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A Study of the Motivations and Expectations of African American Families Engaged in  
the Integration of Nashville Public Schools in 1957

by

Gwendolyn L. Watson

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Major: Leadership and Policy Studies

The University of Memphis

December 2011

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## DEDICATION

To God Be the Glory for *ALL* He has Done!

I honor my father and mother, Leon and Iola Jarmon and my stepmother, Annie Bell Jarmon for the morals and values instilled in me as a child. I honor my husband, Thomas for his love, patience and support throughout this process; you never complained about the many times I left you alone as I traveled to Memphis over the years in pursuit of this goal. I honor my children, Chauncey Leon, (Brooke Charisse), Thomas Latimer and Hugh Lorenzo Watson for their encouragement and support in countless ways. I honor my siblings: Elvin, Obie, Maurine, Lillie, Juanita, Earnestine, Minnie Sue, Lucy, Shirley, Robert and John and their spouses, for their hand in my growth and development as the youngest of the thirteen, ever pouring into my life those things that would help me grow and flourish as a person. Though some: Elvin, Minnie Bee, Obie, Wilma, Lillie and Juanita were with me in spirit only, I could feel their constant encouragement, “saying keep going baby sister.” To three special brother-in-laws that served as surrogate fathers throughout my life, I honor you: George Buford, Gilmore Bronaugh (deceased), and Cecil Dowell Sr. (deceased) you each treated me as one of your own, you served as a constant source of encouragement and you made me feel like I could accomplish anything I was willing to work towards. To my oldest niece, Dr. Laura C. Jarmon, I honor you for paving this way many years ago and for your loving encouragement and countless hours of support and assistance throughout this process. To each and every member of my family, entirely too many to name, thank you for your belief in me, your support and encouragement, from the smallest to the oldest, you make me feel as if I am a special person in your life, I honor and encourage you with this work.

I honor my mother-in-law Mary L. Watson, and father-in law, Hugh Willie (deceased) for the bravery and courage it took to participate in this school integration process in 1957, a process that opened doors for me before you ever knew me. To Barbara and the entire Watson family for the sacrifices you made for this cause.

Especially to my Pastor and his wife, Pastor Frank S. Gordon & Sis. Tamera Gordon, thank you for your continued prayers and encouragement all along this journey. A special thank you to Deacon Kenneth Maurice Taylor Sr. and Mrs. E. LaRaine Taylor for your special prayers and to Deacon Taylor for planting the first seed towards this endeavor many years ago before I had any thoughts about pursuing this degree, your belief in me spoke volumes, I will pass it forward. To my church family and to all of my friends and colleagues who encouraged me, I thank you and appreciate your kindness and support.

I am humbled!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Faith without works is dead: the work required to bring this dissertation to fruition encompassed the guidance and support of many people. I first thank God and commit the works that follow as a result of this dissertation unto him for the betterment of mankind. May the skills, knowledge, experience and wisdom gained through the pursuit of this degree be used to improve life for others, especially children.

This opportunity would not have been possible without the chance to encounter Dr. Larry McNeal, who would later serve as my Dissertation Chairperson and Dr. Reginald Green, for it was through them that I learned about the Leadership Program at the University of Memphis; and was invited and encouraged to participate. These gentlemen along with other professors encountered during my program of study have all also served as mentors, providing robust and engaging classroom discourse and exchanges always with an eye towards producing scholarly work.

Especially to my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Larry McNeal, who has gently but consistently challenged me to excel through encouragement, directions, timely interaction, and constant feedback. Drs. Beverly Cross, Vivian Morris, and Rene'e Sanders-Lawson, have been superb committee members, providing critical feedback during the development of this dissertation. The illumination of the true essence of this project was made possible through their critical guidance and support. Certainly, I acknowledge the participants in this study: Iridell Groves, Maude Moore, Harold and Sorena Street, and Mary L. Watson, who were willing to commit their time to share their story; reliving some very emotionally charged periods of their lives. Once again, they stepped forward to make a difference for others.

