

A college preparatory program as investor in the academic social capital of Black parents

by

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DEDICATION

With praise and thanksgiving to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who granted me the strength to persevere.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DEDICATION	ii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vii
LIST OF TABLES	viii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ix
ABSTRACT	x
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background of the Study.....	1
Purpose and Need.....	1
Definition of Terms	5
Research Questions	6
Limitations	7
Delimitations	8
CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW.....	10
College Preparatory Programs and the Academic Skills Gap.....	10
Parental Engagement and Academic Achievement	12
Social Capital: A General Description	14
Academic Social Capital	18
Inequalities of Parental Academic Social Capital	21
The Unique Issues of Blacks in Education.....	22
Implications for Today	26
A Pre-College Program as Investor.....	28
CHAPTER III RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	30
Rationale for the Study.....	30
Qualitative Research and the Phenomenological Lens	31
Researcher's Role.....	33
Social Capital Research.....	34
Research Methodology and Design.....	35
Research Site	37

	Page
Participant Selection and General Participant Information.....	37
Black Parents and Their Growing STEMs Youth.....	42
Grace and Kat.....	42
David and Danielle.....	45
Mr. B and Christina.....	46
Jack and Franklin	48
Denise and Johnetta.....	50
Data Collection and Analysis.....	52
Reliability, Validity, Trustworthiness and Verification	52
Data Collection.....	53
Stage One	54
Stage Two.....	54
On-going.....	55
 CHAPTER IV RESEARCH FINDINGS	 58
Black Parents and Interactions With Schools	58
School Says	59
Tag – I’m Still It?	62
Telephone/Mis(sed) Communications	64
Duck, Duck, Goose	66
Invisible Racism and Schools	68
Black Heritage and Mountaintops.....	69
Growing STEMs and School Relationships.....	71
Black Parental Social Capital.....	72
Academic Social Capital	73
Head in the Clouds: The High Educational Expectations of Black Parents.....	74
Trust You? Mostly: Black Parents and Teachers	75
We’re Right Here, Eye to Eye: Establishing and Enforcing Norms	78
Robotexts as School Information Sharing?	79
Going to the Education Bank	80
Valued Customers?	81
Accessing the Branch Services	83
Getting to Know the Bank Personnel.....	84
The Bulging Mattress	87
Growing STEMs and Social Capital	88
An Educational Ally.....	89
Provides an Avenue to Higher Education	90
Offers Enhanced Educational Opportunities.....	90
Connects to Information and Other Parents	91

	Page
School Resource Liaison	91
Conclusion	92
CHAPTER V ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	93
Introduction to the Analysis	93
Black Parents and School Site Social Capital	94
My Yard, My Rules.....	95
Pick-a-hand.....	97
Black Parents and Familial Social Capital	98
Black Parents and Issues of Race	100
Illuminating Issues of Race: Critical Race Theory	101
CRT and Interest Convergence	102
CRT and Intersectionality	103
Growing STEMs and School Site Social Capital.....	104
Advancing Together: In Pursuit of Student Success.....	105
Summary	107
Recommendations	109
Considerations for Social Capital Exchange.....	110
Black Parental Social Capital Defined.....	111
A Student Development and Vision Ally.....	112
Shared High Expectations for Their Young Person’s Academic Future.....	112
Encourager of a Self-Motivated and Responsible Youth Mindset	112
Engager in Career Selection Conversations	113
Supporter of a Strong Work Ethic.....	113
Partner in Proper Attitudinal Expectations.....	114
Opportunities that Enhance Education	114
College-going Access, Information and Support	114
Course Information and Guidance	115
Direct, Honest and Timely Communication.....	116
Connections to Other Parents.....	116
Academic Support Resources.....	117
Conclusion.....	117
Future Research.....	118
Summary	119
APPENDIX A REFERENCES CITED	123
APPENDIX B INTRODUCTORY LETTER	135

	Page
APPENDIX C FOLLOW UP SCRIPT	137
APPENDIX D CONSENT FORM	141
APPENDIX E INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	144
APPENDIX F FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS	145

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1 Simple Illustration of Social Capital Access and Functions	16

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1 Demographic Information for Parent Actors	41
Table 2 Academic Description of Parent Actors and Students	42

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ABSTRACT

In the world of finance an investor takes on risk by supplying capital to a company the investor believes to have a high potential for success. The purpose of this study was to understand Black parental academic social capital (what resources do parents have and/or need to support the academic success of their youth) and whether a university-delivered college preparatory program might, through its investments, increase Black parental school-based social capital. Parents in a program sponsored by a Midwestern university that is increasing the number of minoritized youth (Black, Latino/a and American Indian) who pursue degrees in science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM) fields is the focus of this study. This research project also sought to understand parental academic social capital generally.

This study employed qualitative research with a phenomenological lens to better understand Black parental social capital by interviewing parents of youth in a college preparatory program (Growing STEMs). These parents were interviewed regarding their general views of education, their interactions with their teen who participates in the program, as well as their interactions with the Growing STEMs program, teachers and administrators within the school their young person attends, and other parents.

Data were obtained from parent interviews, follow-up interviews, and a reflexive/reflective journal. Grand tour and prompt questions were used to guide the interviews. Data from the interviews were then subjected to two rounds of theme

analysis to identify domain themes, then interrogation based on fit for answering the study's questions.

Black parents interviewed shared their experiences regarding school-site social capital and the social capital that exists in the home, and they shared how they invest their capital to improve academic outcomes for their children in spite of barriers. As a result, I was able to better understand the experiences of these Black parents of high achievers within schools, what might be done to improve access to social capital in schools, and to learn more about both how Growing STEMs has contributed, and how organizations of this type might better contribute, to the social capital of Black parents.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In the world of finance an investor takes on risk by supplying capital to a company the investor believes to have a high potential for success. The purpose of this study is to understand Black parental academic social capital and whether a university-delivered college preparatory program can, through its investments, increase Black parental social capital. Parents in a program at a Midwestern university that is increasing the number of minoritized youth (Black, Latino/a and American Indian) who pursue degrees in science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM) fields is the focus of this study. This research project also seeks to understand parental academic social capital generally and how it might be increased.

Purpose and Need

Individuals such as Karl Marx in the 1800s, and even philosophers prior to Marx, have spoken to issues of capitalism, its construction and the resulting classism (Sorenson, 2000). Over the years, concepts of capitalism, with its exploration of value attribution, have been adapted for use in a variety of fields of study, including sociology. Within sociology, human, cultural, and social capital are among the types typically explored (Lin, Cook & Burt, 2001). Many have been interrogated to some degree for

their usefulness in understanding what occurs in the education enterprise, including exploring the types of capital present in, and desirable to, families (Bourdieu, Sapiro & McHale, 1991; Coleman, 1988).

It is generally agreed that parental engagement can play an important role in student academic achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001; Fehrman, Keith & Reimers, 1987; Jeynes, 2003; Kuperminc, Darnell & Alvarez-Jimenez, 2008; Marinez-Lora & Quinata, 2009; McCarthy, 2000; McNeal, 1999). However, some researchers have found disparate associations between academic achievement and parental involvement (Hill, Castellino, Lansford, Nowlin, Dodge, Bates & Pettit, 2004). One reason for this disparity may be the breadth of elements that are considered components of parental engagement, such as involvement at school, helping with homework, or providing the types of cultural opportunities valued by the society (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Jeynes, 2003; Jung-Sook & Bowen, 2006); as well the range of age-appropriate parental actions considered (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2003); the size of the sample (Jeynes, 2003); or parenting style (Henricson & Roker, 2000).

Disparate findings may also be due to the absence or presence of consideration of social class and/or ethnicity or cultural differences of the parents (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011; Desimone, 2001; Hill et al., 2004; McNeal, 1999). Often, parental involvement explorations have been viewed through a dominant lens (i.e. the only capital recognized as valuable is that reflected in and valued by the dominant culture). As a result, when these findings are applied to families from non-dominant groups, a deficit view of those families results (i.e. if assets occurring in the dominant culture are not found, there is no

value). Some researchers are countering this dominant view by not only including minoritized families in their studies, but by also constructing new understandings of social capital based on the voices and experiences of these families (Clark, 1983; Watkins, 2006). As a result, progress is being made towards illuminating what constitutes parental social capital that positively impacts minoritized youth. A positive finding is that the majority of research suggests that benefits do accrue to children when parents are engaged whether the children are part of White middle- or upper-class families, minoritized families, or lower income families (Catsambis, 2001; Fan, 2001; Harry, Klingner & Hart, 2005; Jeynes, 2003; Kuperminc et. al, 2008; Marinez-Lara & Quintana, 2009; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Redding, 2008; Spenner & Featherman, 1978).

To explore how individuals or groups accumulate the resources necessary for success or utilize resources, social capital theory can be useful. Social capital theory aids in the conceptualization of the process of connecting to people, their networks and their resources. Social capital, according to Bolivar and Chrispeels (2011), “lies in the strength of social relations that make available to the person the resources of others” (p. 8). Bourdieu et al. (1991) and Coleman (1988) expound extensively on the importance of social (as well as cultural) capital and its influence on the academic achievement of children. While social capital focuses on social connections and facilitating access to the resources available in those connections (information, influence, credentialing and reinforcement of identity), cultural capital is concerned with education, language and the culture’s valued artifacts (Bourdieu in Reay, 2010). However, even these distinctions are blurred at times. In terms of parents and capital, Kuperminc et al. (2008) posit that

parental involvement is “a form of social capital, contributing resources that support students’ academic motivation and affirm the importance placed by their families on education” (p. 470). Yet Coleman (1987) makes the case that the social capital available to children from communities and parents has declined over time. This is perhaps why McNeal (1999) finds that diverse and low-income communities often lack the type of social capital that permits access to educational social capital. At the same time, however, Lareau and Horvat (1999), argue that minoritized parents have social capital but are often unable to effectively activate it.

Both Coleman (1988) and Bolivar and Chrispeels (2011) assert that institutions can play a role in increasing academic social capital, yet little is known about how this does or can occur. Although a college preparatory program that targets youth of color for pursuit of a STEM career may not have as a central goal addressing issues of parental access to social capital, it is possible that through the relationships developed, information shared, and norms and sanctions imposed, that such a program could increase parental academic social capital. This study will consider a program at a Midwestern university - Growing STEMs, which is the pseudonym that will be used for a college preparatory program that targets youth in grades 8-12 who are from ethnic/racial groups that the National Science Foundation considers underrepresented in STEM fields (Black, Latino/a, and American Indian). NSF uses the underrepresented designation because these ethnic/racial groups are represented in science and engineering in smaller percentages than their percentage in the overall population (Women, Minorities, and Persons with Disabilities in Science and Engineering: 2011).

Growing STEMs employs a multifaceted and holistic approach that includes motivating, empowering and providing academic support to youth; enlisting and supporting teachers in strategic ways to increase the academic achievement of minoritized youth; and increasing the understanding of families about academic institutions, academic achievement and college degree obtainment. This study seeks to understand if school-site social capital and other forms of academic social capital increase for Black parents who have youth participating in the program, to explore the academic social capital present in Black families, and to discover what leads to social capital formation for Black parents.

To frame this study, following are the definitions, research questions, the literature review and the research methodology.

Definition of Terms

academic social capital - social capital concerned with the accrual of academic benefits.

In this study, the researcher may incorporate as appropriate concepts related to human, cultural and social capital as they relate to the process of connecting to individuals or resources in academic institutions in ways that facilitate the accrual of benefits.

actor – participants. The terms participant, interviewee and actor will be used interchangeably.

Black or African American – this racialized term is used in reference to people of African descent. This includes both recent immigrants and those domestically born.

minoritized – the assignment of a group of people to a minority status based on racial or cultural designations.

Whites – Americans of predominantly European ancestry who are not treated as part of a minoritized group based on race.

Research Questions

This study sought to understand whether and how Black parents actuate social capital and the perceptions of Black parents about any impact Growing STEMs has on their access and actuation of social capital. Secondly it sought to illuminate the general perceptions of Black parents about educational institutions and academic achievement. As a result, the research questions were:

1. How do Black parents perceive their interaction with schools, teachers and parents? What do Black parents perceive as the influence of a program like Growing STEMs on their relationships with schools, teachers and parents?
2. What are the perceived components of academic social capital for Black parents? What is the perception of how Growing STEMs increases, or helps activate, academic social capital for Black parents?

Lessons learned can result in a better understanding of how schools and educational institutions can increase or play a role in activating the social capital of Black parents in particular, resulting in improved academic outcomes for Black youth. Additionally, by positively impacting academic outcomes for Black youth, these

findings could have important implications for effective implementation of multicultural education. Nieto and Bode (2008) describe multicultural education as a “process of comprehensive school reform and basic education” (p. 42). Parent involvement is recognized as a component to be addressed for successful implementation of multicultural education strategies. Nieto and Bode (2008) stress that “(i)n spite of the challenges... (w)hen families become involved, it also means that their language and culture and the expectations they have for their children can become part of the dialogue” (p. 139). Therefore, the study may inform academic social capital theories as well as multicultural education theories. The next chapter will explore the elements of inquiry important to this study: college preparatory programs, social capital and parental involvement in schools.

Limitations

The primary limitation of this study is that the participants were all from one Midwestern school district with less than 40% minoritized youth of all ethnic/racial groups and a The City (pseudonym used for the district location) population of approximately 250,000. Therefore, the findings of this study may not be applicable to parents in other school districts, in any other cities.

Another limitation is that the study is specific to parents involved in one academic enrichment program that selects students for participation, and specific to only

one subset of those parents – Black parents. As a result, the findings should be considered in light of this information.

Additionally, only one interview and two follow ups (member checks) were conducted for a maximum of five participants. Although conversations were held until all questions were answered by participants and the researcher, it is possible that this was not sufficient contact time, and this should be considered.

Finally, since the parents who participated have students continuing in the program, parents may have been hesitant to speak truthfully about their experiences even though I mentioned in the letter, during the study recruitment call, and during the interviews that information shared would not help or hurt their student. This limitation is further exacerbated by the researcher's position as a staff member of the Growing STEMs program. However, most of my work for the program is behind the scenes. Even with that said, parents may have overstated the benefit of Growing STEMs, or they may have underreported problems. At the same time, my identification as a Black parent may have helped mitigate this limitation. My perception is that parents were open as they answered questions. This will be considered during the analysis.

Delimitations

Some of the relevant delimitations of this study were the boundaries of the study itself, and included the following:

1. The study limited the participant pool to parents of sophomores and juniors. In controlling for this, the more limited pool did not produce many parent participants who regularly attend Growing STEMs parent programs.
2. By design, the study did not include parents of students who were not meeting program requirements. As a result, the findings may not be generalized to other program parents.
3. This study targeted parents of students who self-identified as Black. Therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to non-Black parents.
4. In terms of the qualitative research design, all participants were parents of students in one Midwest urban school district. Regional or national settings may be considered for reference only.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

As is true for financial institutions, or any institution, understanding its history can inform the present. In this section I will provide a historic overview of college preparatory programs and the academic skills gap, social capital, academic social capital, and parental engagement comprise the beginning of this review. Finally, I contextualize the issue by providing an overview of the history of Blacks and education.

College Preparatory Programs and the Academic Skills Gap

College preparatory programs became popular approximately 40 years ago when the War on Poverty and Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 birthed what have become known as the TRIO programs – Upward Bound, Educational Talent Search and Student Support Services (Fields, 2001; Swail, 2000). The programs were established to provide academic support to low-income youth and those from ethnic/racial groups underrepresented in colleges and universities. Such programs typically provide extra academic support, college-going information and course advice, and they are offered as an extra-curricular program. These programs also usually offer a parental component. When the Higher Education Act was reauthorized in 1965, federal initiatives expanded to include the McNair program, which provides undergraduates with research

experiences, and in 1998, Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEARUP) was added (Swail, 2000).

But the federal government is not the only sponsor of college preparatory programs. Universities, states governments and other agencies target youth in middle and high school, and some programs begin with children as early as kindergarten. College preparatory programs are said to enhance educational outcomes (Huang, Coordt, La Torre, Leon, Miyoshi, Perez, & Peterson, 2007; Swail, 2000). It is unknown how many students participate in these types of programs, but in spite of their availability, an academic skills gap persists. The College Board (2011) reports that between 2001 and 2011, the mean test scores of Blacks and Latinos in critical reading on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT [administered by the College Board]) decreased by 5 percent as compared to Whites (-1 percent). The mean rate of gain for Blacks on the mathematics section of the test was problematic as well (+1 percentage point for Blacks and +4 percentage points for Whites).

Some attribute this academic skills gap to poverty issues alone, noting the overrepresentation of Blacks in the ranks of those who live near or below poverty level - 27.4% for Blacks in 2010, as compared to 9.4% for non-Hispanic Whites (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor & Smith, 2011). However, the gap does not remain neatly in the socioeconomic box; it is not explained purely by income level. For instance, as recently as 2009, Blacks from every income group who took the college entrance exam known as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) had an average score lower than all test takers making less than \$20,000 per year (College Board, 2011). This is consistent with Lareau

and Horvat's (1999) proposition that "race acts to mediate the importance of class" (p. 38).

The persistence of this gap has alarming implications for our nation. Those who do not succeed academically are at risk of lower income earnings, poorer health and higher rates of incarceration (McKinsey and Company, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The persistence of this academic skills gap, notes McKinsey and Company (a professional management consulting firm), is the "economic equivalent to a permanent national recession" (2009, p. 6). Addressing this gap continues to be a topic among educators and in communities. In addition to considering increasing the number of college preparatory programs, the proposed solutions to the academic skills gap run the gamut from policy changes, to school reform, to improved teacher education. An important consideration has been the role that parents can play to increase academic performance.

Parental Engagement and Academic Achievement

For the past 20 years researchers have been looking at the role of parents in the academic achievement of their youth. Parental engagement, most studies suggest, is a key contributor to student academic achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001; Grolnick & Slowizczek, 1994; Kuperminc et al., 2008; Martinez, DeGarmo & Eddy, 2004; McNeal, 1999), positively influencing both academic performance and attitude (Marinez-Lora & Quinata, 2009). Spenner and Featherman (1978) note: "The encouragement of one's

parents ... appear(s) to shape ambitions more directly and with greater impact than any other source” (p. 392).

Exactly what type of parental involvement (at school or at home or both) is beneficial is sometimes debated (Jeynes, 2003; Jung-Sook & Bowen, 2006). The outcomes may also vary across socioeconomic groups and ethnicities (Hill et al., 2004), but most researchers agree parental involvement has a positive influence on the academic performance of all youth (Jeynes, 2003; Kuperminc et al., 2008). Redding (2008) shares that

(t)he teacher, the student, the parents—this remains the magic triangle of relationships and competencies that determine the student’s trajectory to school success. (p. 271)

However, Black parents are sometimes viewed as obstacles to, rather than partners in, the academic achievement of Black youth (Ogbu, 2003), and Black parents are often not as involved at the school as parents of children of other ethnicities (childtrendsdatbank.org, 2012). Yet research confirms that parents of color want their children to succeed academically: once adjustments are made for socioeconomic status (so that competing factors such as class are eliminated), parent interest in the academic success of children is comparable across all ethnic groups (Fan, 2001; Harry et al., 2005; Nieto & Bode, 2008). Introducing social capital concepts holds promise for understanding these incongruities.

Social Capital: A General Description

Value is key to social capital theory, just as it is in economic theory. The term “social capital” is used across so many fields that it is difficult to settle on one definition.

Social capital theory is useful for conceptualizing the process of connecting to people and their networks in ways that facilitate obtaining something of value. This theory brings together a philosophy popular among sociologists that conceptualizes individual human behavior as constrained by social norms (with its rules of interaction and obligations) with an economic theory that views the individual as an independent agent with self-interests (Coleman, 1988).

Social capital, according to Bolivar and Chrispeels (2011), “lies in the strength of social relations that make available to the person the resources of others” (p. 8).

