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# Kansas City, Missouri, Inner City Schools' Parent Involvement Policy, Practices, and Accreditation Problems

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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Abstract

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MA, Walden University, 2010

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Public Policy and Administration

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## Abstract

In 2012, the Missouri Board of Education took away Kansas City Public Schools (KCPS) accreditation status. For over 40 years, KCPS has struggled with poor academic achievement, decreased enrollment and budget, and numerous leadership turnovers. Although KCPS regained provisional accreditation in 2014 and earned enough points on the annual performance report for consideration to become a fully accredited school system, state education officials first want to ensure that the district can sustain its new performance level before granting full accreditation. The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to explore parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation. Putnam's social capital theory served as the theoretical foundation of this study. Data were collected using semistructured interviews with a snowball sample of 21 parents, 7 from each school. Data were analyzed through Braun and Clarke's 6 phases of thematic analysis. Findings indicated the need for school personnel to be more welcoming to visiting parents, creating afterhours activities for working parents, increasing points of contact between parents and school personnel, teachers investing more time and effort in students, and school personnel making more efforts to keep parents informed. The implications for positive social change are directed at KCPS policymakers, school district leaders, teachers, and staff members as findings can be used to develop and improve policies and practices geared towards improving parents' involvement, which may help KCPS to regain and sustain full accreditation.

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# Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation to my fabulous mother, Gloria Ross. Thank you for instilling in me at an early age how to be a multitasker. By having that skill, I was able to navigate this process, raise my children, work a full-time job, and work in the ministry.

I also dedicate my dissertation to my three children, Marquavis Clark (Que), Darriell Herron (Butter), and Areyon Bounds (Peanut). I wanted you three to know that the sky is the limit to what you can accomplish. Never give up on your dreams, and remember my infamous quote, “If you lose your focus, refocus by redefining your purpose.” Work hard now and play later.

I also dedicate my dissertation to the one who challenged me to start my educational journey in 2003, Lemuel F. Thuston, my former professor and present pastor and bishop. You made everything look so easy, therefore, I emulated you because you are an inspiration

Mom and Bishop Thuston, thank you both for believing in me. My children, thank you for understanding when I had to finish writing a paper or leave you to attend a residency. I love you all and you mean the world to me. I could not have done this without your support.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Kansas City public schools (KCPS), which was previously called the Kansas City Missouri School District (KCMSD), lost its accreditation in 2012 (Dent, 2014; Finkel, 2012; Johnson, Gupta, Hagelskamp, & Hess 2013, KCPS, 2016b). Dent (2014) reported that in 2012, only 27% of Missouri students were ready for college in all four subjects that are tested on the American College Test (ACT) readiness assessment. Finkel (2012) related that for 40 years, KCPS has struggled with poor academic achievement, decreasing enrollment and budget, and high superintendent turnover. Williams (2016) noted that for approximately 30 years, KCPS has not scored at the full accreditation level on the Missouri's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) annual performance report (APR). However, Williams shared that in 2016, KCPS scored at the full accreditation level on the APR; however, school district leaders may have to wait for another year before the DESE grants the district full accreditation as the Missouri Board of Education wants to verify that the district can sustain its recent performance level.

Parent involvement is an important resource in improving kindergarten (K) through 12th-grade children's education in Kansas City, Missouri (Johnson et al., 2013). Johnson et al. (2013) found that parents in Kansas City, Missouri, are ready, willing, and able to be more engaged in their children's education at different levels. Parents' involvement in their children's education increases children's academic functioning (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2015; Pomerantz, Kim, & Cheung, 2012). In this phenomenological research study, parental involvement is defined as parents' participation in school activities and taking on more active roles for policies and practices

they believe would improve schools and enhance student learning, as well as direct communication between parents and teachers concerning their children's school adjustment (Chun & Dickson, 2011; Johnson et al., 2013).

Research that focuses on parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation is limited and in this phenomenological study, I addressed this gap. Findings are directed at KCPS policymakers, school district leaders, administrators, teachers, and staff members as findings can be used to develop and improve policies and practices geared towards improving parents' involvement in their children's education at home, at school, and in the community as parent engagement has been linked to children's academic success, which may help school district leaders to regain and sustain full accreditation. In Chapter 1, I include the introduction, background of the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, theoretical foundation, nature of the study, definition of terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, significance of the study, and a summary.

## Background of the Study

KCPS, which covers most of inner Kansas City, Missouri, has had different accreditation issues over the past 30 years than other school districts that surround it (Dent, 2014; Finkel, 2012; Johnson et al., 2013, KCPS, 2016b). Johnson et al. (2013) reported that after 2002, KCPS has operated with provisional accreditation, and in 2012, the school district lost accreditation. Johnson et al. related that KCPS parents were

extremely frustrated with the public schools and worried about their children's education. The researchers noted that KCPS was the only district in the metropolitan area that allowed charter schools, with a third of the children living in the area attending them (p. 24). The researchers noted that the Kansas City charter school attendance was one of the highest proportions in the United States where a third of children living there attend them (p. 24). Johnson et al. explained that KCPS has struggled with problems that are common to urban districts throughout the United States, such as depopulation, declining tax revenues and budgets, poverty, and school closings.

After meeting the DESE academic standards in 2014, the Missouri Board of Education gave the school district provisional accreditation (KCPS, 2014a). Then in 2016, Williams (2016) reported that KCPS had earned enough points on the APR, which was the first time in 30 years that the school district earned enough points to be considered to become a fully accredited school system. However, Williams explained that education officials wanted to verify that KCPS could sustain its new performance level before granting full accreditation. Johnson et al. (2013) argued that parent involvement may help to improve K through 12th-grade students' education in Kansas City, Missouri, and is a resource that is not fully used by school leaders, teachers, and staff members.

In the United States, parents' involvement in their children's education has become more valued by parents and other stakeholders, such as educational policymakers, school, administrators, teachers, and children (Tekin, 2011). Epstein (2010) explained the possibility of schools doing a great job academically, but ignoring

the need to create partnerships with families. Epstein noted that by ignoring families, these schools build barriers between parents, teachers, and children, which can negatively affect children's school life and learning. On the other hand, Epstein also explained the possibility that there are schools that are ineffective academically, but includes families in positive ways. However, due to weak academic programs, children's learning will be negatively affected. Epstein noted that these types of schools do not show caring educational environments that require academic excellence; good communication; and productive interactions between school, family, and community.

The way in which school administrators, teachers, and staff members care about children is reflected in the way they care about the children's families (Epstein, 2010). Epstein (2010) argued that if educators only view children as students, then they are likely to view the family as separate from the school, where the family is expected to do their job and leave their children's education to the schools. Epstein further argued that if educators view students as children, then they are likely to recognize both the family and the community as partners with the school in children's education and development. The researcher related that partners recognize their shared interest in children as well as their responsibilities. Epstein noted that partners also work together to create better programs and opportunities for students.

Educational leaders believe that parent involvement benefits students, improve schools, help teachers, and strengthen families (Emerson, Fear, Fox, & Sanders, 2012; Epstein, 2010; Nam & Park, 2014). In addition, educational leaders believe that parent involvement is instrumental in every child's success, especially children from ethnically,

linguistically, or culturally diverse backgrounds (Nam & Park, 2014). Therefore, Epstein (2010) emphasized that developing partnerships between parents, educators, and community members can improve school programs as well as the school climate. Partnership development can provide families with services and support; increase the skills and leadership of parents; bring families, educators, and community members together; and assist teachers with their work (Epstein, 2010). Based on this context, it was important to obtain a better understanding of KCPS parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices could be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation. Research is sparse in this area; thus, further research is needed and in this phenomenological study, I addressed this gap in the literature.

## Problem Statement

On September 20, 2011, the Missouri Board of Education took away KCPS' accreditation status, which became effective January 1, 2012 (KCPS, 2016b). For decades, KCPS has struggled with poor academic achievement, decreased enrollment and budget, and numerous leadership turnovers (Finkel, 2012). Finkel (2012) related that district's graduation rates were around 50% and students' composite ACT scores were 16.5 out of 36 as the highest possible score (p. 29). Finkel also reported that within the past 40 years, KCPS has had 27 short-term superintendents (p. 29).

The DESE gave KCPS 2.5 years, until July 1, 2014, to meet academic standards or be officially dissolved as an entity, where the state would take over KCPS system (Finkel, 2012). After 3 years of improvements in academic achievement, end of course

exams, college and career readiness, and attendance and graduation rates, the DESE gave KCPS provisional accreditation on August 6, 2014 (KCPS, 2016a). KCPS received 92.5 points out of 140 points on the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) 5, which assesses school district success in teaching state mandated marks for student achievement (KCPS, 2016a, para. 1). On November 7, 2016, KCPS Superintendent Bedell announced that the KCPS had earned 98 points out of 140 points on the APR (Williams, 2016, para. 9). Williams (2016) shared that this was the first time in 3 decades that KCPS earned enough points to be considered to become a fully accredited school system. However, Williams explained that KCPS leaders may have to wait another year before the DESE grants the district full accreditation because state officials first want to ensure that the district can sustain its new performance level.

Murrillo, chief academic and accountability officer for KCPS, announced that although the district has reached full accreditation levels based on its APR scores, "there is no breathing room" (Williams, 2016, para. 16) and the KCPS must keep up efforts. In researching KCPS' 2012 loss of accreditation, Johnson et al. (2013) asked whether parents were an untapped resource in improving and reimagining K through 12th-grade education in Kansas City. Numerous researchers have found that the inclusion of parents in the American education system is critical in the long-term success of students (Jeynes, 2007, 2012; Johnson et al., 2013; Nam & Park, 2014; Stevens & Patel, 2015). However, Stevens and Patel (2015) found that educators continue to have problems with obtaining parents' participation and effectively using parents as a resource to best meet students' needs.

As KCPS leaders continue efforts to regain state accreditation and implement meaningful reforms (KCPS, 2016a), it is important to explore how school leaders, teachers, and staff members can improve their involvement with parents. Researchers have examined the effects of parent involvement on children's academic achievement (Daniel, Wang, & Berthelsen; 2016; Dotterer & Wehrspann, 2016; McNeal; 2014, 2015) and the effects of parent involvement on children's behavior in the classroom (Fettig, Schultz, & Ostrosky, 2013; McCormick, Capella, O'Connor, & McClowry, 2013); however, specific exploration of parents' perceptions about the parent involvement policy and practices at their children's elementary schools to improve parents' engagement and assist the accreditation process has not been sufficiently studied. Hence, using Putnam's (1993a, 2000) social capital theory as the theoretical foundation, a qualitative phenomenological research study was needed that explored parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to explore 21 parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation. In this study, full accreditation is defined as "a process by which individual schools or entire school districts are certified as achieving minimum standards of quality" (Wieder, 2011, para. 3). The phenomenological

research design was used to uncover and interpret the inner essence of the participants' cognitive processing in relation to some common experience (Patton, 2002). I used Putnam's (1993a, 2000) social capital theory as the theoretical foundation of this study. I collected data using in-depth, face-to-face semistructured interviews with a snowball sample of 21 parents, seven from each school, who had children who attended either (a) one of two public elementary schools or (b) one public charter school in Kansas City, Missouri.

## Research Questions

I addressed one central research question in this qualitative phenomenological research study: What are parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation?

Three subquestions were considered:

1. What are parents' perceptions about how school leaders, teachers, and staff members engage parents in their children's elementary schools?
2. What are parents' perceptions about school leaders', teachers', and staff members' connections to and understandings of their community?
3. What are parents' perceptions about the best way they can make a difference in their children's elementary schools?

## Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation serves as the structure and support for the rationale for the study, problem and purpose statements, research questions, and significance (Grant &

Osanloo, 2015). Grant and Osanloo (2015) also noted that the theoretical foundation provides a grounding base for the literature review, methods, and analysis. I used Putnam's (1993a, 2000) social capital theory as the theoretical foundation of this study. In this section, I provide a brief overview of the theory and provide a more detailed explanation in Chapter 2.

The term *social capital* first appeared in a book titled, *The Rural Community Center*, written by Hanifan in 1916 (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2016). However, Plagens (2011) reported that social capital can be traced back to Dewey's 1900 writings, *The Elementary School Record*. According to Smith (2009), other authors, such as Jacobs (1961), Bourdieu (1983), and Coleman (1988), have moved the social capital discussion into the academic field. Smith credited Putnam (1993a, 1995, 2000) with social capital being a popular focus for research and policy discussion. Putnam's work includes a 1995 article, *Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital*, and a 2000 book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Putnam (2000) argued that in relation to social capital theory, networks have value. Putnam defined social capital as "connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (p. 15). Thus, social capital refers to "nontangible resources such as social networks for the exchange of information, behavioral norms, and trust" (Stevens & Patel, 2015, p. 158). Putnam (2000) related that social capital pertains to civic virtue, which is at its highest power when it is entrenched in a network of reciprocal social relations. Putnam argued that while Americans have become wealthier, their sense of community has decreased.

Putnam explained that a society that has numerous virtuous but isolated people may not be rich in social capital. Putnam noted that while people spend more time in the office, commuting to work, and watching television alone, they spend less time joining community groups, volunteering, and socializing with neighbors, friends, and family.

Within communities, social capital pertains to both individual and group variables (Plagens, 2011). Plagens (2011) related that these variables positively affect levels of social capital, which facilitate formal and informal modes of collective action and forms of spontaneous individual action. The author noted that one outcome of collective and spontaneous individual actions may be higher levels of student and school performance. Hence, social capital is a mediating variable that lies between the actions of individuals and outcomes. In the theoretical foundation section in Chapter 2, I discuss indicators of social capital that educators can use to assess levels of social capital within their own environments.

## Nature of the Study

In this phenomenological research study, I explored 21 parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation. The phenomenological research design was used to understand a phenomenon from the perspective of those who experienced it and there was an essence to shared experience (Patton, 2002; Worthington, 2013). In addition, a phenomenological research design provided an understanding by revealing the meaning

that underpins (Moustakas, 1994; Waters, 2002; Waugh & Waugh, 2004) KCPS parents' perceptions.

I conducted a pilot study before carrying out the main research, which allowed me to test the instructions and questions of this study. I collected data using in-depth, face-to-face semistructured interviews with 21 parents, seven from each school, whose children attended either (a) one of two public elementary schools or (b) one public charter school in Kansas City, Missouri. The selection criteria for being in this study included parents who lived in Kansas City, Missouri, who were fluent in English, and whose children attended either (a) one of two public elementary schools or (b) one public charter school identified in this study. Three schools identified in the study had different rating, which was based on a rating of 1 to 10, where 1 to 3 indicated below average, 4 to 7 indicated average, and 8 to 10 indicated above average (Great Schools, 2017). To participate in this study, parents had children who attended one of the schools identified in their invitation to participate and recommendation request letter and consent form. In the dissertation, I described the schools to protect their identity in the study and I did not list the exact names of the libraries; however, the actual invitation letters and consent forms that were sent to the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) showed the name of the schools and libraries. The schools were as follows: (a) a preK through Grade 6 public elementary school with a 1 rating (below average), (b) a preK through Grade 6 public elementary school with a 4 rating (average), and (c) a K through Grade 8 public charter school with a 10 rating (above average). The public charter school was included in the study because there were no public elementary schools that had an above average rating

(8 to 10). The highest rating for the public elementary schools was a 4 (average). Thus, a charter school was included to obtain parents' perceptions who have children who attend a school in the KCPS' district that had an above average rating. Obtaining parents' perceptions who have children who attend schools with three different ratings levels helped to provide a better understanding of how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation.

Parents who were known to meet the selection criteria were initially contacted by e-mail or telephone. They were sent an invitation letter to participate in the study and they were asked to recommend other parents who met the selection criteria for this study (see Appendix B). The relationship between saturation and sample size was sufficient in this study because using 21 participants allowed me to obtain rich data. Therefore, I reached saturation with 21 participants.

I conducted individual interviews at a time that was convenient for each participant in a private meeting room at a Kansas City public library that was located near the participants; two different libraries were used as two of the schools were close in proximity. Thus, two schools were close to one of the library locations identified in this study. I conducted interviews in a private meeting room at a library as this ensured participants' privacy and it also reduced the risk of a noisy environment or distractions as recommended by Goulard, Zugec, Rothberg, and Daniels (2017). Using snowball sampling, which is a subcategory of purposive sampling (Trochim, 2006a), I recruited 21 parents (seven from each school) who lived in Kansas City, Missouri, who were fluent in

English, and whose children attended either (a) one of two public elementary schools or (b) one public charter school identified in this study. I initially contacted potential participants who were known to meet the selection criteria by e-mail or telephone to start the snowball sample. I sent them an invitation letter to participate in the study and they were asked to recommend other parents who met the selection criteria for this study (see Appendix B). I transcribed all interviews and organized, managed, coded, and stored the data with NVivo. I analyzed the data using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis. I conducted the study based on Walden University's IRB guidelines to ensure the ethical protection of research participants. I discussed the nature of the study in further detail in Chapter 3.

## Definition of Terms

*American college test (ACT)*: The ACT is the leading U.S. college admissions test and measures what students learn in high school to determine their academic readiness for college, with specific assessment in English, math, social sciences, and natural sciences (ACT, 2016; Eduers, 2009).

*Annual performance report (APR)*: Missouri's APR grades school on a percentage scale of 1 to 100 (Crouch & Bock, 2015). "The state uses these numbers to determine whether a district should be rated as accredited, provisionally accredited, or unaccredited" (Crouch & Bock, 2015, para. 8).

*Full accreditation*: Full accreditation is "a process by which individual schools or entire school districts are certified as achieving minimum standards of quality" (Wieder, 2011, para. 3).

*Missouri school improvement program (MSIP) 5*: The MSIP 5 assesses school district success in teaching state mandated marks for student achievement (KCPS, 2016a).

*Parent involvement*: In this study, parental involvement is defined as parents' participation in school activities and taking on more active roles for policies and practices they believe would improve schools and enhance student learning, as well as direct communication between parents and teachers concerning their children's school adjustment (Chun & Dickson, 2011; Johnson et al., 2013).

*Provisional accreditation*: When schools or school districts do not achieve the minimum standards to quality for full accreditation, they receive provisional accreditation due to low academic performance levels (Wieder, 2011). Schools that have provisional accreditation receive increased scrutiny and face additional requirements (Wieder, 2011).

*Social capital*: Social capital refers to "features of social organizations, such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit" (Putnam, 1993a, p. 35).

## Assumptions

I made the following assumptions for this study, which were as follows:

- KCPS parents who participated in this study were aware of the KCPS parent involvment policy and practices as well as the school district accreditation problems.
- KCPS parents were willing to take part in the study because of its significance to focus attention and resources on creating stronger parent involvement

policies and practices to help the school district regain and sustain its accreditation.

- The in-depth, face-to-face semistructured interviews, which took approximately 45 minutes, were appropriate to explore KCPS parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation.
- The in-depth semistructured interview questions were worded so that the participants could accurately understand and interpret the questions being asked.
- The participants honestly and openly answered the interview questions by sharing their perceptions about the questions asked.
- The results of the study may lead to positive social change as findings are directed at KCPS policymakers, school district leaders, administrators, teachers, and staff members, which they can use to develop and improve policies and practices geared towards improving parents' involvement; thus, helping school district leaders to regain and sustain full accreditation.

## Scope and Delimitations

The study's participants included 21 parents, seven from each school, who lived in Kansas City, Missouri, who were fluent in English, and whose children attended either (a) one of two public elementary schools or (b) one public charter school identified in this study. I only focused on their perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement

policy and practices could be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation; how school leaders, teachers, and staff members engage parents in their children's elementary schools; school leaders', teachers', and staff members' connections to and understandings of their community; and the best way they can make a difference in their children's elementary schools. Excluded from participating in this study were KCPS elementary school parents who had children who attended other elementary or charter schools than the two public elementary schools and one public charter school identified in this study. In addition, also excluded were KCPS middle and high school parents, parents whose children attended private schools, parents whose children attended schools in other school districts, parents who do not live in Kansas City, Missouri, and parents who were not fluent in English. In addition, I did not include anyone with whom I had a personal or professional relationship with in my study, which included family members, friends, coworkers, or professional and personal associates. This allowed me to prevent any perceptions about coercion to participate in the study due to an existing relationship between the participants and me.

## Limitations

Several limitations were noted in this phenomenological research study. The first limitation pertained to generalizing the study's result since a snowball sample of 21 parents were used. The findings from the study may be generalized to similar populations of KCPS parents, but the results of the study may not be generalizable to other populations, cities, or states. As a result, future studies could expand the sample

population across other school districts who have lost their full accreditation to achieve a broader understanding of parent involvement experiences and perceptions about how school districts can regain and sustain their full accreditation. A different sampling strategy could also be used, such as purposeful random sampling.

The second limitation pertained to self-reporting or social desirability bias as participants may want to be perceived positively, so they may not respond honestly to the interview questions. However, I assumed that participants honestly and openly answered the interview questions by sharing their perceptions about the questions asked. The third limitation pertained to self-reported data for the interviews as participants may not accurately or fully self-evaluate themselves.