To my fellow students in the Leadership program, my professional colleagues, family and friends, I appreciate the constant encouragement and support during my tenure in this program. Especially to Dr. Laura C. Jarmon and Dr. Brooke C. Watson for being critical friends throughout this process in many ways, serving as intellectual thought partners, and sharing your constructive criticism which has served me well and has helped me to refine this study!

## ABSTRACT

Watson, Gwendolyn Louise. Ed.D. The University of Memphis. December 2011. A Study of the Motivations and Expectations of African American Families Engaged in the Integration of Nashville Public Schools in 1957. Major Professor: Larry McNeal, Ph.D.

This study presented a qualitative analysis of selected events that resulted in the integration of the Nashville Public School System in 1957. In an effort to understand the participants' perception of their experience in the process of integrating the schools, the study provided a critical analysis of why a small group of African American parents, who were a subset of the original group of 126 eligible parents, opted to take advantage of the opportunities afforded them and their children as a result of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision. It utilized the theoretical framework of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) and Spencer's (1995) A Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST), as informed by Bronfenbrenner, to explore elements of parent involvement for these parents—relative to contemporary parent involvement—especially in urban schools. The three primary sources of evidence for this study were structured interviews, image elicitation, and document analysis; these were analyzed through the development of individual narrative cases for each participant, which resulted in a cross-case analysis narrative depicting the study's findings.

The study's results indicated three dominant themes for the parents' motivations and expectations for their participation in the school integration process: the option to attend the school closest to their home; the notion of attending a school that offered better educational outcomes; and the belief that the process of integration was overdue, and the time and opportunity for change was present. Obeying the law emerged, but was not part of a prevailing theme. Further, evidence from these parents' involvement in school

suggested implications towards impacting student achievement. The study concluded that in the context of engaging in the desegregation process, parent involvement was critical to students' success and was fraught with the same issues in 1957 as parents face today in urban schools. This study provided insight into practices schools and communities can employ to engage parents today. It highlighted implications for parent involvement for parents, students, school practitioners and policymakers.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
1	Introduction	1
	Background	2
	Problem Statement	5
	Research Question	5
	Purpose of the Study	6
	Definitions of terms	7
	Significance of the Study	10
	Conceptual Framework	12
	Study Overview	26
2	Literature Review	28
	Historical Perspective of Parent Involvement	29
	Parent Involvement: A Policy Perspective	31
	Parent Involvement	34
	Purpose of Parent Involvement	42
	Impact of Parent Involvement on Student Success for all Students	44
	Barriers to Parent Involvement	45
	Motivation for parent Involvement	47
	Parent Involvement and School Integration Nationwide	49
	Parent Involvement and School Integration in Tennessee	55
	Parent Involvement and School Integration in Nashville	58
	Typologies and Models of Parent Involvement	60
	Parent Involvement in School Integration 1957 vs. Traditional Parent Involvement	71
	Summary	72
3	Methodology	74
	Introduction	74
	Qualitative Research	74
	Case Study	76
	Participants	79
	Data Collection	81
	Data Analysis	82
	Limitations	86
	Delimitations	87
	Summary	88
4	Research Findings	89
	Introduction	89
	Summary of Methodology	90
	Brief Description of Participants	92

Chapter		Page
	Presentation of Data	93
	Narrative Case 1	94
	Narrative Case 2	99
	Narrative Case 3	103
	Narrative Case 4	108
	Cross-Case Analysis	112
	Data Analysis	123
	Summary of Findings	127
5	Conclusions, Discussions, Implications and Summary	128
	Conclusion	128
	Discussion	144
	Theoretical Motivation for Parental Involvement	145
	Implications	152
	Implications for Further Research	159
	Summary	159
	References	161
	Appendixes	
	A. Sample Consent Letter	179
	B. Sample Participation Consent Form	180
	C. Research Interview Protocol Questions	181

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

*Imagine little Black boys and girls and little White boys and girls living in the same neighborhood, spending hours on end playing together in each others' yard, eating at each other's dinner table, yet unable to be educated together in the same school-an atrocity.*

In the years following the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to integrate the nation's public schools, states struggled to meet the court's mandate for action with "all deliberate speed" (Ladson-Billings, 2004; "The Brown II," n.d.). The term *deliberate* was interpreted by all states differently and, in many cases, according to a state's intent to make as few strides as possible to integrate public schools (Brown & Valk, 2004). Some states used delay tactics and constructed policies for prolonging desegregation without violating the Supreme Court ruling, often under the guise of maintaining civility.