According to Lin et al. (2001), it consists of three elements: a social structure in which capital is embedded, opportunities for accessing the capital, and an action-oriented aspect that results in access. McNeal (1999) uses the word “form” (as does Coleman, 1988) rather than structure to describe the social network. Form is used to encompass the expanse of the network, the intensity of the relationships in the network, the locations within the network that those outside can access to connect to the network, and the nature of the relationships of those in the network.

McNeal (1999) appears to agree with Lin et al. (2001) and Coleman (1988) that having a resource (i.e. something of value) as well as form or structure are required elements of social capital. McNeal (1999) and Coleman (1988) investigate the nature of

the relationships in social capital networks with their exploration of obligation. Within social networks or structures, according to McNeal (1999), obligation and reciprocity provide “some sense of investment with the expectation of a return on that investment” (p. 120). Similarly, Coleman (1988) introduces trust and the presence of sanctions and authority with norms of operation as essential to social networks. He also suggests that for the norms and sanctions within the network to be effective, the network must be closed to some degree. Rather than require trust, norms or sanctions, Lin et al. (2001) suggests that only opportunity is necessary. The team also suggests that the expected returns of social capital investments are information, influence, social credentials and reinforcement of identity (p. 7). The following diagram (Fig. 1) provides a simple illustration of the social capital process.

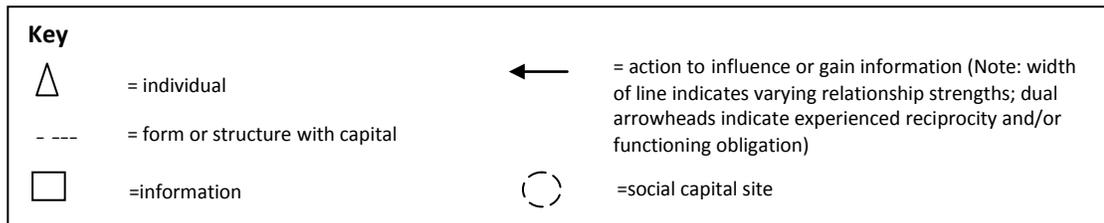
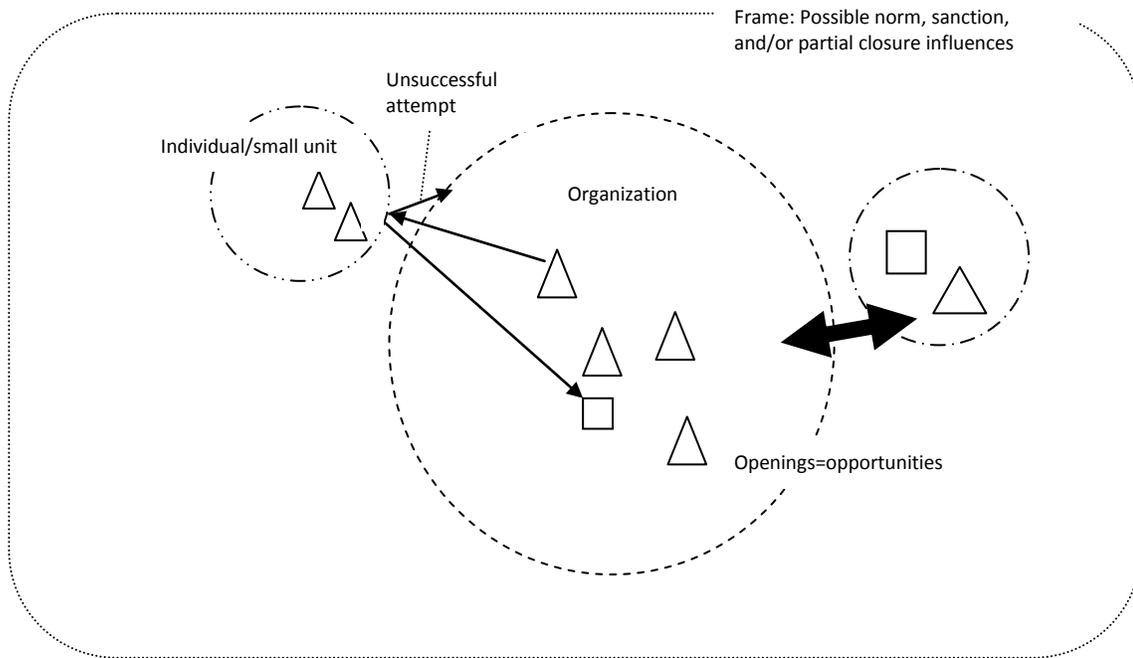


Figure 1. Simple Illustration of Social Capital Access and Functions: Individual or Small Group and Organization

Lin et al. (2001) agree that information sharing and norms and sanctions may be indicators of the existence of social capital and that these are important for the maintenance and reproduction of social capital. They also warn, however, that an action having the desired affect is not an adequate indicator of social capital. Instead they posit that a theory may not be adequately robust to explain an outcome, so the absence or presence of social capital could be missed (p. 11). In fact, Lareau and Horvat (1999)

purport that everyone has social capital, but that not all social capital has the same value in a given venue (p. 39).

In addition, social capital researchers, in their consideration of the social network structure or form, explore whether the assets embedded in the structure are more or less accessible to everyone within the structure, or whether a network hierarchy exists such that the accessing of social capital is dependent on where a person tries to access the resources in the network location (i.e., an administrator in a social network has different social capital as compared to the office secretary) (Burt, 2000; Lin et al., 2001; McNeal, 1999). Also, in considering the form or structure of social networks, where and how holes or entry points exist that allow access to individuals currently outside the social network is important.

As a result of their review of social capital concepts offered by experts in the field, Durlauf and Fafchamps (2005) settle on three ideas common to explications of social capital:

- (1) social capital generates positive externalities for members of a group;
- (2) these externalities are achieved through shared trust, norms, and values and their consequent effects on expectations and behavior;
- (3) shared trust, norms and values arise from informal forms of organizations based on social networks and associations (p. 1644)

For the purposes of this study, then, social capital will be taken to mean the ability to access assets (influence and information) that exist in a social network that can be obtained or mobilized through personal action (Lin et al, 2001; Strayhorn, 2010). In other words, social capital is the resource or benefit potential in a social system that can

be accessed by others through the actions of the actors (or participants) in the network. These notions inform issues of academic social capital as well.

Academic Social Capital

Social capital theory is useful for conceptualizing the process of connecting to people and networks to achieve academic benefits as well (Gibson, Gandara & Koyama, 2004). Generally, social capital constitutes access to information, the ability to exert influence, credentialing and reinforcement of identity (Lin et al., 2001). In this study the focus is on what I term academic social capital. This phrase is used to encompass the process of connecting to individuals in academic institutions in ways that permit the accrual of benefits available in educational institutions (i.e. the ability to influence academic outcomes, access academic information, etc.). Bourdieu et al. (1991) and Coleman (1987) expound extensively on the importance of the social (relational) as well as cultural (educational, linguistic and artifact) capital of parents and its influence on the academic achievement of children.

Bourdieu et al.'s (1991) exploration of cultural capital (here consisting of the knowledge, linguistic habits and artifacts of the dominant group) and reproduction theory are often cited in discussions related to the education. They consider the ways in which educational institutions “grant school capital,” (p. 643) through credentialing, arbitrary valuing of selected ideals and ideas, and the creation of a facade of meritocracy. Bourdieu et al. (1991) further posit that

(f)amiliarity prevents us from seeing everything that is concealed in the apparently purely technical acts achieved by the school institution ... tests or competitive examinations justify in reason divisions that do not necessarily stem from reason (p. 645).

These actions create a “scholastic nobility” via the “hidden linkage between scholastic aptitude and cultural heritage,” (Bourdieu et al., 1991, p. 646). As a result, educational institutions perpetuate the existing inequitable system of social and cultural capital distribution through their methods of categorizing (usually through means of testing) and privileging (typically in association with social status and restating preferred knowledge) (Bourdieu et al., 1991). In educational institutions, as in economic systems, capital also tends to follow capital; in other words, those who have valued forms of social or cultural capital find they can accrue more, and those without sought-after forms of capital find it difficult to obtain it. It is in this way that Bourdieu et al. (1991) maintain that educational institutions perpetuate and preserve something similar to a privileged class (a key contention of Bourdieu’s reproduction theory).

Similarly Bowles and Gintis (2002), in their explorations of schooling in relationship to employment economics, speak of reproduction in terms of intergenerational economic inequality and status transmission, as well as cultural reproduction and cultural change. In their exploration of intergenerational status transmission, they note the role of “cultural transmissions” (p. 5). The two maintain that “schools influence which cultural models children are exposed to ... [and] immerse children in a structure of rewards and sanctions” (p. 13). Further, Bowles and Gintis (2002) suggest that schools do more than “reproduce the reward system in the rest of the society....[S]chooling can ... promote traits that are advantageous to one group (the

group determining the structure of schooling) even if they are not generally advantageous” (p. 13). In so doing, schools privilege certain types of knowledge and resources as contended by Bourdieu.

Beyond reproduction, Coleman’s foundational work (1988) considers the elements of familial capital (financial, human and social) as they pertain to academic achievement. Coleman (1988) contends that the social relationships that exist between children, parents and teachers, based on shared expectations and trust, promote the academic development of children by the establishment and enforcement of norms and the sharing of information.

One form of parental academic social capital currency is the college-going discussion. Black males in particular benefit from college discussions with parents: youth who participate in these discussions tend to earn higher grades in college (Strayhorn, 2010). It is conjectured that college discussions may be an avenue for expressing parental support of academic performance, particularly for minoritized youth (Strayhorn, 2010; McNeal, 1999).

Parental academic social capital can also take the form of increased linkages to schools. Kuperminc et al. (2008) suggest that parental involvement itself is “a form of social capital, contributing resources that support students’ academic motivation and affirm the importance placed by their families on education” (p. 470). In spite of this fact, Black parents are generally less likely to attend meetings at school, volunteer or serve on committees than their White counterparts, and they are even less likely to attend meetings that are directly related to their child’s education (Fan & Chen, 2001; Marinez-

Lora & Quintana, 2009). This has led to accusations that Black parents have low academic expectations and/or do not care about the education of their youth (Ogbu, 2003). But other possibilities exist.

Inequalities of Parental Academic Social Capital

Understanding why the under-involvement of Black parents occurs is complex, and the answer requires considering the charge of Black parents that they experience barriers to participation at school (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). McNeal (1999) adds

(w)e have long been aware that minorities in our society experience a social world far different from that enjoyed by members of the dominant group. This experience clearly carries over into the education arena where minorities are underrepresented in textbooks ..., are treated differently in classrooms by peers and teachers ..., (and) are placed in lower academic tracks (p. 135)

McNeal (1999) is suggesting that not everyone has equal access to the resources embedded in academic social networks; as a result, some parents may also conclude that investment in those networks is worth little. For instance, minoritized and low-income communities are typically low in the type of social capital that facilitates access to educational institutions and resources (McNeal, 1999). And even though research demonstrates that parents of color are as committed to the academic achievement of their offspring as other racial groups (Fan, 2001; Harry et al., 2005; Nieto & Bode, 2008), academic outcomes confirm that parental involvement may be impacted by other issues that impair their ability to positively influence educational outcomes for their children (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; McNeal, 1999). Lareau and Horvat (1999) contend that

minoritized parents have social capital but are often unable to effectively activate their social capital. McNeal (1999) warns that individual views of the world are shaped by our differing experiences, and suggests that acknowledging those experiences as we consider issues of social capital:

[I]t is clear that recognizing the past experiences of these individuals will lead to either a reconceptualization of social capital as it pertains to educational processes or recognizing that how it operates is essentially different across many domains (p. 134).

At the same time, Bolivar and Chrispeels (2011) posit that there are ways in which parent organizations might change the power differential and enhance the capital of low income and minoritized parents. When woven with Coleman's (1988) assertion that institutions can play a role in increasing academic social capital, there is hope that this can be done. But is it possible, given the history of Blacks in America?

The Unique Issues of Blacks and Education

The accounts of the successful strivings of Negroes for enlightenment under most adverse circumstances reads like beautiful romances of a people in a heroic age.

-Carter G. Woodson, Black historian

Each of the racial groups identified as underrepresented in the sciences (Black, Latino/a and American Indian [Women, Minorities, and Persons with Disabilities in Science and Engineering, 2011]) has its own unique historical and socioeconomic characteristics. This section will offer a context for understanding the educational

experiences of Blacks that may continue to influence educational outcomes for Black youth.

The African Atlantic slave trade began as early as the 1400s and was recognized as an official institution in Virginia in 1661 (Webster, 1974). Although slavery has existed in human history for epochs, the American form of slavery was particularly dehumanizing and considered “peculiar” (Webster, 1974). The first enslaved Africans “spoke European languages, had Hispanic and English names,” and in some instances were of both European and African ancestry (Spring, 2010). Most of these “Atlantic Creoles,” who arrived in Jamestown in 1618, were bought to work alongside white indentured servants. While the indentured servants purchased their freedom through their work, though, Creoles had to pay for their freedom (Spring, 2010). And even once freedom was secured, their rights were limited (Spring, 2010).

By the middle of the 1800s the demand in the U.S. for enslaved Africans had increased, and slave traders met that demand by enslaving peoples from the African interior (Spring, 2010). These Africans represented a variety of cultures, languages and religions (Spring, 2010).

In regards to education, the treatment of Blacks in the North and the South were somewhat varied. In the North, Blacks were generally better able to find opportunities to learn to read and write. However, to ensure the economic viability of the southern United States, the intellectual abilities of Blacks were denied and they were treated as animals—both the slave and his or her offspring were slaves for life (the “one drop” rule ensured that even the children of slaves and White masters could not threaten the social

hierarchy) (Hollinger, 2005; Takaki, 2008). But even during these times, history records the daring commitment of Blacks to the pursuit of education, providing evidence of their high regard for learning (Williams, 2005). Education was, and continues to be, appreciated as both a method of resistance and of racial uplift (means to promote progress of the race as a group) among Blacks (Perkins, 1993; Williams, 2005).

And even during slavery, Black parents employed a number of strategies to secure the education of their children. Although learning to read and write was illegal for enslaved Africans in the South, five percent of slaves had learned to read (Spring, 2010). Another strategy employed by southern Blacks was relocation via escape. Relocation was also sometimes a legal option (Lerner, 1972; Perkins, 1993; Williams, 2005). For those few with the financial resources and opportunity, private tutors were employed (Lerner, 1972; Williams, 2005). By the late 1700s, missionary groups and women's literary societies were establishing schools, and by the early 1800s black free women in the North were doing the same (Butchart, 2010; Lerner, 1972; Moore, 1981; Williams, 2005). Family members or acquaintances also provided instruction, and some Blacks were self-taught (Butchart, 2010; Lerner, 1972; Takaki, 2008; Williams, 2005).

As early as 1787 segregated schools were emerging in the North, but by 1855 Massachusetts schools had approved school integration (Spring, 2010), even though slavery was not abolished in America until 1865, after the end of the Civil War. On its heels the Fourteenth Amendment was passed in 1868, which provided equal protection under the law. In spite of this, schools would be primarily segregated through much of the twentieth century (Spring, 2010).

After the Civil War, philanthropic groups ran many of the schools, and those who managed the schools were impressed by the willingness of Black parents to sacrifice in order to ensure that their children were educated. At times, Black parents founded and supported the schools themselves (Butchart, 2010; Lerner, 1972; Walker, 1996; Williams, 2005), since Whites were unwilling to integrate (Spring, 2010). Black parents even chose segregation at times to avoid the hostility towards their children in the schoolhouse (Spring, 2010). This separate was inherently unequal in terms of resources and structures, and often Blacks even found that they were paying for the public schools that supported the education of White youth and bearing an extra financial burden in order to support separate Black schools (Spring, 2010). These Black schools were supported, however, in spite of the danger: The Ku Klux Klan and other Whites took books, whipped those who sent their children to school, burned schools and lynched teachers (Butchart, 2010; Lerner, 1972; Walker, 1996; Watkins, 2006; Williams, 2005). And even when Blacks were able to pursue educational opportunities, that education typically further characterized Blacks as intellectually inferior and cursed, or the education prepared them for second-class citizenship (Anderson, 1988; DuBois, 1994; Spring, 2010; Williams, 2005; Woodson, 1933).

Tension existed between two competing thoughts among Whites about the benefits and pitfalls of educating Blacks. Spring notes:

On the one hand, whites might feel that containing the threat of African culture to the dominant Protestant culture of the United States required “civilizing” African Americans in the same manner as Native Americans. This meant providing schools. On the other hand, whites who thought Africans a threat to their racial purity and culture wanted education of African Americans to occur in segregated schools. (pp. 50-51)

It would continue to cost many Black parents emotionally, physically and financially to secure the most basic of educations for their children. To further their cause, they formed advocacy groups (Kluger, 1976; Williams, 2005) and worked through Black women's organizations (Giddings, 1984; Lerner, 1972). Parents also utilized agencies such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to pursue educational rights (Finch, 1981; Spring, 2010).

The federal voting rights and civil rights acts of the 1950s and 1960s, along with the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, were to have settled the issue of segregation and inequality of access with its finding that separate is inherently unequal (Spring, 2010). In fact, the Black/White academic skills gap was narrowing through the 1970s, then slowed in the 1980s and has stubbornly persisted since that time (Lee, 2002). As a result, inequitable educational outcomes for Black and White students have been a topic of research for more than 40 years.

Implications for Today

The stalled outcomes may be due, at least in part, to the quiet dismantling of *Brown v. Board* through court decisions and political moves that have returned students to neighborhood schools (even if it creates segregation and inequalities in access to a quality education), ended calls for desegregation, and maintained that equal school expenditures are not a right (Orfield, 1996). Sometimes these actions have occurred in the name of "colorblindness" (Delgado & Stefaniec, 2012).

Lareau and Horvat (1999), in their exploration of the experiences of middle class Black parents in schools today, note that “(t)he historical legacy of racial discrimination” (p. 38) continues to be a factor. Black parents come to the educational institution “suspicious and critical of the risk of unfair treatment for their children,” (Wells, Seifert, Padgett, Park & Umbach, 2011, p. 42). Wells et al. (2011) go on to conclude that “although middle class (B)lack families benefit from their class position...they still face an institutional setting that implicitly (and invisibly) privileges white families” (p. 49). In terms of social capital, then, we find a breakdown of the type described by Durlauf and Fafchamps (2005)

exchange is hindered either because agents who could benefit from trade cannot find each other, or because, having found each other, they do not trust each other enough to trade. In either case, some mutually beneficial exchange does not take place. (p. 1645)

Teacher attitudes may be one reason the inequities may persist (Lynn, Bacon, Totten, Bridges & Jennings, 2010). Harry et al. (2005) share this teacher’s statement:

The parents are the problem! They [the African American children] have absolutely no social skills, such as not knowing how to walk, sit in a chair It’s cultural (p. 105)

So, in spite of a Black historical legacy that values education, and in spite of current research that demonstrates that Black parents “treasure” their children and value education (Harry et al., 2005), Lynn et al. (2010) found that teachers report “lack of parental commitment” (p. 307) among the top three reasons that Black students fail to meet academic standards. Perhaps this disconnect points to a lack of, or inability to activate, parental academic social capital.

Schools and institutions can play a role in addressing this issue according to Coleman (1988). And Comer and Haynes (1991) argue that it is not sufficient to simply invite parents (the fall-back method for providing parental involvement for many schools) if those parents are from minoritized populations who may have felt alienated, unwelcome or threatened in the past. Durlauf and Fafchamps (2005) suggest that “[i]n many cases ... the benefits of social capital are only achieved through purposeful action” (p. 1656). Therefore, understanding how schools and organizations can act in ways that help Black parents acquire or activate parental social capital holds potential for improving parental participation in ways that increase student academic achievement. The exploration of a university’s college preparatory program for ethnically and racially diverse youth could add to our understanding.