## Significance of the Study

This study is significant because specific exploration of parents' perceptions about the parent involvement policy and practices at their children's elementary schools to improve parents' engagement and assist the accreditation process is sparse. Findings from the study added to the literature and advanced knowledge by filling a gap in the public policy and administration literature as well as the education literature on parent involvement policy and practices and the accreditation process. Findings are directed at education policymakers, school district leaders, administrators, teachers, and other staff members at the district level to continue to look for ways to improve parents' involvement in their children's education at home, at school, and in the community as parent engagement has been linked to children's academic success (Emerson et al., 2012; Epstein, 2010; Nam & Park, 2014). If KCPS children consistently do well academically,

then the school district stands a better chance of regaining and sustaining its full accreditation.

Thus, parents should be able to improve support for their children by communicating and interacting with their schools and their teachers (Epstein, 2010; Nam & Park, 2014). Since approximately 20% of KCPS students' first or primary language is not English, and student population speaks more than 50 languages (KCPS, 2016b, para. 1, 2016c, para. 5), it is important that school district leaders consider parents' cultural backgrounds in their parent involvement policy and practices. Thus, immigrant parent involvement is also important because it helps them to become familiar with the U.S. school system and gain confidence in their parenting in relation to their children's education and schooling (Nam & Park, 2014).

Along with the public policy and administration and education fields, many other fields might be interested in the research findings such as social work, counseling, and psychology. The findings from the study are also applicable to many agencies and organizations, to include the Missouri DESE and the U.S. Department of Education. This study also has far-reaching social change implications. Findings from the study may lead to positive social change by assisting education policymakers, school district leaders, administrators, teachers, and staff members to better understand parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education, which may assist school district leaders in regaining and sustaining full accreditation. Therefore, findings can be used to develop and improve policies and practices geared towards improving parents' involvement.

## Summary

In this study, I explored parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation. I conducted a pilot study before beginning the main study. Using snowball sampling, I recruited 21 KCPS parents who lived in Kansas City, Missouri, who were fluent in English, and whose children attended either (a) one of two public elementary schools or (b) one public charter school identified in this study. I collected data using in-depth, face-to-face semistructured interviews with all the participants. I transcribed the interviews and organized, managed, coded, and stored the data with NVivo. I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis to analyze the data. Findings from this study may lead to positive social change by encouraging KCPS policymakers, school district leaders, administrators, teachers, and staff members to develop and improve policies and practices geared towards improving parents' involvement in their children's education at home, at school, and in the community, which may help school district leaders to regain and sustain full accreditation.

In Chapter 1, I included the introduction, background of the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, theoretical foundation, nature of the study, definition of terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, significance of the study, and a summary. In Chapter 2, I include the introduction, literature search strategy, theoretical foundation, background of KCPS and its accreditation problems, historical overview of parent involvement policy and practices in the United States,

KCPS parent involvement policy and practices, barriers to parents' school involvement, improving parent involvement to regain and sustain full accreditation, and summary and conclusions. In Chapter 3, I include the introduction, research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and a summary. In Chapter 4, I include the introduction, pilot study, setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, results, and a summary. In Chapter 5, I include the introduction, interpretation of findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and a conclusion.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this study, I explored parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation. Moxley (2016) reported that KCPS lost its accreditation in 2011 after a challenging decade that resulted in half the schools in the district being closed. Finkel (2012) reported that the school district had 27 superintendents in the past 40 years. In August 2014, the Board of Education granted KCPS provisional accreditation and in 2016, the district scored at full accreditation level on the APR; however, district leaders may have to wait another year before receiving full accreditation as state officials want proof that the district can sustain its newly reached performance level (KCPS, 2016b; Williams, 2016).

Researchers have found that parents' involvement in children's learning increases children's academic functioning (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2015; Pomerantz et al., 2012). Cheung and Pomerantz (2015) reported that children whose parents are involved in school and at home tend to show enhanced engagement such as self-regulated strategies, skills such as phonological awareness, and academic achievement. Hence, Cheung and Pomerantz noted that parent involvement plays a role in children's academic functioning even when aspects of children's home environment such as parents' income and education were considered.

It is important to understand parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their

children's education as this may help the school district to regain and sustain its full accreditation. In Chapter 2, I include the introduction, literature search strategy, theoretical foundation, background of KCPS and its accreditation problems, historical overview of parent involvement policy and practices in the United States, KCPS parent involvement policy and practices, barriers to parents' school involvement, improving parent involvement to regain and sustain full accreditation, and summary and conclusions.

## Literature Search Strategy

The literature search strategies for this research included a comprehensive search in Walden University Library databases to include SAGE Premier, ProQuest Central, Thoreau Multi-Database Search, PsycINFO, and Academic Search Complete. In addition, I also conducted searches through Google Scholar. Search terms included *Kansas City public schools and accreditation*, *provisional and accreditation and school district*, and *Putnam and social capital theory and school*. A review of the reference section in each article and dissertation was helpful in finding additional sources.

## Theoretical Foundation

Putnam's (1993a, 2000) social capital theory served as the theoretical foundation of this study. I discuss the theoretical propositions of the theory as well as how researchers have applied the theory in ways similar to this study. I organized this section in the following subsections: social capital theory and research application of social capital theory.

## Social Capital Theory

Social capital pertains to “features of social organizations, such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam, 1993b, p. 35). Three important dimensions of social capital are (a) bonding or exclusive, (b) bridging or inclusive, and (c) linkages (Putnam, 2000; OECD, 2016). OECD (2016) described bonding social capital as links to individuals based on a sense of common identity such as family, close friends, and people who share the same culture or ethnicity. OECD described bridging social capital as links that stretch beyond a shared sense of identity, such as distant friends, colleagues, and associates. OECD described linkages as links to people or groups that are further up or down the social ladder. Per OECD, the benefits of social capital should do with social bonds, such as family and friends helping in many ways, whether emotionally, socially, or economically.

Social capital is beneficial to people and communities because when there is a high level of trust and community participation, socially desirable outcomes are produced (Putnam, 2000). Putnam (2000) related that social capital allows people to find answers more easily to collective problems. Putnam noted that communities with high social capital often have high education achievement, good economic growth, good health, and low crime rates. Putnam also noted that children’s development is influenced by social capital as networks, trust, and reciprocity norms within children’s families, schools, peer groups, and larger communities have major effects on their opportunities and choices. Putnam shared that this affects their behavior and development; hence, social capital has been associated with positive outcomes such as education.

Social capital was originally a sociological concept, but researchers have expanded its use by investigating human behavior, such as in education and economics (Stevens & Patel, 2015). Stevens and Patel (2015) reported that "the social capital of schools may be represented by the quantity, quality, and consistency of educationally focused relationships that exist among parents, children, and schools" (p. 159). Stevens and Patel noted that social capital is frequently conveyed in ways that focuses on improving student achievement. Parent involvement is important to the children's academic success and the connections between people, larger groups, and organizations can be designed to support students' overall development (Jeynes, 2012; Stevens & Patel, 2015).

There are seven social capital individual indicators and two group indicators that educators can use to assess levels of social capital within their own environments (Plagens, 2011). Plagens (2011) reported that the first individual indicator is that people in high social capital communities have learned to be more socially cooperative as they work with others toward a common purpose. The second and third individual indictors pertain to people taking an interest in and having knowledge of the community; thus, there may be a norm that reinforces such behavior and active networks that facilitate the spread of knowledge. The fourth individual indicator is people that truly care about the community and the other individuals who live in it are more likely to take part in community-improving behavior. The fifth individual indicator is that people in high social capital communities are more likely to identify positively with the community. The sixth individual indicator is that people in communities with solidarity are more likely to

trust others in their community, such as students trusting teachers and teachers trusting the principal. They may work with others on issues affecting their productivity and school. The seventh individual indicator is that in a high social capital community, people are more willing to belong to and participate in community groups or associations. The two group indicators are that social capital is high at the community level when the number and variety of associational groups in the community is high and when community-wide social networks are dense and overlapping. Therefore, large numbers of associations in a community indicate that the community members are active beyond home and family life (Plagens, 2011).

When there are high levels of individual and group indicators, collective action is more likely and spontaneous (Plagens, 2011). Plagens (2011) explained that these two actions are the links that bring together social capital to higher levels of school and performance. Plagens noted that while social capital does not guarantee collective action or spontaneous individual action, it does make their occurrence more likely.

**Research Application of Social Capital Theory**

The benefits of parents' involvement in their children's education at all ages is multidimensional (Stevens & Patel, 2015). Stevens and Patel (2015) explored if parent involvement can be understood as an expression of social capital and generativity. The researchers noted that generativity is a process that is important to adult development. They also noted that social capital increases individual opportunities throughout the lifespan and that parent involvement play a major role in students' academic success. Stevens and Patel related that understanding these three factors has the potential to

promote simultaneous benefits for individuals who are at different points across the lifespan. Stevens and Patel administered Epstein and Salina's (1993) validated measure of parent involvement survey to 197 parents and guardians of students in the sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade classes from two K through eighth-grade urban public schools in the Southwest. Both school had students from different ethnic backgrounds.

Findings indicated support for a three-factor model in which generativity served as one factor and social capital was viewed as two different factors: (a) individual level and (b) community level (Stevens & Patel, 2015). Stevens and Patel (2015) explained that at the individual level, interaction takes place between two people, for example, the teacher and the parent. The researchers noted that based on social capital theory, when the line of communication is used in a positive way, the relationship is strengthened, and trust is enhanced. At the community level, school leaders and staff members create opportunities for parents to become involved. Stevens and Patel reported that based on social capital theory, school leaders and staff members who are not open to the idea of parents being involved in school activities offer low levels of social capital because they do not nurture trusting relationships and communication and cooperation is lacking. The researchers found that the generativity factor to be reliable in measuring parents' involvement activities in their children's education. Stevens and Patel noted that parents should believe in their ability to actively promote the well-being of the next generation.

In addition, analysis demonstrated that the three factors were correlated (Stevens & Patel, 2015). Stevens and Patel (2015) found that social capital and generativity together create patterns of behaviors that are often observed. They noted that family and

community involvement are productive and generative activities. Stevens and Patel explained that consideration should be given to the three underlying factors to prevent premature assumptions about the reasons for why parents are not involved, such as blaming parents, teachers, or students for possible situations and consequences that may not be in their control. The researchers provided additional examples, such as teachers blaming parents for students' academic failure. Stevens and Patel suggested that teachers consider whether the creation of social capital was prevented due to parents not having opportunities to be involved in the schools. Stevens and Patel argued that an examination of these factors help with understanding parents' motivation to be involved in their children's school. The researchers shared that motivation comes from many sources, for example, parents investing themselves in a situation because they believe they can be successful in helping their children, it is a great use of their time and energy, or they may experience obstruction to being successfully involved. Stevens and Patel concluded that parents' motivations to engage are attributed to their internal views of themselves and their thoughts about having the means to achieve what they want to accomplish.

## Background of KCPS and its Accreditation Problems

Originally called KCMSD, KCPS was created in 1867 and served 2,150 students (KCPS, 2016b, para. 1). As of 2016, the KCPS educates approximately 15,568 K through 12th-grade children and employs approximately 2,300 teachers and administrators in 35 schools (KCPS, 2016b, para. 1, 2016c, para. 5). The 35 schools consist of six high schools, two middle schools, 24 elementary schools, one career and technical education center, one adult education center, and one alternative graduation center (KCPS, 2016c).

KCPS urban school systems consists of multiethnic and multicultural mix of students (KCPS, 2016b, para. 1). KCPS (2016c) reported that 57% are Black, 28% Hispanic, 9% White, and 6% are classified as Other (para. 5). All students are qualified for free lunch and the graduation rate is 65.3% (KCPS, 2016c, para. 5). The student-teacher ratio is 24 to 1 and daily student attendance is 84% (para. 5). Exactly 1 out of 5 students' first or primary language is not English, and the student population speaks more than 50 languages (para. 5). KCPS is the 12th largest school district out of 548 districts in the state of Missouri (KCPS, 2016c).

For decades, KCPS has struggled with poor academic achievement, decreased enrollment, and budgeting issues (Finkel, 2012). KCPS has had 27 short-term superintendents in the past 40 years (Finkel, 2012). Finkel (2012) reported that Superintendent Covington decreased the number of employees from 4,810 in 2008 through 2009 to 3,544 in 2010 through 2011, and decreased the number of schools from 60 in 2009 through 2010 to 29 in 2010 through 2011 (p. 29). Finkel noted that this decrease in employees and schools resulted in balanced budgets, but problems remained academically with test scores and graduation rates. Dent (2014) reported that in 2012, only 27% of Missouri students were ready for college in all four subjects tested on the ACT college readiness assessment (p. 734).

On September 20, 2011, the Missouri Board of Education voted and took away KCPS accreditation (KCPS, 2016b). Finkel (2012) noted that the DESE gave school district leaders 2.5 years, until July 1, 2014, to meet the academic standard that they proposed, and if they failed, they would be dissolved as an entity with the state taking

over the KCPS system. After students made academic gains by August 2014, the Missouri Board of Education granted the KCPS provisional accreditation (KCPS, 2016b). On its 2016 APR, KCPS earned 98 points out of 140 points, earning the points necessary for full accreditation under the MSIP (KCPS, 2016a, para. 1). KCPS (2016a) reported that this was the first time in approximately 30 years that KCPS earned the points to become a fully accredited school system. KCPS' APR results improved by more than 75 points in 4 years and the 98 points was an 8.5-point increase over 2015 totals (para. 1). Although KCPS leaders are hopeful that the state's education board will view these results favorably and award accreditation in 2016, the state may require another year of demonstrated growth from leaders. Superintendent Bedell credited students, teachers, parents, support staff, and the leadership team for working together and making gains with integrity (KCPS, 2016a).

## Historical Overview of Parent Involvement Policy and Practices in the United States

Understanding parent involvement programs and efforts in the United States provides a helpful context in exploring parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation. Tekin (2011) related that parent involvement historical developments have influenced the understanding, beliefs, perceptions, and philosophy about present-day parent involvement issues. The author discussed the importance of parents in their children's lives and noted that they are the most important role models for their children.

Tekin shared that parents from numerous cultures want their children to academically achieve and succeed in school.

In the United States, parent involvement began in nursery schools at the start of the twentieth century (Tekin, 2011). According to Tekin (2011), from the 1920s through the 1960s, parent cooperative nursery schools flourished. Many of these nursery schools were in college or suburban towns and mothers who stayed at home served as paraprofessional in the classroom by assisting teachers and taking care of the facility; however, such involvement was limited to middle-class families. Tekin noted that the main notion of parent involvement was that parents are knowledgeable about what they want their children to accomplish; thus, they should be involved in their children's school. The author explained that parent involvement decreased the budget and built a connection between school and parents.

During the Great Depression, engagement of parents from low socioeconomic, ethnic, and cultural diverse backgrounds started and their parent involvement rates increased during World War II through programs such as parent self-development training and learning (Tekin, 2011). Head Start, which was developed for disadvantaged families, resulted in wide-ranging parent involvement (Tekin, 2011; Wright, Stegili, & Hartle, 2007). At the start of the program, educators were apprehensive but tolerant of parents whom they believed were deficient in knowledge and skills (Gestwicki, 2007; Tekin, 2011). However, later, Head Start educators were obligated to make sure that the families they served had the highest level of participation; thus, involvement and empowerment became Head Start characteristics (Goldberg, 1997; Tekin, 2011). A main

Head Start philosophy was that parents and educators were equal partners in their children's education (Tekin, 2011; Zigler, 1992). Parents and teachers were regarded as experts, but with different skills (Gestwicki, 2007; Tekin, 2011). Parents determined the involvement level that best fit their lives and commitment and the rationale was that for children to reach their fullest potential, parents must be given the chance to influence programs that shape their children's development (Henrich & Blackman-Jones, 2006; Tekin, 2011). Leaders of Head Start, school staff, and parents worked with students to plan parent activities, volunteer in classrooms, and set hiring standards for professional staff (Kellagan, Sloane, Alvrez, & Bloom, 1993; Stein & Thorkildsen, 1999; Tekin, 2011).

Title 1, previously called Chapter 1, is part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 and President Johnson's Great Society program (Klein, 2015; National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2016). According to the NAEYC (2016), the objective of the federal Title 1 Act is to reduce the achievement gap that occurs between low-income students and other students. The NAEYC shared that about 14,000 of the 15,000 school districts in the United States conduct Title I programs (para. 1). The original purpose of Title 1 was to give additional resources to states and localities for remedial education that help disadvantaged children. However, based on the 1994 reauthorization of Title 1, the focus of the program was changed from remedial education to assisting all disadvantaged children attain challenging state standards that all children are required to meet. The NAEYC noted that Title 1 funds could be used for parental involvement, program improvement, instructional

activities, and counseling, but school district and state leaders were required to meet the accountability standards by increasing students' academic performance.

The Educational of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, which was later called "reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Act in 1990 Amendments of 1997, and Individuals with Disabilities Educational Improvement Act of 2004," also mandated parent involvement (Tekin, 2011, p. 2). Teken (2011) reported that based on these programs, parents of children with special needs were required to monitor whether the individualized education programs (IEP) for their children were aligned with state achievement standards (Tekin, 2011). The programs also required that parents be involved in all areas of the planning process for their children's education (Gestwicki, 2007; Tekin, 2011).

President Clinton signed the Goals 2000, Educated American Act, in March 1994 (Portway & Lane, 1997; Tekin, 2011). Goals 2000 focused on parent involvement where it was mandatory that every state developed policies that helped local schools and local educational agencies to enhance parent-school partnerships (Patte, 2002; Portway & Lane, 1997; Tekin, 2011). Portway and Lane (1997) related that enhancing parent-school partnerships pertained to addressing the various needs of parents and the home, for example, parents of children who were disadvantaged, bilingual, or had disabilities. Thus, it was mandatory that all schools encouraged partnership that increased parent involvement and participation for the academic, emotional, and social growth of children (Portway & Lane, 1997).

As an update to the 1965 ESEA, President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2002 (Klein, 2015; Tekin, 2011). Klein (2015) related that based on the NCLB Act, the federal governments' role in America's education system increased considerably where schools were held responsible for students' academic progress. In addition, focus was on states and schools to increase the academic performance of certain student groups, such as poor and minority students, students in special education, and English-language learners, whose academic achievements were often below their peers. Klein explained that states that did not meet the NCLB requirements risked losing federal Title 1 funds. One NCLB objective was to give parents more choices, such as having additional options to make changes for children who attended low-performing schools (Domina, 2005; Tekin, 2011). The NCLB Act gave parents more rights, such as requiring school leaders to provide additional information about students' progress and the school's performance (U.S. Department of Education, 2003; Tekin, 2011). Tekin (2011) explained that based on the NCLB Act, parent involvement was required in schools and school leaders were required to create a written parent involvement policy that included parents in policy creation and evaluation. Parents were to be involved in planning, evaluating, and improving parent programs. In addition, Tekin noted that school leaders were mandated to provide parents with curricula descriptions and explanations that were easy to understand, ensure that meeting times were flexible, and finances could be used to help parent attendance such as towards transportation, child care, and home visits. School leaders were also mandated to train parents with the goal of increasing other parent involvement as well as provide coordination between parent involvement activities and

other programs such as Head Start (Gestwicki, 2007; Tekin, 2011). Under the NCLB Act, parental information and resource centers (PIRC) had to be created, which assisted parents of children who were identified for academic improvement under Title I (Tekin, 2011).

The current education law, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), was signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), ESSA is an update to the NCLB Act and it also reauthorizes President Johnson's 1965 ESEA. The U.S. Department of Education shared that in 2007, the NCLB Act was scheduled for revisions, but the requirements of the Act were progressively more difficult for school leaders and educators to attain. Thus, in 2010, the Obama Administration responded to the requests from educators and families to develop a better law that had clear goals to prepare all students for college and career success. The National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement (NAFSCE; 2015) reported that the NCLB Act has mandatory requirements for school districts and school leaders to involve parents and families, similar in the ESSA. The NAFSCE shared that these similar mandatory requirements involve school districts offering programs and activities that include parents and family members, as well as meaningful consultations with parents. The NAFSCE related that programs and activities specifically include input from families, such as using parents' input in creating a written parent and family engagement policy and assessing family engagement policy and practices. In addition, the NAFSCE noted that other programs and activities includes family involvement in activities at Title I schools, putting aside at least

1% of grants to pay for parent and family involvement activities, having families take part in determining how to use these funds, and sending 90% of the funding directly to schools (para. 1).

## KCPS Parent Involvement Policy and Practices

It was important to explore KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices as parents of students who attended elementary school in the district were asked to give their perceptions of the parent involvement policy and practices. KCPS receive Title 1 funds; therefore, federal regulations require that the school district develop written policies to make sure that parents of children being served by Title 1 can participate in the program design, implementation, review, evaluation, and revision (KCMSD, 2014). KCMSD (2014) reported that to comply with the federal Title 1 regulations and improve the quality of instructional services provided by Title 1, the school district conducts an annual public meeting for parents of all children who are eligible to receive Title 1 services, where programs and activities provided with Title 1 funds are explained to them. Regular published newsletters are used to inform parents of students receiving Title 1 services about program activities as well as their rights to take part in the design, implementation, review, evaluation, and revision of Title 1 projects. Parents are provided with a midquarter progress report and teachers are available to meet with parents of program participants on parent-teacher conference days. KCMSD noted that materials and in-service activities are provided for parents to promote the education of their children at home.

