff expressed their disappointment with the efforts of religious organizations. One district administrator noted,

> When I was a building principal I went out in the community and worked hard to build and maintain relationships with the local churches. However, as my job got more demanding I had less time to maintain the programs we put in place. When I stopped, the programs stopped. I received very little follow-up efforts from the churches without consistently seeking them out.

Another administrator remarked,

> If it don't benefit them [the church] they don't get involved. Unfortunately, many of these churches don't have the resources to assist their own congregations let alone assist the school.

Comments from community agency officials reflected similar viewpoints as school personnel. Mitch (public relations officer) made these comments,

> In relation to improving in-school and postschool outcomes for African American youth I would have to say that religious organizations have the potential to have a great positive impact.

> Ministers and Pastors want to play a part in the school environment to help the young black males.
>
> I don't think that a majority of religious organizations are tooled to hand out a positive image. For example, a group of ministers wanted to mainstream their churches to be more productive in their community to help build a better community, but they didn't have an idea on how to do it.

Chip's (parole officer) comments aligned with Sherry's. He commented,

> I can tell you the impact I believe that religious organizations can have, because there are not many religious organizations that are directly involved with kids in the community. Nor do we have a lot of kids who go to church.
>
> Although some ministers have stepped out and taken an active role, more pastors could take an active role. I'm fighting with pastors now to join with me to get out in the community and reach out to these kids where they are. Until we start doing that the churches will have little impact because they are not directly involved with what is going on.

In spite of past failed attempts, school personnel and community agency officials still believe that partnerships with religious organizations are essential for improving educational outcomes for African American learners. Regardless of the current lack of involvement of religious organizations, particularly by African American churches, many still view the "Black Church" as an enduring institution that cares for and provides invaluable supports to African American families, (Rogers-Dulan & Blacher,1995). For example, the superintendent of schools invited local ministers to monthly minister's meetings. In spite of declining attendance, she continued hold information sharing

meeting in hope to soliciting their input for developing strategies to improve student and parenting involvement in school and to increase community engagement in schools.

When asked about the significance of the Black church Lilly (high school counselor) responded,

> The core of the African American community is the church. The church is the pendulum between the schools and families and families look to the church to help solve problems.
>
> The superintendent of schools recognizes that religious organizations impact the community. She knows if she is to get the language out about the importance of funding schools, importance of friends, the importance of family, she needs to touch the ministers of every congregation.

Sherry (elementary school principal) explained,

> Because religious organizations are such a center of family in the African American home I believe the ability the church has to impact the quality of education is really high. They can provide motivation, offer encouragement, can offer mentorship, which is critical to the family when there is a missing parent in the nuclear family. So, I think the impact they can have is tremendous.

Likewise, members of the clergy acknowledged the need for their increased involvement with schools. They also expressed an equal desire to partner with schools. For instance, Paul (clergy non-denominational church) confessed,

> We have not really done anything directly related with the schools. We could have a better collaboration with them [schools]. I would like to see churches and schools work closely together. How we can do that I am not sure.

John (clergy Baptist church) identified the need for religious organization to engage more in the political aspects of education.

> Religious organizations need to get involved with the school board. They should create a forum to speak with the superintendent to get information about what's going on so we can exchange information.

Sherry (elementary school principal) noted the need for the involvement of Catholic Priest.

> We have a strong parochial influence in our community. However, your Catholic Priests are not involved at all to help the school because they have their own church-based schools. Perhaps that's why they don't get involved in public schools?
>
> We get much more support from African-American churches in our school, but there is a large population of Catholic kids that could benefit from involvement of the Catholic Priest.

Concerns About Separation of Church and State

Since the 1940s, debate has increased over the legality of public schools interaction with and support of religious organizations. According to the First Amendment of the U. S. Constitution the government can neither establish nor promote religion; and the government shall not impede on a citizen's right to exercise their beliefs. During my observation the exercising or expressing of one's religious beliefs, especially within the Christian faith, appeared to be widely acceptable.

The presumed wall of separation between church and state was virtually non-existent. Many of the government sponsored meetings and events I attended began with

overtly Christian prayers by clergy or agency staff who prayed openly "in the name of Jesus Christ." The overt expression of one's faith was also apparent in my one-on-one conversations with school and government agency staff. For example, Lilly (high school counselor) proclaimed,

> Look how far God has brought me. Race hasn't stopped me from going into a different area, you know?

Speaking in regard to his work in the community, Chip (parole officer) stated,

> I go out there as a man of Christ.

The issue of interactions between public schools and religious organizations, 'separation of church and state' did not emerged until the focus group interview. When I asked focus group informants to recommend strategies to improve collaborative partnerships between schools and religious organizations Shannon (clergy Lutheran church) commented,

> We would love to come to the schools and assist kids with their academic skills, but we must leave our faith at the door.

To which Marsha (district administrator) replied,

> Separation of church and state is the law of the land!

Casey (co-pastor non-denomination church) responded,

> We don't want to come in and teach the kids about religion. We went to the school because we have a genuine interest in kids' academic success. I have both taught and work with Sylvan Learning Centers. I went to the school to offer expertise and support in helping students learn. However, we are not treated as if our support is welcomed.

Mitch (public relations officer), who worked with a coalition of ministers made this remark during our interview,

> The hardest thing to get some ministers to understand is why they can't bring their Bible into the school. I try to explain, "whether you carry a Bible or not kids know you are a minister."

Anthony (YMCA director) gave an example of how his organization partners with schools without compromising Christian principles or violating principles of the First Amendment.

> In my experience working with the YMCA, which is a Christian Organization that works collaboratively with many of the schools, we don't go in talking the talk; we minister by walking the walk. We bring in activities, and programs like basketball, football, and other sports and activities but the importance of Christian principles associated with the development of mind, body, and spirit are embedded throughout our programs.

Despite the existence of various religious denominations in the county, I observed no visible contentions between religious organizations of differing doctrines. There appeared to exist an unspoken consensus regarding the importance of exercising one's religion in publicly, professionally, and in private life.

Strategies For Developing Collaborative Partnerships

An overall consensus exists among school personnel, clergy, and community agency informants of the need for collaborative partnerships between public schools and religious organizations. However, informants shared differing viewpoints in terms of strategies to achieve that end. Lilly (high school counselor) suggested,

> Schools and churches need to sit down and talk to identify problems and possible solutions and action plans to solve the problem. Churches need to come to the school and let them know what they have to offer and find out what the school's needs are and how they can help. The focus has to be on the child, not a select few based on race but all children.

Sally (second year high school teacher) thinks schools and religious organization must utilize an open-minded approach. She stated,

> Schools and religious organizations should come together on a set of common or core values and leave their personal agendas out.

Anthony (YMCA director) believed,

> In order for churches to be more effective at helping school age youth, they must find creative ways to tailor their programs to match or align with those of the schools.

Both Kelly (school board member) and Peter (clergy non-denomination church) alluded to the need of building bridges through increased access and interactions between the groups to increase the level of trust. Kelly (school board member) suggested that

> Even school board members must work harder at collaborating with religious organizations, like occasionally attending services to improve relationships and be proactive instead of reactive. All the religious leaders I have meet have been sincere, they are very honest, and they are good people.

Peter, who's congregation represents one of a few African American churches actively involved with schools, expressed disappointment with the lack of efforts and

attentiveness schools show toward the efforts made by churches to reach African American learners. He stated,

> Schools must make the church a vital part of the educational community and begin to respect spiritual leaders. For example, pastors could receive copies of report cards and progress reports. That would help eliminate a lot of inappropriate behaviors in the classroom. A lot of the time pastors only hear about the problems, when the kids are finally kicked out of schools.
>
> The schools must find ways to collaborate and come along side as they partner in efforts the church is doing as well. The school has to find ways to support programs in the church.
>
> There must be a bridge built so that pastors might be willing to show interest in the school.

Although he believed schools needed to do more to facilitate dialogue and interactions with clergy, he was also specific about with which clergy schools should develop those partnerships.

> I believe partnership efforts have to focus on spiritual leaders who are committed to making a difference.

If I defined spiritual leaders committed to making a difference based on my criteria for identifying clergy informants, it would significantly reduce the number of possible participants. Those criteria included: (a) does their congregation currently engage in educational outreach activities for school age youth? (b) has their congregation developed future organizational plans (vision or mission) for educational outreach? or (c) does their congregation currently work with a public school to support or assist learners

with special needs? According to an estimation based on my field observations only an approximate 10% (7) of clergy met these criteria.

Summary

Overall, educators, religious clergy, and community leaders shared a like sense of 'moral purpose' in regard to serving the welfare of the communities' African American youth. School personnel articulated a willingness to work with religious organizations; however, they also expressed uncertainty about how to do so or questioned the relative benefits of investing their limited time and resources. Despite their concerns, this shared sense of moral purpose has served as the catalyst for continued efforts to develop collaborative partnerships.

Findings of the study indicated that African American learners who are socioeconomically disadvantaged and those with disabilities represent predominate characteristics of African American learners with special needs. While African American residents in the county comprised 54.5% of the county's population, they made up nearly 80% of the school's population. Informants from schools, religious organizations, and community agencies agreed alike that the most significant factor influencing poor educational outcomes related to the lack of character and moral education and parental apathy. Other factors identified by informants include the need for a positive school climate, improved student discipline, and the need for increased cross-cultural interactions between African Americans and White residents.

While there was an overall consensus that parents should shoulder the responsibility for teaching African American learners character and morals, many felt schools and religious organizations need to assume greater responsibility seeing that

many parents failed to do so. The underlying sentiment was that schools should shoulder greater responsibility seeing they spend a greater amount of time with the student. Opposing sentiments believed religious organizations should shoulder the greater responsibility seeing they have greater influence with parents and families.

Regardless of their affiliation, school personnel, religious clergy, or community agency official, all believed that improving the educational outcomes for African American learners required a collective effort of each organization. Collaboration between public schools religious organizations, particularly the Black church offered the most viable means to that end. Chip (parole officer) and Peter (clergy non-denomination church) stated the importance of collaboration best. Chip believed,

> Providing kids with character and moral education must be a shared role between families, school and church it must deal with life issues such as relationships building, issues of divorce, sex education because all these issues impact learning.