A Pre-College Program as Investor

Major Midwest University (pseudonym for the university site) is the home of a two-decade-old college preparatory program that is increasing the number of Black, Latino and American Indian youth who go on to complete degrees in technical areas. The program is comprehensive in nature: youth, teachers and parents are targeted, supported and empowered to increase student academic success. The parental support component includes a yearly kick-off at which parents and the teachers who coordinate the school-based program have the opportunity to meet, a twice-yearly newsletter, two

parent meetings each academic year, a web page, twice-yearly student progress updates, a calendar of activities, and a phone number that is local to the district.

The university's program, Growing STEMs, serves youth in 8-12th grades in the state's capital city, as well as youth in two rural school districts, who are selected to participate in the program. More than 340 young people and their families participate in these three districts. Each of these districts is unique in size and population composition. The largest of the districts serves just over 30,000 youth. Blacks comprise 16.8 percent of this figure and are approximately 40 percent of the Growing STEMs program participants in that district. Growing STEMs is housed within the larger Major Midwest University academic community.

For more than 40 years, pre-college programs like Growing STEMs have been called on to fill the college-going pipeline with minoritized youth. At the same time, educators and communities alike continue to look for new strategies to effectively reduce the academic skills gap. However, at least for Blacks in the U.S., the gap isn't just academic: tackling the gap requires recognizing the historical issues that continue to create barriers to equal opportunity for educational excellence. Applying social capital theory can inform our understanding of how Black parents can effectively interact with the educational social network in ways that increase the academic performance of Black youth, as well as inform our understanding of the types of social capital Black parents have and whether a college preparatory program like Growing STEMs can play the role of a venture capitalist and increase the academic social capital of Black parents in ways that can help reduce the academic skills gap for Black youth.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Rationale for the Study

As noted earlier, historically, Blacks as a racial group in the United States have been marginalized in the education system. This marginalization continues to have a systemically negative effect on the educational outcomes of Black youth today (Harry et al., 2005; Irvine, 1985; Wells et. al, 2011). Kuperminc et al. (2008) posit that parental involvement is “a form of social capital, contributing resources that support students’ academic motivation and affirm the importance placed by their families on education” (p. 470). The purpose of this study is to articulate the elements of Black parental academic social capital, understand Black parental access to academic social capital at the school-site and the assets at the home, as well as to understand whether and how a university-based college preparatory program can increase, or impact the activation of, Black parental social capital.

This chapter provides an overview of the research underpinnings, restates the research questions, describes the participant selection process, and provides an overview of the research methods used in this inquiry.

Qualitative Research and the Phenomenological Lens

Qualitative study, with its roots in cultural anthropology, is appreciated for its ability to illuminate human behavior (Mason, 1996). The goal of qualitative research is to understand complexity, detail and context through inquiry that is systematic and rigorous (Flick, 2002; Mason, 1996). Cook and Reichardt (1979) explain the importance of qualitative research in understanding human experiences:

[T]he qualitative paradigm has the decidedly humanistic cast to understanding social reality ... which stresses an evolving, negotiated view of the social order. The qualitative paradigm perceives social life as ... multiple realities. In this paradigm individuals are conceptualized as active agents in constructing and making sense of the realities they encounter rather than responding ... according to role expectations by social structures. (pp. 35, 36)

The notion of multiple realities affirms that individuals or groups may experience the same phenomena in different ways based on their accumulated lived experiences, or culture. As a result, qualitative research methods are an appropriate choice for investigating the generation of social capital based on the lived reality of Black parents.

Qualitative inquiry suggests the natural environment as the prime place for data gathering (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although a natural environment was not possible for this study, a neutral location (public library) was used for all but one actor interview. Ensuring that the interviews were conducted in a convenient and comfortable location was important. Additionally, since the researcher is the preferred instrument of data collection in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I was that primary tool.

A phenomenological lens was employed in this study as well. Phenomenology “focuses on the conscious experience of how a person relates to the lived world that she or he inhabits” (Orbe, 2000, p. 605) with an attempt to discover the essence of a perceived reality (Giorgi, 1994). Creswell (1998) suggests that phenomenology searches for what is real by suspending judgment until there is a basis on which to make a judgment, and once the data substantiates a reality, that reality is given meaning. The psychological approach to phenomenology focuses on the meaning of an experience for individuals (Creswell, 1998). General meanings, then, are generated from individual descriptions.

Consistent with phenomenological inquiry, I temporarily suspended my ideas about the phenomenon and developed and employed research questions that would explore the lived experiences of Black parents related to the phenomenon of Black parental social capital of high school parents as it relates to the academic success of their children. Statements expressed during the interviews were subjected to both general thematic open coding (development of categories based on segmenting the information) by interrogating paragraphs and were then subjected to a line-by-line analysis to further facilitate axial (assembly of data in new ways) coding before considering the data in light of the study’s questions. This enabled me to go beyond the general themes and more closely examine the language used in relation to the phenomenon. This phenomenological mindset allowed me to explore the “essential or invariant characteristics” (Giorgi, 1994, p. 206) of Black parental social capital. I have not found these concepts explored in this way; as a result, the findings of this exploration could be

valuable as a way to understand and impact issues of academic achievement, particularly for Black youth.

Researcher's Role

As mentioned earlier, the researcher is considered a key investigative tool in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In that position, it is key that the researcher reveal his or her position related to the issue being explored in order to allow the reader to understand how the data is interpreted (Lincoln & Guba 1985). To understand my positionality, it is important for the reader to know that I am a staff member with the Growing STEMs program. In that position I have some contact with parents, including in the development and delivery of some parent programming, but given the number of interactions per year (one or two), the contact is limited. Related to this, the research/participant power imbalance is also important to consider. The research/participant inquiry structure can create a power imbalance according to Mason (1996) and Adler and Clark (2008). As a result of this imbalance, I had to be aware that actors could offer the expected answer rather than sharing cultural insights. I reassured participants repeatedly of the purpose of my questions, the confidentiality of their answers, and that their answers would not help or hurt their Growing STEMs student. One attempt to mitigate this effect was the follow-up interview – perhaps actors would feel more empowered to make statements as summary answers were shared for response.

It is also important to reveal that I am a Black parent of five grown children who were raised in the Midwest University's school district. As such, I have had my own experiences as a parent helping my children navigate successfully. I am also a graduate of the The City School District, although that graduation occurred 40 years ago and the high school from which I graduated no longer exists. Both my experiences as a parent and as a graduate of The City schools were explored reflexively throughout the research process.

Social Capital Research

Coleman's contention (1988) that relationships and organizations fostered by the school may improve social capital is at the heart of this inquiry. Bolivar and Chrispeels (2011) go on to suggest that this social capital can be built at the individual level, resulting in improved interactions with the school system; at the relational level, supporting parents as change agents; or the organizational level, facilitating the development of family-school partnerships.

For the purposes of this study, social capital will be taken to mean the ability to access assets (influence and information) that exist in a social network that can be obtained or mobilized through personal action (Lin et al., 2001; Strayhorn, 2010). In other words, social capital will be the resource or benefit potential in a social system that can be accessed by others through the actions of the actors in the network. Specific to this study, the term "academic social capital" will be taken to mean the ability to access

academic assets and resources for the benefit, in this case, of the children of Black parents.

To interrogate the presence of social capital, Coleman's (1988) work suggests that assessing whether there is trust, the ability to access information, and whether norms and sanctions are present are important considerations. Lin et al. (2001) would agree that assessing the ability to access information is important in social capital analysis, but would also suggest that the ability to influence outcomes, improve credentials or reinforce an identity type, or increase recognition would be important elements to look for as well. Durlauf and Fafchamps (2005) would add to social capital assessments an exploration of the efficiency of the social exchange, with the ability to locate the capital and develop the trust to access the capital as evidence of efficiency.

Durlauf and Fafchamps (2005) also posit that social capital assessments benefit from narrative methods. The phenomenological inquiry conducted is consistent with this preference. This work seeks to understand how and if these academic social capital propositions play out in an assessment of Black parental academic social capital and its potential development via a university-sponsored pre-college program.

Research Methodology and Design

To conduct this inquiry into Black parental academic social capital, the research questions were:

1. How do Black parents perceive their interaction with schools, teachers and parents? What do Black parents perceive as the influence of a program like Growing STEMs on their relationships with schools, teachers and parents?
2. What are the perceived components of academic social capital for Black parents? What is the perception of how Growing STEMs increases, or helps activate, social capital for Black parents?

Qualitative researchers must guard against leading their participants (sometimes referred to as actors) in questioning (i.e. asking questions that lead to the meanings that are made in another culture). One method employed to guard against this type of leading is the use of grand tour questions. Grand tour questions allow the actors to set the direction of the interview and use the language of the culture. These questions have the potential to produce descriptions of significant cultural experiences (Spradley, 1979).

The grand tour questions for this study were:

1. How and when do you interact with the school, teachers and other parents? And
2. Has Growing STEMs influenced those interactions?

In order to ensure that parents had a way to explore the grand tour questions, prompt questions were developed to guide the conversation (see Appendix E). Additionally, actors were asked to reflect on issues of race and academic achievement related to their personal educational experiences and those of their teens. Actors were also given the opportunity to share on any other subject they would like, and I invited

them to ask questions about Growing STEMs. The data systematically obtained through this inquiry was used to generate the themes of Black parental social capital within the social capital framework and to uncover the way that Growing STEMs may impact any increase in parental social capital.

Research Site

Interview data for this social capital exploration was collected between September 2012 and January 2013 from parents whose students attend The City's Growing STEMs program, which has the largest pool of Black Growing STEMs parents from which to recruit. The district's public high schools are located in a predominantly white, urban district in the Midwest. The district had a PK-12 enrollment of nearly 33,300 in 2012-2013, 46% of which were white, 23% Latino/Hispanic, 17% Black/African American, .07% Asian, and less than .01% Native American and Pacific Islander (Department of Education, 2013).

Participant Selection and General Participant Information

Qualitative researchers look for data saturation, or the point at which enough data has been collected to produce a rich understanding of a phenomenon. Mason (2010) states:

one occurrence of the data is potentially as useful as many in understanding the process behind a topic. This is because qualitative

research is concerned with meaning and not making generalised hypothesis statements. (online)

Traditionally, qualitative researchers continue to add to their interview pool until data saturation is reached (Francis, Johnston, Robertson, Glidewell, Entwistle, Eccles & Grimshaw, 2010; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). To provide baseline information for this type of study within Growing STEMs, the researcher set the first set of selection criteria for actors as being the parent of a:

- a) student who self-identified as Black (or African American) on paperwork at the time the student entered the program. Students who self-identify as biracial or multiracial were excluded for this study,
- b) sophomore or junior student (rationale: freshman and senior year are uniquely transitional experiences for families in this Midwest area [middle to high school, and high school to graduation, respectively]), and
- c) young person who had met the program's requirements (participated in at least 75 percent of the program's activities and had a 3.0 or above grade point average so that school site experiences would be somewhat similar).

Rationale: even if these parents were not participating in parent programs, interviewing parents of successful student participants could still inform issues of Black parental social capital.

Seventeen sophomore and junior parents met the purposeful network sample criteria (Glesne, 2006; Maxwell, 2000), representing 16 students. It was anticipated that saturation for the group could be met at four participants (25%). Letters were sent to families describing the research project and clearly communicating that participation (or

non-participation) would not impact their young person in Growing STEMs either positively or negatively (Appendix B).

No letters were returned after mailing, so I assumed they reached their destinations. Two weeks after this letter was mailed, follow-up calls began to identify those parents who met the requirements of the second phase of the selection process.

Parents reached were asked:

a) Do you self-identify as Black or African American?

If yes

b) Is your young person in Growing STEMs your oldest child?

If yes

c) Do you work in the school district?

(See Appendix C for the complete script).

As the first round of calls were made to Growing STEMs parents (made at multiple times of day on various days of the week over 8 weeks), I found that many parents were facing a variety of issues that impacted their ability to participate in additional activities (work schedules, caring for parents, etc.), or that numbers were not working or there was no answer at the numbers called. Email was also used to communicate with those individuals for whom there were email addresses available.

I assessed, in consultation with faculty, whether conducting interviews as participants were selected would compromise confidentiality and determined it would not. As a result, interviews were set as participants consented. The first round of letters and calls produced three participants. A decision was then made in consultation with

faculty to maintain the first set of selection criteria (students who self-identify as Black, sophomores or juniors in good standing), but allow parents to participate whose Growing STEMs student is not the oldest. Doing so was determined not to compromise the study as well. As a result, a second round of letters was sent to an additional four families meeting this criteria, and follow up calls continued to be made to parents who were part of the first round of mailings who did not meet the first set of criteria. Two parents consented who were part of the first round group, but who had older children. The final outcome was self-selection of five interviewees, three meeting the original criteria and two meeting the slightly modified criteria with the deviation being that the Growing STEMs student was not the oldest. Three of those actors participated in follow up interviews.

All participants were reminded during the phone conversation and at the interview and follow ups that participation was not required and would not positively or negatively impact their Growing STEMs student. Additionally, participants were reminded that their identities would be kept confidential, that they could choose to end the interviews at any time and choose not to answer any question.

Participants ranged in age from their early 40s to 50s. Family demographics included one single-parent with extended family members in the home, and four two-parent families. The number of children in the home ranged from one to four, with four parents interviewed working outside the home. Although all parents interviewed had students who self-identified as Black, these actors were Black parents to two domestic (i.e. American born) Blacks, one African refugee, and possibly two (one I am certain

about) multiracial youth. Since the youth self-identified as Black I did not eliminate any of them from the study. Three of the parents were male; two of those were the only Black parent in the home. The remaining two were female and had a second parent who was Black. Table 1 summarizes the parental demographic data for the study sample.

Table 1. Demographic Information for Parent Actors

Male	Female	Age 40-50	Age 50+	Single parent family	Two-parent family	2 nd Black parent (even if not currently in home)	Median number of children	Graduate of The City Schools	Graduate of a Midwest State School	Some post-secondary education
3	2	4	1	1	4	3	4	3	4	4

The racial mix of students provided informative insights into the demographic backgrounds of our parents and how this impacts their navigation of the education system. To provide further demographic information, the educational attainment of the participants, and the current educational attainment of their teens, is considered in Table 2. None of the parents interviewed had a four-year college degree. One had no formal schooling (a refugee); four had some college or were pursuing a degree. By selecting parents of students from this demographic I was able to explore the experiences of parents of one “type” of Growing STEMs student: teens who are in good standing in Growing STEMs (i.e. never having been below the participation or 3.0 grade point average requirements of the program).

Table 2. Academic Description of Parent Actors and Students

Name*	Gender	Parent Educational Attainment	Student Gender	Student Classification
David	Male	None	Female	Sophomore
Denise	Female	Pursuing Associate's degree	Female	Junior
Grace	Female	Associate's degree	Female	Junior
Jack	Male	Some College	Male	Sophomore
Mr. B.	Male	Some College	Female	Junior

* pseudonyms used

Thick descriptions are critical in qualitative research. The following section provides some general and detailed descriptions of the actors.

Black Parents and Their Growing STEMs Youth

It is important in qualitative research to situate the discussion in the lived experiences of the participants. Following are descriptions of the five participants to illuminate the findings. All names are fictitious.

Grace and Kat

Grace is the first one I interviewed and she is the only one who chose her own pseudonym. This is the only interview that occurred at the actor's home as well, at her request. Grace looks to be in her late 30s, but given her comments related to when she went to school she is probably in her early 40s. She has medium-toned brown skin, a medium build and a warm smile. She's in a turquoise top with cap sleeves, black slacks and a pheasant-feathered necklace with matching earrings on the afternoon we meet. Her

face looks flawless and her hair is in a modified dread hairstyle with tan strands mixed into her black hair.

Grace has only one child, Kat, who is a sophomore at President High. Kat has participated in a number of opportunities outside the regular Growing STEMs program because, as I have observed, she exhibits a maturity and interest beyond what is sometimes present in young people her age. Grace speaks of God “leaving her in charge,” so I take this to mean that Grace is a single parent. Grace and Kat live with Grace’s mother.

Grace grew up in The City. Describing her own childhood, Grace says her parents were hard working and made sure all of her needs were met. Grace feels she had a good education but didn’t take full advantage of the opportunities. “I was just was trying to have some fun and ... skated through high school,” she shares.

After high school, Grace had a variety of other educational experiences. She has a military background, a beautician’s license, an associate’s degree and recently returned to The City. Grace began involvement in Kat’s academic life when Kat was small.

Grace explains that she takes her job as a parent seriously. She describes a typical day as a parent as “push and pull. Give and take.” She goes on to share that she often feels “powerless” and “responsible.” “I wish I could just do like a computer and download ... into my teen. I guess we never want our children to experience the same things we do unless they’re all good, and of course we all go through some things,” shares Grace.

Some of their discussions are about normal teen issues, such as how Kat dresses. She describes her daughter as being like herself - a “free spirit ... very happy go lucky. You know, trust everybody.” This is in part why Grace is concerned about “outside influences” on her daughter. She’s is also concerned about Kat being such a “social being.” Grace considers her own insular personality to be a barrier to her involvement in her child’s academic life, but she is involved. She appreciates that Kat has self-confidence.

Grace acknowledges Kat’s academic drive; she describes Kat as “totally focused on her education.” Grace supports her daughter in her academic pursuits. It’s very important to Grace that Kat make wise decisions in high school and succeed in college. An element of parental involvement for Grace is to insert herself into conversations with teachers, advocating on behalf of her daughter.

If I see she’s upset, or not even upset, she just has a concern. I’m going to step in. And if she’s participating in something, I’m going to go and support her.

To address educational and personal choices, Grace speaks extensively about Kat becoming a critical thinker, something Grace learned about when she went back for an associate’s degree. But she feels at somewhat of a disadvantage in her conversations with her daughter; “you know as a teenager the last person you want advice from is your mom (laugh).” However, she keeps trying because she wants the best for Kat.

David and Danielle

David is thin, well-groomed, and soft-spoken. My guess is that he is in his late 40s. He is well-dressed in a tan, patterned polo and dress slacks, and he smells of after shave. David is the second person I interview, and he meets me at the library outside The City near where he and his family live. He has graciously consented to meet with me, even though it becomes obvious during our conversation that he has interrupted the time he would normally be asleep, and that he had to catch a ride with a friend in order to meet me on time.

I do not realize until after our conversation begins that Danielle, David's Growing STEMs daughter, is not the oldest in the family. David and his family are African refugees. His wife convinced David that they needed to come to the U.S. so that their children could get a good education. They have lived in three states over the last seven years. They were in Oklahoma for three years before moving to Kansas City, where the oldest son still lives. David, his wife, and 10 of their children have lived in The City for two years, and they have already moved twice during that time and expect to move a third time. They depend on relatives to assist by providing places for some of the children to sleep: the place they live now will not hold the entire family.

David shares responsibility for day-to-day care of the kids with his wife, who also works. He is often able to walk them to the bus before he leaves for work, and he is there in the evening too. David has no formal education. His family was so poor that they could not afford school supplies, so he wasn't able to attend school. Instead, he hung out with friends and helped his mother.

David works nights and is able to be home until the children are in bed. He enjoys the time with them. He believes he will benefit from the education of his children. He explains it this way: “[T]he food you plant, that’s why you eat tomorrow.”

For Danielle, David says an education will allow her “to succeed however she chooses.” David admits he doesn’t know how to advise his children academically. Instead, he trusts Danielle to know what she needs to do. David does have academic conversations with Danielle about her future, though, and interacts often on behalf of all of his children with the school.

The advice David does give his children is to go to college immediately after graduating from high school. David has seen the children of friends make the mistake of not continuing, convinced by a paycheck that they don’t need further education.

For now, David will stay focused on helping his children succeed here in The City. I spend most of the end of the interview explaining Growing STEMs before giving David a ride home.