Parents' suggestions are solicited in the planning, development, operation, review, evaluation, and revision of programs (KCMSD, 2014). KCMSD (2014) related that timely responses to parent recommendations are provided to parents. School report cards are provided to each parent at the end of the semester. The report card addresses parent participation, disaggregated achievement data with focus on the progress of the targeted population, attendance, school climate, and how the school's Title 1 plan is progressing. Parents are involved in the design, review, and revision of the school compact. Each parent, student, staff member, or administrator signs the compact. KCMSD explained that parents are given timely notification on programs, pending conferences, workshops, and community forums to afford them opportunities for participation.

Orientations are scheduled before school officially begins to provide parents the opportunity to sign all necessary forms, receive policies, and information on school and district expectations and guidelines (KCMSD, 2014). KCMSD (2014) noted that information on the procedure process for filing a complaint about the Title 1 program are given to families at the beginning of the school year. Schools are encouraged to have representation at the Title 1 advisory council meetings. Parents are provided the opportunity to be a part of the interview, selection, and evaluation process of candidates for Title 1 and other positions related to the ESEA. To help nonEnglish-speaking parents, district- and school-related communications are translated and translators are available at parent-teacher conferences and other times needed. Reports are provided on annual meeting participation, monthly involvement activities of each school receiving Title 1 funds, and the Saturday tutoring programs. KCMSD also shared that as part of a Title 1

school and in accordance with the ESEA, parents have a right to know the professional qualifications of classroom teachers and paraprofessionals who assist the teachers.

KCPS parent organizations include school advisory committees (SACs), parent-teacher association (PTA), and parent-teacher-student association (PTSA; KCPS, 2016d). KCPS (2016d) reported that a SAC is a school-based volunteer group that is made up of parents, families of students, community members, and school staff. Some of the functions performed by a SAC include participation in the development of the school budget, working with administration on personnel issues, and providing input into curriculum selections and development. KCPS noted that SACs are a great way for parents to get involved in their children's education as adults who take an active role in education positively affect future generations of leaders, workers, and parents. KCPS related that parents get to see what goes on inside KCPS. KCPS shared that the mission of the KCPS' PTA and PTSA is to support and speak on behalf of children and youths in the schools and community as well as before governmental bodies and other organizations that make decisions affecting children. KCPS also noted that the PTA and PTSA assist parents in developing the skills they need to raise and protect their children. Parent and public involvement are also encouraged.

## Barriers to Parents' School Involvement

Research findings have indicated that there is a positive correlation between parent involvement and positive educational outcomes and academic success, for example, better grades, positive attitudes toward school, and higher test scores (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2009; McCormick et al., 2013; Nam & Park, 2014;

Tang, 2015; Thao, 2009). Johnson et al. (2013) investigated whether parents were an untapped resource in improving and reimagining K through 12th-grade education in Kansas City. The researchers conducted in-depth telephone surveys with 1,566 parents with children who lived in the Kansas City area. Johnson et al. portrayed three different types of parents: (a) potential transformers, (b) school helpers, and (c) help seekers. The researchers described potential transformers as parents who appear ready to take on a larger role in deciding how schools operate. Schools helpers were described as parents who say they could do more to assist their children's school. Help seekers were described as parents who were concerned about their children's learning and appear to seek more guidance from school staff members on how to help their children succeed.

Findings indicated that many parents lacked knowledge about important school issues (Johnson et al., 2013). Johnson et al. (2013) found that although parents had a good understanding that local schools were not improving quickly, many parents were not ready to get more involved. Many parents viewed other issues and problems as more important to raising their children successfully and other changes such as getting more involved at home, as a more effective strategy. Although many parents had concerns about the schools, most parents reported positive relationships with teachers and administrators at their children's schools. However, Johnson et al. emphasized that this finding does not mean that parents do not care about school improvement or that they do not have important views and ideas that school leaders need to consider. Instead, Johnson et al. related that what this finding means is that even though many parents are not giving

local schools very high marks, getting a substantial number of parents to become involved will not be easy.

Findings indicated that parents described as help seekers posed a special challenge for school leaders because they felt more disillusioned with schools than the other groups of parents (Johnson et al., 2013). Johnson et al. (2013) found that help seekers are present at their children's schools and are looking for more support from teachers and school leaders to assist them in helping their children succeed. Thus, the researchers noted that further research is needed that focuses on the sources of their skepticism or mistrust. Findings also indicated that while potential transformers would be very comfortable serving on committees to decide school policies, most them have not taken on an active role. In addition, findings indicated that while school helpers were already active volunteers at their children's schools, they do not feel comfortable taking on advocacy roles (Johnson et al., 2013).

KCPS students are multiethnic, multicultural, approximately 20% of student's primary language is not English, and student population speaks more than 50 languages (KCPS, 2016b, para. 1, 2016c, para. 5). Hence, there are many KCPS students who are immigrants and have immigrant parents, and both groups face unique challenges. Immigrants are defined as individuals who were born in another country outside of the United States and whose parents are both foreign citizens or were both born abroad (Statistics Denmark, 2016). Immigrant children are defined "as children under age eighteen who are either foreign-born or U.S.-born to immigrant parents—now account for one-fourth of the nation's 75 million children" (Passel, 2011, p. 19). Students who are

English language learners (ELLs), their teachers, and the schools and programs where they are enrolled face three major challenges (Uriarte et al., 2011). Uriarte et al. (2011) reported that the first challenge is that students need to be taught and must learn English at a high proficiency level that will provide them access to academic content. The second challenge is that students need to be taught and must learn academic content at a level that is similar to that of English proficient students. Uriarte et al. noted that the third challenge is that students need to actively take part in learning and schools, and programs administered by teachers should successfully engage students in order for students to graduate from high school. Like their children, immigrant parents also encounter many barriers.

In contrast to U.S.-born parents, immigrant parent involvement tends to be less, such as visiting their children's school, participating or attending school activities and events, helping their children with homework, and talking to teachers and school staff (Thao, 2009). Thao (2009) discussed the misperceptions that some school administrators, teachers, and other school staff members have about immigrant parents, such as believing that they do not value their children's education because of less active parent involvement. On the other hand, Thao pointed out that immigrant parents have high expectations of their children and highly value their education. Research findings have indicated that immigrant parents have higher academic expectations for their children compared to U.S.-born parents (Kao, 2004; Thao, 2009). Thao noted that many immigrant parents did not have the opportunity to attend school in their native country and perceive education as instrumental to their children's success in the United States.

Many immigrant parents face some common barriers that prevent them from being active in their children's education such as a lack of knowledge about U.S. culture and school systems, time constraints due to work and family responsibilities, lack of formal education, and not being able to speak and understand English fluently (Thao, 2009). Many immigrant parents may feel embarrassed about their lack of English fluency (Thao, 2009). Due to many immigrant parents' limited opportunities to attend school or get exposed to English in their native country, their ability to help their children complete their school work is negatively affected (Thao, 2009; Turney & Kao, 2009).

School leaders should improve communication with all parents, including immigrant parents, by creating an environment in which parents desire this communication (Marzano, 2003; Nam & Park, 2014). Nam and Park (2010) investigated the perceptions of 106 immigrant parents who lived in the United States for less than 10 years and whose children had been in ELL programs at five elementary and five secondary schools in the Minnesota, across three involvement types: (a) parenting, (b) communicating, and (c) learning at home. Epstein (2010) explained that *parenting* pertains to teachers and school staff members assisting parents with developing supportive home environments. Epstein related that *communicating* pertains to parents and school staff member connecting and interacting. Epstein noted that *learning at home* pertains to assisting immigrant parents to understand their children's learning and collaborating with schools to help their children's education and future goals. Nam and Park selected these three types of parent involvement as dependent variables because immigrant parents easily understood them and they could be easily applied when

educating children. The independent variables were parents' ethnicity, home language, and education level; and children's school level, length of enrollment at a school, and academic achievement in English.

Findings indicated that immigrant parents had positive perceptions about all three types of parent involvement (Nam & Park, 2014). Based on the findings, parent involvement in communication was the most important factor that affected immigrant parents' views of parent involvement (Nam & Park, 2014). Nam and Park (2014) noted that the findings meant that immigrant parents knew the importance of communication between home and school. There was also a strong and positive correlation between all three types of parent involvement. The researchers suggested that if parents communicate more with teachers and other school staff members, then they can better support their children's learning at home and assist their children more positively. In contrast, findings indicated that parents viewed parent involvement differently for the parenting and learning at home types, which were dependent on their children's school level, ethnicity, home language, and educational background. Nam and Park recommended that teachers and other school staff members should give more consideration to parents' cultural backgrounds and educational levels, as well as children's school levels, when offering programs and activities based on the three types of parent involvement.

### Improving Parent Involvement to Regain and Sustain Full Accreditation

Parents in Kansas City, Missouri, have many of the same concerns, goals, and ideas about education and the schools (Johnson et al., 2013). Johnson et al. (2013) investigated whether Kansas City parents were an untapped resource in improving and

reimaging K through 12th-grade education in KCPS. The researchers recommended that effective strategies to build momentum for change and improvement in education must meet parents at their starting points and be designed for different types of parents, specifically, potential transformers, school helpers, and help seekers. Johnson et al. discussed the importance of communication where both parents and educators discuss their concerns and ideas to address problems and strengthen schools in ways that can help students succeed. In addition, the researchers noted that school leaders can bring broader concerns to policymakers.

Along with communication, another effective strategy is listening and addressing key concerns (Johnson et al., 2013). Johnson et al. (2013) explained that parents experience the KCPS education system differently; therefore, one communication strategy or focusing on only small subsets of issues may not work well for all parents. Johnson et al. recommended that change leaders should begin by listening as it is important to identify the main issues that parents are thinking about and to know how to think and talk about them. The researchers shared that parents will be most open to constructive involvement if they know their main concerns are understood and are being addressed. Johnson et al. noted that another effective strategy is providing many and different opportunities for parents to engage. The researchers noted that the more diverse the opportunities to get involved, the greater the chance of attracting parents of different degrees of readiness, willingness, or ability. Johnson et al. emphasized that it is important to engage parents on problems such as school safety, but they should also be engaged on successes, such as the celebration of improvements in student achievement.

Providing many and different opportunities also pertains to attending to the different types of parents who seek to participate in different ways; specifically, the potential transformers, school helpers, and help seekers (Johnson et al., 2013). To engage potential transformers, Johnson et al. (2013) reported that making the most of potential transformers' readiness to engage in school change will mean approaching them as partners. The researchers noted that partnership can be cultivated in several ways. The first way to cultivate partnership with potential transformers is to speak to parents' highest priorities to build the momentum for change. Johnson et al. found that bullying, school safety, educational opportunities for all children, supports for children who need extra help, and assistance or resources for teachers were among the top concerns for parents in Kansas City. A second way to cultivate partnership with potential transformers is to build potential transformers' capacities to lead change efforts. Leadership academies offer parents and concerned citizens opportunities to participate in training that build skills and knowledge about important education issues. A third way to cultivate partnership with potential transformers is to build potential transformers' capacity to be authentic engagement facilitators. The researchers related that engagement should be an ongoing communication process among leaders and people who are embedded in the community life. A fourth way to cultivate partnership with potential transformers is to recognize successes and achievements in parent engagement. Johnson et al. noted that creating venues to recognize accomplishments, honor commitments, and celebrate victories is an important early step in building a sense of shared ownership of problems

and solutions as such opportunities help to maintain high-levels of engagement and energy for change and improvements.

In regard to school helpers, they are already involved with their schools in traditional ways that are admirable and important to the schools' success (Johnson et al., 2013). Johnson et al. (2013) reported that school helpers believe that they could do more, and they can be more engaged if they are asked in the correct way and provided with ways to get involved that respect their time and other commitments. The first way to cultivate partnership with school helpers is to present options that provide a range of engagement levels and opportunities. The researchers noted that although school helpers believe that they could be doing more, they are already supporting their schools; thus, engagement in deeper ways to help improve school policies and practices or to create new community partnerships should not be presented as an all-consuming involvement. Thus, quick, high quality engagement, such as participating in a focus group or a well-designed community forum may allow more parents to contribute. A second way to cultivate partnership with school helpers is to raise awareness of important education policy issues. Johnson et al. shared that while raising awareness of pressing policy issues may not influence behavior change or result in problem solving, it is an important step in keeping access open to parents who are already involved and it may prompt further action on a critical issue. A third way to cultivate partnership with school helpers is to demonstrate the power of parent engagement by making the connection between parent involvement and policy and practice changes. A fourth way to cultivate partnership with school helpers is to communicate through trusted sources. Johnson et al. noted that school

helpers have positive relationships with and trust in teachers and school principals, which presents an opportunity to use the strength of the relationship and communication to encourage parent involvement outside traditional in-school and at-home activities.

Help seekers are different from potential transformers and school helpers because they may not be ready or willing to take on more active roles in their children's schools or to become education advocates (Johnson et al., 2013). Johnson et al. (2013) reported that compared to the two other groups of parents, help seekers are more distant from their children's schools and do not believe that teachers and administrators are making genuine efforts to help their children succeed. To effectively engage these parents, Johnson et al. recommended a deeper understanding of their core needs and experiences, which can be achieved by conducting targeted research into their views, values, and concerns. Finding can then be used to develop engagement approaches that relate to their needs. In addition, the researchers recommended that change leaders focus on opening new lines of communication with help seekers to better understand and reach this group of parents.

The first way to cultivate partnership with help seekers is to strengthen relationships and understanding between school personnel and the community (Johnson et al., 2013). Johnson et al. (2013) recommended that school leaders and staff members should make full effort to create relationships with the school community and build a greater understanding of the social, cultural, and environmental factors that affect students' education. A second way to cultivate partnership with help seekers is to create opportunities and policies that welcome parents into schools, such as reducing teachers' perceptions of parental visitation as a threat or provide professional development that

cultivates the teachers' skills in conflict resolution and moderation. A third way to cultivate partnership with help seekers is to help parents' efforts go further by strengthening communication between teachers and parents about the issues they care about most, which is to help their children learn.

A better understanding of parent involvement is essential to make better use of it in both research and practice (Epstein, 2010). Educators can use Epstein's (2010) six types of parent involvement to develop more comprehensive programs of school and family relationships: (a) parenting, (b) communicating, (c) volunteering, (d) learning at home, (e) decision making, and (f) collaborating with the community (pp. 85-87). Parenting refers to helping all families establish home environments to support children as students. Communicating refers to designing effective two-way communications between school and home about school programs and children progress. Volunteering refers to recruiting and organizing parent help and support at school, home, and other locations. Learning at home refers to providing information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning. Decision making refers to the inclusion of parents in school decisions and developing parent leaders and representatives. Collaborating with the community refers to identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development (Epstein, 2010).

To get the necessary work completed on all six types of parent involvement, an action team for school, family, and community partnerships in each school is necessary

(Epstein, 2010). Epstein (2010) reported from the hard work of many educators and families in many schools, and along with clear policies and strong support from state and district leaders as well as school principals, an action plan is a useful structure that guides the development of a comprehensive partnership program, which includes the six type of parent involvement and the integration of all family and community connections within a single, unified plan and program. Epstein discussed five important steps that all schools can take to develop more positive school, family, and community connections: (a) create an action team, (b) obtain support, (c) identify starting points, (d) develop a 3-year plan, and (e) continue planning and working (pp. 89-92). Creating an action team is a great way to build partnerships and responsibilities of the action team include assessing parent practices, organizing options for new partnerships, implementing selected activities, evaluating next steps, and continuing to improve and coordinate practices for all six types of parent involvement. Obtain support pertains to the need for a budget to guide and support the work and expenses of each school's action team. Identify starting points pertains to the action team working to improve parent involvement. Develop a 3-year plan pertains to the action team using the ideas and goals for partnership that were collected from teachers, parents, and students to develop a 3-year outline of the specific steps that will help the school progress from its starting point on each type of involvement to where it wants to be in 3 years. Epstein related that continue planning and working pertains to the action team scheduling an annual presentation and celebration of progress at the school so that all teachers, families, and students will know about the work that has been done each year to build partnerships.

Teachers and school staff play an important role in engaging parents and creating a welcoming school environment for culturally diverse families (Thao, 2009). Thao (2009) reported that teachers and school staff should take steps to be inclusive and promote parent involvement by being sensitive to the barriers that culturally diverse families experience. Thao recommended four effective engagement strategies that teachers and school staff can use: (a) building relationships with immigrant parents, (b) providing needed information and guidance, (c) having bilingual interpreters or family liaisons within schools, and (d) offering additional support (pp. 2-4). To build relationships with immigrant parents, teachers and school staff should develop positive relationships with parents by greeting parents and communicating with them. Immigrant parents are often not familiar with U.S. education systems; hence, they need to be provided with information and guidance that will help them to understand the expectations of their children and of themselves as parents. It is important to provide information and guidance to immigrant parents in ways that they can understand by having bilingual interpreters or family liaisons within schools. Thao also noted that another effective strategy is informing immigrant parents about the resources and opportunities that are available for their families within the school and community.

## Summary and Conclusions

There is a gap in the literature that focuses on parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation and in this study, I addressed this gap. KCPS has struggled over the past

40 years with poor academic achievement, decreased enrollment and budget, and many short-term superintendents; therefore, it is imperative that public officials, policymakers, school administrators, teachers, and other school personnel pay more attention to how they can increase parents' involvement in their children's education as parent involvement is instrumental in every child's success (Epstein, 2010; Finkel, 2012; Hernandez et al., 2009; Nam & Park, 2004). Schools should consider parents' ethnic backgrounds, educational levels, and languages used at home to form collaboration between parents, teachers, and other school staff (Nam & Park, 2014). While parents face barriers to active parental involvement, they play an important role in their children's education (Thao, 2009). By understanding parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation, school leaders, teachers, and staff members will understand the effective engagement strategies they need to incorporate to reduce barriers and help parents demonstrate and reinforce the value of education and the high expectations they have for their children. In turn, students' high academic achievement will help to the KCPS to regain and sustain its full accreditation.

In Chapter 2, I included the introduction, literature search strategy, theoretical foundation, background of KCPS and its accreditation problems, historical overview of parent involvement policy and practices in the United States, KCPS parent involvement policy and practices, barriers to parents' school involvement, improving parent involvement to regain and sustain full accreditation, and summary and conclusions. In

Chapter 3, I include the introduction, research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and a summary. In Chapter 4, I include the introduction, pilot study, setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, results, and a summary. In Chapter 5, I include the introduction, interpretation of findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and a conclusion.

# Chapter 3: Research Method

In this study, I explored parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation. Using snowball sampling, I collected data for this phenomenological research study using in-depth, face-to-face semistructured interviews with 21 parents, seven from each school, whose children attended either (a) one of two public elementary schools or (b) one public charter school in Kansas City, Missouri. I transcribed the interviews and organized, managed, coded, and stored the data with NVivo. I analyzed the data using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis. In conducting this research study, I followed Walden University's IRB guidelines to ensure the ethical protection of research participants. The IRB approval number was 06-09-17-0151128. In Chapter 3, I include the introduction, research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and a summary.

## Research Design and Rationale

In this section, I state the research questions, state and define the central phenomenon of the study, identify the research tradition, and provide a rationale for the chosen tradition. I organized this section in the following subsections: research questions and phenomenological research design rationale.

### Research Questions

I addressed one central research question in this qualitative phenomenological research study: What are parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement

policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation?

Three subquestions were considered:

1. What are parents' perceptions about how school leaders, teachers, and staff members engage parents in their children's elementary schools?
2. What are parents' perceptions about school leaders', teachers', and staff members' connections to and understandings of their community?
3. What are parents' perceptions about the best way they can make a difference in their children's elementary schools?

**Phenomenological Research Design Rationale**

I used a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation. Snowball sampling is a subset of purposive sampling (Trochim, 2006a) and I used this sampling strategy to collect data through in-depth, face-to-face semistructured interviews with 21 parents, seven from each school, whose children attended either (a) one of two public elementary schools or (b) one public charter school in Kansas City, Missouri. I used NVivo to organize, manage, code, and store the data and I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis.

I considered whether to use a mixed method approach because it has strengths of an additional method to offset the weaknesses of another method when both methods are

used in a study (Johnson, 2013). However, in this study, a mixed methods approach was not needed in answering the central research question and three subquestions. I also considered whether to use a quantitative research method because it reduces the confounding influence of many variables and would allow for credible cause and effect relationships (Johnson, 2013). However, I did not use a quantitative method in this research study because participants' perceptions cannot be measured with standardized instruments. Thus, I used a qualitative research method in this research study because it provided understanding and description of participants' personal experiences of the phenomena (Johnson, 2013).

For this research study, I considered five qualitative research designs: case study, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative inquiry, and phenomenology (Guetterman, 2015). After an extensive review of all five research designs, I chose the phenomenological research design because it is used to understand a phenomenon from the perspective of those who experienced it and there was an essence to shared experience (Patton, 2002; Worthington, 2013). I used the phenomenological research design to present the essence of parents' experiences with how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents and help the school district regain and sustain its full accreditation.

## Role of the Researcher

The qualitative researcher participates in the study, which is different from quantitative researchers who distance themselves from participants (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010; Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). In this phenomenological research

study, my role was an observer-participant during the in-depth, face-to-face semistructured interviews. I contacted and recruited potential participants directly by e-mail or telephone. I conducted the semistructured interviews, which I then transcribed, coded, analyzed, and interpreted. I did not recruit family members, personal friends, or current or past colleagues to take part in the study. Hence, I did not have any personal or professional relationship with potential participants. I also did not have power over potential participants, their participation was not coerced, and there was no conflict of interest in this study.