Peter proclaimed,

> The Schools and the churches must collaborate together to help make a difference. We're committed to doing everything we know how to close the backdoor so that kids will not drop-out and so that we will not continue to lose our kids to prison and to at risk behaviors. All that goes with the whole drug culture and so forth. But if we all commit to doing it, you know, teamwork makes the dream work and together everybody accomplishes more. That's what we are committed to doing and I think that is what we should collaborate on.

Chapter 5: Discussion

It is my held belief that religious organizations are in a unique position to assist public schools to provide needed support for learners with special needs, particularly for African American learners and their families. Religious organizations, particularly the "Black Church," have historically had an influence on the development of the educational, social, and cultural values within the African American community (Rogers-Dulan & Blacher, 1995). Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore ways public schools and religious organizations could develop collaborative partnerships to improve educational outcomes for African American learners with special needs. While many researchers have made references to strategies for interagency collaborations between government and private social service agencies, little research exists on how schools can develop collaborative partnerships with religious organizations.

I utilized a three-phase qualitative recursive data collection and analysis process to capture the perceptions and viewpoints of school personnel, religious clergy, and community agency officials to answer my overarching and subsidiary research questions. As a result of data reduction and analysis processes, four key themes emerged that informants believed had an impact on the engagement and outcomes of African American learners:

1. The lack of character and moral education significantly impacts the academic performance of African American youth.
2. The apathy or lack of involvement in education by parents of African American youth.

3. The need for a more positive and conducive school climate regarding the needs African American learners.
4. Collaborative partnerships between schools and religious organizations could be a viable resource to address these and other issues affecting African American learners with and without special needs.

Why Should Public Schools and Religious Organizations Collaborate?

In this study, I discovered that religious organizations of differing racial make-ups, denominational affiliations, and varying congregational sizes offered a variety of supports and programs in the local school community to assist public schools to better serve African American learners with special needs and their families. Religious organizations offer programs that promote normative values and positive social behaviors in regard to education. The Black churches have a long history of providing formal support services including basic needs assistance, counseling and intervention, and educational programs (Taylor, Lincoln, & Chatters, 2005). Unfortunately, many of the individuals and families most in need of these supports typically do not attend church and therefore lack access to such supports. Collaboration between public schools and religious organizations would offer students and families a broader, more accessible, and coordinated means of community-based services.

Theoretically, collaboration has been identified in educational literature as an effective process to address the multidimensional aspects associated with the development and implementation of service delivery systems. In fact, research has shown that the lack of high levels of collaboration jeopardizes the development of effective and sustainable service delivery systems (Agran, Cain, & Cavin, 2002;

Guetzkow, 1950; White & Wehlage, 1995; Noonan, Morningstar, & Erickson, 2008). Despite a plethora of applicable guidelines available in the literature (Kohler, 1993; White & Wehlage, 1995), key principles of collaborative partnerships were noticeably absent from the existing collaborative initiatives in the county. Collaborative initiatives lacked: (a) consensus on a set of core values and beliefs (e.g., Malloy, Cheney, & Cormier, 1998); (b) measurable goals and action steps to meet those goals; (c) release time and realistic work schedules for representatives to participate in group related activities; and (e) granting of authority to group representatives to direct funding and to restructure existing regulations to support collaborative initiatives (e.g., Bruner, 1991). As a result, collaborative in the county lacked sustainable partnerships, leaving the greater burden of providing services for learners with special needs and their families to the public schools.

Overall, educators, religious clergy, and community agency officials shared a like sense of 'moral purpose' in regard to serving the welfare of the communities' African American youth. School personnel articulated a willingness to work with religious organizations, however, they also expressed uncertainty about how to do so or questioned the relative benefits of investing their limited time and resources. Despite their concerns, this shared sense of moral purpose has served as the catalyst for continued efforts to develop collaborative partnerships. Unfortunately, it appears that the lack of collaborative leadership has led to partnerships characterized by fluid representation, a lack of sustainability, and limited outcomes.

Strategies For Developing Collaborative Partnerships

In a review of educational literature, I identified three concepts of organizational or agency collaboration relating to the development of service systems for learners with special needs: (a) structure and organization of collaborative partnerships (Baker & Stahl, 2004; Kohler, 1996; Melaville & Blank, 1991); (b) authoritative levels of collaboration (Blalock, 1996; Bruner, 1991); and (c) leadership in collaboration (Daka-Mulwanda, Thornburg, Filbert, and Klein 1995; Test, 2000). Of the three, I selected a leadership model of collaboration because I believe it is the most applicable approach for developing collaborative relationships between public schools and religious organizations. Another reason I selected a leadership strategy hinged on the fact that organizational decision-making authority rests with individuals in the proximal geographical location.

Effective collaborative partnerships require strong leadership to guide participants through a process of discovery that can enable participants to overcome historical and ideological misrepresentations and misperceptions related to values, beliefs and intent. Developing an effective collaborative partnership requires a facilitator who can oversee processes of translation, coordination, and alignment between perspectives without being biased by paradigms (Wenger, 1998). According to Wenger, the facilitator or "broker" plays an essential role in the overall success of the collaborative group. The broker must be able to:

> Make new connections across communities of practice, enable coordination, and if they are good brokers–open new possibilities for meaning. It also requires the ability to link practices by facilitating transactions between them, and to cause

learning by introducing into a practice elements of another. Toward that end the broker provides a participative connection. (p.109)

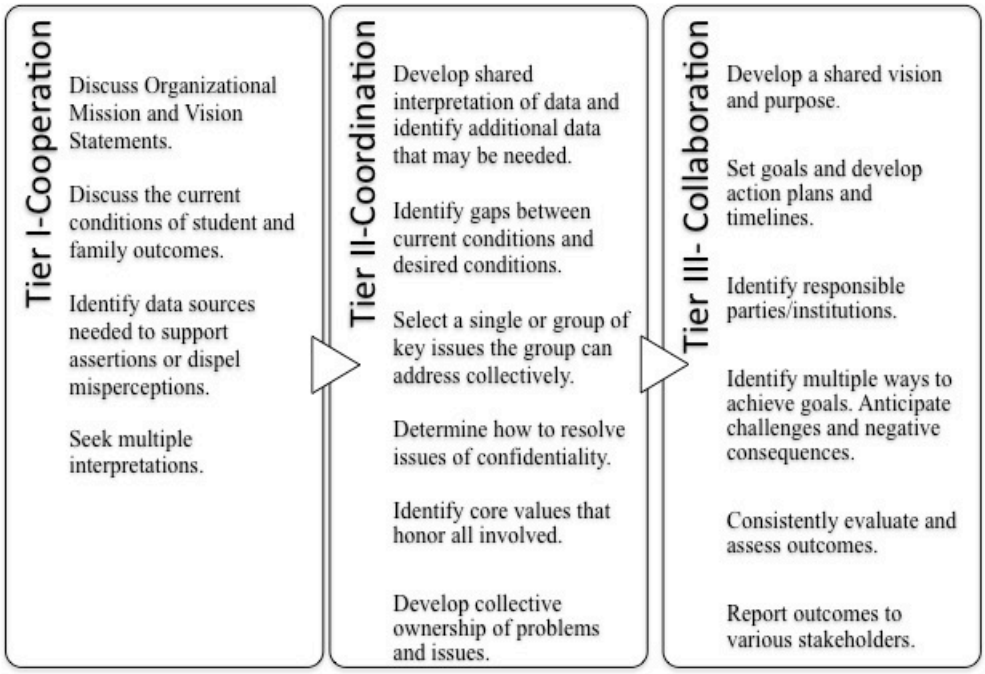
Collaboration between public schools and religious organizations offers promising possibilities for tackling tough issues affecting African American learners with special needs, however, there are no full proof formulas or step-by-step recipes. Uhl and Perez-Selles (1995) noted that to develop collaborative relationships agency representatives need time to engage in routine collegial interactions in order to nurture a shared value for collaboration. The bottom-line—collaboration hinges on people working with people.

Based on my observations of collaborative initiatives and previous lessons learned, I discovered that merely bringing public school officials and religious clergy together misrepresents the true meaning of collaboration. True collaboration involves both a process and an outcome-oriented focus. Eaker, Dufour, and Dufour (2002) describe collaboration as a complex non-linear process that develops through incremental steps characterized more by starts and stops, messiness, and redundancy than sequential efficiency. Based on this study's findings, I constructed the *Three-Tiered Collaboration Model* seen in Figure 5-1. The diagram provides an overview of a process-oriented set of activities that public schools and religious organizations can utilize to move from *cooperation*, to *coordination*, to true *collaboration*.

I embedded Participatory Action Research (PAR) activities throughout the model in order to: (a) engage participants in deliberative-dialogue about problems or issues they believe are relevant to their community, (b) empower marginalized and disenfranchised groups by involving them in decision-making processes, and above all, (c) provide a

framework or agenda for engaging all groups from all faiths, even non-religious world views, in true collaborative interactions. Dependence on a skilled 'broker' or facilitator, as implicated by Wenger (1998), represents the major weakness of this model. The effectiveness of collaborative partnerships hinge on the broker's ability to coordinate and align differing perspectives, as well as manage conflicting interests when they arise. The model involves both a process and an outcome-oriented focus.

Figure 5-1. Three-Tiered Collaboration Model for Developing Collaborative Partnerships.



The Three-Tiered Collaboration Model provides a conceptual framework for a non-prescriptive set of activities that enables members of the group to:

(a) Develop competency regarding the various organizations and professionals who serve learners with special needs and their families,

(b) Develop group understanding and consensus of problems or key issues that impact their community,

(c) Exchange case and experiential-based knowledge and identify research-based best practices that can inform future activities,

(d) Conceptualize solutions and establish goals and action steps to address specific problems and issues, and

(e) Develop consistent timelines for evaluation and maintain accountability through the reporting of outcomes to various stakeholders.