Mr. B and Christina

Mr. B, the third parent I interviewed, met me at the The City library on a warm winter day. Tall with a thick build and in his mid- to late-40s, Mr. B wears a green windbreaker, a black apple cap backwards, and black pants on the day we meet. There is grey in his moustache and neatly-trimmed beard. He was born in The City and still lives in the same neighborhood where he went to school. The neighborhood was, and still is, low- to middle-income according to Mr. B. He grew up in a single-parent home with a

twin sister. He doesn't portray himself as particularly successful academically. He considers himself to have had "a pretty rough childhood" but describes a resilient kid who could see that tomorrow could be better.

Like the others interviewed, he feels he did not take full advantage of the opportunities he had in school. Mr. B and his wife, Bridget, who is Meskwaki Indian and white, have attended some college. As is the case with all of the parents, Mr. B's educational journey shapes some of his views on learning. His academic life-changing moment occurred in the Navy. Mr. B was having trouble in a class when the instructor took an interest in him and helped him learn how to take notes. He moved from the bottom to the top of the class.

Mr. B openly shares about himself, his values, and those of his family, often punctuating his points with a slap/clap of his hands. He and his wife have four daughters, and their Growing STEMs child is the oldest. It is obvious as Mr. B speaks that he takes parenting very seriously:

[I]t starts with them just coming out of the womb. You know, you've got to mold them. You just can't sit there and let them run wild and do whatever they want to do and all of a sudden, when they are seven or eight years old you start clamping down on them.

That theme of molding carries into Mr. B's conversation about his Growing STEMs daughter, Christina. He has a strong relationship with her and he believes this is key to motivating her and her sisters. Mr. B also encourages his children to be self-motivated. In looking back over his own life he sees self-motivation as essential to the success he has achieved (he has developed a nationally-recognized food product), and as

critical to the academic success of his four daughters. This quote engenders Mr. B's attitude:

No matter what someone puts in your head, or what confidence they have in you, that can only go so far. You've got to be self-motivated to do whatever you need to do. ... I feel like, that's a champion.

Do not sit on your laurels thinking that someone is supposed to do something for you. ... Get out there and get it (claps hands for emphasis), you know. Make your own way in this world.

No excuses. Get up, get ready and get after it.

Mr. B's wife is the one involved in the day-to-day academic life of their children, but he is not absent.

Jack and Franklin

Like Mr. B, Jack grew up in the same neighborhood where his high-school aged children now attend school. He played sports in the area and graduated in 1991. Jack "loved" school, but admits he wishes he had been more focused. He is excited that his children will surpass his accomplishments. "I believe kids take off where you leave, you know? (laugh)."

He and his family now live outside The City. We met at a library near his home for his interview. For this meeting, he is coming immediately after work. Jack is about 40, and he looks tired on the cold winter day when we meet. He is dressed in a light sports jacket, with a skull cap and warm gloves. He has an infectious smile. His hair is cut close and his face is smooth. He is tall and built solid, like a former athlete. Jack is

confident and willing to participate. He seems tired and sips a Nestea periodically, as if to stay awake.

This was my fourth interview, and one of my longest. Jack was even willing to come back for a follow-up interview. His two high school sons are two of four of his children. He has a 20 year-old son that also now lives near him outside The City, who is back in school. Having his three sons together and near him is important to Jack. He is married and also has a 7 year-old stepson.

Among his biological children, Franklin, the Growing STEMs student, is the baby, but in the current mix he's in the middle. In discussing Franklin, Jack expresses with pride, "he just, he keeps moving at it (academic excellence). I like Franklin for that. You know, he's got drive." Franklin spends most of his time in school and work. A sophomore taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses, which provide the option of receiving college credit, Franklin has deliberately dropped most extracurricular activities so that he has enough time for academics. In the past he played cello, sung in the choral program, and played football. Remarking about the college preparation courses Franklin is taking, Jack says, "To me, that's sometimes a little extra, but I'm like, man, you do what you feel like you can handle." Jack admits that Franklin often acts more mature than his middle son. Both teenagers work about 15 hours a week. The 7 year-old, while also smart, is heavily involved in sports.

Describing home life, Jack says it's "a lot of ups and downs. It's intense. It's like that ... roller coaster ride that just doesn't stop. And it has its moments when you're really getting whipped around."

Jack's primary academic concern is his son's talkativeness in class. This really bothers Jack. He shares, "I don't remember talking to my mom and dad crazy like that."

At times I was concerned that Jack's work schedule and home life prevented him from connecting with and being involved with Franklin academically, and my field notes reflected this. But as I transcribed Jack's interview, it became apparent that Jack was very proud of and invested in Franklin. He knew Franklin's changing career aspirations, and he admires the fact that Franklin is building his own opportunities. He's very happy that Franklin is in Growing STEMs, even though he doesn't know much about it. We spend most of the end of the first interview with my sharing about the program. He consents to a follow-up interview.

Denise and Johnetta

Denise appears dressed for work on the evening I first meet her. In her dreads with brass earrings that make a soft bell-like sound occasionally and a black nylon wrap outfit, she is intense and helpful. We are both a bit anxious since a snowstorm is predicted for the evening, and at times we look out the window in the small conference room of the library where she has consented to meet near her home. Her comments are often punctuated with a lyrical laugh. This mother of three is 51 and married to a black male. She has a 33 year-old son, her 16-year-old Growing STEMs daughter, and a 13 year-old daughter. It is obvious in speaking with Denise that she enjoys parenting. She is also very affirming in her conversations with her children. "I raise my children and I tell them, if I wanted a common child I wouldn't have bothered to have you. (laugh)," she

says. The girls are very active in extra-curricular activities, and with Denise going back to school and appearing to have primary responsibility for transporting her daughters to extra-curricular activities, she sometimes finds that a great deal of her time is spent in the car.

Denise is not from The City, but she grew up in the state. She moved to The City after she married. Her mother and brother even followed her there. She is currently in school, having lost a job because she did not have the right certification.

Denise has high expectations of her children and the school district. She believes a college education is critical to the future of her children. “If you have dreams ... you get on that pathway and you keep going, no matter what,” she shares.

Denise had what she describes as her “greatest memories” in school, and as a result of those memories she holds the education system accountable to provide the best opportunities possible for her children. But she doesn’t count on the school district to provide what her daughters need without her involvement. She has been a parent volunteer in the school district in one form or another for years.

Denise says her Growing STEMs daughter is an “overthinker.” Like the other students represented in this pool, Johnetta is “totally focused on her education,” says Denise. She also shares that Johnetta “is pretty much good at everything she does. But it comes with work for her.” Denise constantly has career conversations with her children. In addition, she actively seeks the supports and experiences her daughters need, using resources at her daughters’ schools, her school and in the community.

Data Collection and Analysis

Denise, Jack, Mr. B, David and Grace are the parents from whom information was obtained for this study. This section describes more generally the sources of the qualitative data collected. The process carried out during this phase of the project is explained and details discussed as well.

Black parents are the subjects of this study; specifically, Black parents of students who self-identify as Black and are successful sophomores or juniors participating in the Growing STEMs program. To access these parents, prior to beginning the study permission was obtained from the university's research review board. Permission was then sought to access Growing STEMs information to identify participants. Data provided was assessed to obtain the pool of parents that met the study criteria. A copy of the letter developed and mailed to introduce the study can be found at Appendix B.

Reliability, Validity, Trustworthiness and Verification

Qualitative findings can inform issues related to what constitutes academic social capital for Black parents, as well as increase our understanding of how educational institutions might contribute to an increase in, or activation of, Black parental social capital in ways that improve academic outcomes for Black youth.

Qualitative research, and phenomenological research in particular, considers a number of factors to ensure its value, which I gave careful consideration to. For instance,

Creswell (1998) suggests that the researcher should consider his or her influence on the subjects' descriptions of the phenomenon, the accuracy of the transcripts, the fidelity of the researcher in communicating what was conveyed, other meanings or interpretations of the data, use of the transcript to account for research contents and connections, and the stability of the situation description in other situations (p. 208).

Procedures must also be reliable, and this is accomplished by checking the dependability of the data and the procedures (Flick, 2002). This study provided procedural reliability by tracking the data collection process and procedures, as well as participating in a member check via follow-up interviews.

Validity, or trustworthiness, is established by focusing on constructing themes grounded in the experiences of the participants. Whether one sees a relation where there isn't one, rejects a relation when it is present, or asks the wrong question in relation to the inquiry are all considered in determining validity (Flick, 2002). Ensuring that constructs are grounded in the positions of the members is critical to validity as well. "Research aims at presenting reality not producing it," says Flick (2002, p. 222). I employed the following verification procedures to increase validity (Glesne, 2006): a) clarification of researcher bias (by reflecting on my subjectivity), b) member checking via sharing and verifying information at follow-up interviews, and c) employing rich, thick descriptions of observations.

Data Collection

After actors were selected, two stages of data collection were carried out.

Stage One

Both qualitative and phenomenological inquiry use interviews as a method of data collection (Flick, 2002; Mason, 1996; Massey, 2011). Libraries provided both convenient and familiar locations for interviews. Study or conference rooms were reserved for the meetings. During these interviews, actors received a review of the purpose of the study – understanding Black parental involvement in education – and were reminded of the items covered in the letter and presented with the consent agreement. The participants were reminded that they could choose not to participate, could decide not to answer any question or questions, and could end the interview at any time. The consent agreement was signed and a copy provided to the participant before beginning each interview.

Using the grand tour and prompt questions, the interviews were 40 – 70 minutes in length. After the interview participants received a \$10 gas gift card for participation and were invited to be part of a membership check opportunity. Preliminary analysis of the data began immediately following each interview and journaling continued throughout the data collection process.

Stage Two

The second method of collection was a two-person follow-up interview and a one-person follow-up interview. This second stage added an element of verification. Questions for this stage were guided by the grand tour questions as well as a review of the preliminary themes arising from the interviews. The follow-ups were scheduled within two weeks of

the one-on-one interviews. Those who participated were again reminded of the purpose of the study, the importance of confidentiality since participant first names were shared and two participants physically met, and that the same protocols would be followed (including that participants could choose not to answer any question or end participation at any time). The follow-ups were conducted at a neighborhood library. No compensation was provided.

On-going

The reflexive (or reflective) journal is an important component of qualitative research that seeks to meet “credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability” standards (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p. 93). The reflexive journal allowed me to record information about myself (the research tool of qualitative inquiry), as well as to record the decisions that I made related to the methods utilized during the research process. The journal, coupled with my audio reflections, were key to ensuring acknowledgement of my biases. Journaling also took place during the interviews and follow-ups, which provided the texture for the thick descriptions important to qualitative inquiry.

The prompt questions were used to guide each of five one-on-one interviews. However, the order was not strictly adhered to; instead, questions were checked for coverage in the course of conversation. To understand the actors’ lens for viewing schooling, questions were added related to the educational and family backgrounds of

the actors. In addition to allowing for rich descriptions, this dialogue presented another opportunity for the actors to reflect on issues of race and education.

The interviews provided an opportunity for parents to ask questions as well. I encouraged parents to use these meetings to learn more about Growing STEMs, or to give input or express concerns.

One interview was conducted at the home of an actor; all other interviews were conducted at the public library most convenient to the actor. A total of four area libraries were used in The City and the surrounding areas during the course of these interviews. I also conducted two follow-up interviews as member checks; one two-actor follow up with one person joining the second person by phone at a library site; and one individual follow-up at a library. These follow ups were conducted on the same day.

I found there was some tension between working to build rapport with the participants yet responding without judgment to responses. In my attempt to do this, I typically began by sharing what I was doing and at times I shared my own experiences as a parent to build rapport, particularly if I sensed it would make the participant more comfortable. However, I worked not to reveal my own biases during the interviews. For instance, when a parent shared the number of hours a young person might be working, I worked hard not to express concern. All interviews and follow-ups were audio-recorded and notes were taken and transcribed by the researcher with the permission of the participants. Field notes were created after interviews. All transcription was completed within two months after the last interview.

The data collected from the interviews, the follow up interviews and the journal were subjected to coding and categorizing. The role of coding is to “break down and understand a text and to attach and develop categories and put them into an order in the course of time” Flick (2002). NVivo 10 software, produced by QSR International, was used to manage, explore, and find patterns in the interview data. Interview text can be imported into the software package. Audit trails are created, and I tied memos to emerging themes, conducted and saved word searches, and I keyed in my journal entries so that information could easily be included in any analyses.

Notes taken and recordings made were analyzed after each interview and some content analysis began. Using pseudonyms, all interviews were completely transcribed shortly after the follow-up interviews were complete. Consistent with phenomenological inquiry, I did this work myself in order to ensure that all of the information was reviewed. In addition, I keyed my interview notes, which provided another layer of inquiry.

The data is stored on a server maintained by Midwest University that is protected, and backed up, by the university. This information serves as the source for this exploration of Black parents of high achieving Growing STEMs students, social capital and college preparation programs. The findings from this data follow.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

To situate this academic social capital exploration it is important to understand the encounters of Black parents in the education arena. This study considered the experiences of parents of Black students who are doing well within the Growing STEMs program – students who are meeting participation and grade point average (3.0 or above) expectations. In their high school careers, they have consistently met these requirements. These are parents of four female, and one male, teens, two of which are sophomores and three of which are juniors in high school.

The first research question will be considered in this section: How do Black parents perceive their interaction with schools, teachers and parents? This will be followed by an exploration of question two related to Black parents and social capital.

Black Parents and Interactions with Schools

Denise: Education is power because knowledge is powerful. It is something that no one can take away from you and it can take you where you want to go.

Grace: I think education equals knowledge, and knowledge equals power.

The Black parents in this study highly regarded education. These Black parents were also overwhelmingly positive about their interactions with the schools. This was in part because all of the parents were raised in the same Midwest state, and three of the

parents went to school in the The City school district where their young people now attend. These parents recalled positively their own school experiences.

Another element that played a role in this positive attitude toward schools is the experiences that parents reported as they interacted on behalf of their youth. These Black parents of high academic achievers generally reported that they had good experiences with teachers and schools. However, although these parents of future first-generation college students perceived their interactions as positive, they also had some common experiences that are red flags signaling areas of concern. These Black parents saw themselves as needing to interact with schools in the way prescribed by these institutions in order to gain access to the information they sought, often found schools difficult to navigate for meaningful information, and considered school-initiated interactions like the parent/teacher conference to be of little assistance in helping their young people succeed. I consider these topics in the following section. In addition to addressing these issues, I interrogate separately issues of race and the impact of Growing STEMs on Black parental interactions with schools. The findings in this exploration seemed best illuminated by associating them with children's games; as a result, these game themes are used to help express the concepts arising from the findings.

School Says

In the childhood game "Simon Says," the leader tells all of the participants to take a particular action. If the action is preceded by the phrase "Simon says," then the participant is expected to do the requested action. However, if the player receives

instructions that aren't preceded by "Simon says," carrying out the action will eliminate the participant from the game. Either way the person calling out what Simon says or does not say controls the game. Like a game of "Simon Says," parents perceived schools as the controllers of interactions within schools.

This concept played out as I explored the interaction of these Black parents with school personnel. The responses all U.S.-born parents gave to the question 'do you interact with the school?' was illuminating. All of these actors took the phrase to mean 'do you volunteer at the school?' For instance, when I asked Grace about her interactions, she shared, "I'm not active in the PTA [Parent Teacher Association].... (but) if I have it, I'll volunteer money. You know, I believe in service." Similarly, Mr. B responded, "I don't (interact). ... as far as the PTA, or whatever."

Denise's experience, though, best articulated what Black parents perceived as the expectation of schools for parents:

I spent a lot of time at the school. I volunteered a lot. ... I think you have to have an edge in kind of that way because every ...parent, in my opinion, has a ...place.

Parents also understand the sanctioned school-defined interactions to hold a type of social capital that could benefit their children. Jack sensed that because he is not more involved at the school that he may not be able to effectively influence outcomes for his son:

...meetings where the parents and the teachers are there alone? ...I've never been to any of those. I wish! ...I guess that's where some of those decisions get made. ...That's where you put that input, you know – "you guys could do this." (laugh)

Jack acknowledged in this exchange that it is in closed-door conversations with teachers that decisions are made about student access and progress.

So, the majority of the parents in this study did not see themselves as interacting with schools in ways that would position them to have influence at the schoolhouse, or in ways that schools desired. But even though Denise meets what these Black parents perceive as the school's definition of what it means to be a parent who is involved at the school, as in the game Simon Says, there are apparently some interactions that are not affirmed by the school.

For instance, Denise and her daughter, Johnetta, visited the counselor. Together they agreed on a schedule that included AP History, but the final schedule Denise saw later was changed. Johnetta said the counselors told her she was "doing well" and she had enough credits – in other words, she did not need the AP History course. Denise's response to this change was "she needs to be prepared for college and she can take more AP classes. Don't just let her slide by on her schedule." Denise expressed these sentiments in a fairly even tone, and any frustration was cloaked in a smile that perhaps was meant to ease her stress over a system that she has not discovered the key to effectively and consistently influence. Perhaps it was because this was not the first time Denise's desires had gone unmet. Denise was also having issues with the school as they prepared for Johnetta's senior year. The district was suggesting that Johnetta go to school half a day, which Denise thought was a bad idea.

I was really irritated. ... she only will have to go a portion of the day Well what will you be doing the rest of the day? That could be filled with education and knowledge. I mean, I know that sounds funny, and I'm not trying to be mean, but it's like, wait a minute here.

In an environment in which the school is the definer of the relationship (Thirutnurthy, Kirylo & Ciabattari, 2010), perhaps this vignette is not surprising. It appears that even the parent of a high-achieving Black student, a parent who is involved at the school, has limited ability to impact outcomes. Without a “Simon says” before the interaction (i.e. an invitation from the school to be involved at a particular level), parental wishes may be ignored, sometimes even without the courtesy of a personal communication.

So these Black parents have internalized what they perceive to be clear messages from schools about what it means to interact, and that comes with an expectation of working with or contributing to the school in some way. Parents do not see themselves as being able to impact this dynamic in such a way that they can modify the conversation. These parents sense there is a type of influence and information access associated with involvement; yet, even when Black parents interact in ways prescribed by the school they may or may not have influence. But they do not give up.

Tag – I’m Still It?

It is evident during my conversation with Denise that her mishandled interaction with a counselor will not dissuade her from continuing to attempt to hold the school accountable on behalf of her daughter. Unfortunately, Denise, like the other parents, appeared to be engaged in a game of Tag. In this childhood game, someone is “It.” The child who is It must run after other children who are trying to stay away. “It” must touch another child and yell, “Tag, you’re It” to pass on responsibility for being the game’s central figure to another child. It would appear for our Black parents that their attempts

to obtain information and resources from the schools – to make the school It and thus responsible – are at times unsuccessful, providing further evidence that the school is the definer of the parent/school relationship, and perhaps the erector of barriers.

David, for instance, finds himself seeking information from the school on a regular basis. He calls and visits face-to-face to get what he needs and seems to feel he is somewhat successful. Grace's interactions with the school are primarily through email. She uses the Internet to monitor her daughter's academic progress, and uses email to communicate with teachers and administrators about her concerns. Grace contacts a number of people at once, in a bit of a shotgun approach, in the hopes that among those that receive the email will be the person best able to meet her needs. Grace often remains the hardest working player in this game for some time; she is It until she finds the right person to address her concerns.

Denise, who volunteers at the school, expressed a great deal of comfort in the school environment and seemed to have a pool of individuals she could call on. Jack expressed limited but comfortable interactions with the school and commented that teachers reach out to him in association with his son's behavior. Jack's sophomore son, Franklin, sometimes has trouble in class because he talks too much. Jack does not approve of his son's behavior and is pleased that teachers reach out to him when there are issues to address.

However, at times these interactions don't occur smoothly. In a recent incident, a teacher told Franklin that he was alerting Jack to a concern. When Jack did not mention the communication, Franklin assumed that the teacher lied. This created an unwelcome

situation that Jack had to own and try to unravel. Visibly expressing some frustration with the school, Jack said,

[T]he teacher told [Franklin] he was sending me an email and letting me know this was going down. And he hadn't actually got to me. And he might have been trying, which tells me he's got the wrong information. [B]ut somewhere there's the right information because the school's getting this (other) stuff to me.