When conducting phenomenological research studies, researchers should put their biases aside and view the topic from a new view point (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). I used reflexivity, which refers to researchers' self-awareness and strategies for managing possible biasing factors within the study (Jootun, McGhee, & Marland, 2009; Porter, 1993). Therefore, I disclosed any experiences, biases, and values in relation to the research topic. I did not hold any biases against potential participants and I respected all participants. I considered all participants' perceptions on the questions being asked of them. After I have completed the study and it is approved, I will e-mail each participant a summary report of the research findings.

## Methodology

The methodology section is described in sufficient depth so that other researchers can replicate the study. I organized this section in the following subsections: participant selection logic; instrumentation; pilot study; procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection; and data analysis plan.

**Participant Selection Logic**

I used snowball sampling, which is a subcategory of purposive sampling (Trochim, 2006a), to identify potential participants who met the selection criteria for inclusion in the study and then those potential participants were asked to recommend other parents who met the study's criteria. The selection criteria for being in this study included parents who lived in Kansas City, Missouri, who were fluent in English, and whose children attended either (a) one of two public elementary schools or (b) one public charter school identified in this study. Three schools identified in the study have different rating, which is based on a rating of 1 to 10, where 1 to 3 indicate below average, 4 to 7 indicate average, and 8 to 10 indicate above average (Great Schools, 2017). To participate in this study, parents must have children who attended one of the schools identified in their invitation to participate and recommendation request letter and consent form. In the dissertation, I described the schools to protect their identity in the study; however, the actual invitation letter and consent form that were sent to the Walden University IRB showed the name of the schools. The schools were as follows: (a) a preK through Grade 6 public elementary school with a 1 rating (below average), (b) a preK through Grade 6 public elementary school with a 4 rating (average), and (c) a K through Grade 8 public charter school with a 10 rating (above average). The public charter school was included in the study because there were no public elementary schools that had an above average rating (8 to 10). The highest rating for the public elementary schools was a 4 (average). Thus, a charter school was included to obtain parents perceptions who have children who attend a school in the KCPS' district that had an above average rating.

Obtaining parents' perceptions who have children who attend schools with three different ratings levels helped to provide a better understanding of how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation. Parents who were known to meet the selection criteria were initially contacted by e-mail or telephone. They were sent an invitation letter to participate in the study and they were asked to recommend other parents who met the selection criteria for this study (see Appendix B).

The sample size in qualitative studies tend to be smaller in comparison to quantitative studies (Mason, 2010). For phenomenological research studies, Klenke (2008) recommended two to 25 participants, Creswell (1998) recommended five to 25 participants, and Morse (1994) recommended at least six. Mason (2010) reported that in qualitative research, numerous issues can affect sample size, but saturation should be the guiding principle. Strauss and Corbin (2014) explained that saturation is a matter of degree and that it is always possible for new data to materialize. Strauss and Corbin noted that saturation pertains to the point where it becomes counterproductive to collect additional data as the new information does not necessary add to the model, story, framework, or theory. In this study, at least 21 participants, seven from each school, were used to find trends in participants' parent involvement experiences. In this study, the relationship between saturation and sample size was adequate as using a snowball sample of 21 participants allowed me to obtain rich data. Therefore, I reached saturation with 21 participants.

## Instrumentation

I used a 45-minute researcher-developed interview guide to conduct individual in-depth, face-to-face semistructured interviews with participants (see Appendix C). The questionnaire was structured to obtain data on parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation. In addition, the questionnaire was structured to elicit participants' perceptions about how school leaders, teachers, and staff members engage parents in their children's elementary schools; about school leaders', teachers', and staff members' connections to and understandings of their community; and about the best way they can make a difference in their children's elementary schools.

Researchers use semistructured interviews to generate qualitative data using open-ended questions and prepared probes (Morse & Richards, 2002). In conducting semistructured interviews, researchers use the interview guide but are not restricted by it because they have the flexibility to further probe areas from participants' responses (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Smith & Osborn, 2003). Chan, Fung, and Chien (2013) noted that researchers can make sure that a wide range of issues are addressed by asking focused instead of leading questions and then carefully listen to participant responses.

## Pilot Study

I conducted a pilot study before carrying out the main study. A pilot study allowed me to evaluate the feasibility, cost, and time of the main study. In addition, a pilot study allowed me to test the instructions and questions of this study as well as

decrease errors or confusion with the interview process before starting the main study. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) related that pilot studies help the researcher to figure out the time needed to conduct the interviews and the feasibility of the research. Three parents who met the study's criteria, one from each school identified in this study were selected to participate in the pilot study; therefore, in-depth, face-to-face semistructured interviews were conducted with three participants to test the instructions and questions. Connelly (2008) and Treece and Treece (1982) explained that a pilot study sample should be 10% of the sample projected for the larger main study. Therefore, since the sample size for the main study was 21, I used three parents, which is 14% of the larger sample for the main study.

**Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

I completed the National Institutes of Health (NIH) human research protections training (see Appendix D). I also complied with all federal and state regulations, such as abiding by the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (2016) ethical conduct of human subjects research. After receiving Walden University's IRB approval to conduct the study, I conducted a pilot study with three parents who met the study's criteria, one from each school, and made any necessary changes to the interview procedures and questions (see Appendix A for the e-mail invitation to participate and recommendation request for the pilot study). After completing the pilot study, I began the main study. Contact information for parents in the pilot study, as well as the initial parent contact information for the main study if the pilot study participants did not want to share contact information, were obtained from personal and professional contacts. Although I

did not include anyone with whom I have a personal or professional relationship with in the study, which includes family members, friends, coworkers, or professional and personal associates to prevent perceived coercion to participate due to any existing or expected relationship between the participants and me, I did ask them if they knew individuals who fit the study's criteria to get snowball sampling going. I contacted parents who were known to meet the selection criteria individually by e-mail or telephone. I sent potential participants an invitation to participate and recommendation request letter, where they were invited to participate in the study and recommend other parents who met the selection criteria for this study (see Appendix B). In the letter, I informed participants that they could ask questions about the study by e-mail or telephone. To prevent perceived coercion or obligation to take part in the study, I did not invite anyone with whom I had a personal or professional relationship with to participate in the study.

On the invitation letter to participate in the study, potential participants were asked to complete the questions on the invitation letter and e-mail the answers back to me if they are interested in participating in the study. I reviewed potential participants' responses to the questions to ensure that they met the selection criteria for participation. For potential participants who met the selection criteria, I contacted them individually by telephone or e-mail to set-up an appointment to conduct semistructured interviews at a time that was convenient for them. The interviews took place in a private meeting room at a Kansas City public library that was located near the participants; two different libraries were used as two of the schools were close in proximity. Thus, two schools are

close to one of the library locations identified in this study. I conducted interviews in a private meeting room at a library as this ensured participants' privacy and it also reduced the risk of a noisy environment or distractions (Goulard et al., 2017).

Before participants took part in the interviews for the main study, I asked participants to read and sign a hard copy consent form. I answered any question that participants had while they reviewed the consent form. Although it was unlikely that participation in the study would result in any acute discomfort, I provided participants with reasonable protection from distress or psychological harm. On the consent form, I informed participants that they could seek counseling by calling the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's, 2014) national helpline at 1-800-662-4357 should they experience any negative effects from taking part in this research study. I audio-taped the interviews, which took approximately 45 minutes (see Appendix C for the interview guide). Before I concluded the interviews, I answered participants' questions or concerns. After I answered all questions or concerns, I ended the interviews and thanked participants for their participation.

After I transcribed the interviews, I analyzed the data. After the study is completed and approved, I will e-mail a summary report of the research findings to all participants. I will keep the data secured in a locked file cabinet and password protected computer in my private home office. In my private home office, I am the only one with access to the data. I will keep all data for at least 5 years based on Walden University guidelines. After 5 years, I will properly destroy all data using techniques such as shredding and demagnetizing.

**Data Analysis Plan**

I analyzed the interview questions against the central research question and three subquestions. I transcribed the interviews and organized, managed, coded, and stored the data with NVivo. Jabbar (2015) reported that NVivo is a data management tool that is used to organize data. Researchers can use NVivo to organize and manage a large dataset with a clear coding structure, which can help with the creation of themes and the searching of data (Academic Triangle, 2015). King (2004) related that NVivo is helpful to the researcher as it can be used to index segments of text to particular themes, link research notes to coding, carry out complex search and retrieve operations, and allow the researcher to examine possible relationships between the themes.

I analyzed the data using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis:

1. Familiarizing yourself with your data.
2. Generating initial codes.
3. Searching for themes.
4. Reviewing themes.
5. Defining and naming themes.
6. Producing the report. (pp. 16-23)

I found no discrepant cases. Preliminary themes in this study included parent involvement policy and practices, accreditation, engaging parents, community connection and understanding, and making a difference.

## Issues of Trustworthiness

In this section, I discuss four qualitative counterparts to quantitative validity and reliability: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I also discuss ethical procedures of this study. I organized this section in the following subsections: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical procedures.

### Credibility

Credibility refers to ensuring that the results of the study are credible and believable from participants' perspectives (Trochim, 2006b). Researchers use credibility strategies such as reflexivity, member checking, prolonged and varied field experience, triangulation, time sampling, peer examination, establishing authority of researcher, interview technique, and structural coherence (Anney, 2014). I established credibility using reflexivity and saturation. Using reflexivity, I revealed all biases and experiences pertaining to KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices and its accreditation. I also ensured data saturation.

### Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent the results of the study can be generalized or transferred to other settings or contexts (Trochim, 2006b). Bitsch (2005) noted that thick description and purposeful sampling can be used to establish transferability. I ensured transferability by providing rich, thick description of the study's context and participants. In addition, I used snowball sampling, which is a subcategory of purposive sampling (Trochim, 2006a).

## Dependability

Dependability refers to how stable the findings are overtime (Bitsch, 2005). Strategies that can be used to establish dependability include triangulation, audit trail, peer examination or iterator comparisons, a code-recode strategy, and stepwise replication (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2010; Chilisa & Preece, 2005; Krefting, 1991; Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007). I established dependability using an audit trail where I kept multiple documents for cross-checking: interview notes, audiotaped interviews, and transcriptions of those interviews.

## Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent the results of the study can be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers (Baxter & Eyles, 1997; Trochim, 2006b). Strategies that can be used to establish confirmability include reflexive journal, audit trail, and triangulation (Bowen, 2009; Koch, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I established confirmability using audit trails and reflexivity.

## Ethical Procedures

I completed the NIH human research protections training (see Appendix F). I abided by Walden University's IRB guidelines when conducting the study. In addition, I abided by the State of Missouri regulations, such as the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (2016) ethical conduct of human subjects research. I also abided by all federal regulations to ensure the ethical protection of research participants. I did not begin data collection until I received Walden University's IRB approval. The data

collected presented no greater than minimal risk and I followed Walden University's IRB guidelines to protect the data that were generated from the interview questions.

Before I began each interview in the pilot study and main study, I gave all participants a consent form that had been approved by Walden University's IRB to review and sign; thus, obtaining their permission to participate in the study. In the consent form, I outlined participants' protections and ethical guidelines that were followed during the research study such as the voluntary nature of the study and participants' right to withdraw at any time without fear of reprisal or penalty. In the consent form, I also outlined any physical or psychological risks that the participants might experience and indicated that participants were not obligated to complete any part of the study with which they were not comfortable. Although it was unlikely that participation in the study would result in any acute discomfort, I provided participants with reasonable protection from distress or psychological harm. On the consent form, I informed participants that they could seek counseling by calling the SAMHSA's national helpline at 1-800-662-4357 if they experienced any negative effects from taking part in this study.

I respected all participants' rights during the research process and data collection stage. After I collected the interview data, I removed all identifiable data that could identify the participants; therefore, I numbered or coded the interviews to match each participant. In doing this, participants' identities were protected; however, I knew the identity of the participants, which I kept confidential. Before beginning the interviews, I

informed all participants that the interviews would be audio-taped, which allowed me to make a verbatim transcription.

I provided participants with my contact information and the contact information for my dissertation committee chair if they had any further questions or concerns about the research study. I also provided participants with the contact information of the Walden University representative with whom they could talk privately about their rights as participants. I will keep all data secured and my supervising committee was the only one with access to the data. I will keep all data in a locked file cabinet and password protected computer in my personal home office for at least 5 years based on Walden University's guidelines. I will properly destroy all data after 5 years using methods such as shredding and demagnetizing. I will e-mail a summary report of the research findings to each participant after the study is completed and approved.

## Summary

I explored parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation. I transcribed the in-depth semistructured interviews and I used NVivo to manage the data. I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis to analyze the data. The data that I collected presented no greater than minimal risk and I followed Walden University's IRB procedures to protect participants and the data.

In Chapter 3, I included the introduction, research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and a summary. In Chapter 4, I

include the pilot study, setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, results, and a summary. In Chapter 5, I include the introduction, interpretation of findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and a conclusion.

# Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to explore 21 parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation. In-depth semistructured interviews with 21 parents, seven from each school, whose children attended either (a) one of two public elementary schools or (b) one public charter school in Kansas City, Missouri, were used to address the central research question of parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation? In addition, three subquestions were considered: (a) What are parents' perceptions about how school leaders, teachers, and staff members engage parents in their children's elementary schools, (b) what are parents' perceptions about school leaders', teachers', and staff members' connections to and understandings of their community, and (c) what are parents' perceptions about the best way they can make a difference in their children's elementary schools?

The interviews were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis. Themes that emerged from the data are presented according to their corresponding research questions. In Chapter 4, I include the pilot study, setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, results, and summary.

## Pilot Study

I conducted a pilot study prior to the main study to evaluate the feasibility, cost, and time of the main study. In addition, the pilot study enabled me to test the instructions and questions of this study and minimize errors or confusion with the interview process prior to the main study. Furthermore, the results of a pilot study helped to establish the internal consistency of the data analysis technique. Three parents were recruited and selected to participate in the pilot study. Their demographics were as follows: (a) two Black females and one Black male, (b) one from each school identified in this study, and (c) met the study's criteria. In-depth, face-to-face semistructured interviews were conducted with the three participants to test the instructions and questions at two public libraries. Results from the pilot study indicated that the interview guide's instructions and questions were clear and free from bias, therefore, no changes were required.

## Setting

I used snowball sampling to recruit participants for in-depth semistructured interviews. I interviewed 21 parents, seven from each school, whose children attended either (a) one of two public elementary schools or (b) one public charter school in Kansas City, Missouri. The interviews took place from June 27, 2017 to August 20, 2017 in a private meeting room at a Kansas City public library that was located near the participants; two different libraries were used as two of the schools were close in proximity. There were no personal or organizational conditions that influenced participants or their experiences at the time of the study that may influence interpretation of results in this phenomenological study.

## Demographics

From the 33 parents who were initially contacted (eight from each of the two public elementary schools and 17 from the public charter school), I chose seven parents from each school. Seventeen out of 21 participants (81%) were female and 4 out of 21 participants (19%) were male. Sixteen out of 21 participants (76%) were Black and 5 out of 21 participants (24%) were White. Participants lived in Kansas City, Missouri, were fluent in English, and had children who attended one of the three schools identified in this study. The schools were as follows: (a) School 1: A preK through Grade 6 public elementary school with a 4 rating (average); (b) School 2: A K through Grade 8 public charter school with a 10 rating (above average), and; (c) School 3: A preK through Grade 6 public elementary school with a 1 rating (below average). Table 1 depicts relevant participant demographics.

Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

| Participants | Gender | Race | School type | School rating |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| School 1 Participant 1 | Female | Black | Public elementary | 4 |
| School 1 Participant 2 | Male | Black | Public elementary | 4 |
| School 1: Participant 3 | Female | Black | Public elementary | 4 |
| School 1: Participant 4 | Female | Black | Public elementary | 4 |
| School 1: Participant 5 | Female | Black | Public elementary | 4 |
| School 1: Participant 6 | Female | Black | Public elementary | 4 |
| School 1: Participant 7 | Male | Black | Public elementary | 4 |
| School 2: Participant 1 | Female | Black | Pubic charter | 10 |
| School 2: Participant 2 | Female | White | Public charter | 10 |
| School 2: Participant 3 | Female | Black | Public charter | 10 |
| School 2: Participant 4 | Female | White | Public charter | 10 |
| School 2: Participant 5 | Female | Black | Public charter | 10 |
| School 2: Participant 6 | Female | White | Public charter | 10 |
| School 2: Participant 7 | Female | White | Public charter | 10 |
| School 3: Participant 1 | Male | Black | Public elementary | 1 |
| School 3: Participant 2 | Female | Black | Public elementary | 1 |
| School 3: Participant 3 | Male | Black | Public elementary | 1 |
| School 3: Participant 4 | Female | White | Public elementary | 1 |
| School 3: Participant 5 | Female | Black | Public elementary | 1 |
| School 3: Participant 6 | Female | Black | Public elementary | 1 |
| School 3: Participant 7 | Female | Black | Public elementary | 1 |

## Data Collection

I used a 45-minute, researcher-developed interview guide to conduct individual in-depth, face-to-face semistructured interviews with participants (see Appendix C). The guide was structured to obtain data on parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation. In addition, the guide was structured to elicit participants' perceptions about how school leaders, teachers, and staff members engage parents in their children's elementary schools; about school leaders', teachers', and staff members' connections to and understandings of their community; and about the best way they can make a difference in their children's elementary schools. Each interview took approximately 45 minutes and were audio-recorded. I transcribed the interviews and analyzed the data.

## Data Analysis

I analyzed the interview questions against the central research question and three subquestions. I transcribed the interviews and organized, managed, coded, and stored the data with NVivo. I analyzed the data using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis:

1. Familiarizing yourself with your data.
2. Generating initial codes.
3. Searching for themes.
4. Reviewing themes.
5. Defining and naming themes.

6. Producing the report. (pp. 16-23)

I found no discrepant cases. Table 2 depicts the themes that emerged during the analysis, the codes that contributed to the themes, and a representative quotation from each theme.

Table 2

*Emergent Themes, Codes Contributing to Themes, and Representative Quotations*

| Themes | Codes contributing to themes | Representative quotation |
|---|---|---|
| Parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation (corresponding to the central research question) | Teacher/students; policy awareness; general; better informing of parents; needed changes; needed afterhours opportunities; multiple points of contact needed; good existing practices; needed-welcoming attitude; needed-school leader involvement; policy awareness level; on parents | "Parents need to be invited into schools more often even if it's disruptive to teachers . . . . Making parents feel welcomed gives parents more ownership to talk about things with your kids." |
| Parents' perceptions about how school leaders, teachers, and staff members engage parents in their children's elementary schools (corresponding to Subquestion 1) | Improving; useful practices; not engaging | "Teachers and staff reach out on a regular basis. Parent teacher conferences, e-mail and phone calls to let us know what is going on." |
| Parents' perceptions about school leaders', teachers', and staff members' connections to and understandings of their community (corresponding to Subquestion 2) | Lack of connection; limited connection/understanding; solid connection/understanding | "They need more interaction with the community to know exactly what is going on with the children that they teach." |
| Parents' perceptions about the best way they can make a difference in their children's elementary schools (corresponding to Subquestion 3) | Participation; network; communicate | "The best way is to become involved with your child and your child's teacher. It is very important. When all come together, it's a win, win for all." |

## Evidence of Trustworthiness

In this phenomenological research study, I established validity and reliability through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I established credibility using reflexivity and saturation. Using reflexivity, I revealed all biases and experiences pertaining to KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices and its accreditation. I also ensured data saturation. I ensured transferability by providing rich, thick description of the study's context and participants. In addition, I used snowball sampling, which is a subcategory of purposive sampling (Trochim, 2006a). I established dependability using an audit trail where I kept multiple documents for cross checking interview notes, audiotaped interviews, and transcriptions of those interviews. I established confirmability using audit trails and reflexivity.

## Results

Based on all the analyzed data, a total of five major themes and five minor themes emerged. Major themes and minor themes are discussed and include quotations and descriptive narrative data related to the themes in block quotation format, quotation marks, and summary of quotations. Therefore, in presenting the results, I used some direct quotes from the transcripts to support the findings, but quotations were used sparingly as I summarized most of the direct quotations and sought similarities between participants' responses. I used double quotation marks when the information being quoted was less than 40 words and freestanding block quotation format when the quotation consisted of 40 or more words, which does not require quotation marks. Lee and Hume-Pratuch (2013) reported that citing the participants was not necessary as data

gathered from research participants are not cited. Thematic analysis Step 1 or categorization of text appears in Appendix E, which shows all the participants' verbatim responses that went with each major theme and minor theme from the interview data. I organized this section as follows: central research question, Subquestion 1, Subquestion 2, and Subquestion 3.

**Central Research Question**

What are parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation? Two major themes emerged during the analysis of data related to the central research question. This subsection is organized as follows: (a) Major Theme 1: KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education if schools were more welcoming to visiting parents, if afterhours activities were created for working parents, and if more points of contact between parents and school personnel were established; and (b) Major Theme 2: KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation if teachers invested more time and effort in students and if school personnel made more efforts to keep parents informed. Table 3 depicts the number of participants who contributed to each major theme and the percentage of participants who contributed to those major themes.