Hawkins and McDowell (2008) noted that Greensboro, North Carolina, the first southern city to announce its intent to observe the *Brown* decision, was a frontrunner in modeling other states' evasive responses to *Brown*. Greensboro announced its compliance in 1954 but did not initiate integration until 1957 after adopting the Pearsall Plan of desegregation by the North Carolina government, which shifted responsibility from the state to the local education agencies. Hawkins and McDowell (2008) pointed out both this plan's evasive intent and its bias in offering white parents choice and tuition assistance for enrolling their children in non-integrated schools, further disenfranchising African American parents and their children.

While there was a body of research on the various aspects of school desegregation and parent involvement, there was a scarcity of research on African American parents' motivations and expectations relative to school desegregation (Edwards, 1993; Egerton, 2009; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005, revised). Information about African American family involvement in desegregation is related to litigation issues primarily. Nashville like other cities faced litigation from parents with *Kelly v. Board of Education* (Egerton, 2009; "The Brown II," n.d.).

#### *Background to the Study*

African American parents were not full partners in the planning and decision-making process of school integration in the Metropolitan Nashville Public School system but only limited partners through the "Negro Parent Teacher Association (NPTA)" (Holden, 1958). African American parents and their allies, however, sought to influence the integration process through legal means. The first ever petitions to come before the board for enrollment in a segregated school came from two Fisk University professors who were White and sought their children's enrollment into "all-Negro" schools ("Massive Resistance," n.d.). The request was denied, and they later joined in the first lawsuit brought by African Americans, when 21 Black parents petitioned for enrollment of their children in all-White schools. The case, *Kelly v. Board of Education*, was not resolved for several years after the start of desegregation (Egerton, 2009). The initial year of integration was 1957, which began with the first-grade followed by one grade a year until the entire school system was integrated (Holden, 1958; "School Desegregation," 2010).

African American parents, like all parents, wanted the best education for their children, but they also wanted to protect them and keep them safe (“School Desegregation,” 2010). Many Whites were dissatisfied and unsupportive of the Supreme Court decision, which mandated integrated schools, so there was the constant threat of violence (“School Desegregation,” 2010). Concerned about the situation, many local ministerial organizations, the Negro Parent Teacher Association, and civic organizations offered their support to the integration process in the Metropolitan Nashville Public School system (Holden, 1958). One civic organization visible in the efforts to support parents in the integration process was the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE). CORE was an interracial organization that practiced and taught non-violence. CORE’s primary focus addressed the concerns and needs of African American parents and their children. Another group, the Nashville Association of Churches, encouraged their congregations to participate in the integration process (Holden, 1958).

Originally, because of rezoning, 126 first-grade students were eligible to attend all-White schools (Egerton, 2009). For African American parents, a challenge was the fact that only their first-grader could attend the previously all-White schools, which left a dilemma for families with both older and younger children. Further confounding the issue was that parents were reluctant to send only one of their children to the neighborhood school. Families with two working parents also faced the dilemma of hiring sitters for non-school age children while they walked their six-year-old to school. That task was normally given to the older children in the families, but because they attended different schools, this posed a problem (Holden, 1958). Almost half of the students registered for integrated schools but because of concerns about safety sought and received a transfer.

According to Egerton (2009), 19 students attended or attempted to attend on the first day, but due to the tense and violent climate only 11 Negro students returned on day two and only 11 (11) Negro students remained in all-White schools for the duration of the first year.