So parents not only find they must be the drivers of meaningful communication specific to their young person, they also find they bear the consequences of miscommunications. Parents find they are It, looking for the right individual to address their concerns, and pursuing an issue until it is appropriately addressed. Communication concerns continue as a theme as I consider the topic of parent/teacher conferences.

Telephone/Mis(sed)-Communications

In The City, parent/teacher conferences are a staple. Each year parents are invited into the school to visit classrooms and meet with teachers. Every Black parent in this study confirmed participating in these conferences. Grace shared that she is generally pleased with what she learns during parent/teacher conferences. According to her, she receives the information she needs about her daughter's progress in school and perhaps a reminder of information already passed on to the child about what might increase her young person's academic performance. Her recollection of these interactions is similar to what was expressed by all of the parents:

I feel like they give me ... the necessary feedback where Kat is concerned. ... and ... they were open to hearing anything I had to say. [T]here wasn't much because Kat is a positive student, very focused on her studies. She doesn't require a lot of ... direction when it comes to

that... She gets her homework and everything. So the teachers usually have ... positive feedback. And the most you really have to say is "thank you" or, ... if she's not achieving the goal or target she's set for herself, what can she do.

Mr. B's perception was that teachers were "pretty frank," and he confirmed that most conversations focused on the fact that his daughter met expectations, and that if there was a need for academic improvement, teachers spoke "honestly" about that as well. In the same way that Grace shares "there wasn't that much" during her parent/teacher conferences, Denise described these interactions as "quite boring." The teachers tell her Johnetta is a "pleasure to have in class, she doesn't cause a lot of trouble ... what else do you want to know?" Jack had also attended parent/teacher conferences and generally heard good things about the progress of his son. And even when teachers had concerns to share, Jack appreciated their directness.

Given that all of the parents of these Black high-academic achievers attend parent/teacher conferences, a few troubling issues arise. First, the fact that all of the parents in the study attend these opportunities regularly, yet none of the parents view this as facilitating meaningful relationship-building with anyone at the school, nor does it act, in most cases, as a source of meaningful information for these parents, is a cause for concern. Parents are committing the time and energy to accept the invitation of the school to participate, yet they gain little from the interaction. And one has to wonder whether the content of messages to other parents of high achieving students is simply "you have a good student who doesn't cause trouble."

It is also important to note here that other than during parent/teacher conferences, parents were not contacted by an individual teacher or the school at other times unless it

was related to a student disciplinary action. Additionally, when I probed Jack (the only parent who had a conversation with a teacher related to the behavior of his child), he seemed surprised when I inquired whether Franklin was bored in class and that perhaps that was playing a role in his behavior. And although during our conversations Jack mentioned this as an on-going issue, no information has been provided, nor is there ongoing teacher involvement, to help Jack as the parent navigate this with Franklin. Instead, Jack was left to solve this issue and give an account to the school system.

These missed opportunities for developing relationships and imparting key information, as well as the mis(sed)-communications, mean parents are marginalized in the school/parent dynamic. Like a bad game of telephone, where a strong, clear message is whispered by the person who begins the game into the ear of the next player, but then is garbled as it is whispered ear-to-ear down the line, parent/teacher conferences and calls for parent involvement are about the school appearing to give a strong message of shared responsibility for the education of youth, but the message being lost in the school as it plans and delivers programs. That is the reality for the parents in this study. This concern is also apparent in the technology connections schools make with parents, which are explored next.

Duck, Duck, Goose

One nuance to this exploration was the identification of technology as key to helping parents find the right person to connect to, and for helping schools get information to parents. During three of the interviews parents paused to check text

messages from the school on their cell phones. David held his in his hand throughout most of the interview. Grace spoke extensively about use of the Internet to make contact with teachers and resolve an issue related to her daughter's grade in a class.

But just as in our society at large, the use of technology does not always result in effective communication or in connections that provide the types of information needed or wanted. Jack shared that, "for the most part I get a lot of texts from the school. But it's only the events that... they're having." So although technology is being used by schools, it only gives the appearance of an invitation to connection without providing the opportunity to build a relationship with a person that becomes a partner in the educational process, nor does it typically provide the type of information that parents really want.

This appears similar to a game of "duck, duck, goose," which involves the players sitting in a circle waiting to be tapped by the child who is It. Each child is tapped on the head and the child who is It either says "duck" or "goose" as s/he administers the tap. The person who is tapped as the child who is circling says "duck" may stay seated, but when the child taps a child and says "goose" that child must get up and run after the primary player, trying to catch him or her before that person reaches the spot they once occupied in the circle, at which time the goose becomes It. Similarly, parents often find they are "tapped" by the school's technical communication, but left to chase down the school to get what they really need.

Invisible Racism and Schools

Due to the unique experiences of Blacks in America, it is important to interrogate the perceptions of the parents in this study related to racism within the schools.

Exploring this theme also provides a glimpse through the lens from which parents view the experiences of their youth, and it has certain implications for the place from which Growing STEMs students are launching.

During my first two interviews, I hesitated to raise questions of race directly because I did not want to lead the participant. However, the questions outlined triggered little discussion specific to race. Additionally, during my interview with Grace she alluded to the potential that racism might have been involved in the missed (positive) assessment of Kat, but without naming it, we did not get into a detailed discussion. When I asked directly in the follow-up interview whether her daughter Kat had experienced any racism in school, Grace was cautious, but given Kat's desire to excel academically and her work ethic, at times she wondered whether racism was a factor:

You know, at times I'm not certain. ...[Kat] seems to have the desire ... to do the best. She's concerned about ... getting the best grades she can to be able to get into college.... [T]here are a couple of classes that I'm not altogether certain why she's not able to achieve the A in those classes. ... And when I talk to [Kat] I don't see that ... there's ... a lot of encouragement. [A]gain, I haven't spoken with any of the teachers, so I really can't say ... why that is.

When I asked Mr. B whether any barriers exist in school associated with race, he responded that, although he has not noticed that it has affected his daughter, he's confident racism impacts education for other children at his daughter's high school. He

even shared a little about his own experiences connected to issues of race, and suggested that education holds hope for eliminating racism.

... obviously it was a lot worse when I was growing up. But ... it's still there....[M]y memories ... are of people driving by in cars when we were walking home from school and people were saying things.... I'm not saying that's not happening now, but, I know it happened ... when I was coming up. And ... there was a sense of division. I mean, we as black folks in high school, we all kind of stuck together. ... [I]t's a lot more integrated now ... as far as people being open-minded.... And that comes from education.

Although education may be positively affecting some attitudes, Denise shared that for her daughter the race-related issues she faces arise mostly among her daughter's Black peers. And even though Jack went to school in the same city as Mr. B, who experienced racial incidents, perhaps because he is younger he didn't think racism affected his life or that it affects the life of his children now. When asked to compare what it was like for him as a Black male going to school with the experiences of his sons, Jack declared that the diversity in his school as he grew up, and the diversity of the school now, prevents racism from being an issue.

The illusive nature of race in the discussions, even though it is alive and well in U.S. schools (Milner, 2008), requires me to give this issue closer examination. Due to the responses of these parents, I will further explore issues of race in Chapter V.

Black Heritage and Mountaintops

I'm proud of [Christina] that ... she's more aware of her culture. I think that's so important.... I know it sounds crazy, but I want her ... to be like Maya Angelou. ...[T]o where you ... carry yourself well, but you are understanding your past. And she understands it by reading and seeing things that she's like, 'wow, I never knew.' I mean, she never knew that

there was a time where... there was ... a Black water fountain and a White water fountain and those kinds of things. And it blows her away to think about that.

In spite of their expressions that racism has little to no impact on their children, all of the parents in this study think it is important for their young people to be aware of their heritage. This assessing of value for embracing cultural heritage is consistent with Yosso's (2005) contention that cultural capital includes "cultural knowledges nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history (and) memory" (p. 79). For Grace, this has meant being proactive in talking to her daughter about her culture, and Denise has taught her children about their Black heritage and seems comfortable with their knowledge.

Jack, on the other hand, expressed that he wished his children knew more. He recalled a recent incident related to Martin Luther King Jr. Day. The day is typically a holiday for the district, but it was proposed that the day be used as a snow make-up day. Black students organized and petitioned the school board to have another day chosen as the snow day. Jack shared his frustration that his sons did not understand why having school on that day would be an issue.

I'm like, maybe you should open up a book," he said, "because that's the man (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.) that fought for... a lot of the rights that you have today. And ... to them, they think they just fell out of a tree.... And I think that's probably the opinion of a lot of kids. Which is kind of sad because then what's the future going to hold?

It was evident that all of the U.S.-born Black parents of high achievers in this study valued their Black cultural past and encouraged their young people to learn from and appreciate it. Mr. B shared not only about Christina's journey to understanding Black

history, but he also shared one thing schools could do to help out youth: represent history more inclusively.

I truly felt that the history books in school was skewed, not telling the truth to what really happened. ...They don't tell us the true story about Columbus and things of that nature. ...and that's a disservice to the kids, because ... it's almost telling them a lie....

And Grace, who did appear concerned about possible racism at the school, offered an analysis of the problem that is more consistent with what one might call Christian principles. She focused on the heart of the person who espouses racist attitudes:

I personally don't believe that ... race is ever really the real problem. I believe what's in the heart is the real problem. ...Even if somebody is a racist... it starts at their heart

Today's children are not at Dr. King's mountaintop yet, but their parents want them to understand who has helped them get this far up the mountain. And it is because we have not yet arrived - racism is still firmly entrenched in U.S. educational institutions - that programs like Growing STEMs exist. But does this program make a difference for its parents in terms of increasing their social capital? The next section explores that topic.

Growing STEMs and School Relationships

Before leaving this section on the perceptions of Black parents about their interactions with schools, teachers and parents, I consider whether Growing STEMs has any influence on these relationships with schools.

Denise was the only parent that mentioned that her relationship with Growing STEMs facilitated a connection within the school that resulted in access to information. It is important to note that she is also the only parent interviewed who has attended Growing STEMs programs designed specifically for parents. Beyond this, the parents in this study did not share information related to any impact on school relationships or information access during these interviews. I propose a strategy for improving the assessment of this component in future studies in the summary section.

Interview answers did, however, help inform issues related to what social capital may exist in Growing STEMs generally, and how parents are accessing, or might access, it. Those topics will be explored in the following section.

Black Parental Social Capital

The second component of this study sought to understand the perceived elements of academic social capital for Black parents. In other words, do Black parents consider themselves to be connected to schools in ways that facilitate their influence over academic outcomes for their youth or access to the information and resources in schools? In exploring this, I considered what these Black parents of high academic achievers perceived as necessary to have influence and access. I also considered their observations of Growing STEMs and whether the program helps increase, or activate, their academic social capital. In order to explore these issues, I considered first whether the conditions existed for social capital exchange, then moved to what these Black parents of high

achievers perceived as the social capital they needed to possess to access the capital at school, the existence of any social capital assets among these parents that remained untapped, as well as any perceived influence of Growing STEMs on parental social capital.

Academic Social Capital

As mentioned previously, Kuperminc et al. (2008) posit that parental involvement is a type of social capital that provides resources that increase academic outcomes for youth. For the purposes of this inquiry, I considered primarily parental involvement with schools and whether they were able to influence outcomes or obtain the information they sought.

Coleman (1988), in considering the role of familial capital (financial, human and social) in academic achievement, contends that the social relationships between children, parents and teachers, when there are shared expectations and trust, can promote the academic development of children by establishing and enforcing norms, and by sharing information. Layered with the concepts expressed by Lin et al. (2001), social capital also requires a social structure in which capital is embedded, opportunities for accessing the capital, and an action-oriented aspect that results in access. It is without question that school sites possess certain capital that can lead to student academic excellence as defined by our culture. It seems important, then, to consider whether these Black parents of high academic achievers have the type of academic social capital, or are able to activate their existing capital, in ways that facilitate an exchange. To frame this inquiry, I first

examined the data to determine whether Coleman's (1988) prerequisites were met for social capital to be formed (i.e., shared expectations, trust, establishment and enforcement of norms, and sharing of information). I begin by exploring the presence or absence of shared expectations.

Head in the Clouds: The High Educational Expectations of Black Parents

When I asked Denise to describe what came to mind when she heard the word "education," she responded "knowledge, power, freedom and choice." In fact, all of the parents in the study spoke of it with high regard. Whether these are echoes of racial uplift (Perkins, 1993; Williams, 2005) or just parents expressing practical appreciation for the financial benefits of an education, the Black parents in this study placed a premium on education and what it could provide to their children. All of the parents in the study expressed a desire for their children to do well in high school and beyond. Parents shared extensively about their high expectations for their youth and spoke proudly of their children's academic achievements.

These young people are all meeting the educational expectations of the school system generally. Jack, however, acknowledged that although his son is doing well academically, at times he has an issue with disruptively talking too much in class. And contrary to the stereotype that is sometimes expressed related to Black parents and whether they are willing to address behavior issues (Harry et al., 2005; Thirutnurthy et al., 2010), Jack expressed embarrassment at his son's actions and spoke extensively

about the corrective measures he has taken at home, and about his accessibility to teachers related to this topic.

So, do parents in this study share the same expectations as the school district for these young people? If the purpose of schools is to produce young people who excel in the school system, it would appear the answer is yes.

Trust You? Mostly: Black Parents and Teachers

Another factor in Coleman's (1988) social capital equation is trust. Although Lin et al. (2001) suggest that only opportunity is necessary to access social capital, given that U.S.-born parents and their children spend at least 13 years connected to educational structures, and since Durlauf and Fafchamps (2005) posit that mistrust can keep capital exchanges from occurring, examining issues of trust is important. To explore this topic, I considered the responses of parents related to their own educational experiences, the general perceptions of the parents in the study about the school system in The City, and the concerns shared by Black parents about interactions with The City schools.

All of the parents in this study except David were raised in the same Midwestern state, and only one of those parents was not born and raised in The City. The four U.S.-born Black parents had many positive things to share about their own educational experiences and those of their children, and regarding their interactions with schools in general. "Some of my best memories are my elementary years," said Denise, and she went on to tell about two teachers who took a special interest in her. When I asked Jack about his educational experience, he said he "loved it." Jack, Denise, Mr. B. and David

acknowledged that schools have more opportunities for their children than were available to them.

All of the parents appeared to feel good about their own educational experiences (again, except David who is not U.S.-born), although they wish they had taken better advantage of the opportunities available. But because they had positive experiences, the foundation exists for a relationship of trust. Mr. B in particular stated that teachers are “real professionals,” and Jack shared that he appreciated that teachers don’t “candy coat” things.

But in spite of these generally positive views, Black parents in the study found challenges, and those challenges created feelings of distrust. For instance, Denise is an active advocate for her daughters and she doesn’t hesitate to ask for whatever they need. She also spoke highly of the teachers. She said of them, “They’re supportive. ... I love the teachers ... I love the fact that they work with [Johnetta] and stuff.” But she also shared that her trust is not blind. She watches what teachers are doing in relation to her expectations and goals for her children, and interacts with teachers if she has concerns:

I trust (teachers) will do their job if there’s eyes watching them. Because it is a stressful job, and you have so many people [H]opefully you’re paying attention, but if not, I’m gonna sit down and deal with you ... and question you....

Denise expressed concern that teachers, though well-meaning, may not pay appropriate attention to the needs of her daughter due to a number of factors, including job stress and class size. As mentioned earlier, Denise also had the experience of visiting with the counselor, setting Johnetta’s schedule so that it ensured the rigor Denise wanted, then having the schedule changed in a one-on-one conversation with Johnetta. But Denise is

not the only parent to have experienced some puzzling moments. Grace's concern surfaced in a comment regarding how schools are now in comparison to how they were when she was in school.

[W]hen I was coming up ... when a teacher saw that you were so focused on ... getting to the institutions of higher learning, and that you were focused on what your gpa [grade point average] was, when they saw that you were that determined, then they did everything in their power to help you along the way. And I feel like that has changed.

Grace made it clear, however, that she did not place the blame for this change on teachers, nor did she blame the students. She just thinks it's "different," she insisted.

Contrary to the perceptions shared by Denise and Grace, Mr. B believes teachers "give a little extra 'umph' when a kid shows that they really, really, really want to learn." I'm unsure why these parents had such different perceptions. It could be due to the different levels of interaction: Mr. B is not the primary person in the home interacting with the school, while Grace is the only one advocating on her daughter's behalf, and Denise seems to be the primary advocate. There could also be a gender perception difference.

So, do the Black parents in this study trust teachers, counselors and schools? It appears the answer is a cautionary yes. Do schools reciprocate? It seems that another cautionary "yes" may be in order. After all, one might take Denise's interaction with the counselor to indicate distrust of the parent on behalf of the school: if one assumes that the counselor would not deliberately sabotage Johnetta's future, perhaps the counselor felt that Denise did not really know what was best for her daughter. Rather than express those thoughts in Denise's presence, though, she brought Johnetta in alone and changed

her schedule. Perhaps school personnel trust Black parents with their eye on them as well.

We're Right Here, Eye to Eye: Establishing and Enforcing Norms

As we have seen, the Black parents in this study share the same high academic expectations espoused by schools, and they have at least some trust of the system. But aspirations can sometimes be divorced from reality (i.e., we can say one thing then act in a way that is inconsistent with our words). However, in the case of these parents, their high aspirations are supported by deliberate parental acts that reinforce the types of behavior schools express as important to academic success. For instance, both Jack and Mr. B shared about using responsibilities at home to ensure that their children learn good work habits. Grace, Denise and David have reached out to teachers to secure the academic success of their children. Jack has lectured his sons about the importance of controlling their tongues in the classroom. And Denise encouraged her daughter to take challenging courses. These parents sent consistent messages at home and at school regarding the establishment and enforcement of educational norms.

An interaction Mr. B had with Christina was one of the more striking examples of this type of parental establishing and enforcing of academic norms. Christina went out for track but her grades began to slip. Mr. B and his wife told Christina she would have to quit track, which she did, and her grades improved. I probed about Christina's response a bit, surprised that this approach had not backfired. Mr. B looked at me a little puzzled, and said, "She knows that her ... grades are more important than track. Even

though her friends are in track, (and) she wants to be in this social thing ... she understood. ...[W]hen that was taken away, she got back on her game.” These Black parents of high achieving students actively establish and enforce norms that are consistent with those espoused by schools.

Robotexts as School Information Sharing?

The final aspect of academic social capital I’ll explore as I seek to determine whether the conditions are right for social capital access to occur is that of information sharing. As mentioned, schools do share, and Black parents do receive, some information about the academic progress of their children, particularly through parent/teacher conferences. However, the content of that message – “your young person is/is not meeting course expectations, and if not, here’s what s/he can do” – provides little more than the information shared with students. Other communications reportedly deliver information about school events. Parents like Denise, Grace and Jack have also shared some about their children with the school.

However, it is evident that this exchange is not satisfactory, particularly for Denise. Her ongoing advocating for more challenging classes for her daughter mentioned previously is symptomatic of this deficiency. And Grace hinted at dissatisfaction in her comments as well, but I think she was unsure what to think of where the breakdown was occurring, and she did not want to place blame without knowing. In spite of this, the conditions for social capital access, although imperfect, do exist. In the next section, then, I consider whether access does occur.

Going to the Education Bank

In the world of finance, when you are a Bill Gates or Warren Buffet, everyone is interested in handling your money. But when Ms. Williams needs a loan, after completing the paperwork she can be left feeling that the bank is doing her a favor even though the bank will benefit in the end.

Similarly, these parents value communication from the school: they check their cell phones (even during the interview) to be sure a text isn't from "the school." They all attend parent/teacher conferences. They reach out via email, like Grace; or search the Internet to find a teacher who has urgent information, like Jack; or visit the school for face-to-face conversations, like David and Denise. But like our fictitious Ms. Williams, they are sometimes left feeling that they are the only ones with something to gain in this exchange. When the issue of the social capital of these Black parents of academic high-achievers is considered, three themes emerge. These parents a) activate some social capital in the school, b) perceive that development of a relationship with the school requires a particular type of parental social capital and, c) consider themselves to be responsible for developing and maintaining any relationship with the school. So, what type of social capital do these Black parents of high achievers consider themselves to possess? Here, banking analogies may continue to be a good vehicle for communicating what is occurring related to social capital access and schools for these parents.