Table 3

*Number and Percentage of Participants Who Contributed to Central Research Question Major Themes*

| Major themes | No. of frequencies ($N$ = 21) | % of frequencies |
|---|---|---|
| KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education if schools were more welcoming to visiting parents, if afterhours activities were created for working parents, and if more points of contact between parents and school personnel were established | 11 | 52% |
| KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation if teachers invested more time and effort in students and if school personnel made more efforts to keep parents informed | 12 | 57% |

**Major Theme 1: KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education if schools were more welcoming to visiting parents, if afterhours activities were created for working parents, and if more points of contact between parents and school personnel were established.** Five participants (School 2: Participants 4, 5, 6, and 7 and School 1: Participant 3) reported that they were not sufficiently familiar with the parent involvement policy to perceive opportunities for improvement. Three participants reported that improvements in parental involvement needed to begin with parents, rather than with changes in district policy. School 1: Participant 7 related that discipline, nurturing, and knowledge need to first comes from the home, which will then result in students doing better at school. Therefore, parent involvement starts at home. Similarly, School 1: Participant 6 shared that in order for parents to become more engaged, the needed improvement was "more parent involvement." School 3: Participant 7 perceived a need for more engagement on the part of stay-at-home parents:

> Parents [who] can stay home need to be more involved in the kid's life. Parents should be mentors and get involved in some kids' lives like the big brother, big sister program. If full-time (FT) working parents can take 1 day off a month to go to the school to have lunch with their child or kids that they don't even know. I think that would be a way to get involvement and trust amongst the parents and the staff and that would give more communication.

The remaining participants perceived a need for improvements in district policy. School 2: Participant 2 believed that parents needed to be welcomed into the school more

openly if they were going to become more engaged with their children's education. In addition, School 2: Participant 2 discussed inviting parents to the classroom even if it was disruptive to teachers, inviting parents to have lunch with the children, and making parents feel welcome, which gives them "more ownership to talk about things with" their children. Similarly, School 1: Participant 1 also believed that more opportunities for parental engagement were needed during school hours such as having field trips and allowing parents in children's classrooms at certain times, which was stopped as teachers believed it was disruptive and some children did not have anyone to check on them.

Three parents believed that the creation or modification of afterhours school programs would help parents to engage. School 2: Participant 3 reported that parents would be better able to engage in their children's education if opportunities for engagement were offered during hours when parents were available. School 2: Participant 3 noted that the school does not "have a good plan in place for parents" as parents are busy working and do not have time to volunteer during school hours, thus, KCPS staff members can do something for those parents after hours. School 3: Participant 3 agreed that afterhours programs, such as an open house, were needed to encourage parental engagement as parents could share their opinions with the school staff. School 3: Participant 4 shared that parents would be encouraged to engage with afterhours programs if teachers and school leaders participated in those programs.

School 2: Participant 1 related that parents would be able to engage more fully in their children's education if their children's school and the district had more stable leadership. In addition, School 2: Participant 1 believed that frequent changes in district

leadership allowed for inequitable treatment of schools, where some schools were treated better than others. Five participants related that parents could become more engaged if the schools and teachers made more efforts to keep them informed such as establishing more methods of reaching out to parents and increasing the points of contact between parents and schools. School 2: Participant 1 noted that many parents do not have Internet access and recommended that teachers make contact by phone and update the school's website. Similar to School 2: Participant 1, School 3: Participant 6 also discussed the need for teachers to exercise more ingenuity in reaching out to hard-to-reach parents, such as by trying different contact methods to include e-mailing, talking with parents, telephone conference, or group chat. School 3: Participant 1 suggested implementing in-person meetings between teachers and parents that were separate from parent-teacher conferences, to allow distribution of important information. In addition, School 3: Participant 1 noted that teachers were too disengaged from the community they served. School 3: Participant 2 proposed weekly or monthly updates on students' progress. School 3: Participant 5 discussed the need for more interactions between parents, teachers, and students.

**Major Theme 2: KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation if teachers invested more time and effort in students and if school personnel made more efforts to keep parents informed.** Six participants reported that they were not sufficiently aware of the parent involvement policy to perceive a need for improvements (School 1: Participant 5; School 2: Participants 3 and 4; and School 3:

Participants 2, 3, and 6). Seven participants perceived a need for teachers to become more involved with students, rather than a change be made to the parent involvement policy. School 2: Participant 3 stated:

> They can improve practices to regain accreditation. Hire teachers that have commitment to the students. Teachers just want a paycheck. Some teachers are not used to African-American students and don't know how to deal with them. They can improve on how they educate the children and the teachers they hire.

Similarly, School 1: Participant 1 assigned responsibility for the district's accreditation problems to a lack of teacher involvement, rather than to insufficient parental engagement. School 1: Participant 1 related that teachers want a paycheck, are not at school to teach, are passing children when they are not ready, and should get more involved instead of always sending children to in-school suspension (ISS). School 1: Participant 4 shared that teachers should be involved and invest in children's education, show the children they care whether they pass or fail, implement afternoon programs such as study hall, and invite parents to participate and get involved. School 2: Participants 1, 5, and 7; and School 3: Participant 5 also noted a need for increase teacher involvement instead of policy changes that would influence parental engagement.

Five parents reported that the parent involvement policy could help the district regain and retain its accreditation if it was changed and there was a requirement for school personnel to keep parents better informed. School 2: Participant 1 suggested using "parent contracts" that would inform parents about the requirements for their children's grade, such as test scores, so that their children are successful, which would help the

school to keep its accreditation. School 2: Participant 1 also emphasized the importance of district leaders doing more to inform parents and setting high school standards and enforcing them. School 2: Participant 2 reported that schools needed to help parents feel connected because if there was more commitment to the school, it would help to improve engagement and student success. School 2: Participant 6 suggested that schools should rally parents to support and encourage students, which would raise students' test scores. School 1: Participant 7 suggested that teachers should be the ones to connect with parents by helping them understand what is going on in the classroom. Similarly, School 3: Participant 7 suggested that teachers should reach out to parents and get them more involved. School 1: Participant 2 related that teachers should e-mail parents regarding students' progress, thus, improving their interactions with parents.

**Subquestion 1**

What are parents' perceptions about how school leaders, teachers, and staff members engage parents in their children's elementary schools? One major theme and two minor themes emerged during the analysis of data related to Subquestion 1. This subsection is organized as follows: Major Theme 3: The district is currently implementing useful practices, Minor Theme 1: Schools are not engaging parents, and Minor Theme 2: Current practices are inadequate but improving. Table 4 depicts the number of participants who contributed to the major theme and two minor themes and the percentage of participants who contributed to those major and minor themes.

Table 4

*Number and Percentage of Participants Who Contributed to Subquestion 1 Major and Minor Themes*

| Major and minor themes | No. of frequencies ($N$ = 21) | % of frequencies |
|---|---|---|
| The district is currently implementing useful practices | 11 | 52% |
| Schools are not engaging parents | 7 | 33% |
| Current practices are inadequate but improving | 3 | 14% |

**Major Theme 3: The district is currently implementing useful practices.**

Eleven participants reported that the schools their children attended engaged in some practices that were genuinely helpful in increasing parental engagement. School 1: Participant 4 perceived the PTA as an effective liaison as information was sent to parents. School 1: Participant 5 reported that school personnel were really trying to engage parents through team work. School 1: Participant 7 related that the district's parent involvement policy was adequate and that school personnel needed parents to take some initiative because "it all starts at home." School 2: Participant 2 perceived the parent-teacher-student organization (PTSO) fundraising as an effective means of encouraging parental engagement:

> PTSO do all the extra fundraising that gets parents involved. Then you get to know your kid's teachers and other teachers so when you come to the school there is more communication. With their Title I program in the summer the teachers teach the parents how to read French with their students.

School 2: Participant 3 described school personnel's effort to engage with parents as "excellent" because they have "strong relations with students and parents." School 2: Participant 4 discussed four school programs offered by the school as effective in engaging parents: back-to-school events, parent-teacher conferences, Facebook page, and concerts. Similarly, School 2: Participant 6, and School 3: Participant 6 perceived that parent-teacher conferences as well as e-mail and telephone calls were useful and noted that school personnel were generally effective at getting parents engaged.

**Minor Theme 1: Schools are not engaging parents.** Seven participants shared that school personnel were not trying to get parents engaged. School 1: Participant 2 stated:

> As a single father, they don't try to engage as they used to. No homework and I try to contact but no response. They don't care, it's like they given up. They're there for a paycheck and don't get paid enough.

School 2: Participant 3 also reported a lack of effort on the part of school leaders and teachers to engage with parents, such as not asking parents for their input. School 2: Participant 1 believed that efforts were being made, but that these efforts did not consider the needs of parents and were therefore ineffective. School 2: Participant 1 shared that some parents do not know how to get engaged and may be disconnected due to limited time because of work and family responsibilities as well as "sociobackground disconnect." School 2: Participant 1 recommended that school personnel should ask parents to volunteer by reaching out to parents through hand dial or personal phone calls. School 3: Participant 1 also suggested that outreach efforts should be tailored to the

community in which they are implemented: School 3: Participant 7 indicated that outreach to parents of younger children was effective, but that the parents of older children were not effectively engaged.

**Minor Theme 2: Current practices are inadequate but improving.** Three participants reported that school personnel did not make adequate efforts to engage parents, but that these efforts were showing signs of improvement. School 2: Participant 1 described efforts to improve diversity:

> I think they improved. The diversity, lack of understanding. They are going into preschools and into the community trying to connect. People in the community thought you had to apply to the school and thought it was a private school, but it's not. They're always ways to improve but I think they are making those steps.

School 2: Participant 3 referred to diversity among school personnel as detrimental to parental engagement, but stated that the school was making efforts to alleviate the negative effect of cultural differences. School 1: Participant 2 discussed teachers from outside of the community who did not do enough to engage parents as their focus on receiving a paycheck, but added that teachers from within the community had a more positive effect.

**Subquestion 2**

What are parents' perceptions about school leaders', teachers', and staff members' connections to and understandings of their community? One major theme and two minor themes emerged during the analysis of data related to Subquestion 2. This subsection is organized as follows: (a) Major Theme 4: School personnel have limited

connection and understanding, (b) Minor Theme 3: School personnel lack connection and understanding, and (c) Minor Theme 4: School personnel have a solid connection and understanding. Table 5 depicts the number of participants who contributed to the major theme and minor themes and the percentage of participants who contributed to those major and minor themes.

Table 5

*Number and Percentage of Participants Who Contributed to Subquestion 2 Major and Minor Themes*

| Major theme and minor themes | No. of frequencies ($N$ = 21) | % of frequencies |
|---|---|---|
| School personnel have limited connection and understanding | 15 | 71% |
| School personnel lack connection and understanding | 5 | 24% |
| School personnel have a solid connection and understanding | 1 | 5% |

**Major Theme 4: School personnel have limited connection and understanding.** Fifteen participants reported that school personnel had only a limited understanding of and connection to the community. School 1: Participant 5 related that some school personnel had a connection to the community as they reached out and got involved, but some school personnel did not have that connection due to their lack of engagement with community members. Similarly, School 1: Participant 7 related that some school personnel were disconnected as their focus was on getting a paycheck and then going home, thus, they needed to be more involved. School 2: Participant 6 expressed that teachers from other countries often did not understand the needs of U.S.

parents and students at first because they came from a country where parents drop off their children and did not get involved. However, the participant noted that as they gained experience in U.S. schools, many of them gained a better understanding and appreciation for parents' involvement:

> They do. The teachers come from different parts of the world, so it is different. [In those] countries, parents drop the kids off and have no involvement. It's a culture shock, but once they get over that they appreciate it.

Similarly, School 2: Participant 5 reported that teachers who had emigrated from regions with significantly different cultures, such as Africa, found it difficult to work with Black students. School 3: Participant 2 also believed that some school personnel had a better understanding of students and the community than others based on their background. School 3: Participants 3 and 5 related that some school personnel were not connected to the community, but believed that disconnected personnel were trying to better acquaint themselves with the community's needs. In addition, School 3: Participant 5 reported that disconnected school personnel could improve their understanding by interacting more with the community to "know exactly what is going on with the children that they teach." Like School 3: Participant 2, School 3: Participant 7 perceived school employees' understanding of the community as dependent on their background. Similarly, School 3: Participant 6 shared that teachers seemed to have only a limited connection to the community because their exposure to it was limited and filtered by what they heard and saw on social media and television.

**Minor Theme 3: School personnel lack connection and understanding.** Five participants reported that school personnel had no connection to or understanding of the community. School 1: Participant 3 related that school leaders have different backgrounds from those in the community, which limits their understanding:

> School leaders do not live in our neighborhood [or] community so they don't know. They don't understand. If you don't live where I live it will be harder to understand my community. You don't go through what I go through. They are an outsider looking in but do not understand my culture because they are not a part of it.

Similarly, School 2: Participant 2, and School 1: Participant 4 reported that teachers do not have a connection or know the children they are teaching. School 1: Participant 4 noted that many children live in poor areas and teachers do not know how to deal with those children behavior, thus, neglecting them and letting them fail. In addition, the participant noted that parents should be involved and that teachers do not care if parents do not show up. Similarly, School 3: Participant 1 related that school personnel do not understand the children's environment. School 3: Participant 4 attributed the disconnection between school personnel and the community to generational differences.

**Minor Theme 4: School personnel have a solid connection and understanding.** Only one participant reported that school personnel had a strong connection to and understanding of the community. School 2: Participant 7 stated:

> Pretty savvy about the community. Students can come from all over the Kansas City area. I don't think we are accepted by many in the community from

inaccurate perceptions. I think they look for diversity. They go to daycares and preschools to invite socioeconomic backgrounds to increase a positive image in the community.

**Subquestion 3**

What are parents' perceptions about the best way they can make a difference in their children's elementary schools? One major theme and one minor theme emerged during the analysis of data related to Subquestion 3. This subsection is organized as follows: (a) Major Theme 5: Participation and (b) Minor Theme 5: Communication and networking. Table 6 depicts the number of participants who contributed to the major theme and minor themes and the percentage of participants who contributed to those major and minor themes.

Table 6

*Number and Percentage of Participants Who Contributed to Subquestion 3 Major and Minor Themes*

| Major theme and minor theme | No. of frequencies ($N$ = 21) | % of frequencies |
|---|---|---|
| Participation | 12 | 57% |
| Communication and networking | 9 | 43% |

**Major Theme 5: Participation.** Twelve participants perceived getting involved at the school as the best way to make a difference. School 1: Participant 2 reported getting involved by volunteering when she has free time by assisting school personnel when they need help, and participating in food give away. The participant also

highlighted that teachers do not get paid well, so it is important that parents show that they care about the students.

School 1: Participant 4 discussed getting involved by reviewing children's work and being present at the school to advocate for her children. School 2: Participant 5 suggested participating in or creating a school event. School 2: Participant 7 also discussed volunteering as an effective way to get involved as well as making sure her children are at school and prepared. School 3: Participant 4 noted that participation is the best way to make a difference as it helps parents to gain a better understanding of their children and what is going on in their lives. School 3: Participant 6 discussed being involved by monitoring children's progress and keeping an open line of communication with the teacher:

> Every day we send our kids to school and we are expecting the teachers to do their job but we as parents need to [do our] job as well. That entails sending them to school on time. Having them with their proper school supplies that they need to be ready to learn, pencils, pens, and all that good stuff and being involved. Parents need to follow up on homework, parent e-mails, and let teachers know who I am and who the student is. Let teachers know that they can come to me anytime for any type of communication. Being involved, showing your face, and showing that you are interested in your child's life in their elementary school years.

**Minor Theme 5: Communication and networking.** School 2: Participant 4 shared that more networking among parents was needed and that the best way to make a difference was to know other children and their parents. Eight parents discussed the need

to initiate more communication with school personnel, especially teachers. School 1: Participant 5 shared that the best way for parents to get involved is with getting involved with their children and the teachers as working together was "a win, win for all." Similar to School 2: Participant 2, School 2: Participant 1 noted the importance of constant communication with the child's teacher and finding out from the teacher what the child needs. School 2: Participant 3 shared that the best way to make a difference was for parents to know what was going on with their children, advocate for their children, and communicate and work as a team with teachers.

School 2: Participant 7 recommended paying attention to their children's agendas and working with teachers. School 3: Participant 1 suggested communicating with teachers by visiting the school, connecting with the teachers, and working together as a team. School 2: Participant 6 pointed out that communication with teachers would be more effective when parents are closely involved in their children's work such as helping with homework, being present and answering their children's question, and contacting teachers through notes, e-mail, or telephone calls as teachers will want to help if they know parents want to be involved:

> Stay involved. Be involved when doing homework. Be around to answer questions for them. Try to understand their work and send notes, e-mails, or call the teacher. If teachers know you want to be involved they will want to help.

## Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to explore 21 parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be

improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation. I collected data using in-depth, face-to-face semistructured interviews with a snowball sample of 21 parents, seven from each school, who had children who attended either (a) one of two public elementary schools or (b) one public charter school in Kansas City, Missouri. I used one central research question and three subquestions to guide the study. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis, five major themes and five minor themes emerged in answering the research questions.

First, regarding the central research question about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation, two major themes were found. The first major theme for the central research question indicated that KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education if schools were more welcoming to visiting parents, if afterhours activities were created for working parents, and if more points of contact between parents and school personnel were established. In relation to the first major theme, five participants reported that they were not sufficiently familiar with the parent involvement policy to perceive opportunities for improvement. Three participants reported that improvements in parental involvement needed to begin with parents, rather than with changes in district policy. The remaining participants perceived a need for improvements in district policy, such as school personnel being more welcoming of parents into the school; inviting parents to the classrooms, cafeteria,

and on school trips; creating and modifying afterhours school programs; and increased effort by teachers to reach out to parents by telephone, e-mailing, in-person meeting with parents that are separate from parent-teacher conferences, group chat, weekly or monthly updates on students' progress, and more interactions between parents, teachers, and students. In addition, participants discussed the need for more stable leadership due to frequent changes in district leadership and inequitable treatment of schools.

The second major theme for the central research question indicated that KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation if teachers invested more time and effort in students and if school personnel made more efforts to keep parents informed. In relation to the second major theme, six participants reported that they were not sufficiently aware of the parent involvement policy to perceive a need for improvements. Seven participants perceived a need for teachers to become more involved with students by implementing afternoon programs such as study hall and inviting parents to participate and get involved, rather than for a change to be made to the parent involvement policy. Five parents reported that the parent involvement policy could help the district regain and retain its accreditation if it was changed and there was a requirement for school personnel to keep parents better informed through parent contracts that would inform parents about the requirements for their children's grade, such as test scores; setting high school standards and enforcing them; helping parents feel connected and informed, which would improve engagement and student success; and e-mailing parents regarding students' progress, which would improve their interactions with parents. One participant noted that

the district's accreditation problems was due to a lack of teacher involvement, rather than to insufficient parental engagement as teachers want a paycheck, are not at school to teach, are passing children when they are not ready, and should get more involved instead of always sending children to ISS.

Second, regarding the first subquestion about how school leaders, teachers, and staff members engage parents in their children's elementary schools, one major theme and two minor themes were found. The major theme for the first subquestion indicated that the district is currently implementing useful practices. In relation to the major theme that the district is currently implementing useful practices, 11 participants reported that the schools their children attended engaged in some practices that were genuinely helpful in increasing parental engagement, such as the PTA being an effective liaison by sending information to parents; the PTSO encouraging parent engagement through fundraising; and school personnel engaging parents through team work, back-to-school events, parent-teacher conferences, Facebook page, concerts, e-mails, and telephone calls. Findings also indicated that participants perceived the district's parent involvement policy as adequate and that school personnel needed parents to take some initiative.

The two minor themes for the first subquestion indicated that schools are not engaging parents and current practices are inadequate but improving. In relation to the first minor theme that schools are not engaging parents, seven participants shared that school personnel were not trying to get parents engaged, such as assigning homework to the children, asking parents for their input, and taking into account the needs of parents. Participants also noted that some parents do not know how to get engaged and may be

disconnected due to limited time because of work and family responsibilities as well as "sociobackground disconnect." Findings indicated that school personnel should ask parents to volunteer by reaching out to parents through personal phone calls, tailoring outreach efforts to fit the community in which they are implemented, and to focus outreach efforts toward parents of older children.

In relation to the second minor theme for the first subquestion that current practices are inadequate but improving, three participants reported that school personnel did not make adequate efforts to engage parents, but that these efforts were showing signs of improvement. Findings also indicated that school personnel were taking steps to improve diversity such as going into preschools and communities to connect with children and parents and encouraging them to apply to the public charter school. In addition, findings indicated that diversity among school personnel was detrimental to parental engagement, but school personnel were taking steps to alleviate the negative effect of cultural differences. Participants also shared that teachers from outside of the community did not do enough to engage parents as their focus was on receiving a paycheck, but added that teachers from within the community had a more positive effect.