African American parents were concerned about integration, but with the vigilant support of CORE and other volunteers they persisted through the jeering, taunting crowds to open the door on a new era of education for the Metropolitan Nashville Public School system (Holden, 1958). The first day of school came and went without bodily harm to any of the six-year-olds or their parents, but mobs and segregation supporters roamed from school to school taunting, throwing items, and intending to disrupt the process. One reported incident occurred at a school where an angry crowd overwhelmed the police and forced their way into the school; they roamed from classroom to classroom looking for Black children, but the children were moved to the principal's office, were slipped out a side door, and were driven home (Edgerton, 2009; "Massive Resistance," n.d.). Some African American parents returned to the all-white schools the next day and persisted for the rest of the year, while others transferred their children back to their original schools.

White parents were encouraged to boycott integration of schools, and attendance was very low for the first few days of school ("Massive Resistance," n.d.). In their neighborhoods, participating African American parents experienced violent acts and threats, which included cross burnings, small fires set to property exteriors, and disturbing phone calls. The most extreme incident came one night when one of the schools, Hattie Cotton Elementary School, where an African American child was enrolled, was bombed shortly after midnight. The school suffered severe damage to one

wing (“Massive Resistance,” n.d.; “School Desegregation,” 2010). This violent act changed the tone of integration in Nashville but not in the way the pro-segregationists intended; rather, it strengthened the city’s resolve to integrate schools peacefully instead of stifling the process.

The 1957 Metropolitan Nashville Public School (MNPS) desegregation process occurred at a time when African Americans were barred from access to virtually all civic privileges except paying taxes (Seigenthaler, 2006). Yet some parents engaged in the process of desegregation by placing their children in integrated settings. Consideration and attention to the feelings and concerns of African American families engaged in the desegregation process in 1957 is important to understanding their motivation to send their children to previously all-White schools.

#### *Problem Statement*

The motivations and expectations of the parents of the 11 children have not been examined from an educational perspective. Neither had there been an attempt to foster an understanding of African American parent involvement during this time. This study was an examination of the motivations and expectations of the African American parents of the 11 first-grade students who enrolled and completed the first full year of the Nashville Public School desegregation process in 1957.

#### *Research Questions*

This study examined the motivations and expectations of African American parents who placed their first-grade children in integrated schools during the first year of desegregation of the Metropolitan Nashville Public School system in Nashville,

Tennessee, in 1957. This study was guided by an overarching question and two sub-questions.

*Overarching Research Question*

Why were the African American parents of the 11 students engaged in the desegregation of the Nashville Public School system in Nashville, Tennessee in 1957?

*Sub-questions*

1. What led the African American parents of the 11 students engaged in the desegregation of the Nashville Public School system in Nashville, Tennessee in 1957?

2. What were the expectations of the African American parents of the 11 students engaged in the desegregation of the Nashville Public School system in Nashville, Tennessee in 1957?

*Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of the motivations and expectations of African American parents of the 11 students who persisted in the 1957 desegregation process underway in Nashville's public schools. This study illuminated these parents' persistence in the process under hostile circumstances ("Massive Resistance," n.d.). This study sought to identify these motivations and expectations as concepts that might guide administrators in identifying effective strategies for parent involvement in today's schools.

## *Definitions of Terms*

The following terms are used for the purpose of this study:

1. Achievement—The attainment of success in learning and development (Price, 2002).
2. African American or Black—Of or belonging to an American ethnic group descended from African peoples having dark skin; African American—approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) as one of five minimum categories for race for the U.S. Census (“Racial,” n.d.).  
  
African American will be the terminology used in this study for the purpose of consistency. The terms Negro or Black as they appear within the research will be maintained and identified as such by the use of quotation marks.
3. CORE—The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was founded in 1942 by a group of Chicago students who were mainly pacifists deeply influenced by Henry David Thoreau, Mahatma Gandhi’s teachings, and the nonviolent civil disobedience campaign that Ghandi used successfully against British rule in India. The students became convinced that the same methods could be employed by Blacks to obtain civil rights in America (Holden, 1958).
4. Desegregation—Is eliminative and negative, implying the removal of legal and social prohibitions (Stulberg, 2008); here the term refers to the process of opening public facilities to everyone, regardless of race. The term desegregation and integration are used interchangeably in chapter one, however subsequent chapters in this study will refer to the parents’ action as integration-the act of participating in the process following the act of

desegregation (the removal of legal and social prohibitions), except where the term refers to the action of desegregation or is so used in the literature.