Valued Customers?

Durlauf and Fafchamps (2005) suggest that “[i]n many cases ... the benefits of social capital are only achieved through purposeful action” (p. 1656). The parents in this study take action. At minimum, all of the parents stay at least somewhat informed about what is going on at the school via email and text messages, and they all participate in parent/teacher conferences. However, although parents express general satisfaction with what they obtain from parent/teacher conferences, an analysis of the content suggests that they do not gain meaningful information from them, except David, who is still learning the U.S. school system. In terms of social capital, it seems their actions do produce some weak access to information, but these parents are being offered a banking product with the lowest return on investment.

And whether it is David calling and visiting, Jack and Grace reaching out to a teacher electronically, or Denise visiting with a counselor, all of these parents do invest time. And these expenditures translated into some social capital for the parents. All had a limited degree of success in finding information, and at times were able to modestly influence outcomes for their children as a result of reaching out in these ways. Grace, for example, was finally able to unravel a situation related to her daughter’s poor grade. And Jack, for instance, was able to speak with a teacher about changing Franklin’s instructor after he found the right contact.

It also appears safe to suggest that the high-achieving youth that these Black parents in the study are associated with create a degree of social capital for the parent. Like having a known banking whiz-kid for a son or daughter, in some ways the

achievements of these young people garner positive attention that provides the parents with greater influence in the school setting. For instance, in the case of Jack and Franklin, given that many minoritized males are often relegated to special education courses when they have behavior issues (Hosp & Reschly, 2003; Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Gibb, Rausch, Cuadrado & Chung, 2008), the fact that Jack is contacted when problems occur, and that he is able to negotiate on behalf of his son in ways that allow Franklin to continue to take high-ability courses, is atypical.

And in keeping with the analogy of the banking whiz, another way the achievements of these youth may create the type of social capital that the school culture sanctions is by helping their parents speak the language and learn the procedures of educational institutions (which schools are not facilitating easy access to). Jack, for example, does not know what the courses are that Franklin takes, but he knows that he may be able to get college credit. The high achievement of these youth gives them apparently non-parent negotiated access to some of the courses, instructors and peers that will help them develop the habits, mindsets and skills they need to succeed academically – the very thing these parents want for their children.

What is troubling about these vignettes, however, is that they support the reality that schools only accept and value certain types of capital and offer a “rate of return” inconsistent with the assets of the parents. I purport that the parents in the study are unable to actuate the social capital they have, even though they have the desire to impact the education system positively, they put in the time, and they are sometimes even investing at the level supposedly expected by schools to create influence. As a result,

although these parents all actuate some social capital via their deliberate actions that schools endorse, schools are treating them like less than valued customers and ignoring other capital inherent to these Black parents of high achievers.

Accessing the Branch Services

Consistent with social capital theory, the Black parents in the study perceive that a strong relationship is key to social capital access (Bolívar & Chrispeels, 2011). Denise expressed this understanding of how schools work: “sometimes you just have to go and you have to do the face-to-face and say, ‘Okay, this is what I need.’” She added that the benefit of having this type of relationship is that “you can say stuff to people.” Denise’s ‘people’ have included principals, teachers and counselors. But does saying things to people have the outcomes that Denise wants? Sometimes the answer is yes, as in the situation in which she was able to acquire a tutor. However, in a more recent interaction Denise’s request for a tutor was met by an explanation that Johnetta was not doing poorly enough in a class to warrant having the district provide a tutor. Denise was frustrated with this response. “So you have to be failing?” Denise asked.

Some parents, like Jack, expressed the reality that he doesn’t have time to pursue this type of involvement that schools sanction. His work and family responsibilities prevent that depth of engagement. But as I explored his involvement during our conversation, he appeared to come to a new realization that it is in the one-on-one interactions that he is unable to attend with teachers that the real decisions are made.

Like banking patrons, these parents of high achievers perceive there is little “banking” benefit unless they stop in and spend time at the local branch.

Getting to Know the Bank Personnel

In addition to the Black parents in the study understanding that it is necessary to invest time to develop relationships (Bolívar & Chrispeels, 2011), these parents also perceived it as their responsibility to develop the relationships. Like our fictitious Ms. Williams who, if she wants a loan, will need to go to the bank and impress the right people, these parents believe it is their responsibility alone to locate and develop relationships with the school personnel who can make things happen for their youth. The language of the parents in this study related to this topic was very telling in this regard.

For instance, when I asked Jack whether he believed the school understood the high expectations he has for his son, his responded, “I haven’t followed up enough.” This ownership attitude was echoed time and again in every interview. As mentioned earlier, it was particularly telling that parent/teacher conferences, a staple school-sponsored opportunity in which all of the parents interviewed participate, does not help develop the type of relationship that could improve academic social capital access. In fact, Jack mentioned that he considers the parent/teacher conference to be the time that *he* follows up with the teachers, even though the parent/teacher conference is the invitation of the school.

The only other school-initiated invitation mentioned by these Black parents beyond the PTA involved a disciplinary issue. Jack, who is the father of a talkative-to-

the-point-of-disruption male high-achiever, stated that although he goes to the parent/teacher conference to find out how his son is progressing, the exchange is not particularly useful. “All of them are ... busy telling me how my kids are top of the class in their grades,” he said. Whether this is simply the expression of a proud father or something more, Jack does not receive information regarding strategies he can employ at home to help guide Franklin toward more positive classroom behavior, in spite of the vast knowledge available in schools related to youth development. When I asked whether the teachers thought perhaps his son was off-task because he wasn’t challenged enough (Jack had mentioned previously that his son may be bored), Jack commented that teachers have not initiated or participated in conversations along those lines with him. On his part, however, Jack has communicated his willingness to meet with teachers at any time. And even with having visited the school and expressed this willingness, Jack is unsure when and how he will get more feedback about Franklin’s progress, other than at the next parent/teacher conference.

Perhaps the clearest evidence of the parent-owned nature of interactions with schools was also expressed by Jack. As he described an unsuccessful attempt by a teacher to reach him related to Franklin’s behavior, Jack’s response was that he was going to have to be the one to go to the web site and try to figure out what needed to be done to contact the teacher.

Jack’s response to another of my questions about interacting with the school is also very telling: “I probably haven’t been involved as much as I should. But that’s because ... for the most part, the kids are doing what they’re supposed to,” he said. To

Jack, school involvement is not about building relationships or gaining access to additional information of academic benefit. Jack's understanding is that if his children are doing well, there is no need for him to communicate with the school, and the school will not communicate with him. In fact, none of the parents mention any reaching out by the school to develop relationships that might increase social capital access or strengthen relationships, even the ones that might have begun at a parent/teacher conference.

Denise, who is the only parent who expressed that she has the level of involvement that mirrors what these Black parents consider to be at the level schools define as interacting (via her volunteering, being part of the PTA, etc.), also expressed a troubling notion: it is her responsibility to determine how to use her involvement in ways that can result in benefit for her children. In other words, she has to decide how and where to navigate in order to ensure the outcomes she desires. This unstable type of involvement costs her time, both in terms of making the personal connections, but also in terms of strategizing so that she can identify what type of capital she needs to retrieve and where. In describing her approach to accessing the social capital in schools, Denise consistently uses phrases like, "I have to set up another appointment to go back and talk to the school," or "I've had to go in and talk to the counselors," or she's had to "sit down and deal with teachers." Her language also reflects the view that she owns successful outcomes for her children: "there's a lot of questions that I just have to sit down and figure out and look at," "maybe I just need to go in and get a print out of what's going on there and look and see," etc. So these Black parents of high achievers in the study must not only visit the local school 'bank branch,' they must determine on their own who they

need to see, what it is they need to access from the menu of services, and they must make the right selections. All of these scenarios continue to ignore the wealth that these parents possess. It is this wealth to which we will now turn our attention.

The Bulging Mattress

In the days when putting your money in the bank was risky business, stuffing cash in your mattress was considered a somewhat safe alternative. In some ways, these Black parents of high academic achievers are putting their resources into their safest bet – their relationships with their children (Coleman, 1988). As already mentioned, in the case of academic social capital in schools, these Black parents of high achieving students are responsible for developing that relationship with very little assistance. Schools are perceived to provide minimal points of access via parent/teacher conferences, a web page, and text messages, while parents who want to create the types of relationships that can result in influence and information access important to their youth must be the ones who make it happen.

However, if schools committed to investing in relationships with the parents in this study, they would find that these families participate in a number of deliberate actions in the home that, if linked to through relationship, could help ensure stronger and more consistent messages to Black youth and thus potentially increase their academic achievement (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Jeynes, 2003; Jung-Sook & Bowen, 2006). For instance, as mentioned earlier, these Black parents have high expectations of the school and of their youth, and they communicate these expectations and enforce these

norms through action. Jack and Mr. B shared that they are committed to helping their children learn a strong work ethic and respect for authority. To this end, their children have chores at home and these parents enforce adherence to the standards.

Since Franklin is talkative, Jack also regularly communicates with his son about this and approaches it from a variety of angles – from explaining to Franklin that he is in the way of his own learning to suggesting that his son be concerned that he is preventing others from learning. He encourages respect for the teachers and their knowledge, too.

All of the parents are concerned about, affirm and expect their young people to be self-motivated. At the same time, they support their children by providing transportation to and from school events and work, supply emotional encouragement, work to correct nonproductive behavior and make opportunities for their young people when possible through work and job shadowing experiences. They are proud of what their young people have achieved and they expect them to excel. Finally, all of the parents also participate in conversations about college-going, which McNeal (1999) and Strayhorn (2010) suggest as important to academic performance, particularly for minoritized youth. During the summary I will consider how these actions contribute to familial social capital.

Growing STEMs and Social Capital

Both Coleman (1988) and Bolivar and Chrispeels (2011) assert that institutions can play a role in increasing academic social capital; in other words, institutions may help parents increase their influence or access to information. Growing STEMs, by

generating positive outcomes for participants via a college preparation program that works to develop relationships of trust with the same shared norms and values as the parents, is viewed by these Black parents of high academic achievers as a partner in the success of their youth.

In speaking with the Black parents of high academic achievers in this study, Growing STEMs helps them increase their school-site social capital primarily by a) partnering with Black parents in ways that echo their own expectations, aspirations and perceptions of their children and b) by providing another avenue for accessing information and resources.

An Educational Ally

Among the Black parents in this study, only three of the parents – Grace, Denise and Mr. B – had participated in Growing STEMs programs. Of these, only one (Denise) has attended any of the parent-specific programs. In spite of this, all of the parents expressed that what they find in the program is an educational ally – an entity that views their young people as they do - as high achievers who will graduate from college. Mr. B shared that Growing STEMs programs show parents that “they care.” This perception is critically important given messages that these parents receive elsewhere in the education system. The increases parent confidence in their assessment of the ability of their young person: having a university-sponsored program invest in their young person confirms their perception of their young person’s abilities.

Beyond this caring and affirming environment, the parents in the study expressed their appreciation for the following components of Growing STEMs:

Provides an Avenue to Higher Education. Tied to this notion of being an educational ally, Mr. B and Grace spoke about the program as “positive” because it provides a real path to higher education for their young people via the scholarship earned by successful participants. Parents want the opportunity for their young people to work towards a scholarship and view it as important to making a college education achievable. For these working-class families, knowing that they could help their young person work towards a scholarship that they could in some ways guarantee (if requirements are met) is a critical asset.

Mr. B said that Growing STEMs was “great because the kids ... strive for something. [T]hey know that if they keep a certain gpa (grade point average) that there’s a reward for them down the road, past high school.” (Growing STEMs youth can earn an eight semester tuition scholarship by successfully completing the four year program and pursuing a STEM degree at Midwest University.) Mr. B also remarked that the Growing STEMs scholarship supports student self-motivation by giving them a goal that is high (meeting the grade and participation requirements) yet obtainable.

But beyond providing a tangible avenue for obtaining a higher education degree, the parents find more in Growing STEMs – academic experiences.

Offers Enhanced Educational Opportunities. Grace, Mr. B and Denise also shared about the encouraging nature of the opportunities their children experienced during their

participation in Growing STEMs, and they spoke appreciatively about the way in which these opportunities position their young people for future success. Grace shared about a leadership program her daughter was able to participate in, and Denise talked about summer learning experiences – both Growing STEMs offerings. Additionally, Mr. B noted the importance of the positive peer support the program provides to the youth.

Connects to Information and Other Parents. In addition, Mr. B, Grace and Denise expressed how much they valued the opportunity to attend parent program offerings, even if they were unable to go. Denise, the only parent who has attended the parent component of Growing STEMs, noted that the component is an important asset that provides a connection to other parents, as well as to information

These parents also generally trusted, and looked for, communication from Growing STEMs, whether regarding their young person’s academic progress or related to opportunities within the program.

School Resource Liaison

In addition to providing the “educational ally” supports, Denise also shared that Growing STEMs helped connect her to resources located in the school. The previous year when she needed a tutor for her daughter, she contacted Growing STEMs. Office staff made a call to a teacher contact in the district who made a couple of suggestions. That information was then passed back to the parent, and a tutor was successfully located. Growing STEMs became a social capital liaison for the parent.

Conclusion

For the parents in this study, conditions are right for social capital exchange to occur between parents and schools. These parents share the same expectations for their youth espoused by schools, have a degree of trust in schools, encourage adherence to the same norms and expectations as schools, and place themselves in position for information sharing via participating in parent/teacher conferences and reaching out to schools. However, these parents feel schools make them responsible, through time commitments beyond this, for any access to the capital in schools.

This is a loss for schools, who would find that these Black parents want to partner with them to ensure positive outcomes for their young people. If they had ready sites for social capital access schools would also discover that these parents are creating home environments that focus on academic success, and they would find these parents are looking for an educational ally.

In terms of Growing STEMs, those parents who are knowledgeable about the program find increased parental confidence via the high academic expectations the program holds for their children. Additionally, parents find a school site liaison that connects them to resources at the school.

These implications of these findings and new opportunities they hold will be explored in the following chapter.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction to the Analysis

Redding (2008) states that the teacher, student and parents are the “magic triangle of relationships and competencies that determine the student’s trajectory to school success” (p. 271). The purpose of this study was to understand Black parental academic social capital generally and whether a university-delivered college preparatory program might, through its investments, increase Black parental social capital. Parents in a program sponsored by a Midwestern university that is increasing the number of minoritized youth (Black, Latino/a and American Indian) who pursue degrees in science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM) fields is the focus of this study.

This study employed qualitative research methods with a phenomenological lens to better understand Black parental social capital by interviewing parents of youth in a college preparatory program (Growing STEMs). These parents were questioned regarding their general views of education, their interactions with their teen who participates in the program, as well as their interactions with the Growing STEMs program, teachers and administrators, and other parents.

Data were obtained from parent interviews, follow-up interviews, and a reflexive/reflective journal. Grand tour and prompt questions were used to guide the interviews. Data from the interviews were then subjected to two rounds of thematic

analysis via a domain, then line-by-line, interrogation. The themed contents were then subjected to appropriate fit analysis for the study's questions.

This study sought to understand whether and how Black parents actuate social capital at the school, and to understand the perceptions of Black parents in the Growing STEMs program regarding whether it influences their ability to access or actuate their social capital. Additionally, this study sought to illuminate the general perceptions of Black parents in this program about educational institutions and academic achievement.

Generally, the Black parents of high academic achievers who participated in this study highly regard education. Consistent with the contentions of Fan (2001), Harry et al. (2005) and Nieto and Bode (2008), these parents want their children to succeed academically. However, these Black parents appear to access little of the school-based capital that could improve academic outcomes for their children.

Black Parents and School Site Social Capital

Parental involvement is considered a type of social capital (Kuperminc et al., 2008), and that involvement can take a variety of forms. One form can be increased linkages to schools (Coleman, 1988). Although Black parents generally are not as likely to attend meetings, volunteer or serve on committees at school as their White counterparts (Fan & Chen, 2001; Marinez-Lora & Quintana, 2009), the parents in this study all attend meetings at school. In addition, these Black parents of high achievers also described their interactions with schools as generally positive, and recalled their

own experiences in school as primarily good. These parents also appeared not to be overly concerned about their children experiencing unfair treatment, which is a common topic of Black parents found by Wells et al. (2011). However, these parents of future first-generation college students do have other common experiences that raise concerns. I return to childhood game analogies, which I think prove useful in exploring these concepts.

My Yard, My Rules

As mentioned earlier, in spite of the good conditions that exist for social capital exchange, some barriers exist. For instance, although these Black parents all participate in parent/teacher conferences, understand that strong relationships are important to accessing social capital resources (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011), and most even regularly reach out to teachers or use the Internet or other methods to obtain information, these parents additionally perceive that successful interactions *with* schools must occur in the way prescribed *by* schools, a notion supported by other research (Thirutnurthy et al., 2010). Schools are perceived to provide minimal points of access via parent/teacher conferences, a web page, and text messages, and these avenues do little to facilitate social capital exchange, even though parents want to create the types of relationships that can result in influence and provide information access important to their youth. Instead, parents find they must follow the school's capital-access rules with little assurance of reciprocal action.

Educational systems make it difficult for them to access social capital, or at least do not take deliberate action to provide it, thus inhibiting the ability of these parents to accumulate the cultural capital of educational institutions (such as the educational language or higher education-related knowledge) that school systems value. Their experiences are consistent with Ogbu's (2003) finding that Black parents have more difficulty getting their children into Advanced Placement and Honors classes, have teachers with lower expectations of their children, and have counselors who do not generally encourage them to enroll in challenging classes.

Even when these parents follow the apparent rules of social capital access through purposeful action (i.e., volunteer at the school, seek information, and regularly interact with teachers, principals and counselors [Durlauf & Fafchamps, 2005]) they are unable to consistently improve outcomes for their youth. As occurs at times when children play games, the yard rules become the rules of play. In other words, because parents are coming to the school "yard," it is those rules that are to be adhered to. As a result, these parents experience the effects of the existing inequitable system of social capital distribution that constitutes the yard rules (Bourdieu et al., 1991; McHale, 1991).

As mentioned earlier, Bourdieu et al.'s (1991) exploration of cultural capital (here consisting of the dominant culture's sanctioned linguistic expertise, knowledge/education and artifacts) and reproduction theory are often cited in discussions related to education (see Bowles and Gintis, 2002). The ways in which educational institutions bestow school-based social capital, based on the valuing of certain types of information and knowledge, perpetuates an existing inequitable system

of social and cultural capital distribution according to Bourdieu et al. (1991). These writers maintain that, as in economic capital distribution, capital follows capital: those who have valued capital forms can accrue more, and those without those forms of capital find it difficult to obtain it. By continuing this “my yard, my rules” mentality, schools exclude and leave unacknowledged the resources, knowledge and capital inherent within these Black families of high academic achievers. This inhibits not only access to the capital in schools, but it also inhibits improvement of the game – schools do not experience the benefit of leveraging the resources existing in these families that could increase the success of schools and benefit the minoritized youth in them. But this is not the only challenge parents in the study faced.

Pick-a-Hand

Another children’s game involves a child hiding an object in one hand, putting both closed fists behind his or her back, then inviting the player to guess which hand the object is in. The player should have a 50/50 chance of picking the hand with the object, but at times the child with the object actually passes it back and forth between hands, showing the player only the empty hand so the player can’t win.