Third, regarding the second subquestion about school leaders', teachers', and staff members' connections to and understandings of their community, one major theme and two minor themes were found. The major theme for the second subquestion indicated that school personnel have limited connection and understanding. In relation to the major theme that school personnel have limited connection and understanding, 15 participants reported that school personnel had only a limited understanding of and connection to the

community. Findings also indicated that based on school personnel's' background, some had a connection to the community as they reach out and get involved, but some did not have that connection due to their lack of engagement with community members and their exposure was limited and filtered by what they heard and saw on social media and television. However, some participants believed that disconnected personnel were trying to better acquaint themselves with the community's needs and to better understand what was going on with the children that they teach. In addition, findings indicated that some school personnel were disconnected as their focus was on receiving a paycheck and then going home and that teachers from other countries often did not understand the needs of U.S. parents and students at first because they came from a country where parents drop off their children and did not get involved, but as they gained experience in U.S. schools, many of them gained a better understanding and appreciation for parents' involvement.

The two minor themes for the second subquestion indicated that school personnel lack connection and understanding and school personnel have a solid connection and understanding. In relation to the first minor theme for the second question that school personnel lack connection and understanding, five participants reported that school personnel had no connection to or understanding of the community as school leaders have different backgrounds from those in the community. Findings also indicated that teachers do not have a connection or know the children they are teaching as many children live in poor areas and teachers do not know how to deal with those children behavior, thus, neglecting them and letting them fail. In addition, the participant noted that parents should be involved and that teachers do not care if parents do not show up. A

participant also attributed the disconnection between school personnel and the community to generational differences. In relation to the second minor theme for the second subquestion that school personnel have a solid connection and understanding, one participant reported that school personnel had a strong connection to and understanding of the community by seeking out diversity by going to daycares and preschools to invite children from different socioeconomic backgrounds to attend the charter school to increase a positive image in the community.

Fourth, regarding the third subquestion about the best way they can make a difference in their children's elementary schools, one major theme and one minor theme were found. The major theme was participation and the minor theme was communication and networking. In relation to the participation major theme, findings indicated that 12 participants perceived that getting involved at the school was the best way to make a difference, such as volunteering and assisting school personnel when they need help, participating in food give away, and participating in or creating a school event. Findings also indicated that teachers do not get paid well, so it is important that parents show that they care about the students. Participants also discussed reviewing children's work, being present at the school to advocate for their children, making sure their children are at school and prepared, monitoring children's progress, and keeping an open line of communication with teachers.

In relation to the communication and networking minor theme for the third subquestion, findings indicated that more networking among parents was needed and that the best way to make a difference was to know other children and their parents. Eight

parents discussed the need to initiate more communication with school personnel and for parents to get involved with their children and the teachers, such as finding out from teachers what is going on with their children, what the children need, advocate for their children, and communicate and work as a team with teachers. Participants also recommended paying attention to their children's agendas; and communicating with teachers by visiting the school, connecting with the teachers, working together as a team, helping with homework, being present and answering their children's question, and contacting teachers through notes, e-mail, or telephone calls as teachers will want to help if they know parents want to be involved.

In Chapter 4, I included the introduction, pilot study, setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, results, and a summary. In Chapter 5, I include the introduction, interpretation of findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and a conclusion.

# Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In this phenomenological research study, I explored 21 parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation. I collected data using in-depth, face-to-face semistructured interviews with a snowball sample of 21 parents, seven from each school, who had children who attended either (a) one of two public elementary schools or (b) one public charter school in Kansas City, Missouri. This study was designed to answer one central research question about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation. Three subquestions were also considered, which were parents' perceptions about how school leaders, teachers, and staff members engage parents in their children's elementary schools; parents' perceptions about school leaders', teachers', and staff members' connections to and understandings of their community; and parents' perceptions about the best way they can make a difference in their children's elementary schools.

Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis, five major themes and five minor themes were found. First, regarding the central research question about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation, two major themes were found. The first major theme for the central research question indicated that KCPS' parent involvement policy and

practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education if (a) schools were more welcoming to visiting parents, (b) afterhours activities were created for working parents, and (c) more points of contact between parents and school personnel were established. The second major theme for the central research question indicated that KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation if teachers invested more time and effort in students and if school personnel made more efforts to keep parents informed.

Second, regarding the first subquestion about how school leaders, teachers, and staff members engage parents in their children's elementary schools, one major theme and two minor themes were found. The major theme for the first subquestion indicated that the district is currently implementing useful practices. The two minor themes for the first subquestion indicated that schools are not engaging parents and current practices are inadequate but improving. Third, regarding the second subquestion about school leaders', teachers', and staff members' connections to and understandings of their community, one major theme and two minor themes were found. The major theme for the second subquestion indicated that school personnel have limited connection and understanding. The two minor themes for the second subquestion indicated that school personnel lack connection and understanding and school personnel have a solid connection and understanding. Fourth, regarding the third subquestion about the best way they can make a difference in their children's elementary schools, one major theme and one minor theme were found. The major theme was participation and the minor theme was communication

and networking. In Chapter 5, I include the introduction, interpretation of findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and a conclusion.

## Interpretation of Findings

To explore parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation, this phenomenological research study was designed to answer one central research question and three subquestions. The findings for this study are interpreted in relation to Putnam's (1993a, 2000) social capital theory and the literature review. This section is organized in the following subsections: central research question, Subquestion 1, Subquestion 2, and Subquestion 3.

### Central Research Question

What are parents' perceptions about how school leaders, teachers, and staff members engage parents in their children's elementary schools? The findings for the central research question may be attributed to Putnam's (1993a, 2000) social capital theory and the literature review. The central research results indicated two major themes. The first major theme for the central research question indicated that KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education if (a) schools were more welcoming to visiting parents, (b) afterhours activities were created for working parents, and (c) more points of contact between parents and school personnel were established. These findings relate to increasing parental engagement and can be interpreted in the context of Putnam's social

capital theory as parent involvement is important to the children's academic success and the connections between people, larger groups, and organizations can be designed to support students' overall development (Jeynes, 2012; Stevens & Patel, 2015). Participants perceived a need for improvements in district policy, such as school personnel being more welcoming of parents into the school; inviting parents to the classrooms, cafeteria, and on school trips; creating and modifying afterhours school programs; and increased effort by teachers to reach out to parents by telephone, e-mailing, in-person meeting with parents that are separate from parent-teacher conferences, group chat, weekly or monthly updates on students' progress, and more interactions between parents, teachers, and students. The findings are consistent with the literature as Johnson et al. (2013) discussed cultivating partnership with parents who are described as help seekers and are more distant from their children's schools by creating opportunities and policies that welcome parents into schools, such as reducing teachers' perceptions of parental visitation as a threat or provide professional development that cultivates the teachers' skills in conflict resolution and moderation.

In addition, participants reported that improvements in parental involvement needed to begin with parents, rather than with changes in district policy. This finding can be interpreted in the context of the literature as Johnson et al. (2013) found that although parents had a good understanding that local schools were not improving quickly, many parents were not ready to get more involved. Many parents viewed other issues and problems as more important to raising their children successfully and other changes such as getting more involved at home, as a more effective strategy. Although many parents

had concerns about the schools, most parents reported positive relationships with teachers and administrators at their children's schools. However, Johnson et al. emphasized that this finding does not mean that parents do not care about school improvement or that they do not have important views and ideas that school leaders need to consider. Instead, Johnson et al. related that what this finding means is that even though many parents are not giving local schools very high marks, getting a substantial number of parents to become involved will not be easy. In addition, Johnson et al. discussed help seekers who posed a special challenge for school leaders because they felt more disillusioned with schools than the other groups of parents. Johnson et al. found that help seekers are present at their children's schools and are looking for more support from teachers and school leaders to assist them in helping their children succeed.

Furthermore, participants discussed the need for more stable leadership due to frequent changes in district leadership and inequitable treatment of schools. This finding is consistent with the literature as Finkel (2012) noted that KCPS has struggled with numerous leadership turnover with 27 short-term superintendents in the past 40 years. In addition, the author explained that KCPS has struggled with poor academic achievement and decreased enrollment and budget. Finkel reported that Superintendent Covington decreased the number of employees from 4,810 in 2008 through 2009 to 3,544 in 2010 through 2011, and decreased the number of schools from 60 in 2009 through 2010 to 29 in 2010 through 2011 (p. 29). Finkel noted that this decrease in employees and schools resulted in balanced budgets, but problems remained academically with test scores and graduation rates. Dent (2014) reported that in 2012, only 27% of Missouri students were

ready for college in all four subjects tested on the ACT college readiness assessment (p. 734).

The second major theme for the central research question indicated that KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation if teachers invested more time and effort in students and if school personnel made more efforts to keep parents informed. These findings may be attributed to Putnam's (1993a, 2000) social capital theory. In relation to the finding that school personnel should make more effort to keep parents informed, Stevens and Patel (2015) noted that based on social capital theory, when the line of communication is used in a positive way, the relationship is strengthened, and trust is enhanced. Findings can also be interpreted in relation to the literature as the finding that teachers should invest more time and effort in students is in line with Johnson et al. (2013) reporting that parents who are help seekers do not believe that teachers and administrators are making genuine efforts to help their children succeed. Johnson et al. recommended that school leaders and staff members should make full effort to create relationships with the school community and build a greater understanding of the social, cultural, and environmental factors that affect students' education.

Seven participants perceived a need for teachers to become more involved with students by implementing afternoon programs such as study hall and inviting parents to participate and get involved, rather than for a change to be made to the parent involvement policy. This finding is in line with the literature as the NAFSCE (2015) reported that the NCLB Act has mandatory requirements for school districts and school

leaders to involve parents and families, similar in the ESSA, where similar mandatory requirements involve school districts offering programs and activities that include parents and family members, as well as meaningful consultations with parents. The NAFSCE related that programs and activities specifically include input from families, such as using parents' input in creating a written parent and family engagement policy and assessing family engagement policy and practices. In addition, the NAFSCE noted that other programs and activities includes family involvement in activities at Title I schools, putting aside at least 1% of grants to pay for parent and family involvement activities, having families take part in determining how to use these funds, and sending 90% of the funding directly to schools (para. 1).

For the second major theme, five parents reported that the parent involvement policy could help the district regain and retain its accreditation if it was changed and there was a requirement for school personnel to keep parents better informed through parent contracts that would inform parents about the requirements for their children's grade, such as test scores; setting high school standards and enforcing them; helping parents feel connected and informed, which would improve engagement and student success; and e-mailing parents regarding students' progress, which would improve their interactions with parents. In addition, in relation to the first major theme, five participants reported that they were not sufficiently familiar with the parent involvement policy to perceive opportunities for improvement; and six participants reported that they were not sufficiently aware of the parent involvement policy to perceive a need for improvements for the second major theme. These findings are in line with the literature, as Johnson et

al. (2013) reported that many parents lacked knowledge about important school issues. However, the findings also contradict the literature as KCMSD (2014) reporting of the KCPS parent involvement policy and practices are not consistent with these participants' perceptions. KCMSD reported that each parent, student, staff member, or administrator signs the compact, which explains how parents, staff, and students will share responsibility for students' academic achievement; and how partnership is used to ensure students achieve state's high standards. Thus, the compact describes the responsibilities of parents, school staff, and students. In addition, KCMSD explained that parents are given timely notification on programs, pending conferences, workshops, and community forums to afford them opportunities for participation, which also contradicts the findings from these participants. Furthermore, KCMSD noted that school report cards are provided to each parent at the end of the semester, which addresses parent participation, disaggregated achievement data with focus on the progress of the targeted population, attendance, school climate, and how the school's Title 1 plan is progressing, which is also contradictory to the findings.

One participant noted that the district's accreditation problems was due to a lack of teacher involvement, rather than to insufficient parental engagement as teachers want a paycheck, are not at school to teach, are passing children when they are not ready, and should get more involved instead of always sending children to ISS. This finding relates to Putnam's (1993a, 2000) social capital theory as Stevens and Patel (2015) discussed teachers blaming parents for students' academic failure. Stevens and Patel suggested that teachers should consider whether the creation of social capital was prevented due to

parents not having opportunities to be involved in the schools. Stevens and Patel argued that an examination of these factors help with understanding parents' motivation to be involved in their children's school. The researchers shared that motivation comes from many sources, for example, parents investing themselves in a situation because they believe they can be successful in helping their children, it is a great use of their time and energy, or they may experience obstruction to being successfully involved.

**Subquestion 1**

What are parents' perceptions about how school leaders, teachers, and staff members engage parents in their children's elementary schools? The findings for Subquestion 1 may be attributed to Putnam's (1993a, 2000) social capital theory and the literature review. Subquestion 1 results indicated one major theme and two minor themes. The major theme for Subquestion 1 indicated that the district is currently implementing useful practices. In relation to the major theme that the district is currently implementing useful practices, 11 participants reported that the schools their children attended engaged in some practices that were genuinely helpful in increasing parental engagement, such as the PTA being an effective liaison by sending information to parents; the PTSO encouraging parent engagement through fundraising; and school personnel engaging parents through team work, back-to-school events, parent-teacher conferences, Facebook page, concerts, e-mails, and telephone calls.

These findings may be attributed to Putnam's social capital theory as Stevens and Patel (2015) explained that at the community level, school leaders and staff members create opportunities for parents to become involved. In addition, the findings are also

consistent with the literature as Johnson et al. (2013) recommended that effective strategies to build momentum for change and improvement in education must meet parents at their starting points and be designed for different types of parents, specifically, potential transformers, school helpers, and help seekers. Johnson et al. noted that another effective strategy is providing many and different opportunities for parents to engage. The researchers noted that the more diverse the opportunities to get involved, the greater the chance of attracting parents of different degrees of readiness, willingness, or ability. Johnson et al. emphasized that it is important to engage parents on problems such as school safety, but they should also be engaged on successes, such as the celebration of improvements in student achievement.

Findings for the major theme also indicated that participants perceived the district's parent involvement policy as adequate and that school personnel needed parents to take some initiative. These findings are also in line with the literature as Johnson et al. (2013) reported that school helpers believe that they could do more, and they can be more engaged if they are asked in the correct way and provided with ways to get involved that respect their time and other commitments. Johnson et al. noted that cultivating partnership with school helpers is to present options that provide a range of engagement levels and opportunities. The researchers noted that although school helpers believe that they could be doing more, they are already supporting their schools; thus, engagement in deeper ways to help improve school policies and practices or to create new community partnerships should not be presented as an all-consuming involvement. Hence, quick, high quality engagement, such as participating in a focus group or a well-designed

community forum may allow more parents to contribute. In addition, cultivating partnership with school helpers can include raising awareness of important education policy issues, demonstrating the power of parent engagement by making the connection between parent involvement and policy and practice changes, and communicating through trusted sources. Johnson et al. emphasized that school helpers have positive relationships with and trust in teachers and school principals, which presents an opportunity to use the strength of the relationship and communication to encourage parent involvement outside traditional in-school and at-home activities.

The two minor themes for the first subquestion indicated that schools are not engaging parents and current practices are inadequate but improving. In relation to the first minor theme that schools are not engaging parents, seven participants shared that school personnel were not trying to get parents engaged, such as assigning homework to the children, asking parents for their input, and considering the needs of parents. These findings can be interpreted in the context of the literature as Johnson et al. (2013) discussed the importance of communication, listening, and addressing key concerns. Johnson et al. explained that parents experience the KCPS education system differently; therefore, one communication strategy or focusing on only small subsets of issues may not work well for all parents. Johnson et al. recommended that change leaders should begin by listening as it is important to identify the main issues that parents are thinking about and to know how to think and talk about them. The researchers shared that parents will be most open to constructive involvement if they know their main concerns are understood and are being addressed. In addition, the NAFSCE (2015) discussed the

NCLB Act and ESSA mandatory requirements for school districts and school leaders to involve parents and families, such as using parents' input in creating a written parent and family engagement policy and assessing family engagement policy and practices. To effectively engage help seekers, Johnson et al. recommended a deeper understanding of their core needs and experiences, which can be achieved by conducting targeted research into their views, values, and concerns. Finding can then be used to develop engagement approaches that relate to their needs.

Participants also noted that some parents do not know how to get engaged and may be disconnected due to limited time because of work and family responsibilities as well as "sociobackground disconnect." These findings can be interpreted in the context of the literature as Johnson et al. (2013) discussed the need for greater understanding of the social, cultural, and environmental factors that affect students' education. KCPS students are multiethnic, multicultural, approximately 20% of student's primary language is not English, and student population speaks more than 50 languages (KCPS, 2016b, para. 1, 2016c, para. 5). Hence, there are many KCPS students who are immigrants and have immigrant parents, and both groups face unique challenges. Tekin (2011) shared that parents from numerous cultures want their children to academically achieve and succeed in school. Many immigrant parents face some common barriers that prevent them from being active in their children's education such as a lack of knowledge about U.S. culture and school systems, time constraints due to work and family responsibilities, lack of formal education, and not being able to speak and understand English fluently (Thao, 2009). Many immigrant parents may feel embarrassed about their lack of English fluency

(Thao, 2009). Due to many immigrant parents' limited opportunities to attend school or get exposed to English in their native country, their ability to help their children complete their school work is negatively affected (Thao, 2009; Turney & Kao, 2009). Nam and Park (2014) recommended that teachers and other school staff members should give more consideration to parents' cultural backgrounds and educational levels, as well as children's school levels, when offering programs and activities based on the three types of parent involvement: (a) parenting, (b) communicating, and (c) learning at home. Thus, school leaders should improve communication with all parents, including immigrant parents, by creating an environment in which parents desire this communication (Marzano, 2003; Nam & Park, 2014).

Findings also indicated that school personnel should ask parents to volunteer by reaching out to parents through personal phone calls, tailoring outreach efforts to fit the community in which they are implemented, and to focus outreach efforts toward parents of older children. These findings may be attributed to Putnam's (1993a, 2000) social capital theory as Putnam (2000) argued that social capital is beneficial to people and communities because when there is a high level of trust and community participation, socially desirable outcomes are produced. This finding can also be interpreted in the context of the literature as educators can use Epstein's (2010) six types of parent involvement to develop more comprehensive programs of school and family relationships: (a) parenting, (b) communicating, (c) volunteering, (d) learning at home, (e) decision making, and (f) collaborating with the community (pp. 85-87). Parenting refers to helping all families establish home environments to support children as students.

Communicating refers to designing effective two-way communications between school and home about school programs and children progress. Volunteering refers to recruiting and organizing parent help and support at school, home, and other locations. Learning at home refers to providing information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning. Decision making refers to the inclusion of parents in school decisions and developing parent leaders and representatives. Collaborating with the community refers to identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development (Epstein, 2010).

In relation to the second minor theme for the first subquestion that current practices are inadequate but improving, three participants reported that school personnel did not make adequate efforts to engage parents, but that these efforts were showing signs of improvement. This finding can be interpreted in the context of the literature as Johnson et al. (2013) found that parents described as help seekers posed a special challenge for school leaders because they felt more disillusioned with schools than the other groups of parents (Johnson et al., 2013). Johnson et al. (2013) found that help seekers are present at their children's schools and are looking for more support from teachers and school leaders to assist them in helping their children succeed. Findings also indicated that school personnel were taking steps to improve diversity such as going into preschools and communities to connect with children and parents and encouraging them to apply to the public charter school; diversity among school personnel was detrimental to parental engagement, but school personnel were taking steps to alleviate the negative effect of

cultural differences; and teachers from outside of the community did not do enough to engage parents as their focus was on receiving a paycheck, but added that teachers from within the community had a more positive effect. These finding can be attributed to Putnam's (1993a, 2000) social capital theory as (Plagens, 2011) noted that educators can assess their levels of social capital within their own environments such as learning to be more socially cooperative as they work with others toward a common purpose; taking interest in and having knowledge of the community; thus, there may be a norm that reinforces such behavior and active networks that facilitate the spread of knowledge; truly caring about the community and the other individuals who live in it; identifying positively with the community; trusting others in the community, such as students trusting teachers and teachers trusting the principal; and more willing to belong to and participate in community groups or associations.

**Subquestion 2**

What are parents' perceptions about school leaders', teachers', and staff members' connections to and understandings of their community? The findings for Subquestion 2 may be attributed to Putnam's (1993a, 2000) social capital theory and the literature review. Subquestion 2 results indicated one major theme and two minor themes. The major theme for Subquestion 2 indicated that school personnel have limited connection and understanding. In relation to the major theme that school personnel have limited connection and understanding, 15 participants reported that school personnel had only a limited understanding of and connection to the community. Findings also indicated that based on school personnel's' background, some had a connection to the community

as they reach out and get involved, but some did not have that connection due to their lack of engagement with community members and their exposure was limited and filtered by what they heard and saw on social media and television. These findings may be attributed to Putnam's (1993a, 2000) social capital theory as Putnam (2000) discussed social capital as "connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (p. 15). Putnam discussed the importance of high social capital, which often leads to high education achievement, good economic growth, good health, and low crime rates. Putnam also noted that children's development is influenced by social capital as networks, trust, and reciprocity norms within children's families, schools, peer groups, and larger communities have major effects on their opportunities and choices. Putnam shared that this affects their behavior and development; hence, social capital has been associated with positive outcomes such as education. On the other hand, Stevens and Patel (2015) discussed low levels of social capital among school leaders and staff members who are not open to the idea of parents being involved in school activities because they do not nurture trusting relationships and communication and cooperation is lacking.