5. Expectation—Elements or outcomes of a system designed and delivered for the greater good of the participants
6. Integration—The positive acceptance of desegregation and the welcomed participation of Negroes into the total range of human activities (Stulberg, 2008)
7. Invitations—The climate in which parents are invited to involve themselves in child school learning, extended by the school, the teacher, or the child (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005, revised)
8. Life Context—Differences in parents’ knowledge, skills, time and energy, and family culture (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005, revised)
9. Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools—Nashville Public Schools officially formed in 1963 with the consolidation of Nashville Public Schools and Davidson County Schools (“History,” n.d.).
10. Motivation—Conceptualized to include inner forces, enduring traits, behavioral responses to stimuli, and sets of beliefs and effects. Motivation is the process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008).
11. Nashville Public Schools—One of the four public school systems servicing Davidson County residents prior to the 1963 consolidation of the county and city government. Nashville Public Schools served students inside the city

limits of Davidson County with separate systems for African Americans and Whites (“History,” n.d.).

12. Negro Parent Teacher Association—The association of African American educators and parents serving segregated schools for African Americans that was instrumental in supporting parents during the Nashville Public School Integration process (Holden, 1958)
13. Parent Involvement or Parent Engagement—Defined as parents taking a personal interest in the education of their children, communicating through their action that education is important to success in life; instilling a love of learning that translates into a sense of pride and achievement as knowledge accumulates and is put to good use (Williams, 2000)
14. Parents School Preference Committee—A primary anti-integration organization fighting to maintain the segregated school systems in Nashville. This group engaged state and local policymakers to maintain segregated schools (“Massive Resistance,” n.d.; Egerton, 1994).
15. Segregation—The policy or practice of separating people of different races, classes, or ethnic groups, as in schools, housing, and public or commercial facilities, especially as a form of discrimination (“Civil Rights glossary,” 2001).
16. Self-efficacy—Belief in one’s ability to act in ways that will produce desired outcomes (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).
17. Violence—Threats or acts of harm predicated against a person or group of people (Egerton, 1994).

18. White or Caucasian—A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa, approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) as one of five minimum categories for race for the U.S. Census (“Racial,” n.d.).

White will be the terminology used in this study for the purpose of consistency. The term Caucasian as it appears within the research will be maintained and identified as such by the use of quotation marks.

### *Significance of the Study*

Parents must accept responsibility for helping their children attain educational success (Price, 2002). Understanding parent motivation for school involvement was critical to developing parent involvement programs that drew parents into partnership with schools for the purpose of student success. According to the National Standards for Family Engagement (formerly, the National Standards for Parent Involvement), it was important to empower parents to be advocates and decision-makers for their children and all children in order to ensure fair and equitable access to opportunities for school success. They also suggested that research had shown that parent advocacy had a positive and lasting effect on student success. Desegregation was seen as an essential opportunity for African American children to have equitable opportunities to learn as communicated in the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 (Egerton, 2009). Informed by Level 1 of the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) model of parental involvement and the Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory, Spencer (2006), this study sought to illuminate the nature of parental involvement from the perspective of the 11

parents who persisted through the initial year of public school desegregation in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1957.

This research could benefit state and local school-policy makers as they outline culturally sensitive frameworks for local school system leaders used in the development of required parent involvement policies. School practitioners (principals and teachers) could benefit from knowledge of which critical parent involvement constructs were likely to be more successful and impactful in the structuring of effective parent engagement programs. Programs that were more purposeful in structure and implementation could also respond to the need for greater cost effectiveness in these times of lean education budgets. Likewise, parents themselves could become more empowered as they participate in both home-based and school-based parent involvement activities that could enhance their knowledge, understanding, and motivational commitment to their child's learning. And lastly, students could benefit from parent involvement programs that generate high levels of parent participation and empowerment that translate into more support for students from parents at school and at home.