Overcoming Barriers to True Collaboration

Beliefs expressed by early 19th century educators continue to strongly influence the perceptions and views held by many educators serving marginalized groups today. Principally, those beliefs purport that the disparate social and economic status of marginalized individuals result from a lack of educational opportunities (Stevens, Wood, & Sheehan, 2000). This belief still resonates throughout educational, religious, and political circles. As a result many people still believe education beyond all other devices could be the "great equalizer," and the key to solving the problems of persons in poverty. Theoretically these beliefs offered a great deal of promise for marginalized groups, but in reality, the outcomes have not been forthcoming.

For example, since the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) and the Education of Handicapped Children Act in 1975 (EHCA), the federal government has invested billions of dollars to provide greater access and increased resources for educating marginalized populations, particularly African

Americans and students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged. Despite this huge investment, African Americans, as well as other marginalized groups including students with disabilities and those that are socioeconomically disadvantaged, continue to experience disparate educational outcomes (Rusch, Hughes, Agran, Martin, & Johnson, 2009). In short, federal initiatives targeting the improvement of educational outcomes and closing performance gaps for marginalized groups have failed (Trainor, Lindstrom, Simon-Burroughs, Martin, & Sorrells, 2008).

Challenging longstanding ideological misrepresentations. I disagree with the with the 19th century paradigm that education is a "great equalizer." I believe the greater influence on student outcomes is not what we do to them, but what we believe about them. What we believe about people determines how we treat them; our perceptions about them determine the opportunities we afford them. Since the inception of public schools, dominant cultural ideologies and systems of beliefs have always been the guiding force of educational policy and practices. Stevens, Wood, and Sheehan (2000) defined ideology as a system of beliefs that function to shape people's behaviors, to give them direction, and effectively acts to exclude other beliefs.

Banks (1998) and Smith (2008) pointed out that when schools fail to reflect on their fundamental assumptions [*ideology*] and proceed with practices based on deficit perspectives, they increase the risk of adopting concepts with misleading and detrimental ramifications. Deficit perspectives of African Americans and other marginalized groups have deep-seated roots in educational ideology, where marginalized groups are viewed as lacking characteristics, including behaviors considered normative by the dominant culture (Jones & Palmer, 2004). According to Edwards and Warin (1999), many schools base

their initiatives on notions that promote middle-class ideals and values over the values of marginalized groups.

In spite of federal initiatives requiring schools to provide marginalized groups with a greater voice in the decision-making processes, many new school initiatives continue to focus on assimilating marginalized groups to dominant cultural values (Edwards & Warin, 1999; Shepard & Rose, 1995). Hughes (2005) described these educational initiatives as recycled themes that have been reintroduced by legitimate authorities and accepted by a majority of constituents.

The implications of educators' beliefs about marginalized groups become imperative to the way they reflect on theories that inform their practice. Their perceptions play a significant role in the efforts schools make to develop collaborative relationships with marginalized members of the school community. Lutz and Merz (1992) warned that when fundamental differences in values and beliefs exist and various participants are not allowed to express their differences or participate in decision-making processes, residual conflicts remain that will undoubtedly resurface. As the racial and religious landscape in America grows more diverse, educators will face increased incidents of cultural conflicts.

Separation of church and state. Throughout America's history, religion has been embraced by millions of Americans as a context for character and moral development (Monsma, 2006). Even today, religion continues to shape how many people think and understand various aspects of their lives, such as politics and education, good and evil, as well as morality and sexuality, to name a few. These issues play a significant role in the culture and climate within families, schools, and communities.

The level of permissible collaboration between public schools and religious organizations continues to be an issue of national debate. The First Amendment of the United States Constitution states, "Congress [state or local governments, *emphasis added*] shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Various interpretations of the First Amendment by state and federal courts of the literal existence or non-existence of a wall of separation between church and state have been ambiguous at best and continue to be an issue of strong debate.

There exist two camps on each extreme of this argument. Strict separationists consider any form of interaction between public schools and religious organizations to violate the First Amendment. At the other extreme are those who purport that secularization of public schools represents a hostile attack against religion. Over the past half century, the United States Supreme Court has sought to distinguish between permissible and impermissible accommodations under the First Amendment. The longstanding historical argument over the legal parameters of the First Amendment represents the fundamental cause for the polarization between public schools and religious organizations (Vandenberg, 2008).

Typically, public schools have aligned with the strict separationist perspective by adopting a stance of religious neutrality. Schools have attempted to exclude religion as much as possible by simply not conducting prayers, refusing to use religion to teach values, and refraining from funding faith-based social service programs. In this way they cannot be viewed as favoring one religion over another and therefore remain neutral (Monsma, 2006).

In spite of the ongoing national debate, this study found a majority of the informants embraced the idea of collaboration between public schools and religious organizations. However, concerns in regard to the First Amendment were not overlooked. For example Marsha, a school administrator in the focus group commented,

> I believe working with religious organizations could be extremely beneficial for students, but separation of church and state is the law of the land.

Pastors Shannon, Casey, and Corey, clergy in the focus group believed that separatists' sentiments towards religious organizations led educators to be assuming and close-minded in regard to the intent of religious organizations for getting involved in schools.

I discovered that although various religious sects existed (i.e., Baha'i, Catholic, Jehovah's Witnesses) within the community, none of the religious organization clergy advocated for the teaching of formal religious doctrines in public schools. Likewise, no respondent from among school personnel or community leaders felt the involvement of religious organizations would impose or promote sectarian religious beliefs. To the contrary, each expressed belief in the potential benefit collaboration between public schools and religious organizations might lend to their individual organizational success. For example, school informant Sherry (elementary school principal) commented,

> Religious organizations are the center of African American families…I believe the church's ability to impact the quality of education is very high.

Lilly (a high school counselor) commented,

> Involvement of religious organizations in schools has the potential to have a great impact on students' in-school and postschool outcomes.

Likewise, members of the clergy shared an overall consensus in regard to the importance of a quality education. Both Paul and Peter (clergy non-denominational churches) believed that the level of a child's education determines the depth to which the church can teach children about God and the child's ability to understand the Scriptures. John (clergy Baptist church) had a slight dissent in regard to the effect of the quality of education on the development of faith. He commented,

> I concur with the belief that collaboration between the two organizations could indeed improve educational outcomes for youth, however, education does not and should not affect the churches ability to pass on their legacy of faith. The legacy of faith is passed down through the family.

These perceptions and views of collaboration between public schools and religious organizations in this community were not indicative of the broader national debate on the separation of church and state. Instead, perceptions of public school personnel and religious clergy aligned more closely with the early 18th century ideology of merging education with religion in order to achieve social cohesion and to develop a common culture (Rippa, 1997). This perspective seemed to be embedded both in denominational doctrines as well as public school and local government agency practices. This was exemplified by the pervasive presence of religious organizations in government led collaborative initiatives, as well as numerous observed public events in which religious clergy were allowed to openly pray and express tenets of their faith.

I encourage both public school and religious organization personnel not to allow misunderstanding or extremist interpretations of First Amendment principles prevalent in the national debate to stand in the way of establishing meaningful and sustainable

partnerships. Instead, public schools and religious organizations should utilize the fundamental principles of the First Amendment to forge more in-depth understanding of organizational workings and increase cross-cultural competency and sensitivity.

Religious organizations, particularly within the African American community, possess a significant level of influence on the value and perceptions parents hold toward education. Despite declined enrollment, the Black church continues to hold the allegiance of large numbers of African Americans and exerts great influence over their behavior (Billingsly & Caldwell, 1991; Taylor, Lincoln, & Chatters, 2005). Research studies have shown that African American youth maintain a higher level of religious activities and beliefs than their peers (Bachman, Johnston, & O'Malley, 2005; Smith, Faris, Denton, & Regnerus, 2003). Taylor, Lincoln, and Chatters (2005) purported that African American religious organizations possess a unique group or collectivist orientation, which is particularly suited for promoting normative beliefs and behaviors.

Misperception over the permissible level of interaction between church and state can serve as a barrier to forging promising partnerships between public schools and religious organizations. To prevent such barriers, public schools and religious organizations must purposefully seek a shared understanding of the principles of the First Amendment and operate in accordance with the law. Concerns in regard to separation of church and state present some very real challenges, however the potential benefit to students far outweighs the risk.

Implications For Future Research

True collaboration can be difficult to achieve when dominant parties are unsympathetic or lack empathy toward cultures unlike their own. The greatest

opportunities for true collaboration come when school personnel understand the cultural contexts of the communities they serve. Typically, school personnel base their perceptions of differing cultures on assumptions endorsed by institutional beliefs and knowledge (Joshi, Eberly, & Konzal, 2005). Parsley (2007) cautions,

> If your logic is sound, you will reach a correct conclusion, but only if your assumptions are correct. But if one or more of your starting assumptions are false, you can have air tight, full proof reasoning and logic—but come up with a very wrong conclusion." (p. 38)

This study has several implications for future research. First, research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of the Three-Tiered Collaboration Model on collaborative partnerships' ability to develop shared goals and action plans that achieve satisfactory outcomes. I designed the model to serve both as a process-oriented model and an outcome-oriented model. As a process tool it is designed to empower marginalized or disenfranchised members of a community in decision-making processes to solving problems and issues that impacting their community. As an outcome-oriented tool it provides members of a share community with a framework for prioritize efforts, set goals and objectives, and develop measures to monitor their progress.

By allowing traditionally disenfranchised and marginalized groups, particularly religious organizations who serve these groups to participate in the decision-making process, schools increase their cross-cultural competency and expand the pool of programs and resources needed to adequately meet the educational needs of special needs learners.

Second, educators and clergy identified parental apathy towards education as a key factor impacting African American learners educational outcomes. However, further research is needed to examine the impact of pervasive racial and socioeconomic segregation on African American parents socioeconomically disadvantaged participation in their children's education. Efforts to develop effective partnerships between public schools and religious organizations would be well served by capturing the perceptions and viewpoints of parents in regard to school and religious organization effectiveness. Educators and religious clergy must work harder to increase their awareness of the lived experience of these parents and how those experiences shape their perspectives and views.