However, some participants believed that disconnected personnel were trying to better acquaint themselves with the community's needs and to better understand what was going on with the children that they teach. In addition, findings indicated that some school personnel were disconnected as their focus was on receiving a paycheck and then going home and that teachers from other countries often did not understand the needs of U.S. parents and students at first because they came from a country where parents drop

off their children and did not get involved, but as they gained experience in U.S. schools, many of them gained a better understanding and appreciation for parents' involvement. These findings may be interpreted in the context of the literature as Johnson et al. (2013) discussed the importance of cultivating partnership with parents described as help seekers to strengthen relationships and understanding between school personnel and the community. Johnson et al. recommended that school leaders and staff members should make full effort to create relationships with the school community and build a greater understanding of the social, cultural, and environmental factors that affect students' education.

The two minor themes for the second subquestion indicated that school personnel lack connection and understanding and school personnel have a solid connection and understanding. In relation to the first minor theme that school personnel lack connection and understanding, five participants reported that school personnel had no connection to or understanding of the community as school leaders have different backgrounds from those in the community. Findings also indicated that teachers do not have a connection or know the children they are teaching as many children live in poor areas and teachers do not know how to deal with those children behavior, thus, neglecting them and letting them fail. In addition, the participant noted that parents should be involved and that teachers do not care if parents do not show up. A participant also attributed the disconnection between school personnel and the community to generational differences. The findings for the first minor theme may be interpreted in the context of the literature as KCPS urban school systems consists of multiethnic and multicultural mix of students,

with 57% being Black, 28% Hispanic, 9% White, and 6% are classified as Other (KCPS, 2016b, para. 1, 2016c, para. 5). Exactly 1 out of 5 students' first or primary language is not English, and student population speaks more than 50 languages (para. 5). Thao (2009) noted that teachers and school staff play an important role in engaging parents and creating a welcoming school environment for culturally diverse families (Thao, 2009). Thao (2009) reported that teachers and school staff should take steps to be inclusive and promote parent involvement by being sensitive to the barriers that culturally diverse families experience. Thao recommended four effective engagement strategies that teachers and school staff can use: (a) building relationships with immigrant parents, (b) providing needed information and guidance, (c) having bilingual interpreters or family liaisons within schools, and (d) offering additional support (pp. 2-4). To build relationships with immigrant parents, teachers and school staff should develop positive relationships with parents by greeting parents and communicating with them. Immigrant parents are often not familiar with U.S. education systems; hence, they need to be provided with information and guidance that will help them to understand the expectations of their children and of themselves as parents. It is important to provide information and guidance to immigrant parents in ways that they can understand by having bilingual interpreters or family liaisons within schools. Thao also noted that another effective strategy is informing immigrant parents about the resources and opportunities that are available for their families within the school and community.

In relation to the second minor theme that school personnel have a solid connection and understanding, one participant reported that school personnel had a strong

connection to and understanding of the community by seeking out diversity by going to daycares and preschools to invite children from different socioeconomic backgrounds to attend the charter school to increase a positive image in the community. This finding may be attributed to Putnam's (1993a, 2000) social capital theory as Plagens (2011) discussed both individual and group variables that positively affect levels of social capital, which facilitate formal and informal modes of collective action and forms of spontaneous individual action. The author noted that one outcome of collective and spontaneous individual actions may be higher levels of student and school performance.

**Subquestion 3**

What are parents' perceptions about the best way they can make a difference in their children's elementary schools? The findings for Subquestion 3 may be attributed to Putnam's (1993a, 2000) social capital theory and the literature review. Subquestion 3 results indicated one major theme and one minor theme. The major theme for Subquestion 3 indicated that 12 participants perceived that getting involved at the school was the best way to make a difference, such as volunteering and assisting school personnel when they need help, participating in food give away, and participating in or creating a school event. Findings also indicated that teachers do not get paid well, so it is important that parents show that they care about the students. Participants also discussed reviewing children's work, being present at the school to advocate for their children, making sure their children are at school and prepared, monitoring children's progress, and keeping an open line of communication with teachers.

These findings may be attributed to Putnam's (1993a, 2000) social capital theory as Putnam (2000) discussed the value of networks and volunteering. The findings are also consistent with the literature as Epstein (2010) discussed volunteering as one type of parent involvement that educators can use to develop more comprehensive programs of school and family relationships. In addition, KCPS (2016d) discussed the importance of parents getting involved in their KCPS parent organizations such as SACs, PTA, and PTSA. KCPS (2016d) reported that a SAC is a school-based volunteer group that is made up of parents, families of students, community members, and school staff. Some of the functions performed by a SAC include participation in the development of the school budget, working with administration on personnel issues, and providing input into curriculum selections and development. KCPS noted that SACs are a great way for parents to get involved in their children's education as adults who take an active role in education positively affect future generations of leaders, workers, and parents. KCPS related that parents get to see what goes on inside KCPS. KCPS shared that the mission of the KCPS' PTA and PTSA is to support and speak on behalf of children and youths in the schools and community as well as before governmental bodies and other organizations that make decisions affecting children. KCPS also noted that the PTA and PTSA assist parents in developing the skills they need to raise and protect their children, and parent and public involvement are also encouraged.

In relation to the communication and networking minor theme for the third subquestion, findings indicated that more networking among parents was needed and that the best way to make a difference was to know other children and their parents. Eight

parents discussed the need to initiate more communication with school personnel and for parents to get involved with their children and the teachers, such as finding out from teachers what is going on with their children, what the children need, advocate for their children, and communicate and work as a team with teachers. Participants also recommended paying attention to their children's agendas; and communicating with teachers by visiting the school, connecting with the teachers, working together as a team, helping with homework, being present and answering their children's question, and contacting teachers through notes, e-mail, or telephone calls as teachers will want to help if they know parents want to be involved. These findings are consistent with Putnam's (1993a, 2000) social capital theory, where social capital refers to "nontangible resources such as social networks for the exchange of information, behavioral norms, and trust" (Stevens & Patel, 2015, p. 158). Putnam (2000) related that social capital pertains to civic virtue, which is at its highest power when it is entrenched in a network of reciprocal social relations. Putnam argued that while Americans have become wealthier, their sense of community has decreased. Putnam explained that a society that has numerous virtuous but isolated people may not be rich in social capital; thus, Putman noted the importance of joining community groups, volunteering, and socializing with neighbors, friends, and family. Stevens and Patel (2015) noted that based on social capital theory, when the line of communication is used in a positive way, the relationship is strengthened and trust is enhanced.

These findings are also consistent with the literature. Epstein (2010) related that communicating pertains to parents and school staff member connecting and interacting.

Parents should be able to improve support for their children by communicating and interacting with their schools and their teachers (Epstein, 2010; Nam & Park, 2014). Johnson et al. (2013) discussed the importance of communication where both parents and educators discuss their concerns and ideas to address problems and strengthen schools in ways that can help students succeed. Johnson et al. also discussed strengthening communication between teachers and parents about the issues they care about most, which is to help their children learn. Findings from the literature also indicated that school leaders should improve communication with all parents, including immigrant parents, by creating an environment in which parents desire this communication (Marzano, 2003; Nam & Park, 2014). Nam and Park (2014) found that parent involvement in communication was the most important factor that affected immigrant parents' views of parent involvement. Nam and Park noted that immigrant parents knew the importance of communication between home and school, and suggested that if parents communicate more with teachers and other school staff members, then they can better support their children's learning at home and assist their children more positively. In addition, Nam and Park (2014) related that engagement should be an ongoing communication process among leaders and people who are embedded in the community life.

## Limitations of the Study

Several limitations were noted in this phenomenological research study. The first limitation pertained to generalizing the study's result since a snowball sample of 21 parents were used. The findings from the study may be generalized to similar populations

of KCPS parents, but the results of the study may not be generalizable to other populations, cities, or states. As a result, future studies could expand the sample population across other school districts who have lost their full accreditation to achieve a broader understanding of parent involvement experiences and perceptions about how school districts can regain and sustain their full accreditation. A different sampling strategy could also be used, such as purposeful random sampling.

The second limitation pertained to self-reporting or social desirability bias as participants may want to be perceived positively, so they may not respond honestly to the interview questions. However, I assumed that participants honestly and openly answered the interview questions by sharing their perceptions about the questions asked. The third limitation pertained to self-reported data for the interviews as participants may not accurately or fully self-evaluate themselves.

## Recommendations

The three recommendations for future studies are grounded in the strengths and limitations of the study as well as the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. First, as noted in the limitations of the study section, it is recommended that in future research studies, the sample population could be expanded across other school districts who have lost their full accreditation to achieve a broader understanding of parent involvement experiences and perceptions about how school districts can regain and sustain their full accreditation. In doing this, different sampling strategies could also be used, such as purposeful random sampling.

Second, findings for Major Themes 1 and 2 contradicts the literature. Specifically, findings for Major Theme 1 indicated that five participants (School 2: Participants 4, 5, 6, and 7 and School 1: Participant 3) reported that they were not sufficiently familiar with the parent involvement policy to perceive opportunities for improvement; and findings for Major Theme 2 indicated that five participants (School 2: Participants 4, 5, 6, and 7 and School 1: Participant 3) reported that they were not sufficiently familiar with the parent involvement policy to perceive opportunities for improvement, which contradicts the literature. KCMSD (2014) reported that each parent, student, staff member, or administrator signs the compact, which explains how parents, staff, and students will share responsibility for students' academic achievement; and how partnership is used to ensure students achieve states' high standards. Thus, the compact describes the responsibilities of parents, school staff, and students. In addition, KCMSD explained that parents are given timely notification on programs, pending conferences, workshops, and community forums to afford them opportunities for participation. Furthermore, KCMSD noted that school report cards are provided to each parent at the end of the semester, which addresses parent participation, disaggregated achievement data with focus on the progress of the targeted population, attendance, school climate, and how the school's Title 1 plan is progressing. Thus, based on the contradiction of the findings in relation to the literature where some participants were not sufficient aware of the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practice to answer the interview questions related to the central research, future research could focus on ways in which school personnel inform parents about the KCPS parent involvement policy and practices, the effectiveness of the

methods used to disperse or share the information, and ways to improve these methods to reach all parents and increase their knowledge and understanding.

Third, future research could focus on incorporating Epstein's (2010) five important steps within KCPS and investigate whether these steps can be used to develop more positive school, family, and community connections and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation. These steps include (a) creating an action team, (b) obtaining support, (c) identifying starting points, (d) developing a 3-year plan, and (e) continue planning and working (Epstein, 2010, pp. 89-92). Based on the findings in this phenomenological research study, Epstein's steps may be used to address participants' perceptions about school personnel limited understanding of and connection to the community, increase parents' knowledge about how they can volunteer and participate during and after school, increase communication and networking between school personnel and parents, increase parent involvement through the use of parent contract, improve immigrant parent involvement, and ensure consistent leadership.

## Implications

Participants in this study indicated that KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education if schools were more welcoming to visiting parents, if afterhours activities were created for working parents, and if more points of contact between parents and school personnel were established. In addition, participants indicated that KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation if teachers invested more time and effort in students and if school personnel

made more efforts to keep parents informed. These findings have potential effect for positive social change at the individual, family, organizational, societal, and policy levels.

At the individual, family, and organizational levels, parents should be able to improve support for their children by communicating and interacting with their schools and their teachers (Epstein, 2010; Nam & Park, 2014). Since approximately 20% of KCPS students' first or primary language is not English, and student population speaks more than 50 languages (KCPS, 2016b, para. 1, 2016c, para. 5), it is important that school district leaders consider parents' cultural backgrounds in their parent involvement policy and practices. Thus, all parent should be encouraged to engage with school personnel, including immigrant parents, as their involvement is also important because it helps them to become familiar with the U.S. school system and gain confidence in their parenting in relation to their children's education and schooling (Nam & Park, 2014).

At the organizational, societal, and policy levels, these findings are directed at education policymakers, school district leaders, administrators, teachers, and other staff members at the district level to continue to look for ways to improve parents' involvement in their children's education at home, at school, and in the community as parent engagement has been linked to children's academic success (Emerson et al., 2012; Epstein, 2010; Nam & Park, 2014). Findings from the study may lead to positive social change by assisting education policymakers, school district leaders, administrators, teachers, and staff members to better understand parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education, which may assist school district leaders in regaining and

sustaining full accreditation. Therefore, findings can be used to develop and improve policies and practices geared towards improving parents' involvement. If KCPS children consistently do well academically, then the school district stands a better chance of regaining and sustaining its full accreditation; hence, this study also has far-reaching social change implications.

This study is significant because specific exploration of parents' perceptions about the parent involvement policy and practices at their children's elementary schools to improve parents' engagement and assist the accreditation process is sparse. Findings from the study added to the literature and advanced knowledge by filling a gap in the public policy and administration literature as well as the education literature on parent involvement policy and practices and the accreditation process. Along with the public policy and administration and education fields, many other fields might be interested in the research findings such as social work, counseling, and psychology. The findings from the study are also applicable to many agencies and organizations, to include the Missouri DESE and the U.S. Department of Education.

## Conclusion

To further understand how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation, it was important to obtain the perceptions of parents about how school leaders, teachers, and staff members engage parents in their children's elementary schools; parents' perceptions about school leaders', teachers', and staff members' connections to and understandings of their community; and

parents' perceptions about the best way they can make a difference in their children's elementary schools. Therefore, it was essential to understand their perceptions as findings may be used to assist education policymakers, school district leaders, administrators, teachers, and other staff members at the district level to continue to look for ways to improve parents' involvement in their children's education at home, at school, and in the community as parent engagement has been linked to children's academic success (Emerson et al., 2012; Epstein, 2010; Nam & Park, 2014).

Participants shared that the best way they can make a difference in their children's elementary schools was through participation such as volunteering and assisting school personnel when they need help, participating in food give away, and participating in or creating a school event. In addition, participants discussed the need for improved communication and networking such as initiating more communication with school personnel and for parents to get involved with their children and the teachers by finding out from teachers what is going on with their children, what the children need, advocate for their children, and communicate and work as a team with teachers. These findings support previous research findings in the literature as numerous researchers have found that the inclusion of parents in the American education system is critical in the long-term success of students (Jeynes, 2007, 2012; Johnson et al., 2013; Nam & Park, 2014; Stevens & Patel, 2015). However, Stevens and Patel (2015) found that educators continue to have problems with obtaining parents' participation and effectively using parents as a resource to best meet students' needs.

Although the KCPS earned enough points on November 7, 2016, to be considered to become a fully accredited school system for the first time in 3 decades, KCPS leaders still must wait another year before the DESE grants the district full accreditation because state officials first want to ensure that the district can sustain its new performance level (Williams, 2016). As Murrillo, chief academic and accountability officer for KCPS, announced that although the district has reached full accreditation levels based on its APR scores, “there is no breathing room” (Williams, 2016, para. 16) and the KCPS must keep up efforts. It is recommended that keeping up efforts include further tapping parents by improving parental engagement in their children’s education, which in turn will assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation; thus, improving and reimagining K through 12th-grade education in Kansas City, Missouri.

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Appendix A: E-Mail Invitation to Participate and Recommendation Request

for the Pilot Study

Dear **Name Will Be Inserted Here**,

My name is Gena Ross and I am currently a doctoral student at Walden University. I am exploring parents' perceptions about how the Kansas City Public Schools' (KCPS') parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation. The study is not sponsored by the KCPS district.

I would greatly appreciate your participation.

Your participation would involve participating in a face-to-face interview, which will take about 45 minutes in a private meeting room at a Kansas City public library close to you. Interviews will be conducted at a time that is convenient for you and you will be given a consent form to review and sign before the interview begins.

The information from the interviews will be kept strictly confidential and no one who participates will be identified in any of the study's report that I prepare.

If you have any questions about the pilot study, please feel free to e-mail me at address redacted] or give me a call at [Phone number redacted].

If you are interested in participating in the pilot study and/or would like to recommend other parents who live in Kansas City, Missouri, who are fluent in English, and whose children currently attend [name of public elementary school], [name of public elementary school], and [name of public charter school] in the KCPS district to be a participant in this study, please complete the questions below in a reply e-mail to me.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and assistance with my research project.

Sincerely,

*Gena Ross*

Gena Ross
[Phone number redacted]
[E-mail address redacted]

**If you are interested in participating in the pilot study and/or would like to recommend other parents who live in Kansas City, Missouri, who are fluent in English, and whose children currently attend [name of public elementary school], [name of public elementary school], and [name of public charter school] in the**

**KCPS district to be a participant in this study, please complete the questions below in a reply e-mail to me at** [E-mail address redacted]**:**

1. What is your name?
2. What is your race? (Please select by **bolding** your answer)
    a. African American
    b. Black
    c. Caucasian American
    d. Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish
    e. Asian
    f. Other_____
3. What is your gender?
4. What is your contact information?
5. Are you fluent in English?
6. Do you live in Kansas City, Missouri, and have a child who currently attends [name of public elementary school], [name of public elementary school], or [name of public charter school] in the KCPS' district?
7. Are there other parents who live in Kansas City, Missouri, who are fluent in English, and whose children currently attend one of the schools noted above that you would like to recommend to be participants in this study? If so, what are their names and contact information?

Appendix B: E-Mail Invitation to Participate and Recommendation Request

for the Main Study

Dear **Name Will Be Inserted Here**,

My name is Gena Ross and I am currently a doctoral student at Walden University. I am exploring parents' perceptions about how the Kansas City Public Schools' (KCPS') parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation. The study is not sponsored by the KCPS district.

I would greatly appreciate your participation.

Your participation would involve participating in a face-to-face interview, which will take about 45 minutes in a private meeting room at a Kansas City public library close to you. Interviews will be conducted at a time that is convenient for you and you will be given a consent form to review and sign before the interview begins.

The information from the interviews will be kept strictly confidential and no one who participates will be identified in any of the study's report that I prepare.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to e-mail me at [E-mail address redacted] or give me a call at [Phone number redacted].

If you are interested in participating in the study and/or would like to recommend other parents who live in Kansas City, Missouri, who are fluent in English, and whose children currently attend [name of public elementary school], [name of public elementary school], and [name of public charter school] in the KCPS district to be a participant in this study, please complete the questions below in a reply e-mail to me.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and assistance with my research project.

Sincerely,

*Gena Ross*

Gena Ross
[Phone number redacted]
[E-mail address redacted]

**If you are interested in participating in the study and/or would like to recommend other parents who live in Kansas City, Missouri, who are fluent in English, and whose children currently attend [name of public elementary school], [name of public elementary school], and [name of public charter school] in the KCPS district to be a**

**participant in this study, please complete the questions below in a reply e-mail to me at** [E-mail address redacted]**:**

1. What is your name?
2. What is your race? (Please select by **bolding** your answer)
    a. African American
    b. Black
    c. Caucasian American
    d. Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish
    e. Asian
    f. Other_____
3. What is your gender?
4. What is your contact information?
5. Are you fluent in English?
6. Do you live in Kansas City, Missouri, and have a child who currently attends [name of public elementary school], [name of public elementary school], or [name of public charter school] in the KCPS' district?
7. Are there other parents who live in Kansas City, Missouri, who are fluent in English, and whose children currently attend [name of public elementary school], [name of public elementary school], and [name of public charter school] in the KCPS district that you would like to recommend to be participants in this study? If so, what are their names and contact information?

# Appendix C: Interview Guide

## Introduction

- Welcome participant and introduce myself.
- Have participant review and sign consent form. Give participant a copy of the consent form to keep.
- Explain the general purpose of the interview and why the participant was chosen.
- Discuss the purpose and process of interview.
- Explain the presence and purpose of the recording equipment.
- Outline general ground rules and interview guidelines such as being prepared for the interviewer to interrupt to assure that all the topics can be covered.
- Address the assurance of confidentiality.
- Inform the participant that information discussed is going to be analyzed in aggregate form and participant's name will not be used in any analysis of the interview.

## Discussion Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological research study is to explore parents' perceptions about how the Kansas City Public Schools' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation.

## Discussion Guidelines

Interviewer will explain:

Please respond directly to the questions and if you do not understand the question, please let me know. I am here to ask questions, listen, and answer any questions you might have. If we seem to get stuck on a topic, I may interrupt you. I will keep your identity, participation, and remarks private. Please speak openly and honestly. This session will be tape recorded because I do not want to miss any comments.

**General Instructions**

When responding to questions that will be asked of you in the interview, please exclude all identifying information, such as your name and names of teachers, principals, superintendents, and other parties; and the name of the school. Your identity will be kept confidential and any information that will permit identification will be removed from the analysis.

**Possible Probes**

- Could you elaborate more on that?
- That was helpful, but could you provide more detail?
- Your example was helpful, but can you give me another example to help me understand further?