The missed opportunity inherent in the parent/teacher conference can feel like a game of pick-a-hand. Comer and Haynes (1991) posit that one strategy of educational institutions is to simply invite parents to school. And schools do frequently invite parent participation (Thirutnurthy et al., 2010). Comer and Haynes (1991) point out, however, that an invitation is not enough for minoritized parents who may feel unwelcome in

schools. Based on the experiences of these Black parents of high achievers, however, it seems Comer and Haynes' (1991) contention should be extended: it is not enough to invite parents of minoritized youth to school *and* there must be capital of value when they act on that invitation. Participation in the one activity that parents are invited to each year – the parent/teacher conference - does not provide meaningful information or connection to these Black parents that could better position their youth for academic success. Instead, it is a reiteration of information that teachers share with students.

The missed opportunities and mis(sed)-communications serve the schools by presenting the appearance of an invitation to relationship. It is evident, however, that like picking the wrong hand, the parent/teacher conference is not intended to be a social capital connection site. And even when parents have relationships in the social network of schools they experience an inconsistent ability to influence outcomes and obtain meaningful information.

Black Parents and Familial Social Capital

As mentioned earlier, equally troubling is the way in which educational institutions appear to ignore the social capital that these Black parents of high achievers have in their relationships with their children. Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital asserts that the accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills and abilities valued by the dominant class, as well as social and financial capital, are acquired either through family connections or through schooling. These Black parents of high academic achievers are

rich in familial capital, which they are applying to transcend their limited access to the types of capital schools value and reinforce.

One way in which familial capital is exhibited within these families is in the form of parental encouragement, which Spenner and Featherman (1978) note shapes student ambition. These parents consistently speak messages of high expectation and support directly focused on the academic success of their youth. Yet their familial social capital (Coleman, 1988), evidenced by strong, academically-focused bonds, is not tapped into by the schools. This is in spite of the fact that these parents participate in youth social development in ways supported by parenting research, such as by exhibiting a more authoritative parenting style, acting as reliable consultants, and encouraging autonomy (Brooks, 2008). They reinforce behaviors that position their young people for learning, encourage a self-motivated and responsible decision-making mindset, position their young people for opportunities, are savvy at locating resources, support academically-positive relationships, seek college-going information and have an intimate knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of their young people. This is an exhibition of Clark's (1983) findings: "The case studies of high achieving students indicate the existence of an intergenerational transmission of behavior patterns" (p. 112). This rich environment, when considered alongside the inconsistent ability of these parents to influence outcomes and access information even when the social capital access rules are followed, support Lareau and Horvat's (1999) contention that Black parents have social capital but are often unable to effectively activate it.

Black Parents and Issues of Race

Perhaps the most surprising finding given my own experiences in school and the experiences of my children was that most of these Black parents of high academic achievers did not perceive issues of race as having influenced their experiences in school or of impacting their children. Although parents might have responded with hesitation because of my connection to the Growing STEMs program, I did not sense that. It may have been true that at least one of the parents was hesitant to name it as racism; some others appeared to want to adopt the notion of being colorblind (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Most of the parents in the study (Jack, Mr. B, Denise) thought little about issues of race in connection to the experiences of their young people in schools. It could be that parents are looking for blatant acts – for instance, the kind of name-calling that Mr. B experienced in school – as examples of racism. This does not, however, negate the fact that racism is part of the fabric of America, particularly in its institutions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Racism is the “means by which society allocates privilege and status” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 21). That is why Lareau and Horvat (1999), in their exploration of the experiences of middle class Black parents in schools today, note that the historical legacy of racism continues to influence outcomes for minoritized youth, and Wells et al. (2011) posit that our education system still “implicitly (and invisibly) privileges white families” (p. 49).

Illuminating Issues of Race: Critical Race Theory

At this point, I introduce critical race theory (CRT) into the analysis in order to inform the discussion. Although this was not part of my literature review, I had not anticipated that most of the parents in the study would have so little to say about the influence of race on academic outcomes for their youth. As a result, I am calling on CRT, which can help inform explorations of this type.

CRT, first developed to illuminate issues of race within the legal landscape, is a paradigm that is useful in exploring the illusive nature of racism. It has since been used in law, sociology, history, ethnic studies and women's studies (Yosso, 2005). In her summary of CRT, Yosso (2005) identifies the five tenets of CRT as

- 1) the intercentricity of race and racism;
- 2) the challenge to dominant ideology;
- 3) the commitment to social justice;
- 4) the centrality of experiential knowledge;
- and 5) the utilization of interdisciplinary approaches (p. 73)

CRT considers historical, economic, class, gender and other issues that support and institutionalize racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Racism continues to be at work in our schools today due to the continuing effects of historical legacies, and its racism-tinged environment can seem quite normal due to its institutionalism.

CRT “acknowledges the contradictory nature of education, wherein schools most often oppress and marginalize while they maintain the potential to emancipate and empower” (Yosso, 2005, p. 74). I will employ this theory as I look at the responses of parents related to issues of race and consider why it may appear to parents that racism is not playing a role in their experiences.

CRT and Interest Convergence. CRT maintains that any progress that does occur in a system is as a result of interest convergence, which purports that racial equality and equity are pursued and advanced only when the needs of the minoritized converge with the “interests, needs, expectations and ideologies of Whites” (Milner, 2008, p. 333). This is important to consider as we look at the experiences of these Black high academic achievers. It is true that these youth are being granted some social capital – all of the youth, for instance, appear to participate in some Advanced Placement courses. However, Wells et al. (2011) found that the high academic aspirations of minoritized youth are not being compensated with the types of courses and opportunities consistent with their aspirations. Instead, the offer of some opportunities achieves the needs of the majority. In this case, it would appear that offering some Advanced Placement (AP) courses to minoritized youth aids schools that must meet testing and accountability requirements, perhaps thanks in part to such initiatives as the federal government’s No Child Left Behind Act, which holds schools accountable for student performance outcomes (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). It would be inappropriate to consider the provision of AP classes as a reflection of high expectations of teachers or counselors.

This may be why parents in the study generally report that their young people are not experiencing blatantly racist acts, nor are their friends. CRT would maintain that it is not that the system has changed out of its own desire to be equitable and inclusive; instead, providing some of the limited opportunities that these young people are benefiting from serves the school by helping it meet particular reporting standards, which also happens to benefit minoritized youth.

To meet these accountability requirements, however, it is not necessary for parents to have involvement at the high school level. As a result, the youth may experience some positive benefits of interest convergence, but not the parents.

CRT and Intersectionality. Another CRT concept important to this interrogation of race is that of intersectionality. This idea concerns itself with how multiple orientations - race, gender, class, national origin and sexual orientation, for instance - impact a particular outcome (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

In the case of our Black parents of high academic achievers, race and class are two of the issues compounding the negative experiences of these parents. The working-class status of the parents in this study, tied to their own lower educational attainments, is compounded by issues of race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Although a few of the parents indicate they have had some college, none of the parents in the study hold a four-year college degree; only one has a two year certification, who is also a single mother and is living with family; and one is pursuing a two-year degree. As a result, these parents exhibit mindsets similar to what Thirutnurthy et al. (2010) describe: “with less formal education than the teachers, they view the teachers as professionals with specialized knowledge to which the parents do not have access and rely on teachers to direct the child’s educational experiences” (p. 119). Thirutnurthy et al. (2010) compare this to middle-class parents, who tend to “conduct themselves as peers to teachers, ... feel entitled to direct their child’s classroom experiences, and have social networks that include educators as well as other parents at the school” (p. 119). As a result of these

class differences, the parents in the study come to the school with a different frame of reference than that of middle class minoritized, or White parents.

For Denise and Grace, their experiences may be further complicated by perceptions of Black women as difficult and assertive (Harris-Perry, 2011). Issues of race, class and gender may also be influencing the behavioral challenges that the only male high-achiever in the study is facing (Gibbs, 1988).

Although it is evident that racism is still having an impact on the school experiences of minoritized youth and their parents, the goal of this study was to explore not only parental social capital access at the school site but also how programs like Growing STEMs might influence the social capital available. To that end, I now turn to the role a college preparation program is playing to increase the social capital access of Black parents of high achievers.

Growing STEMs and School Site Social Capital

The primary focus of this study was the impact of a minoritized youth-serving college-preparation program on school-based parental social capital. Bolivar and Chrispeels (2011), as well as Coleman (1988), posit that there are ways in which organizations might change the power differential and enhance the capital (influence and access to information) of low income and minoritized parents.

A goal of this study was to understand the elements of Black parental academic social capital, how Black parents access academic social capital, as well whether and how a university-based college preparatory program can increase, or impact the

activation of, Black parental social capital. Towards this goal, this section considers whether any of the assets of social capital desired by Black parents in this study are present in Growing STEMs. Here I present what the Black parents interviewed shared regarding what Growing STEMs provides that the parents in the study indicated they consider social capital.

For reference, Growing STEMs provides ongoing opportunities for families to interact with program staff and families. Kick-off events begin each year where families are provided with an overview of the upcoming year's events. In the fall and the spring there are parent programs, with topics chosen that staff hope will meet parent needs. Parents are invited to attend any of the four campus visits each year with students. They are also invited to programs at the close of each academic year. Seniors and their parents are invited to participate in a special set of college transition sessions. Additionally, the program sends updates to families at the end of each semester on their young person's program progress, hosts a web page, sends a twice-yearly newsletter to the Growing STEMs family in the The City program, has a phone number that is local to the district, and tries to make email access easier through a common email.

Advancing Together: In Pursuit of Student Success

Interviewer: So how do you feel about those (parent program) parts of the Growing STEMs program? Are they beneficial...?

Mr. B: I think they're beneficial because they're positive. They're... showcasing ... their students. Showing the parents ... they care, and that they're behind the program 100%.

This caring notion is where we will start our exploration of the social capital these Black parents of high achievers find in the Growing STEMs program. This foundation – the program’s demonstrated commitment to families through their investments and the “showcasing” of these high achieving students - sends a clear message of care. Growing STEMs builds upon this foundation and generates positive outcomes for group members by developing relationships of trust with shared norms and values that influence expectations and the behaviors of minoritized youth based on association. As a result, it is well positioned to increase the social capital of the program’s parents.

The program does improve access to traditional types of school-based social capital. For instance, the program becomes a social capital liaison for parents at times, helping them connect to school-related resources, whether people (as in the case of tutoring) or information (as in the case of college-going resources).

Although the majority of parents interviewed had not participated in the components of the Growing STEMs programs offered specifically for parents, the parents spoke of the overall program as “positive” because it provides a real avenue to higher education for their young people via the scholarship earned by successful participants, the educational programming provided to their children, the program’s positioning of these young people for future success, and the positive peer support provided.

Together, these Growing STEMs programmatic actions, based on parent interview information, increase non-school-based parental social capital by

strengthening parental confidence, which is a component of what Lin et al. (2001) refers to as the social capital benefit of “reinforcement.” This component has value because it “provides emotional support ... (and) public acknowledgement of one’s claim (or right) to certain resources” (Lin et al., 2001, p. 7). Growing STEMs, by agreeing with parents that their young people have potential via communication of high expectations and the investment of university resources, increases their social capital by “legitimizing” their parenting skills and their ability to assess their young person’s academic abilities.

In addition, Growing STEMs becomes a resource for information that can link to school-site social capital. Parents can utilize it to connect to resources for their youth both at school and beyond. For example, parents are connected to summer program opportunities, college-going resources, and community internships via Growing STEMs.

Summary

In this exploration of academic social capital, I found that the Black parents in the study value education and expect their children to achieve academically at high levels. These parents attend meetings at the school and regularly access information via phones and the Internet; one even volunteers consistently.

This group of parents also generally trusts the school and feels their children are well-served there, and most do not believe issues of race impact their teens. Conditions appear at least good for social capital access to occur given the expressed common goals of both schools and these parents: high academic achievement of youth. Yet all of the parents in this study also experience barriers to access of school-site social capital. These

parents find that schools prescribe the ways in which they can activate their social capital, and that even when these parents accept school invitations and follow the prescribed strategies of involvement, they still experience inconsistent outcomes (i.e., they find they have an unpredictable ability to influence outcomes or obtain meaningful information). These findings support Bourdieu et al.'s (1991) reproduction theory, which holds that schools perpetuate an existing inequitable system of social and cultural capital distribution via their privileging of certain types of information and knowledge (see also Bowles and Gintis, 2002).

Although the parents in this study did not express concerns that issues of race impacted their children, given the historical legacy of racism and the disproportionately poor academic outcomes for minoritized youth, it was important to consider the current form that racism may be taking that has cloaked it from view. As a result, critical race theory was utilized to help inform the experiences of these Black parents. Employing this theory helped illuminate the way in which opportunities provided to minoritized youth may appear to be offered based on merit, when providing the opportunity actually benefits the school by helping it meet achievement standards, constituting a point of interest convergence. This may also explain why the minoritized youth appear to occupy a space of increased opportunity while at the same time their parents continue to experience inconsistencies during their attempts to influence outcomes and obtain information. CRT would purport that their attempts could be further negatively impacted by unfavorable views based on socio-economic status or gender (illuminating issues of intersectionality).

Growing STEMs is considered by the parents in this study to be an educational ally. By building on the reinforcement social capital provided, the program facilitates parental activation of social capital in ways that result in positive outcomes for their youth, and that facilitate the accessing of the information they want.

Recommendations

Black parents of high achievers in this study are taking advantage of the limited opportunities for the accumulation of some of the social capital made available to them at schools, although largely their social capital remains inactivated. Growing STEMs provides some social capital to these families as well. However, it is important to consider what this study can help us learn about what actions schools and pre-college programs can take to increase capital access for these Black parents of high academic achievers, i.e., to build social capital.

In answer to this question, I consider both strategy and content: in other words, what could schools and educational institutions do to facilitate social capital exchange, and what do these Black parents of high school high-achievers seek in such an exchange? To construct these recommendations, in this analysis I allowed the voices of the parents to create the topics. This approach is consistent with Thirutnurthy et al.'s (2010) contention that schools should involve parents in conversations related to parental involvement.

Considerations for Social Capital Exchange

One of the outcomes of this study was the affirmation that schools continue to make access to school site social capital challenging for those who do not have the types of social capital (racially or economically, for example) that schools privilege. Instead, schools give the illusion of equity of access by inviting parents to come to the school or to visit their web presence, or to receive their text messages. However, what is obtained when parents act on those invitations does little to ensure social capital exchange.

As a result, I suggest that schools think about their invitations to the school with social capital implications in mind. This will require schools to develop deliberate strategies and points of access that make building relationships with key personnel a priority and that facilitate the retrieval of the types of information that parents say they want and need. To do this, schools might consider simple strategies such as dividing families among personnel members and holding those individuals accountable (by incentivizing this work) for a certain number of school-initiated contacts each year. The family might have the same contact for the two (middle school) to five (some high schools) years that youth are in these upper grades. This would ensure that parents have a consistent point of contact within the school. That contact person within the system would then be responsible for making further connections within the school on behalf of the parent, should the need arise.

Outreach contacts should become routine so that parents become accustomed to communication that is not directly tied to student behavior. This content must also receive purposeful consideration so that it serves social capital development purposes.

Contacts initiated must reflect knowledge of the specifics important to that family. This strategy could do a great deal to provide clear social capital exchange opportunities. It is important to note that the parents in the study have a wealth of social capital in their relationships with their youth that remains untapped, and largely unvalued, by schools. As a result, it is important that schools work to use familial capital to increase student achievement. This might occur via conversations about the child's strengths and interests or responsibilities at home.

In terms of locating the type of information important to improving educational outcomes for minoritized youth, schools could consider a portal approach, providing one point of contact (email or phone number) that allows parents, no matter what the concern, to send one email and then have the school locate the appropriate person to respond. The person or persons responsible for the portal would have regular communication with the parent to ensure that the information requested is received in a timely way. Technology exists to permit regular tracking of these types of follow-ups.

These same strategies could also be utilized by an educational outreach program like Growing STEMs to improve their delivery of information, and to increase social capital exchange. But what do the Black parents of high achievers in this study consider social capital?

Black Parental Academic Social Capital Defined

The information obtained from the interviews was synthesized to develop the themes shared in this section as well. The interview information was analyzed for

comments related to schools and to Growing STEMs in order to identify topics related to what parents in the study say they value. This section suggests what schools and informal education programs like Growing STEMs might offer parents that would support their actions in ways that could increase the success of their high academic achievers.

A Student Development and Vision Ally

As mentioned earlier, these parents of high academic achievers are looking for an ally. These parents described their need for what I term a Student Development and Vision Ally. The qualities of this ally include having:

Shared High Expectations for Their Young Person’s Academic Future. One of the characteristics of this Student Development and Vision Ally is related to high expectations of minoritized youth for bright academic futures. Denise wants high school to prepare Johnetta for college. She is looking for an educational ally – someone who shares the same vision for her daughter’s future that she does. An ally, according to Denise, would make sure that Johnetta is preparing now for the rigor of college, an ideal shared by all of the parents in the study. But these parents want their ally to be more.

Encourager of a Self-Motivated and Responsible Youth Mindset.

Interviewer: What’s your impression of how Franklin is feeling about the program, and how do you feel about it as a parent?

Jack: I’ve observed that [i]t’s motivated him. ...he tries to be a part of everything that they have going on. ... he’s ... driven enough to do it himself. ...he puts a lot of energy into it.

These comments by Jack acknowledge the type of self-motivated and responsible mindset development in Franklin that all of the parents expressed as something they value. This self-motivated attitude is being developed in the home by Jack who, even though Franklin is a sophomore, encourages his son to read and understand the college application information already coming to their home. And it's consistent with Mr. B's message to his children of self-motivation. The parents in the study want an ally who is committed to helping their teens develop this attribute. Additionally, they want their ally to have an eye on the future.

Engager in Career Selection Conversations. Under this theme other actions that would be appropriate for an educational ally are career selection conversations. Denise has been having these talks with her children since they were in kindergarten. David has conversations with his daughter about becoming a medical doctor. Jack is aware of all the shifts and changes in Franklin's aspirations. And Jack, Grace and Mr. B. want their children to exceed what they have achieved in life and reach their full potential. An educational ally would provide assistance in helping their children reach that goal. But they realize even high aspirations, self-motivation and career conversations are not enough. They want their ally to be a

Supporter of a Strong Work Ethic. As previously mentioned, having a strong work ethic is also fundamental in these households. Jack and Mr. B, for instance, are instilling this in their children through the chores they assign as a component of their home values. An educational ally would reinforce these values through consequences and rewards. But they also want their ally to be a

Partner in Proper Attitudinal Expectations. An educational ally would require the same behavioral expectations as the parents. For instance, Jack has an ongoing battle with his sons about being talkative to the point of being disruptive in the classroom. Although the school calls Jack to make him aware of the issue, and although Jack is extremely troubled by his son's actions, he needs help. An educational ally would partner with Jack to address the problem.

Beyond these student-specific actions, there are other things parents in the study expressed that could inform our notion of how to partner with parents in ways that allow them to activate their social capital. Parents in the study are looking for opportunities, information, and college-based support.

Opportunities that Enhance Education

Grace: "(I am) empowered in that I know that ... (the student) activities are positive. They're enhancing ... her education. ...And ... she's getting everything that ... maybe if she weren't in Growing STEMs I wouldn't necessarily be able to provide her.

These parents of high achievers want enhanced educational opportunities for their young people. All of the parents expressed this as important. But their minds are on college as well.

College-going Access, Information and Support

Denise speaks extensively about the types of college-going questions she needs answers to, and three of the parents interviewed had questions for me about Growing STEMs and the college-going process. They want to know how the decisions they are

making now affect their child's academic and college funding futures. They want to know what their young people need beyond "the basics." They want to know what role community college can play. They want to know if they have the "right" information.

Financial aid information is also high on the list of types of information that parents want access to. "[T]hat's one reason that, a lot of times our people don't get where they need is because of the financial pulls and strains," said Denise. All of the parents consider a scholarship as essential to college-going access for their families. How to pay for college is a major issue.

Finally, these parents are concerned about the support that will be provided when their children go to college. Grace shared a concern about who will hold her daughter accountable when she goes to school, a sentiment I heard echoed by Denise and Jack:

I'm that voice in her ear right now that's always saying ... you have to do things in order, and you have to put this first ... your education is key But I'm not going to be there once she leaves... I'm not sure what is on campus that is going to encourage her to put her studies first.