Finally, additional research is needed to explore factors that would motivate school and religious organizations to actively engage in student-focused partnerships. The disappointing outcomes for African American learners with disabilities (e.g., 47% dropout in 2007) highlight the need for research in the implementation of transition education and practice. Partnerships between schools and religious organizations can led to the development of critical social networks that hold the potential to improve employment, educational, and social opportunities not just for African American learners with disabilities, but for all learners.

Study Limitations

This study comprised a small sample of informants from public schools, religious organizations, and community agencies in a county located in the Southeast region of the United States. Therefore, findings should not be assumed to be representative of cultural groups in areas outside of the region. Findings of the study have limited transferability,

not due to a small sample size or a result of unreliable findings, but due to the variability of local community constructs. Local cultural communities vary drastically based on their unique social and historical contexts that are often unrelated to demographic characteristics. These variations contribute to the formation of cultural values that influence how participants form and interact within particular cultural groups (Wenger, 1998).

Conspicuously absent from the study are the viewpoints of students and parents. I designed the data collection and analysis processes of the study to validate the reliability of the perspectives and viewpoints of informants in regard to issues they believed impact educational outcomes for African American learners with special needs. It would be unfair and irresponsible to assume that the characteristics of African American students and their parents identified by informants represent valid realities without first capturing their viewpoints.

Conclusion

Current educational literature provides a number of well thought-out, theoretically based prescriptions for collaboration (Baker & Stahl, 2004; Blalock, 1996; Uhl & Perez-Selles, 1995). Regrettably, most offer practices representative of the phrase "old wine in new bottles," rooted in the historical educational ideology of assimilation, where well-intended professionals come together to decide what is in the best interest of the clientele from marginalized groups. Typically, these practices further marginalize the voices and experiences of marginalized groups, usually minorities and the socioeconomically disadvantaged.

Increased religious pluralism and racial diversity in the United States call for a paradigm shift in the ideology of public schooling. Education, religious, and community leaders alike must challenge the exclusive ideology of assimilation ingrained in past practices and begin adopting more inclusive practices where the voices and views of marginalized persons can be heard and incorporated in the decision-making process. Collaboration between public schools and religious organizations can offer a practical means for promoting more inclusive attitudes toward differing race, gender, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as increasing cross-cultural competency and sensitivity in the local school community.

Educational researchers can play an essential role in unifying these traditionally polarized groups. Through PAR strategies, researchers can assist participants in establishing starting points for critical reflection, communicate their points of view and understand the viewpoints of others, and build bridges between differing ideological perspectives. Developing meaningful and sustainable partnerships between public schools and religious organizations provides a platform for improving school-community relationships and promoting cultural competence. Most importantly, these partnerships offer a viable means for improving educational outcomes for all learners.

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APPENDIX A

Supreme Court Rulings on Religion in Public Schools

APPENDIX A
Supreme Court Rulings on Religion in Public Schools

"Establishment Clause"		
Year	Supreme Court Case	Ruling
1947	Everson v. Board of Education	Applied the Establishment Clause to state and local governments and announced that the clause erected a "wall of separation" between religion and government; upheld a New Jersey statute that allowed local school boards to reimburse parents for the cost of busing their children to religious schools.
1968	Board of Education v. Allen	Upheld a New York state program that required local school boards to loan textbooks at no cost to students in public and private schools, including religious schools.
1971	Lemon v. Kurtzman	Announced an important Establishment Clause standard, now known as the "Lemon Test": invalidated Rhode Island and Pennsylvania programs that in various ways subsidized instruction in secular subjects in private schools, most of which were religious.
1973	Committee for Public Education v. Nyquist	Invalidated a New York stat program that granted tuition credits to parents of children in private schools, many of which were religious; invalidated grants for maintenance and repair of these schools because the facilities were used for worship and religious

		instruction.
1983	Mueller v. Allen	Upheld a Minnesota statute that allowed parents to deduct from their state income taxes any money they spent on tuition, textbooks, and transportation for their children attending elementary and secondary schools, including religious schools.
1985	Aguilar v. Felton	Invalidated a federal program that paid New York public school teachers to provide remedial secular instruction to students living in low-income areas. This instruction was provided to students in both public and private schools, a substantial number of which were religious.
1985	Grand Rapids School District v. Ball	Invalidated two Grand Rapids, Mich. School programs that provided public funds for supplemental secular instruction in private schools, many of which were religious.
1988	Bowen v. Kendrick	Upheld the eligibility of religious groups to receive funding under the 1981 Adolescent Family Life Act, a federal program that awards grants to private groups that provide sex education.
1997	Agostini v. Felton	Overruled Aguilar v. Felton, thus upholding a federal program that offered secular remedial services inside New York City religious schools; more generally held that the

		government may directly provide aid to religious institutions when the aid is secular and the government provides safeguards to ensure that the recipients use the aid for secular purposes.
2000	Mitchell v. Helms	Upheld a federal program that provided instructional materials and equipment to public and private schools, including religious schools, that educated children who live in low-income neighborhoods.
2002	Zelman v. Simmons-Harris	Upheld a Cleveland, OH, program that gave vouchers to low-income parent who chose to send their children to eligible private schools, most of which were religious.
2007	Hein v. Freedom From Religion Foundation	Denied taxpayers the right to challenge the executive branch's use of discretionary funds for programs that support religious groups.
"Free-Exercise Clause"		
Year	Supreme Court Case	Ruling
1940	Minersville School District v. Gobitis	Ruled that the Free Exercise Clause did not give religiously motivated public school students the right to opt out of a compulsory flag-salute ceremony.
1943	West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette	Overturned Minersville v. Gobitis (1940). Upheld the rights of students who were Jehovah's Witnesses to refuse to salute the American Flag, affirming right of students to resist compulsory recitation of

		official orthodoxy.
1948	McCollum v. Board of Education	Prohibited use of public schools for voluntary, privately funded religious classes as violation of the Establishment Clause.
1952	Zorach v. Clauson	Allowed public schools to excuse students to attend religious classes away from school property.
1962	Engel v. Vitale	Prohibited recitation of a school-sponsored, nonsectarian prayer as violation of Establishment Clause ban on government creating and sponsoring a religious activity.
1963	Abington School District v. Schempp	Prohibiting a program of daily Bible reading in public schools, ruled that government action must have a predominantly secular purpose.
1968	Epperson v. Arkansas	Overturned statute prohibiting the teaching of evolution, on basis that government sought to ban material objectionable to a particular religion.
1969	Tinker v. Des Moines School District	Upholding students' right to wear armbands protesting the Vietnam War, ruled that school authorities cannot suppress expression unless it causes material disruption or violates the rights of others.
1972	Wisconsin v. Yoder	Involving Old Order Amish, ruled that the Free Exercise Clause limited the state's power to require children to attend school.
1981	Widmar v. Vincent	Ruled that a state university could not exclude a student group from using school buildings on the basis of the

		group's religious viewpoints.
1987	Edwards v. Aguillard	Overturned statute requiring teaching of both evolution and creationism, concluding that the law impermissibly promoted a particular religious belief.
1990	Board of Education v. Mergens	Upholding the Equal Access Act, ruled that high schools, like universities, had an obligation to provide equal access to public facilities to all groups, including religious organizations.
1992	Lee v. Weisman	Prohibited school-sponsored prayer delivered by invited clergy at school commencement, on the grounds students were being forced to participate in a religious ceremony.
1995	Rosenberger v. University of Virginia	Ruled that the Free Speech Clause required the stat university to provide the same financial subsidy for student Christian publication as for all other publications.
2000	Santa Fe Independent School District v. Doe	Ruled that public schools may not sponsor student recited prayer at athletic contest or other school events.
2001	Good News Club v. Milford Central School District	Held that Free Speech Clause prohibited an elementary school from excluding an evangelical Christian program from a list of approved after school activities.

APPENDIX B

Field Observation Form

APPENDIX B
Field Observation Form

Site: _____
Document #: _____
Date: _____
Time: _____

Reflections	Targeted Questions	Summary of Targeted Questions	Issues/Themes
	Describe the site observed.		
	What people, events, or situations were involved?		
	Which research questions did the contact bear on most centrally?		
	What new speculations or hunches about the field situation were suggested by the contact?		
	Where should I place the most energy during the next contact or visit?		
	Were there any other salient, interesting, illuminating, or important points observed in this contact?	1. 2. 3. 4. 5.	

APPENDIX C

Interview Domain Questions/Topics

APPENDIX C
Interview Domain Questions/Topics

Time of interview: _____
Interview Code:_____
Date: _____
Place: _____
(Setting and context)
Interviewer: _____
Interviewee: _____
(Brief description of interviewee)

Domain/Topics: School Personnel

1. What impact do you believe activities of religious organizations have on the schools ability to provide African American youth with a quality education? How do their activities impede school efforts?

2. What do you think of the statement that, "character and moral education are essential to a student's academic success?" Who do you believe should shoulder the responsible for character and moral education of school age youth?

3. Based on your experiences, What area(s), academic and/or social do you feel need the greatest attention in order to improve educational outcomes for African American youth? Explain.

4. What influence do you think the culture and climate of schools have on the academic performance of African Americans? What influence do you think conditions in the home and in the community have on the attitude of African American youth about learning and school?

5. What do you believe religious organizations have done well in regard to assisting schools and families in helping African American youth succeed in school? In what areas do you feel they could improve their efforts?

6. What do you feel needs to happen to improve collaboration between schools and religious organizations? How do believe this collaboration will benefit African American youth?

7. Is there anything else you would like to share in relation to activities of religious organizations and/or working collaboratively with them to educate African American youth?

Interview Domain Questions/Topics

Time of interview: _____
Interview Code:_____
Date: _____
Place: _____
(Setting and context)
Interviewer: _____
Interviewee: _____
(Brief description of interviewee)

Domain/Topics: Religious Organization Clergy

1. What impact do you believe the quality of public education have on the church's ability to pass down their legacy of your faith?

2. Would do you think of the statement that, "character and moral education is essential to a students' academic success?" Who do you believe should shoulder the responsible for character and moral education of school age youth?

3. Based on your experiences, What area(s) academic and/or social do you feel need the greatest attention in order to improve educational outcomes for African American youth? Explain.