**Interview Questions**

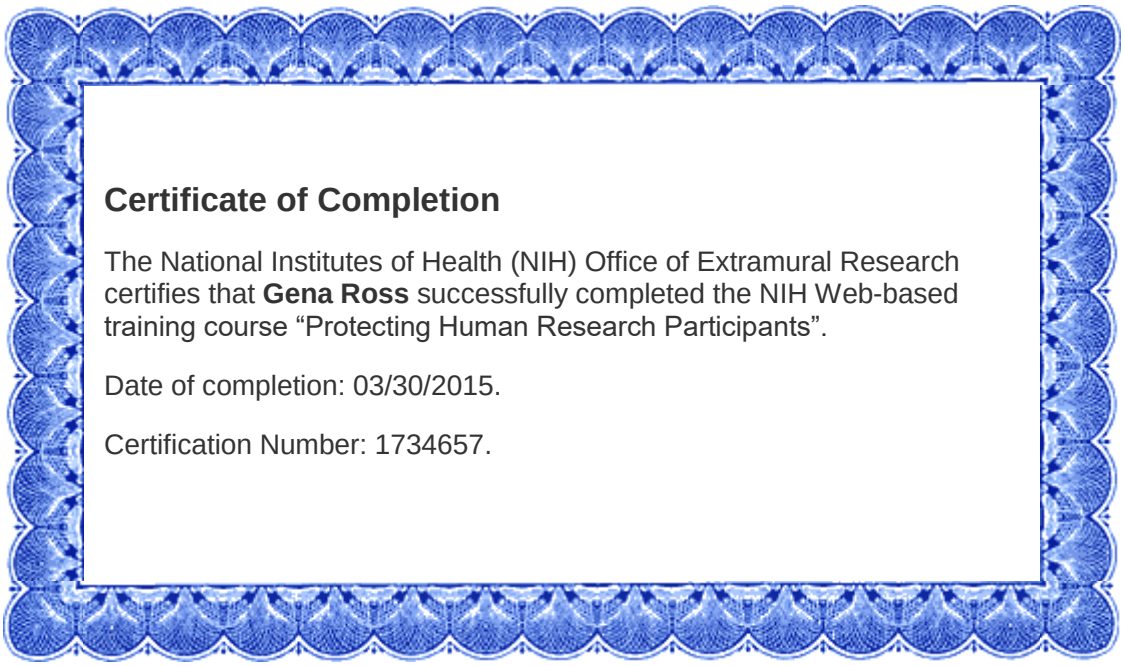
1. What are your perceptions about how school leaders, teachers, and staff members engage parents in your child's elementary school?
2. What are your perceptions about school leaders', teachers', and staff members' connections to and understandings of your community?

3. What are your perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education?
4. What are your perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation?
5. What are your perceptions about the best ways that you can make a difference in your child's elementary school?

**Conclusion**

- Ask and answer any questions and thank the participant for his or her time.

Appendix D: NIH Certificate



**Certificate of Completion**

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Gena Ross** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course “Protecting Human Research Participants”.

Date of completion: 03/30/2015.

Certification Number: 1734657.

Appendix E: Thematic Analysis Step 1 or Categorization of Text

**Central Research Question**

**Central Question 1:** What are parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation?

**Central Thematic Label 1: What are parents' perceptions about how the KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education and assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation.**

**Major Theme 1: KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to better engage parents in their children's education if schools were more welcoming to visiting parents, if afterhours activities were created for working parents, and if more points of contact between parents and school personnel were established.**

**Five participants (School 2: Participants 4, 5, 6, and 7 and School 1: Participant 3)**: Reported that they were not sufficiently familiar with the parent involvement policy to perceive opportunities for improvement.

**Three participants reported:**
That improvements in parental involvement needed to begin with parents, rather than with changes in district policy.

**School 1: Participant 7 stated:**
Discipline, nurturing, knowledge comes from home first. Then when they come to school they will do better. Parent involvement, it starts at home first.

**School 1: Participant 6 shared**:
That in order for parents to become more engaged, the needed improvement was more parent involvement. They just have to be involved.

**School 3: Participant 7 perceived a need for more engagement on the part of stay-at-home parents:**
Parents [who] can stay home need to be more involved in the kid's life. Parents should be mentors and get involved in some kids' lives like the big brother, big sister program. If full-time (FT) working parents can take 1 day off a month to go to the school to have lunch with their child or kids that they don't even know. I think that would be a way to get involvement and trust amongst the parents and the staff and that would give more communication.

**The remaining participants perceived a need for improvements in district policy.**

**School 2: Participant 2 believed that parents needed to be welcomed into the school more openly if they were going to become more engaged with their children's education:**
Parents need to be invited into schools more often even if it's disruptive to teachers. Invite the parents in to have lunch buts is discouraged. Making parents feel welcomed gives parents more ownership to talk about things with your kids.

**School 1: Participant 1 also believed that more opportunities for parental engagement were needed during school hours:**
They didn't have any field trips. And some say parents are not allowed in their child's classroom after a certain time and she is used to checking on children in classroom and parents were stopped saying they were disrupting the class. Also, some kids didn't have no one to check on them so it stopped for all.

**Three parents related that creation or modification of afterhours school programs would help parents to engage.**

**School 2: Participant 3 reported that parents would be better able to engage in their children's education if opportunities for engagement were offered during hours when parents were available:**
I don't think they have a good plan in place for parents. Parents are busy working and don't have time to volunteer [during school hours]. Maybe KCPS can do something for those parents after hours.

**School 3: Participant 3 agreed that afterhours programs were needed to encourage parental engagement:**
If possible for some to try to participate in after school programs after work. I know it's hard but it's a good idea to get involved with open house or something where the school system gets some opinions from the parents. It's a start.

**School 3: Participant 4 shared that parents would be encouraged to engage with afterhours programs if school leaders participated in those programs:**
I think the teachers [and] school leaders should be in after school programs and be involved in the children's lives.

**In the perceptions of one parent, parents would be able to engage more fully in education if their children's school and the district had more stable leadership.**
**School 2: Participant 1 believed that frequent changes in district leadership allowed for inequitable treatment of schools:**
There's a learning curve and there is now new administration. Some schools get treated better than others. So it's a challenge. The district needs consistency. Keep administration the same for a while and not have pet schools.

**Five participants related:**
That parents could become more engaged if the schools and teachers made more efforts to keep them informed, as by establishing more methods of reaching out to parents and increasing the points of contact between parents and schools.

**School 2: Participant 1 noted that many parents did not have Internet access and recommended that teachers make contact by phone:**
Just let the parents know what is going on. Send phone blasts, update the school website. There's a breakdown between the district and the school even for simple engagements. Parents should be kept in the loop and all parents don't have the internet. Go back to old school method calling people.

**School 3: Participant 1 suggested implementing in-person meetings between teachers and parents to allow distribution of important information and teachers were too disengaged from the community they served:**
I feel that they should have certain events that would allow the parents and teachers to connect other than parent teacher conferences. The teachers just teach at school and stay late for conferences. After that they are getting in their cars and going home out of our community.

**School 3: Participant 2 proposed more frequent updates on students' progress:**
I suppose they could give weekly updates or monthly updates on how our children are doing.

**School 3: Participant 5 perceived a need for more interactions of any kind between parents and teachers:**
More interaction with parents. More interaction with the teachers and the students.

**School 3: Participant 6 also perceived a need for teachers to exercise more ingenuity in reaching out to hard-to-reach parents, such as trying different contact methods:**
By making sure they keep on doing what they are doing by e-mailing and talking to parents. Also making sure that they reach out to parents that never show up or never come to a meeting or don't get an email to engage those parents. Most parents work and are not able to be available. Maybe they can do a phone conference with them or maybe get a group chat going on to make sure that it's not always the same parents being involved. Reach out to the others for more participation.

**Major Theme 2: KCPS' parent involvement policy and practices can be improved to assist the school district in regaining and sustaining its full accreditation if teachers invested more time and effort in students and if school personnel made more efforts to keep parents informed.**

**Six participants reported that they were not sufficiently aware of the parent involvement policy to perceive a need for improvements (School 1: Participant 5; School 2: Participants 3 and 4; and School 3: Participants 2, 3, and 6).**

**Seven participants perceived a need for teachers to become more involved with students, rather than for a change to be made to the parent involvement policy.**

**School 2: Participant 3 stated:**
They can improve practices to regain accreditation. Hire teachers that have commitment to the students. Teachers just want a paycheck. Some teachers are not used to African-American students and don't know how to deal with them. They can improve on how they educate the children and the teachers they hire.

**School 1: Participant 1 offered a similar response, assigning responsibility for the district's accreditation problems to a lack of teacher involvement, rather than to insufficient parental engagement:**
It's not the parents, it's the teachers. The teachers are just there for a paycheck and not to teach. They should help kids and not always sending them to ISS all of the time. Stop passing kids when they know they are not ready to be passed along just to get your attendance. Get teachers that are really involved.

**School 1: Participant 4 perceived a need for teachers to invest in children:**
The teachers themselves need to be involved and invest in the child's education. Invest and be there for the child. Let the child know you care whether they pass or fail. They don't do that. Show it and be there. Implement afternoon programs like study hall, bring parents and teachers and have them be involved and participate and they don't do that.

**Other participants described a need for increased teacher involvement rather than for policy changes that would influence parental engagement were School 2: Participants 1, 5, and 7; and School 3: Participant 5.**

**Five parents reported:**
The parent involvement policy could help the district regain and retain its accreditation if it were changed to require schools to keep parents better informed.

**School 2: Participant 1 suggested parent contracts that would inform parents of accreditation requirements:**
If parent expectations are set, have a parent contract so they know their children's' grade to help the students be successful and to keep accreditation. Parents may not know what goes into accreditation or about the test scores . . . . The district is not doing enough to inform parents. Make sure the standard is set up high and enforce it. The bar has been set too low because they just needed the bodies.

**School 2: Participant 2 reported that schools needed to help parents feel connected:**

Parents need to feel connected. They don't know how to do that or their working or not around but if there's more commitment to the school itself it will help improve engagement and carry over to the kids itself.

**School 2: Participant 6 suggested that schools should rally parents to support and encourage students:**
They can get the parents to offer support for the students to raise their test scores.

**School 1: Participant 7 suggested that teachers should be the ones to connect with parents:**
Teachers have to put forth the effort to help the parents understand what's going on in the classroom.

**School 3: Participant 7 also suggested that teachers be required to reach out to parents:**
I think they need to speak to the parents and get the parents more involved.

**School 1: Participant 2 perceived a need for teachers to e-mail parents regarding students' progress:**
It can be improved maybe if they keep in touch with parents by e-mailing and keep up with the students and act like they care. If teachers interact with parents more it may improve it.

**Subquestion 1**

**Subquestion 1:** What are parents' perceptions about how school leaders, teachers, and staff members engage parents in their children's elementary schools?

**Subthematic Label 1: What are parents' perceptions about how school leaders, teachers, and staff members engage parents in their children's elementary schools.**

**Major Theme 3: The district is currently implementing useful practices.**

**Eleven participants reported that the schools their children attended engaged in some practices that were genuinely helpful in increasing parental engagement.**

**School 1: Participant 4 perceived the PTA as an effective liaison:**
PTA sends out information to parents.

**School 1: Participant 5 described a more general perception that school personnel were making adequate efforts to engage parents:**
I think they really try to do their best to engage the parents. It's team work. I think they're doing the best that they can.

**School 1: Participant 7 perceived that the district's parent involvement policy was adequate and that school personnel needed parents to take some initiative:**
More parent participation because teachers, staff leaders, and students all need help and it all starts at home.

**School 2: Participant 2 perceived PTSO fundraising as an effective means of encouraging parental engagement:**
PTSO do all the extra fundraising that gets parents involved. Then you get to know your kid's teachers and other teachers so when you come to the school there is more communication. With their Title I program in the summer the teachers teach the parents how to read French with their students.

**School 2: Participant 3 offered a general endorsement of the efforts of school personnel to engage with parents:**
Excellent! [School personnel] have good strong relations with students and parents.

**School 2: Participant 4 perceived four programs offered by the school as effective in engaging parents:**
Back to school events, parent-teacher conferences, Facebook page, and concerts.

**School 2: Participant 6 also perceived parent-teacher conferences as useful, and added that school personnel were generally effective at getting parents engaged:**
Teachers and staff reach out on a regular basis. Parent teacher conferences, e-mail, and phone calls to let us know what is going on.

School 3: Participant 6 perceived e-mail notifications and parent-teacher conferences as effective in engaging parents:
By sending me e-mails, keeps me informed about what's going on in the school. Also having parent-teacher meetings is very helpful. It helps you to know what's going on in the classroom and gives a better understanding what the teacher is teaching my child. Also, other things that help me out, being engaged.

**Minor Theme 1: Current practices are inadequate but improving.**

**Three participants reported:**
That school personnel did not at present make adequate efforts to engage parents, but that these efforts were showing signs of improvement.

**School 2: Participant 1 described efforts to improve diversity:**
I think they improved. The diversity, lack of understanding. They are going into preschools and into the community trying to connect. People in the community thought you had to apply to the school and thought it was a private school, but it's not. They're always ways to improve but I think they are making those steps.

**School 2: Participant 3 referred to diversity among school personnel as detrimental to parental engagement, but stated that school personnel were making efforts to alleviate the negative effect of cultural differences:**
We have foreign teachers. There are cultural differences. Their understanding of community would not be what it would be to American teachers. It's different. Our kids are different from the kids in other countries where our teachers come from. They're working to improve it. I guess it's pretty good.

**School 1: Participant 2 described teachers from outside of the community who did not do enough to engage parents, but added that teachers from within the community had a more positive effect:**
Teachers [who are] not a part of the community don't care. They just want a paycheck. But teachers in the community do know and I think they may care.

**Minor Theme 2: Schools are not engaging parents.**

**Seven participants related that school personnel were not trying to get parents engaged.**

**School 1: Participant 2 stated:**
As a single father they don't try to engage as they used too. No homework and I try to contact, but no response. They don't care, it's like they given up. They're there for a paycheck and don't get paid enough.

**School 2: Participant 3 also reported a lack of effort on the part of school personnel to engage with parents:**
Not a lot of engagement. The teachers, school leaders, and parents are not engaged together. They don't ask for my input.

**School 2: Participant 1 believed that efforts were being made, but that these efforts did not consider the needs of parents and were therefore ineffective:**
Increase parent involvement through engagement. My perception is that some parents don't know how to get engaged. They may not have the time because they have to work and take care of the kids. Therefore, there may be a disconnect. It's always like the faithful few that get involved. Also, a sociobackground disconnect. They can ask them to volunteer. Use phone blasts but personal touch, hand dialing phone calls. Reach out the old school ways to parents.

**School 3: Participant 1 also suggested that outreach efforts should be tailored to the community in which they are implemented:**
I feel that they need to reach out a little more in the community to the parents in the community.

**School 3: Participant 7 indicated that outreach to parents of younger children was effective, but that the parents of older children were not effectively engaged:**
I think at a young age they communicate pretty well, but as they get older they don't.

**Subquestion 2**

**Subquestion 2:** What are parents' perceptions about school leaders', teachers', and staff members' connections to and understandings of their community?

**Subthematic Label 2: What are parents' perceptions about school leaders', teachers', and staff members' connections to and understandings of their community.**

**Major Theme 4: School personnel have limited connection and understanding. Fifteen participants reported the perception that school personnel had only a limited understanding of and connection to the community.**

**School 1: Participant 5 discussed the following about school personnel having a connection to the community:**
Some do and some don't. Some teachers try to reach out and do things in the community and some don't.

**School 1: Participant 7 also perceived that some school personnel were disconnected:**
Some staff need to be involved more with the community instead of coming to school making a paycheck and going home. They need to be involved.

**School 2: Participant 6 related that teachers from other countries often did not understand the needs of U.S. parents and students at first, but that as they gained experience in a U.S. school, many of them gained a better understanding:**
They do. The teachers come from different parts of the world, so it is different. [In those] countries, parents drop the kids off and have no involvement. It's a culture shock, but once they get over that they appreciate it.

**School 2: Participant 5 reported a similar perception, saying that teachers who had emigrated from regions with significantly different cultures found it difficult to understand the community and its needs:**
Teachers from different countries like African teachers have a hard time dealing with Black kids and they take it out on them.

**School 3: Participant 2 also perceived that some school personnel had a better understanding of the community than others:**
Some do and some don't [understand the community] depending on their background. They may not understand where certain students are coming from.

**School 3: Participant 3 agreed with the perception that some school personnel were not connected to the community, but believed that disconnected personnel were trying to better acquaint themselves with the community's needs:**
I feel if they don't they try to make an effort to connect and try to make kids aware and know what's going on in the community. Stretch out the importance of community life and school.

**School 3: Participant 5 reported a similar perception and added that disconnected school personnel could improve their understanding by interacting more with the community:**
They need more interaction with the community to know exactly what is going on with the children that they teach.

**Like School 3: Participant 2, School 3: Participant 7 perceived school employees' understanding of the community as dependent on their background:**
I think some of them understand based on their background and a lot of them probably don't.

**School 3: Participant 6 reported that school personnel have only a limited connection to the community because their exposure to it was limited and filtered:**
I feel that the teachers know some about the community but not as much because majority of the teachers don't live in the neighborhood so they only hear about what's going on in the community by what they hear, or what's on social media, media, and TV. Not living there physically they are just going off of what they hear.

**Minor Theme 3: School personnel lack connection and understanding.**

**Five participants reported:**
School personnel had no connection to or understanding of the community.

**School 1: Participant 3 perceived school personnel as coming from a background very different from the community where they worked and taught, such that their insight was limited:**
School leaders do not live in our neighborhood [or] community so they don't know. They don't understand. If you don't live where I live it will be harder to understand my community. You don't go through what I go through. They are an outsider looking in but do not understand my culture because they are not a part of it.

**School 1: Participant 4 reported a similar perception:**
No connections. If they had a connection they would know the kids that they are teaching. Lot of the kids come from poor areas and they don't know how to deal with the child or their behavior, they neglect them and let them fail. Parents should be involved. If parent doesn't show up then the teachers don't care. Luckily my kids have me as a parent.

**School 2: Participant 2 stated**:
I don't think there is a true connection.

**School 3: Participant 1 stated:**
I don't feel that they understand the environment that our kids are living in.

**School 3: Participant 4 attributed the disconnection between school personnel and the community to generational differences:**
Far different generations and they cannot connect.

**Minor Theme 4: School personnel have a solid connection and understanding.**

**Only one participant reported:**
That school personnel had a strong connection to and understanding of the community.

**School 2: Participant 7 stated:**
Pretty savvy about the community. Students can come from all over the Kansas City area. I don't think we are accepted by many in the community from inaccurate perceptions. I think they look for diversity. They go to daycares and preschools to invite socioeconomic backgrounds to increase a positive image in the community.

**Subquestion 3**

**Subquestion 3:** What are parents' perceptions about the best way they can make a difference in their children's elementary schools?

**Subthematic Label 3: What are parents' perceptions about the best way they can make a difference in their children's elementary schools.**

**Major Theme 5: Participation.**

**Twelve participants perceived getting involved at the school as the best way to make a difference.**

**School 1: Participant 2 discussed getting involved by volunteering:**
I can do whatever the school needs, food give away, feed the kids, [and] be there for them if they need help. I can volunteer if I have free time. I can volunteer if they need support. Teachers don't get paid a lot, so we can act like we care about our students.

**School 1: Participant 4 noted that getting involved meant reviewing children's work and being present at the school to advocate for her children:**
I'm involved, I check papers. I'm there. They know I'm in their corner so if they are not treated right my children will let me know and I will make an appearance. I'm there.

**School 2: Participant 5 suggested participating in or creating a school event:**
Participate in events. I created an event.

**School 2: Participant 7 also perceived volunteering as an effective way to get involved:**
I volunteer as much as I can. Make sure the kids are at school and prepared.

**School 3: Participant 4 perceived participation in general as the best way to make a difference:**
Participation is everything. You will get a better understanding of the kids and what's going on in their lives. Sometimes there's a big gap where you don't know what's going on as the parent.

**School 3: Participant 6 related that being involved meant monitoring the children's progress and keeping an open line of communication with the teacher:**
Every day we send our kids to school and we are expecting the teachers to do their job but we as parents need to [do our] job as well. That entails sending them to school on time. Having them with their proper school supplies that they need to be ready to learn, pencils, pens, and all that good stuff and making sure that. Being involved. Parents need to follow up on homework, parent e-mails, and let teachers know who I am and who the student is. Let teachers know that they can come to me anytime for any type of communication. Being involved, showing your face, and showing that you are interested in your child's life in their elementary school years.

**Minor Theme 5: Communication and networking.**

**School 2: Participant 4 discussed a need for more networking among parents, saying that the best way to make a difference was to:**
Try to know other kids and their parents.

**Eight parents perceived a need to initiate more communication with school personnel, particularly teachers.**

**School 1: Participant 5 spoke of getting involved with the teacher:**
The best way is to become involved with your child and your child's teacher. It is very important. When all come together, it's a win, win for all.

**School 2: Participant 1 discussed an opportunity for constant communication with the teacher:**
Making sure I'm in constant communication and find out from the teacher what my child needs.

**Similarly, School 2: Participant 2 stated:**
Communicate with the teachers.

**School 2: Participant 3 said the best way to make a difference was by:**
Knowing what is going on and be an advocate for my child. Communicate and work with the teacher as a team.

**School 2: Participant 6 pointed out that communication with teachers would be more effective when it was based on a close acquaintanceship with the child's work and needs:**
Stay involved. Be involved when doing homework. Be around to answer questions for them. Try to understand their work and send notes, e-mail, or call the teacher. If teachers know you want to be involved, they will want to help.

**School 2: Participant 7 said:**
Work with teachers. Look at agendas and really communicate with teachers.

**School 3: Participant 1 suggested communicating with teachers by visiting the school:**
Easily just pop up in the class like my parents did me. Connect with the teachers. Parents and teachers need to work together as a team.