They also want school-site information, though.

Course Information and Guidance

Although school counselors, teachers, and web pages are available to these Black parents, there are a host of questions about what is occurring in schools and how parents can access what they need for the success of their young person. Many of the concerns Denise expressed are related to whether she and Johnetta are making the school-based decisions now that will best position her for future success. Jack and Denise are unclear about the advanced courses their young people are taking.

In addition, Denise wants to know what summer opportunities are available to her daughter through the school. And she wonders if it's worthwhile to have her daughter take courses at the area community college the summer before her freshman year. Parents have questions that need answers because, as Jack puts it, "My school didn't have that stuff." The type of ally they want would also key in on communication.

Direct, Honest, Timely Communication

Tied to school information is the ability to get information not only about their young person, but about youth activities and school information in general, in a direct, honest and timely way. Denise, Grace and Jack want improved access to information, and both Denise and Jack express the importance of having information come through non-student avenues (they commented during their interviews that schools often rely on students to deliver information to parents, and they view this as an ineffective method of communication).

Additionally, they want to get to know others.

Connections to Other Parents

Denise: You know what might be interesting? Is for Growing STEMs to actually look at maybe partnering some parents together to develop more of a relationship too. ... so they can be their own kind of support system as well.... There's always strength in numbers.

Denise has and values her parent connections – she feels "very blessed" to have those supports. As a result, she makes the case for parent connectivity. She could provide parents with an opportunity to get program information they may have missed,

and to create community. “If it became more of a fun thing for kids and families, I think it would make a huge difference,” she shared.

Parents want an ally with the resources to ensure their young person’s academic future, too.

Academic Support Resources

At times parents want support that is more tangible. Denise has a need for tutors for her daughter from time to time, for example. But she also seeks job shadowing and summer program opportunities, and even more science experiences in the basic program.

Another resource parents appreciate is the tie for their young people to academically -motivated peers. Mr. B and Jack speak about how they value this, and Denise shares the value of this for Johnetta, who “has found her support system with girls who think like-minded. So it’s not as though you’re going to pull (her) down.”

Conclusion

Schools must leverage the opportunities that they have for social capital exchange. They must move beyond inviting parents to schools to give the illusion of inclusiveness. Instead, they must give deliberate thought and develop strategies that ensure that, when parents come, they are offered a real ability to develop relationships and access resources in ways that allow them to activate their social capital. Deliberate, consistent outreach that includes tapping into the existing familial social capital in ways that serve students must also be considered.

In terms of what parents in this study would consider social capital, they seek an educational ally that mirrors the aspirations and expectations they have for their young people. They want an ally that encourages their young people to be self-motivated and responsible, engage in career conversations, and support a strong work ethic and a proper attitude. They also want enhanced educational experiences; college-going access, information and support; information on school courses; direct communication; connections to other parents and academic support. All of these topics seem well within the mission of schools and educational institutions to provide, or to connect parents to.

Future Research

This study involving Black parents of high achievers provided some insights related to school-based social capital and the ability of a university-based college preparatory program to increase social capital. However, in order to develop parent programming that might better meet the needs of our minoritized parents, future research should more closely define the research pool to ensure that participants are prepared to speak on this topic. In addition, the researcher should be prepared to introduce topics covered in parent program offerings in order to determine if any of the topics were, or would be, of help in increasing school-based social capital.

In addition, although the pool for this study consisted of only those youth who self-identified as Black, bi- or multi-racial youth were found to self-identify as Black, and thus were included in the pool. Future studies might consider whether the school site

experience is different when the non-Black parent of a bi-racial child is the primary parent interacting with the school. In the current study, two of the five children lived in homes where one of the parents is non-Black.

Future studies might also consider the school site itself and interview teachers and administrators of these high achievers to determine whether the participation of these youth in Growing STEMs has any influence on teacher or administrator perceptions of students or parents. It is possible that Growing STEMs is creating some social capital for parents without the direct parental connection. This would be a topic for consideration.

Finally, future research might interrogate the experiences of Black parents of Growing STEMs youth who fall below the program's requirements to determine what social capital access issues and needs are present. This information could help inform the lived experiences of this group of parents and their interactions with schools. Information obtained could also be used to create programs for parents who may be further marginalized by the existing limited access to social capital in schools by considering if there are any additional supports that this set of parents would want.

Summary

This study sought to understand whether and how Black parents actuate social capital and the perceptions of Black parents about any impact Growing STEMs has on their access and actuation of social capital. Secondly it sought to illuminate the

general perceptions of Black parents about educational institutions and academic achievement, and to determine whether a university-delivered college preparatory program might, through its investments, increase Black parental social capital.

Generally, the Black parents of high academic achievers who participated in this study highly regard education, want their children to succeed academically, and reach out to schools in at least some of the ways that schools define as acceptable. In spite of this these Black parents appear to access little of the school-based capital that could improve academic outcomes for their children. Bourdieu et al.'s (1991) reproduction theory is at work in this setting, making it difficult for these Black parents of high academic achievers to access the social capital in the school-site system. This is in spite of the rich resources within the familial unit that could be tapped.

Employment of Critical Race Theory helped explain the invisibility of racism in the experiences of these Black parents in schools. CRT's concepts of intersectionality around class and gender, as well as interest convergence around school reporting of student achievement, were explored to consider how race is impacting the experiences of these Black parents and their youth.

The social capital these parents access within a university-sponsored college preparation program, Growing STEMs, was also considered. In addition to partnering in the social capital of reinforcement, parents in the study also perceive the program as an educational resource liaison. The interview comments of these Black parents of high academic achievers were also used to construct a strategy for social capital exchange, and to determine the type of capital that would be beneficial to these parents to access.

This includes a student development and vision ally who shares the parents' high academic expectations, encourages a self-motivated and responsible mindset, engages in career-selection conversations, supports a strong work ethic, and partners in proper attitude development. Additionally, these parents are seeking

- Enhanced educational experiences
- College-going access and information
- School site information
- Direct, honest and timely communication
- Connections to other parents, and
- Academic support resources

These concepts are important to consider when developing parent programming or structuring interactions with Black parents of high achievers. Central to this conversation is the revealing of the familial capital that remains untapped by schools.

The Black parents in this study acknowledge the benefits of education. They want their youth to take full advantage of everything that education has to offer, and they want every benefit it can provide. Providing an equitable opportunity demands that schools address issues of inequitable access to social capital. But this will mean deliberate, conscious effort to address the inequities. Bowles and Gintis (2002) suggest “it is possible for a school system or any other system of socialization to promote the spread of a cultural trait that would otherwise not proliferate” (p. 13). With that hope in mind, it is important to reflect on these words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle.” Those of us who hope to shape new outcomes for minoritized youth must continue to struggle for change, express new strategies for that change (Yosso, 2005), and find new

ways to implement that change in the school setting (Bowles & Gintis, 2002).

APPENDIX A

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APPENDIX B

INTRODUCTORY LETTER

Dear Growing STEMs parent,

I am going back to school to get a Masters degree in curriculum and instruction at Iowa State. I am currently conducting research supervised by Dr. Patricia Leigh and Dr. Warren Blumenfeld on Black parental involvement in education. I would like to speak with you about being part of this project if your Science Bound student in high school is the first to go to high school, and if you are not employed by the school district. As a member of this study, you would be asked to be part of

- One approximately one-hour interview, and
- One approximately one-hour focus group meeting.

I will be conducting interviews starting [insert date]. The interview would be arranged for a time that's convenient for you. Involvement in these interviews is entirely voluntary and there are no known or anticipated risks to participation in this study. INVOLVEMENT WILL NOT AFFECT YOUR YOUNG PERSON'S PARTICIPATION IN SCIENCE BOUND EITHER POSITVELY OR NEGATIVELY. The questions are quite general (for example, insert sample question?). You may choose not to answer any of the interview questions and may terminate the interview at any time. You may also choose not to participate in the follow-up interview or focus group meeting with other Science Bound parents.

With your permission, the interview will be tape-recorded to make it easier to collect accurate information. The tape will later be transcribed for analysis. All of the information you provide will be considered confidential. The data collected will be kept in a secure location and disposed of in 10 years.

If you have any questions about this study, or you would like additional information before making a decision about participation, please feel free to contact Dr. Warren Blumenfeld at 515-294-5931 or Dr. Patricia Leigh at 515-294-3748.

I also want to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Institutional Research Board at Iowa State University. However, the final decision about participation is yours.

I will call in the next two weeks to follow-up on this invitation. At that time I will ask a few additional questions. If we determine that you can participate and you are interested in participating, we will schedule the first meeting.

If you have any questions prior to my call, or if you need to update your contact information, please feel free to contact me at

Thank you for considering this opportunity. I look forward to speaking with you soon.

APPENDIX C
FOLLOW UP SCRIPT

P = Potential Participant; I = Interviewer

I - May I please speak to [name of potential participant]?

P – This is [name of Potential Participant].

I – Hi, this is - with Growing STEMS at Midwest University. I’m calling to follow up on the letter I hope you received regarding my research for my Masters degree in curriculum and instruction at Midwest U. My project is under the supervision of Dr. - Leigh and Dr. - Blumenfeld, and the topic is Black parental involvement in education.

Your participation or non-participation will not in any way affect the advancement of your child in Growing STEMS. However, your participation could help me understand how you, as a parent, interact with and think about your interactions with the high school.

Is this a convenient time to give you more information about the interviews?

P - No, could you call back later (agree on a more convenient time to call person back).

OR

P – Yes.

I - Background Information:

- I will be conducting interviews starting [insert date].
- The first interview would last about one hour, and would be arranged for a time that’s convenient for you.
- Involvement in this interview is entirely voluntary and there are no known or anticipated risks to participation in this study.
- INVOLVEMENT WILL NOT AFFECT YOUR YOUNG PERSON’S PARTICIPATION IN GROWING STEMS EITHER POSITVELY OR NEGATIVELY.
- The questions are quite general. For example,

1. Could you describe what it's like to be a parent of a high school student?
2. Do you interact with the school, teachers and other parents? If so, can you describe any of those interactions?
3. What do you do as a parent in Growing STEMs?
4. Thinking about Growing STEMs, what's your relationship with the school, teachers, and other parents different?

· You may decline to answer any of the interview questions you do not wish to answer and may terminate the interview at any time.

· With your permission, the interview will be tape-recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis.

· All information you provide will be considered confidential.

· The data collected will be kept in a secure location and disposed of in 10 years.

Are you willing to participate in the study?

1. P – yes

I—Then I do have another question to ask before we sign you up!

- Is your high school Growing STEMs student the first to attend high school?

P-- no

I--Well congratulations to you, then, for helping another child navigate through high school! For this study, though, I'm looking for parents whose Growing STEMs high school sophomore or junior is the first to go through high school.

Can I answer any questions for you before I go? Thank you so much for speaking with me then, and have a good [night/day] and I will see you at a Growing STEMs event soon!

OR

2. P-- yes

I--Thank you! Then I have one additional question. Do you work in the school district?

P-- yes

I--Thank you! For this study, I'm looking for parents who do not work for the school district. But I really appreciate your speaking with me. Can I answer any questions for you before I go? Then I look forward to seeing you at a Growing STEMs event soon!

OR

P-- no

I--Then I would be very interested in having you be part of the study. Would you like to talk with one of my study supervisors before making a decision about participating?

P-- yes

I--Please feel free to contact Dr. - Leigh at - or Dr. - Blumenfeld at -. I will give you a few days to follow up with them, then I'll touch base with you again, if that's okay?

OR

P-- no

I--Then thank you again for being willing to participate in the study. Are you ready now to look at dates and times, or would you prefer that I call you back later this week?

P—I'm ready now

I--Great! Will [propose a date and time] work? [continue until an agreement]. Would you be able to meet me at the Library? I will try to reserve one of the conference rooms. Once I have that confirmed, I will call back. Is this the best number to reach you at?

OR

P—I prefer a call back

I--No problem! Will [propose a date and time] work for me to call again? [continue until an agreement]. Is this the best number to reach you at?

· I also want to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Institutional Research Board at Midwest University. However, the final decision about participation is yours.

· And I will bring a consent form to the interview for you to sign before you participate. And after the interview has been conducted and all of the data have been analyzed, you will receive an executive summary of the research results, as well as a \$10 gas card. I anticipate you will receive this by June 30.

· Can I answer any other questions for you right now?

P—yes, I have a question [answer questions]

OR

P-- no

I--Then let me also give you my contact information in case you need it. My phone number at work is -, and my cell phone number is -. I can also be reached by email at -.

P – Thank you. Good-bye.

I - Good-bye.

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM FOR: BLACK PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

This form describes a research project. It has information to help you decide whether or not you wish to participate. Research studies include only people who choose to take part—your participation is completely voluntary. Please discuss any questions you have about the study or about this form with the project staff before deciding to participate.

Who is conducting this study?

This study is being conducted by Anita Rollins with the oversight of Dr. [REDACTED] Leigh and Dr. [REDACTED] Blumenfeld.

Why am I invited to participate in this study?

You are being asked to be part of this study because you are the parent of a high school student in the [REDACTED] program. You should not participate if you, or your spouse, work for the school district, or if you have an older student who graduated from the high school that your SB student now attends.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to understand Black parents and how they feel about education, how they communicate with school personnel and other parents, and whether [REDACTED] changes the way Black parents interaction with schools or parents.

What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to talk about education, your interactions with school personnel, and your interactions with other parents during:

_____ one 90 minute interview
_____ and one 60 minute focus group meeting.

You will be committing to meet twice over about a four week period: the focus group meeting will be scheduled between one and four weeks after your interview.

The types of questions that will be asked include:

1. How do you interact with schools, teachers and parents?
2. Do you think [REDACTED] has changed your relationship with schools, teachers and/or parents?

With your permission, the interview will be tape-recorded to help me collect information, and later the tape will be transcribed for analysis. What you share will be kept confidential – it will not be associated with your name.

What are the possible risks and benefits of my participation?

Risks—The possible risk related to your participation in this research is that you may recall some interactions at school or with parents that were upsetting.

Benefits—You will not receive any direct benefit from taking part in this study, but you may find that it is helpful to talk about your interactions with the school and other parents. I hope that this research will increase our understanding of what it is like for Black parents as they interact with schools, and increasing understanding of whether a program that helps young people prepare for college also helps parents.

How will the information I provide be used?

The information you share with me will be used in a research paper that will be available to those both inside and outside [REDACTED].

What measures will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of the data or to protect my privacy?

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by applicable laws and regulations. Records with personal information will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of [REDACTED] University, and the [REDACTED] Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies with human subjects) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent allowed by law, the following measures will be taken: Your name will be removed from the information you share and will be tied to a fictitious name beginning with the interview. Although the information you share will be analyzed to identify themes in your statements, if reporting any information would compromise your confidentiality, it will not be included. [REDACTED] University maintains a secure network and storage capability. This will be used for storage of the study data for up to 10 years before erasure or deletion. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

Will I incur any costs from participating or will I be compensated?

You may have transportation costs as a result of participating in this study. You will receive a \$10 gas gift card for the interview in appreciation for your participation in this study. You will not receive compensation for the focus group. You will need to complete a form to receive this payment. Please know that payments may be subject to tax withholding requirements, which vary depending upon whether you are a legal resident of the U.S. or another country. If required, taxes will be withheld from the payment you receive.

What are my rights as a human research participant?

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in the study or to stop participating at any time, for any reason, without penalty or negative consequences. You can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interview or focus group.

Although I work for the [redacted] program, the information you provide will not be shared with other staff in the program, or with teachers or administrators in the school district, until after all information that might make it possible to identify you has been removed. And your participation in the study will not affect your young person in [redacted] either positively or negatively.

What if I am injured as a result of participating in this study? I do not anticipate any injury as a result of participation in this study.

Whom can I call if I have questions or problems?

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study contact Anita Rollins at [redacted], or Dr. [redacted] Blumenfeld at [redacted] or Dr. [redacted] Leigh at [redacted].
- If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, [redacted] or Director, [redacted] Office for Responsible Research, [redacted] Hall, [redacted] University, [redacted].

Consent and Authorization Provisions

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent when you come to the first interview.

Participant's Name (printed) _____

(Participant's Signature)

(Date)

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The research questions proposed for this inquiry are:

1. How do Black parents interact with schools, teachers and parents? What do Black parents perceive as the influence of a program like Growing STEMs (pseudonym for ██████████ to be used in thesis) on their relationships with schools, teachers and parents, if they perceive an influence?
2. What are the components of academic social capital for Black parents? How does Growing STEMs increase social capital for Black parents, if it does?

Related to the grand tour questions, the prompt questions proposed for this inquiry are:

1. When you hear the word “education,” what do you think of?
2. When you hear the word “school,” what comes to mind?
3. Could you describe what it’s like to be a parent of a high school student?
4. What does it mean to you for your child to be successful academically?
5. Do you interact with the school, teachers and other parents? If so, can you describe any of those interactions?
 - a) Who do you know at your young person’s school?
 - b) Can you describe how you interact with the people you know?
 - c) How do you learn about how your young person is doing in school?
 - d) What kind of information do you receive from the school? What forms does that information take? What is the source, or sources?
 - e) Can you describe your last interaction with a teacher?
 - f) What do you do when your young person has a problem at school?
 - g) Can you tell me about your last parent/teacher conference? Tell me what it’s like from the time you learn the parent/teacher conferences are coming up. What is it like when it’s over?
 - h) Can you think back to a parent/teacher conference before your young person was in Growing STEMs? Can you describe one?
6. What do you do as a parent in Growing STEMs? What do you hear, see and experience?
7. Thinking about Growing STEMs, what are your relationships with the school, teachers and other parents?

The data systematically obtained through this inquiry will be used to generate themes of the components of

APPENDIX F
FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS

Based on an analysis of the first interview responses, the following script was developed:

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR COMING/JOINING US!

Reminder: Although two of you have now met each other, please do not share who participated in this focus group. And as a reminder, I will use an alias when I write my paper. Also, please remember you can choose not to answer any question, and that you can choose to end your participation at any time. And that your answers and participation will not help or hurt your Growing STEMs student.

I have now met with 5 parents of young people in Growing STEMs who self-identified as black. What I'd like to do during this time is just revisit some of the ideas that were expressed to make sure I understand what your experiences are.

*So, in all of the interviews I started out with a question about education and what that word means to you. I heard things like – it's power, it provides opportunities. Any other thoughts on education?

*Could you share what things you worry about when it comes to your child's education?

*Is it safe to say you view parenting a teenager as challenging?

*Is it safe to say you admire/are proud of your children?

*Is it safe to say you have high expectations for your young persons? And that you express those expectations in conversations and through your actions? Could you share a recent conversation you had or action you took to support the high expectations you have for your young person?

*Okay, I'd now like to revisit your interactions with the school and other parents.
--do I understand correctly that you do not have any individual in the district that you have an on-going connection with to address school-related issues?
--do I understand correctly that you get the information you want from the school about what is going on with your young person? What kind of information do you need or

want (status), or what is it that you want to communicate to the school (increase expectations)?

--do I understand correctly that you get that information, and you also communicate with the school, multiple ways – technology, phone, face to face, etc.? Do the ways that are available work for you? Can you describe a recent interaction?

--can I also ask what you think your role is in the parent/school relationship? What is the role of the school?

*I just want to remind your answers won't impact your child positively or negatively, but I'd like to know, if you interact with teachers or others in the district, do you sense that there is a difference in your interactions because of your young person's involvement in Growing STEMs? Do they mention in their interactions that they know your young person is in Growing STEMs?

*Do you have any other parents that you connect with to share about parenting issues? Are any of those parents connected to Growing STEMs?

*Did I hear correctly that you or your children have not had any negative experiences in school as a result of being black?

*Did I hear correctly that you have conversations with your children about their own culture or issues related to being black?

*Parents are all busy. What type of parent program could Growing STEMs provide that would be beneficial? (topics, people, etc.)

Do you have any questions for me?

THANK YOU!