4. What influence do you think the culture and climate of schools have on the academic performance of African Americans? What influence do you think conditions in the home and in the community have on the attitude of African American youth about learning and school?

5. What do you believe schools have done well in regard to assisting African American youth succeed in school? In what areas do you feel they could improve their efforts?

6. What do you feel needs to happen to improve collaboration between schools and religious organizations? How do believe this collaboration will benefit African American youth?

7. Is there anything else you would like to share in relation to activities of the schools and/or working collaboratively with them to educate African American youth?

Interview Domain Questions/Topics

Time of interview: _____
Interview Code:_____
Date: _____
Place: _____
(Setting and context)
Interviewer: _____
Interviewee: _____
(Brief description of interviewee)

Domain/Topics: Community Organization Leaders

1. What impact does the quality of public education have on outcomes for African American youth in the community? What impact does the activities of religious organizations have?

2. What are your thoughts or ideas on the statement that, "character and moral education are essential to a students' academic success?" Who do you believe should be responsible for character and moral education of school age youth?

3. Based on your experiences, What area(s), academic and/or social do you feel need the greatest attention in order to improve educational outcomes for African American youth?

4. What influence do you think the culture and climate of schools have on the academic performance of African Americans? What influence do you think conditions in the home and in the community have on the attitude of African American youth about learning and school?

5. What do you believe schools have done well in regard to assisting African American youth succeed in school? What do you believe religious organizations have done well? In what areas do you feel they each could improve their efforts?

6. What do you feel needs to happen to improve collaboration between schools, community, and religious organizations? How do believe this collaboration will benefit African American youth?

7. Is there anything else you would like to share in relation to educating African American youth and/or working collaboratively with schools and religious organizations?

APPENDIX D

Key Informant Relevant Statements

APPENDIX D
Key Informant Relevant Statements

School Staff (SS)

Question 1 - What impact do you believe activities of religious organizations have on the schools ability to provide African American youth with a quality education?

Informant	Relevant Statements	Remarks
LILLY	• The school's must recognize the significant role of religious organizations as advocates for families. • She (the superintendent) recognizes that religious organizations impact the community. She know if she is to get the language out about the importance of funding schools, importance of friends, the importance of family, she needed to touch the ministers of every congregation.	*While religious leaders are seen as influential in the community in regards of impacting the moral and social issues in the community. No mention was made of their potential or need to be involved in decision-making processes or proactive activities, instead only as responsive agents.
SALLY	• The core of the community is the church. The church is the pendulum between the schools and families. • Families look to the church to solve problems.	Although she stated, "I have not seen it personally. I have seen members of organizations be active in school, but I have not seen one religious organization taking an active role in the school."
KELLY	• Religious organizations come from a positive place. • They support African American youth in terms of monetary and moral support. • The church is a vessel of communication. The church can promote a positive message about the importance of school.	*Mention is made of the church's potential to positively impact the quality of education, however, very little mention was made of actual activities the church engages in to impact educational outcomes.
SHERRY	• African American religious leaders have a really major impact on the community, we look to them to help us: dry down hostile situations, identify issues that affect the bond issue. • Because religious organizations are such a center of family in the African American home I believe the ability the church has to impact the quality of education is really high. • They can provide motivation,	

LILLY	• The school's must recognize the significant role of religious organizations as advocates for families. • She (the superintendent) recognizes that religious organizations impact the community. She know if she is to get the language out about the importance of funding schools, importance of friends, the importance of family, she needed to touch the ministers of every congregation.	*While religious leaders are seen as influential in the community in regards of impacting the moral and social issues in the community. No mention was made of their potential or need to be involved in decision-making processes or proactive activities, instead only as responsive agents.
SALLY	• The core of the community is the church. The church is the pendulum between the schools and families. • Families look to the church to solve problems.	Although she stated, "I have not seen it personally. I have seen members of organizations be active in school, but I have not seen one religious organization taking an active role in the school."
KELLY	• Religious organizations come from a positive place. • They support African American youth in terms of monetary and moral support. • The church is a vessel of communication. The church can promote a positive message about the importance of school.	*Mention is made of the church's potential to positively impact the quality of education, however, very little mention was made of actual activities the church engages in to impact educational outcomes.
SHERRY	• African American religious leaders have a really major impact on the community, we look to them to help us: dry down hostile situations, identify issues that affect the bond issue. • Because religious organizations are such a center of family in the African American home I believe the ability the church has to impact the quality of education is really high. • They <u>can</u> provide motivation, offer encouragement, <u>can</u> offer mentorship, which is critical to the family when there is a missing parent in the nuclear family. So, I	

Question 2- What do you think of the statement that, "character and moral education are essential to a student's academic success?"		
Informant	Relevant Statements	Remarks
LILLY	• That's it in a nutshell. For example, I went into in-school detention classroom; there was a picture on the wall that said, "Live to Your Dreams." I asked the kids, "What does that mean, live to your dreams? One student replied, "oh that's just a pretty picture on the wall." Another student replied, "No, I can't live to my dreams if I'm gonna sit in detention hall because I'm not in the classroom getting my education so that I can live to my dream." • Character and moral education is a connection to what I do now and what I want to do with my future. • If students cannot connect the need to be honest, for being punctual at school to getting to class on time, to making decisions, how good decisions lead to rewards and bad decisions lead to negative consequences. • I think it is important (character and moral educaton), I think there connection [to student academic success].	
SALLY	• I can answer that 100%! I think its crucial. If character and moral values are not in place for a student they are not being productive members in class or society. • If teachers are not taking time to speak and discuss and establish character and moral values or support those positive ones they are missing out on a fundamental basis humanity and living with others. • Expectations should match the character and morals students need when they become adults.	Many times they (students) know what is wrong, but do not have the moral evidence to do it. Many of them look to others that entice them to do morally wrong, such as high end influences participating in those activities that may look appealing but be morally wrong.
KELLY	• I believe character and moral education is important because its something that has a strong influence in developing the types of individuals they will become.	
SHERRY	• I believe it is essential. That's the piece (character and moral education) significant right now in many of our younger children as they are growing up and developing a sense of what is right	

and wrong.

Who do you believe should shoulder the responsible for character and moral education of school age youth?

LILLY	• That starts at home. In the family. • The Bible teaches that character should be passed on from generation to generation. So parents have the duty of teaching their children character and morals. • If parents don't pass methods (character and morals) on, the kids won't know how to pass it on	*Future implications: How or what has lead to the decline of character and moral education from an older generation to the younger generation?
SALLY	• It should be the done at home, but we know it's not. That is evident across the board in America, regardless of socio-economic status. • Responsibility has been passed to movie stars and even to President Obama. However, to me it begins at home and if it is not beginning at home it is the schools responsibility to try and provide it as best as possible since they spend the most hours a day with the kids. • Third, would be the church, not because its least important, but because number of hours spends at church is exceeded by that of home and school. Often times you see a correlation between kids who are very much involved in their church, parents are very involved in their lives. (See Noel's comments question 3b).	Churches could help the school establish character and moral kick-off's at the beginning of the school year, supporting schools in holding assemblies, bringing in speakers, holding functions or incentives to model good behavior and good citizenry. Churches could support schools and schools could support churches.
KELLY	• I think it should be done at the home.	I think character and moral education at home is where we are slipping most. We have a large element of single parents and single working parents; therefore students don't get a lot of character and moral development at home. Many students are basically on their own.
SHERRY	• We have always believed that the family should be the first person to provide that moral and character education, however today it has become the responsibility of the church and school.	Many of our students come from hostile home or community environments. We (schools) try to this with character education in the

	classroom, but I think it should be done across the board (home, school, and community) so we can instill skills in our children that help them feel good about themselves that they can be successful. Schools have to provide character and moral education to help level the playing field for those students not receiving character and moral education in the home. * Schools have increasingly become the focal point of social and moral education, at the same time, they meet increasingly rigorous state and federal academic performance requirements. Research has proven that variables of the home and community, which are beyond the schools control, greatly influence students' outcomes.

Question 3- Based on your experiences, What area(s) of academics do you feel need the greatest attention in order to improve educational outcomes for African American youth? Explain.

Informant	Relevant Statements	Remarks
LILLY	No Response	
SALLY	• As a English teacher generally I see it literacy (illiteracy) as number one. Not just the ability to read ad write, it's the ability to be able to understand what you are processing.	We have low ACT, low LEAP, and GED scores simply because of comprehension skills. It's not that they don't have a desire to read or want to read; it's just that they don't have the fluency skills. Only 5% approx. of my 8th graders read for pleasure. There is a really big problem in understanding the idea of code-switching—not writing or speaking to someone who you don't know without slang. I appreciate everything about my kids, they don't understand that they cannot write or respond to test questions the way they speak to friends or at home.
KELLY	• Certainly the reading component, reading is the basis for everything. If a student can't read he or she becomes frustrated and they can't achieve and begin to act out in class.	Reading is key. Reading should be developed before a student enters school. I think its very, very important that mom and dad, aunty or grandma whoever it is needs to sit down and read with their children.
SHERRY	• Parenting skills training and mentoring is an important piece that is missing, especially with the absence of father in the home, because these can have a positive impact on student attitude towards learning and on student outcomes when pursing their education.	Help parents to teach their children patience and a sense of acceptance of failure, and how to improve when they have failed. I think religious organizations and different groups can provide encourage and promote the message that education is important. Also, promote intrinsic values other than the popular cultural values of outward

		appearances (i.e.; hair, nails, clothing, etc.)

Based on your experiences, What area(s) of social skills do you feel need the greatest attention in order to improve educational outcomes for African American youth? Explain.

LILLY	No Response	
SALLY	• This is a touchy, touchy subject sex education is number one. I also hear a lot about drinking and drugging.	We have a high number of teenage parents (male/female; pregnant or already have children). Its kind of an acceptable norm amongst the community. It's the elephant in the room that now one talks about. I don't see anybody being pro-active with these young men and women. There is no curriculum (i.e. science) being taught to students about their sexuality. Young women are being left with absent fathers and they go to the same school as the father who has no participation in the child's life or even claim the child. Perhaps this could be a combined effort with religious organizations.
KELLY	• The one that's most visible is the lack of respect for each other.	They (students) are so hateful to one another. They constantly tell each other to shut-up or call each other the "N" (nigger) word. They say they are just joking.
SHERRY	• Respect. Teachers use to be highly regarded in the community. Some how they don't have the same respect they have had in the past. • I think we have recognized that the issue is not necessarily racial, but economical; one of social class versus skin color or ethnicity. The value or lack of that social classes place on education. For example, persons of poverty tend to value extrinsic tangible	Although churches can play a significant role in promoting a intrinsic message and improve the level of student engagement in school there appears to be little carryover from what is being preached on Sunday to what is exercised on Monday and

	things, whereas middle class may place value on more intrinsic things like personal improvement, motivation. So activities like study and homework are important activities.	Tuesday. Though some students and their families are very involved in church on Sunday there is little evidence of it on Monday. (See SHERRY Comments question 1).

Question 4 - What influence do you think the culture and climate of schools have on the academic performance of African Americans?

Informant	Relevant Statements	Remarks
LILLY	• I don't think the school climate hampers their success. For many of the kids the school environment is a safe haven for them. Some never hear a kind word and are constantly scolded for the least of things. Some live in homes where the common language is cuss words. • Some students don't feel that they are a part of the whole, they want to be successful and they become frustrated with themselves. • Some feel that school is a threat to them.	Some students attend because it's a safe place and provides them with a meal.
SALLY	• This is the focus at our school this year, the culture and climate at school. However, nothing in education is ever done overnight. It takes years.	It is in our best interest as teachers and administrators to have a cohesive, positive culture and climate in schools for ourselves as well as students to work in, because if we are not happy, how are they (students) happy.
KELLY	• Culture in school is a major influence in whether a school is going to be successful or not. I think that with a strong school culture you have strong parent involvement. Parent involvement has a major impact on what happens in the schools unfortunately we don't have the parents being involved in our schools.	By this time last year I was drained because of the negativity in school and many of the teachers myself included had called in for sick or personal leave days. By May many of us were in tears. Some parents who come from low social economic backgrounds don't feel like they can contribute to their child's schooling. However, they are just as important as other parents and we'd like to have them in our classroom.
SHERRY	• I think the culture and climate is effected mainly by the fact that many of our teachers come from middle-class and the children they teach are from poverty or from lower income. So we (students and teachers) don't always understand or relate to cultures different from their own.	Having different cultures can be a good thing because that's life (students and teachers) can discover common ground.

		However, it can also be fertile ground for miscommunication between students and teachers, school and family. The question is how do we overcome this problem? Building relationships with kids is most critical thing schools can do to help students so they can feel the climate is supportive and that they can take risk in learning without fear of being ostracized.
What influence do you think conditions in the home and in the community have on the attitude of African American youth about learning and school?		
LILLY	• Kids are aware when education is not important to parents, and so they don't perform in school because the expectation is not there. • Parents force some kids to go to school in order to receive their "crazy check" (Soc. Security Check for students labeled as ADD or ADHD. Parents are eligible to receive monthly payments from the federal government to cover the added expenses to assist them meet the needs of their disabled child).	When education is at the bottom of parents priority list students don't take a interest in it or give their best effort. I'm hearing students constantly tell me, I am like this (ADD, ADHD), when I come to school I behave like that.
SALLY	• Conditions at home regardless of race are going to affect everything. I think depending on the whether or not there are enough resources in terms of paying rent, mortgage is huge because it determines whether parents' especially single mothers work two or three jobs.	I've discovered however, that parents of often work multiple jobs to provide their child with stuff and not taking the time to realize that the child needs someone to read to them, or ask them about their homework, or just listen to them. That basically discourages them because they don't feel supported at home. Some students remain after school for tutoring programs because they are intrinsically motivated to do well.
KELLY	• The lack of priority on education at home gives students a false concept of how we get things in life. The correlation is that they always get what they want somehow, I'm not wanting for nothing.	For example, I'm going to get the latest iPod, it does not matter that I'm on free lunch. I still get the material things I want so how does an education get me money?
SHERRY	• Expectations are set on being good in school because you are suppose to, are to pass the LEAP so you can go to 9th grade and eventually get out of my	

	house. • The emphasis at home for many of the parents particularly those from low socio-economic backgrounds tend to be focused more on physical appearance versus improvement in learning. There seems to be a lack of interest by some groups who may benefit from things remaining the same.	There are not a lot of my students who attend my class that are really active in everything that going on or have aspiration beyond the basics.

Question 5- What do you believe religious organizations have done well in regard to assisting schools and families in helping African American youth succeed in school?

Informant	Relevant Statements	Remarks
LILLY	• Some churches have adopted schools, others have programs in the church to give students outlets so they can talk about things, and they have set up after school tutoring and homework supervision. Some ministries have involved themselves in mentoring programs.	I would consider this a positive but not enough.
SALLY	• I can't attest to this question because I have not seen a whole lot.	
KELLY	• I think that religious organizations have done a awful lot with discipline, they have come back to support our students.	
SHERRY	• There are a small number of churches who are doing some wonderful things such as providing opportunities for tutoring and assisting schools with issues at school.	

In what areas do you feel they could improve their efforts?

LILLY	• I feel to get to the core of problems impacting student achievement churches have to start working with the parents.	Some parents want things don't feel good about themselves They want things but they don't how to get them, they are not familiar with resources that can help. As members of the local church, congregations must reach out and send a message that they care through relationship building.
SALLY	• A meeting to successfully establish common goals, determine what resources organizations have to bring to the table, and select a common goal for the group, and develop a level of respect for all and don't try to control. I feel like you have two strong organizations (churches and schools) who can see to those things happening.	We have high drop-out rates among African American students.
KELLY	• I think they could have a greater role by promoting the importance of staying in school in their sermons. • We in the school community need to be	

	able to call upon preachers and pastors and ask them to help us out. For example, making home visits because they may have a greater influence upon some families. • Increase clergy capacity to work with schools so they can be more proactive, and be more supportive of educating students.	Sometimes they come in with an adversarial stance before talking to us.
SHERRY	• I don't think churches have done good enough job at assisting kids with developing appropriate behaviors for school. • I think small neighborhood churches can help kids, however, they appear to have little influence because we still see the prevalence of the drug culture and gangs of kids who terrorize areas in the community. • I think they could have a greater influence, but many have lay pastors who work to take care of their families and cannot focus full-time as pastors addressing the mission of the church or issues in the community. • Catholic Priest are typically not involved in public schools even though there is a large population of Catholic kids in public schools, instead they engage primarily in their own church-based schools.	Students who attend Catholic churches could benefit from their priest involvement in public schools.

Question 6 - What do you feel needs to happen to improve collaboration between schools and religious organizations?

Informant	Relevant Statements	Remarks
LILLY	• Schools and churches need to sit down and talk to identify problems and possible solutions and action plans to solve the problem. • Churches need to come to the school and let them know what they have to offer and find out what their (schools) needs are and how they can help. • The focus has to be on the child, not a select few based on race but all children.	
SALLY	• How wouldn't it benefit them!? Any collaboration that can bring resources together would be great, especially in the area of getting kids to respect themselves more in terms of wanting to learn and read and do more and discover more and be creative and be curious about life.	
KELLY	• More contact, specifically between school administration and clergy on a regular basis like once a quarter to inform pastors of what's happening in the school community. I think this needs to be done on a regular and consistent basis.	
SHERRY	• It can help but help. Because positive collaborative involvement by its nature shows interest and increases the level of motivation.	

How do believe this collaboration will benefit African American youth?

LILLY	No Response	
SALLY	No Response	
KELLY	• It benefits the system. There are several pastors who have had life experiences that could highlight the importance of their faith and how education can help youth.	
SHERRY	• In this community it can play a vital role in pulling kids out of poverty and changing the mindset of what's important in life.	

Question 7- Is there anything else you would like to share in relation to activities of religious organizations and/or working collaboratively with them to educate African American youth?

Informant	Relevant Statements	Remarks
LILLY	• I would love to work further with your committee on this topic. • We have to get solutions. We have to find out why so many of our black males are incarcerated. What is missing in the home that we need to put back so that our kids can feel that they are important? • Although we have families with single moms and dads…there are many great men and women who were raised by single parents.	We have to put those important basics of God back in the family.
SALLY	• I think in the end schools and religious organizations have to be open-minded to the needs of students. Everyone has to be on one page. • Typically, most religions have a common message of being a good person. • Schools and religious organizations should come together on a set of common or core values and leave their personal agendas out.	
KELLY	• All the religious leaders I have meet have been sincre, they are very honest, and they are good people. Even school board members must work harder at collaborating with religious organizations, like occasionally attending services to improve relationships and be proactive instead of reactive.	
SHERRY	No Response	

Religious Organization Clergy (ROC)

Question 1 - What impact do you believe the quality of public education have on the church's ability to pass down their legacy of your faith?

Informant	Relevant Statements	Remarks
PAUL	• The quality of education is very important as to how we (ministers) are able to educate the children.	The level that they (schools) bring the children to gives them the ability to understand what we are teaching about God. One of the things the church battles with is how far we can bring the teaching of the Lord if they have no education or ability to understand and learn.
PETER	• We have had a good working relationship, but there are definite conflicts in areas of curriculum in the school and what the church teaches.	* How do we identify our differences and similarities?
JOHN	• Of course the schools have a direct impact on the churches' ability to pass down their legacy of faith. Unfortunately, today most schools have a negative impact on the churches' ability to pass down their legacy of faith. • The legacy of faith is passed down through family. Schools are structured to focus on academics not any particular religion or denomination. Education does not and should not effect the churches ability to pass on their legacy of faith.	For these reasons: 1. Schools can either reinforce or they will subvert the values that parents teach their children. 2. Schools are becoming increasingly secular. Students who are Christians feel they have the liberty to exercise their faith in school but must leave their Christianity at the door.

Question 2- Would do you think of the statement that, "character and moral education is essential to a students' academic success?"		
Informant	Relevant Statements	Remarks
PAUL	• I think character and moral education is very important to the child. You can't have one without the other [character and moral education and academic education].	However, simply providing good moral education does not ensure that students will act in good moral character.
PETER	• Character and moral education is essential because children are more than just a mind, but they live in a society governed by laws. So they could succeed in getting an education, but it must impact their character, morals and values in or for them to succeed in society.	Kids can score high on test and get a wonderful education, but without sound character and moral they can ultimately fail in life.
JOHN	• Students with good character experience fewer problems yielding and respecting authority. I believe good moral character will increase the attentiveness of students in school and increase their respect for those in authority.	
Who do you believe should shoulder the responsible for character and moral education of school age youth?		
PAUL	• I believe that begins in the home with the parents. We teach this in the church that it is the responsibility of the parents to educate their children about morals and values.	We tell our parents that they cannot just drop their child off at church and say, "all right teach my child and give them scriptures."
PETER	• I believe first of all the responsibility lies at home.	It it's the churches responsibility to the children that attend our church to conduct ourselves in accordance to the morals and values of our faith, because as a church we are family of believers and bare some responsibility for one another, children included.
	• Second, schools also carry a large part of the responsibility since kids spend more time with teachers than with parents.	
	• The church also bears some of the responsibility. But we can't underestimate the fact that schools today have a greater influence and time in the lives of children than do churches and parents.	Parents must be the primary influence of a child's morals and values.
	• "I am only speaking into the child's life for about thirty to forty-five minutes a week.	According to some statistics

		Who can have the greatest influence in their lives? Me or the teacher who speaks to the student thirty to forty hours a week. Now I say the teacher."	schools have a greater influence with children that do the home, therefore must carry a greater responsibility for teaching character and morals.
JOHN	•	Parents should shoulder the responsibility for teaching children good character and morals. The church serves as a support to parents in training their children, but the primary responsibility falls on the parents.	Many children are not being churched, those who do attend spend no more than an hour or two there at best. Those who have the greatest access will have the greater influence Churches must empower parents to impact the morals and values in their children's lives. It's important to emphasize that its not just low socioeconomic and single parent homes whose children need this education. Two parent and well to do parents are equally guilty of failing in this area.

Question 3- Based on your experiences, What area(s) academic do you feel need the greatest attention in order to improve educational outcomes for African American youth? Explain.		
Informant	Relevant Statements	Remarks
PAUL	• I really don't have much knowledge about that area. I can't speak to that.	
PETER	• First of all, reading and secondly, math is two areas that they fail and hurt in the most.	Books and reading is not how students interact in the African American community and so therefore reading is so vital to their success. When a child is not encouraged to read, not encouraged to get books, then that's where they are going to fall behind.
JOHN	• Schools are doing a better job at getting students involved (career options in high school), but must continue involving them in the learning process. • Smaller student teacher ratios. Improve race ratios (# of diverse staff to the diversity of students).	
Based on your experiences, What area social skills do you feel need the greatest attention in order to improve educational outcomes for African American youth? Explain.		
PAUL	• There is a lot that needs to be done, wall that need to come down. Social learning through interaction.	There is so much segregation here, you don't see to much mixing. There is little mixing socially between black and white, mostly in the church. We have two social class side by side who don't come together: black and white as well as the well off and the not so well-offs.
PETER	• To social skills that have to be restored is the reinforcement of the importance of marriage, family; the way a man treats women, the way a husband interacts with a wife, the way a wife interacts with her husband.	This is the work of the church, we all worship the Lord, through that we could have some social inside and outside the church. People have

JOHN	• Students need things like recreational opportunities to participate in physical activities, family oriented activities, and more interactions with a more diverse population of the community.	become comfortable with things the way they were. To many of our kids do not have examples either at home, and often times in the community. We must find ways to teach those skills in the schools because it's not being learned in the home. I would like to write a curriculum and assist with bringing stable black families in the schools that students would interact with.

Question 4- What influence do you think the culture and climate of schools have on the academic performance of African Americans?

Informant	Relevant Statements	Remarks
PAUL	• The schools need a little more discipline and more control. At times the schools hands are tied, and they are not able to bring the discipline they want. • Its important that the child has instruction from home on how they are to conduct themselves at school, the purpose of that the authority of the parents goes with the child to the school.	I don't believe it is the teachers fault, I believe it's the rules of the society now. I've heard stories from teachers at the church about how they correct children and the child goes home and tells the parent and the parent berates the teacher for correcting the child.
PETER	• Schools have often conformed to the value systems of the media that is around them, therefore, they re-enforce many of the values that they are seen and heard from the latest rapper, the latest hip-hop, the latest television program.	We teach parents of children in our Sunday School classes that the teacher is the authority of that child and the parent has to back the teacher for the child to learn the lesson.
JOHN	• Individuality [lack of cohesiveness] in the way teacher effects the application of rules and how students respond to rules. • Teachers should model respecting authority by their attitudes about the authority they are under and how they follow their directives. • Technology can support learning, however it can also be a distraction when used inappropriately.	For example, because homosexual behavior is accepted in the media it is now accepted in the schools.

		The school system does nothing to address inappropriate sexual behaviors. The way they handle it is doing nothing for fear of a lawsuit. Unless we have a spiritual awakening in our society that is going to affect schools. For example, just as children can pit parent against parent when they fail to be consistent students do the same in school.

What influence do you think conditions in the home and in the community have on the attitude of African American youth about learning and school?

PAUL	• When the church demonstrates a structure of learning through church and Sunday School in how they teach and discipline it carries over to the school.	I'm proud of our Christian teachers that teach in public schools. They serve the Lord by bringing their Christian beliefs and attitudes to the school. When they do the kids benefit. They are able to teach in a Christ-like manner, demonstrating Christian values to the children. For example, I just talked with a single mother who has four children, she is having to work two jobs to make ends meet. How can she give much attention to time to her child's schooling, homework and extracurricular activities?
PETER	• In reality parents teach intentional or by default. With 70% or more of African American children growing up in single parent households many of our parents teach by default because of the demands of single parenting.	
JOHN	• The overall level of parent involvement is low. Too many parents fail to evaluate progress reports or report cards. Parents fail to get involved in Parent Teacher Organizations (PTO) or even attend open house.	To many African American homes because of absent

	parents teach by default that education is not important because they don't reinforce the value of education. Having or lacking parental involvement has little to do with parents' socioeconomic status or single or two parent home status.

Question 5- What do you believe schools have done well in regard to assisting African American youth succeed in school?		
Informant	Relevant Statements	Remarks
PAUL	• The schools are constantly adjusting trying to find a model that's good for to developing attitudes of the children and the atmosphere in the schools.	
PETER	• I applaud every dedicated teacher who commits to making a difference. I believe their commitment and compassion makes a difference.	
JOHN	No Response	
In what areas do you feel they could improve their efforts?		
PAUL	No Response	
PETER	No Response	
JOHN	• Black history should be integrated in the curriculum for all students. Not just in a Black History Club.	Few members in the community have knowledge of the contribution of Black Americans such as the Tuskegee Airmen during WWII.

Question 6- What do you feel needs to happen to improve collaboration between schools and religious organizations?

Informant	Relevant Statements	Remarks
PAUL	• We have not really done anything directly related with the schools. We could have a better collaboration with them. • Collaboration should begin in the lower grades and not wait until students are in high school. • I would like to see churches and schools work closely together.	How we can do that I am not sure. The schools must find ways to collaborate and come along side as we partner in efforts the church is doing as well. The school has to find ways to support programs in the church.
PETER	• I believe partnerships efforts has to focus on spiritual leaders who are committed to making a difference. • Their must be a bridge built so that pastors might be willing to show interest in the school.	A lot of the time pastors only hear about he problems, when the kids are finally kicked our of schools.
JOHN	• Religious organizations need to get involved with the school board. The should create a forum to speak with the superintendent to get information about what's going on so we can exchange information.	Schools must make the church a vital part of the educational community and begin to respect spiritual leaders. For example, pastor's could receive copies of report cards and progress reports. That would help eliminate a lot of inappropriate behaviors in the classroom. Barriers of racial, socioeconomic, and close-mindedness will need to be broken down.

How do you believe this collaboration will benefit African American youth?

PAUL	• I think modeling Christian morals and behaviors with in the schools and with the kids would influence their attitudes and behavior. • It would introduce the schools to another aspect of the community and demonstrate unity to children and the community.
PETER	No Response
JOHN	No Response

Question 7- Is there anything else you would like to share in relation to activities of the schools and/or working collaboratively with them to educate African American youth?

Informant	Relevant Statements	Remarks
PAUL	• We have attempted to reach out to other ministries to work together. We don't just say, "Ok, well my message is the only message." I believe that if you reach a person in his area they will be prone to listen to you about the gospel.	
PETER	• I believe we all have a responsibility to our children. We need to provide summer camp programs where we work with kids for eight hours a day for eight weeks in the summer to impart values that help them in their education. Expose them to different environments through field trips. These types of thing every church in the community could do. • We can collaborate with schools in order to provide our kids with after school tutoring and other wholesome activities that enrich kids education. • Team work makes the dream work an together everybody accomplishes more.	
JOHN	• Churches have to be more proactive. We can't be afraid or embarrassed by past experiences that may appear shameful, but in reality help us to come to where we are today. • We have a tendency to hide our mistakes from our youth. We fail to be transparent revealing our failures as well as our success.	

Community Leaders (CL)

Question 1 - What impact does the quality of public education have on outcomes for African American youth in the community?

Informant	Relevant Statements	Remarks
MITCH	• I don't think that public schools focus on the fact that there is a great need for diverse education. Financial means, developmental differences, all of these thing play a part in how students achieve academically. • Students whose attitudes misalign with that of teachers/educators are often labeled or thought of negatively. I'm not talking about medical labeling, but label society place on persons because of their position or lifestyle.	To be a fine-tuned institution, you don't mask the problem with one solution. You don't reach individuals with varied backgrounds with one pathway. African American student often act out not because they are no brilliant, but because they are seeking their own level of understanding and the teachers don't quite get them (See Noel, socio-economic diversity). A younger sibling of a student labeled as a troublemaker often receives the same label simply by virtue of relation. Then there is labeling based on skin color. Its amazing the preferential treatment light-skinned African Americans receive. If they are bright enough. They are readily accepted by the white society.
CHIP	• When you talk about a good quality education helps students develop reading, writing skills. Unfortunately when we talk about a quality education we are not talking about college for a lot of kids. • The impact of a quality education has on the African Americans is vital in that it provides opportunities and hope for a productive life. Unfortunately, we don't see a lot them get that because they don't stay in school long enough.	It impacts the community tremendously when you have kids who cannot express or advocate for themselves verbally or in writing (See Dyer). Their inability to read, speak, and write leads to negative stereotyping and label based on their inability to represent themselves in a positive manner, which has a lot to do with their educational levels.

What impact does the activities of religious organizations have?

MITCH	• In relation to in-school and postschool outcomes for African American youth I would have to say that religious organizations have the potential to have a great positive impact. However, currently I would have to say that they have a negative effect. • Ministers and Pastors want to play a part in the school environment to help the young black males.	I don't think that a majority of religious organizations are tooled to hand out a positive image. For example, a group of ministers wanted to mainstream their churches to be more productive in their community to help build a better community, but they didn't have an idea on how to do it. Poor leadership often time sends out negative messages.
CHIP	• I can tell you the impact I believe that religious organizations can have, because there are not many religious organizations that are directly involved with kids in the community. Nor do we have a lot of kids who go to church. • A lot religious organizations have great programs with their congregations, but they don't partner with schools. • Churches could have a greater impact on how kids perform in school if the doors were open and they were invited to address problems before it gets to the point where kids had to be put out on the street.	The hardest thing to get some ministers to understand is why they can't bring their Bible into the school. I try to explain, "whether you carry a Bible or not kids know you are a minister." * Very few if any religious organizations have a written vision or mission statement that speaks to the direct of their organization. Likewise the question of how can ministers work with schools without compromising their religious traditions and practices. Some ministers have stepped out

	and taken an active role, more pastors could take an active role. I'm fighting with pastors now to join with me to get out in the community and reach out to these kids where they are. Until we start doing that the churches will have little impact because they are not directly involved with what is going on. Kids are being kicked to the street and the church is getting involved after the fact.

Question 2- What are your thoughts or ideas on the statement that, "character and moral education are essential to a students' academic success?"

Informant	Relevant Statements	Remarks
MITCH	• Morality and character has everything to do with how well we develop.	Of the inmates in the jail 17 to 35, I would approximate that 95% were black. But, they are not in jail because they are black, they are in jail because that segment of individuals had poor moral guidance or poor leadership.
CHIP	• Character and moral education plays a significant role in the developing and preparing the total child to be productive Americans. Teaching kids academic skills and social skills are so important.	

Who do you believe should be responsible for character and moral education of school age youth?

MITCH	• Character is developed through your parents' character.	Parents help children develop a hierarchy of accountability for their actions, first to themselves, their parents, and (the law) others.
CHIP	• It has to start at home, however it does not end at home. Providing kids with character and moral education must be a shared role between families, school and church it must deal with life issues such as relationships building, issues of divorce, sex education because all these issues impact learning.	The church has an obligation to reach out to every family. I talked to pastors all the time about coming from behind the pulpit, going out into the community, and reaching out to families, even if they don't know Christ. Every principal, every teacher, every administrator have to be a model of what we want students to become. Everybody (family, church, school) is responsible.

Question 3 - Based on your experiences, what academic skills do you feel need the greatest attention in order to improve educational outcomes for African American youth?		
Informant	Relevant Statements	Remarks
MITCH	• There needs to be an increase in educational paths, particularly offerings of technical and vocational education.	When we talk about the high dropout rates, kids drop out because they are not interested anymore, not because they are not smart.
CHIP	• I think reading and writing skills are the most important. If we can improve reading and writing skills with kids starting at a very young I think we can have the greatest impact on academic achievement.	They are not excited or stimulated about staying in school current academic track. Reading and writing has a great impact on student self-esteem.
Based on your experiences, what social skills do you feel need the greatest attention in order to improve educational outcomes for African American youth?		
MITCH	• Improve parks and recreational activities for youth. Getting people together is a great way to build diversity in your society.	Education and knowledge is transferred through socialization of persons with diverse, not just racial, but differing socioeconomic backgrounds and life experiences.
CHIP	• Socially we have to work with kids on being able to communicate verbally, and articulate how they feel. How to disagree. It can make a difference in the level of violence in our neighborhoods.	Kids are killing each other because they don't know how to verbally communicate with each other as it relates to disagreeing. Being proactive is saying, how can we sit down as parents, with teachers, or peers to respectfully disagree about something and walk away and still be good neighbors or still be good friends? Life skills will follow this.

	There are many educational opportunities to create dialogue with students (i.e., listening to music, watching a movie)

Question 4 - What influence do you think the culture and climate of schools have on the academic performance of African Americans?

Informant	Relevant Statements	Remarks
MITCH	• A lot of the students suffer because of the lack of sensitivity or an understanding of diverse system or individual needs of students.	School segregation brought increased access and resources for African American students, but it also brought greater insensitivity and misunderstanding into their educational experience.
CHIP	• People don't like to say or discuss it but everything is white and black. That culturally impacts our kids because they feel they are stereotyped, they are labeled, they are targeted. They feel that they are not going to be given a fair opportunity.	Another challenge came with the integration of the have and have-nots. Each group has unique cultures and need differing experiences to be successful in the educational setting.
	• Conversations with school personnel; principals, administrators, and teachers it always comes back to we are doing everything that we can. " It's just some of these students, we can't get no support from parents or the home."	You look at the expulsion rates, in-school suspensions at the schools, and it is primarily made up of African Americans. Imagine that kind of impact. If kids are being expelled, suspended, or sent to alternative schools how will that impact our community. We have to address that to identify targets and see what we are really doing.

What influence do you think conditions in the home and in the community have on the attitude of African American youth about learning and school?

MITCH	• Things have changed financially in the parish in the past 20 years. We had folk with good jobs and good degrees, but we really have not advanced that much, because we have not bridged the gap in the importance of parental involvement in schools. We still believe that it's the school's responsibility to educate our kids.	We help our students to understand their importance to society or the importance their educations has on their future. We don't encourage our kids to aspire to greater things, instead, our position

		is let them fend for themselves.
CHIP	• At home there has to be moral support as it relates to the importance of education. Unfortunately, we have a lot of families with parents who don't finish high school or were not fortunate enough to go to college; therefore they are not pushing education.	Many of the industries in the area now require high school diplomas or college degrees to work there. If a large percentage of our kids continue to drop out where will they work?
	• If we are going to talk about cultural influences on African American students learning we got to talk about how race affects it all. And that's something political leaders, church leaders, and school administrators are not willing to sit down and have one general discussion about. And that is part of the problem.	For example, recreation is a big thing in helping kids to stay in school and out of trouble in the community. I have sat in council meeting where parish leaders discussed having one recreation system however, their kids (white) continue to participate in one system while our kids (blacks) participate in another. Many persons keep their mouths closed because they are afraid that deep rooted feelings or perceptions of racism may come out.

Question 5 - What do you believe schools have done well in regard to assisting African American youth succeed in school?

Informant	Relevant Statements	Remarks
MITCH	• Schools are trying really hard to meet the demands of society. • They have raise money through the bond issue but the placement of the money is a concern.	
CHIP	• I think schools are doing more to reach out to kids who are not college bound, offering options for high school graduation such as vocational education where kids can learn a trade. • The accelerated program to help kids who are two or three years behind in school is another thing I think the schools are doing well.	

What do you believe religious organizations have done well? In what areas do you feel they each could improve their efforts?

MITCH	• I think that they have a great desire but I think the delivery is poor.	For example, in the past example I saw more ministers selling out than ever before, trading their influence for jobs and positions.
CHIP	• I think they are doing things well within their own congregations, but little to reach outside of them or to the schools.	When we talk about leadership of a group we look at educational background, experiences, and work ethics. In the Black community we talk about moving up a little higher, but when it is time to really deliver the good we got to look for ourselves.

Question 6 - What do you feel needs to happen to improve collaboration between schools, community, and religious organizations?

Informant	Relevant Statements	Remarks
MITCH	• Churches have to show a concern for what happens in schools. • Schools are desperate to see it happen, but they have to allow the entire component necessary for the kids, parents, and church involvement.	You don't have to tell them your ministers, just be there. We (African Americans parents) are the least participants in the education system because we believe that the total experience should come from the schoolhouse, and that's not so. One of the barriers of this is the leadership in a lot of churches are not equipped to make that happen because of skepticism. There message is strictly a Sunday morning message. It's not a community message.
CHIP	• Bridge the gap of communication. Churches need to let schools know they are available, the schools need to let churches know the door are open for them to participate in kids learning process. Likewise community agencies need to let the schools know that to. By bridging communication churches, schools, and community organizations can work in conjunction when serving the same kids and their families.	When schools ask for these groups to come in, they are reluctant. Families should be able to receive coordinated services and feel confident about their information being kept confidential. Bridging the communication enables agencies to know if what they are doing is working.

How do believe this collaboration will benefit African American youth?	
MITCH	• I think collaboration between agencies will have a great impact on the learning process. (What would be some of specific examples of outcomes of this improved learning process?)
CHIP	• I believe providing collaborative services, especially to single parent families would increase student and parent value of education.

Question 7 - Is there anything else you would like to share in relation to educating African American youth and/or working collaboratively with schools and religious organizations?

Informant	Relevant Statements	Remarks
MITCH	• I think we have to come together. We've got to get back to looking out for one another.	
CHIP	• What we have to do as community leaders is to embrace our youth and meet them where they are at. We have to stand up as community leaders and say, "you know what, I got your back. I'm supporting you 100%. When your wrong I'm going to tell you your wrong, but we are going to work together to make that wrong right. • Ministers can go speak to business to help kids get jobs. • It would be great if we could, without violating confidentialities refer families to churches for counseling and support.	When it comes to our African American Youth, a lot of them have lost hope in the system, the criminal justice system, school systems, and the religious and church systems. They feel they are being pushed out, they are not being made to feel apart of or valued.