Motivating factors that drove parent involvement in their children's lives impacted and directed the outcomes for these children, shaped the future perceptions and behaviors of children relative to the importance, value, and impact of education in their lives. Study of parent motivation offered insight into human behavior relative to decision-making attitudes and actions. From a parental perspective, parents fought to secure resources for their children's future, specifically the resource of educational opportunities—advocacy. This study was designed to identify the elements that motivated the parents in the MNPS 1957 desegregation process and to examine whether

the same motivational factors could in theory or practice align with current research on motivating parents of today's students to become more actively involved in both school-based and home-based activities that impact student academic and developmental success.

### *Conceptual Framework*

The conceptual framework for the study was based on the research of parental involvement from both a psychological perspective and a cultural perspective. This study used the model developed by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 1997, 2005, revised), which asked why parents got involved in their children's educational performance as a backdrop. Understanding this research using Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) model and the Phenomenology and Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST), Spencer's (1997) model provided a framework for identifying the motivations of parents engaged in the desegregation of the Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) in 1957, and identified strategies for potential parent involvement in today's schools. Among the available models of parent involvement, this model more directly addressed the motivation factors that drove parents to become involved in their children's education and in their schools from a psychologically perspective. For this reason, the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) model was selected to provide the structural framework for this study's design. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's theoretical model's primary attention was given to the "Why" of parent involvement, which was the foundation of this study.

Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) proposed that it was the nature of parents to be interested in their children's success in school, and that parents might be motivated to

support school efforts by getting involved in school-based and home-based involvement programs or activities. The benefits of parent involvement might be associated with student achievement, the teacher's perception of student competence, student grades, and student scores on achievement tests. Other benefits could be linked to school success as it related to greater retention rates, lower dropout rates, higher rates of participation in advanced courses, and higher on-time graduation rates. The benefits of parent involvement crossed all sectors of parent demographics and included students at risk of not being successful. Given these benefits, it was important for policy makers, state and local education agencies, and schools to be aware of the elements of parent involvement that could be utilized to create more effective parent involvement programs.

Parent involvement research was conclusive on the importance of parent involvement to the academic success of children and the impact of family-school interaction on student outcome (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; "Parent Plus," n.d.). Walker, Shenker, and Hoover-Dempsey (2010) cited that Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1986) provided the theoretical foundation of the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) Model for Parent Involvement. Bandura (1989) examined parental role construction and parental responsibility, asking questions about parents' beliefs about their ability to impact the child's education.

The Hoover-Dempsey model consisted of five levels of parent involvement. Level 1 included Personal Motivation, Invitations, and Life Contexts and was bridged to Level 2 by parent involvement forms. Level 2 discussed Parent Mechanisms of Involvement. Level 3 identified encouragement, modeling, reinforcement, and instruction as mediated by Child Perception of Parent Mechanisms. Level 4 looked at Student Attributes

Conducive to Achievement, and Level 5 addressed Student Achievement. These five levels cascaded from Level 1 to Level 5, and the success of each subsequent level was contingent on the success of Level 1; therefore, Level 1 served as the theoretical foundation of this study. Level 1 was characterized by three overarching tenets: Personal Motivation, Invitation, and Life Context. Personal Motivation addressed Parental Role Constructs and Parental Efficacy. Invitation addressed the General School Invite, the Specific School Invite, and the Specific Child Invite, and Life Context addressed the Parent's Knowledge & Skills, Time and Energy, and Family Culture. Why parents chose to get involved in the child's education was the focus of Level 1 of the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) Model and was also the focus of this study. Level One suggested that parent involvement was influenced by a specific set of personal beliefs and contextual factors. Walker et al. (2010) suggested that of all of the elements identified in Level 1 of the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) Model, the parents' perception of the invitations, specifically from the teacher and child, "may be the most potent motivator among all grade levels and across all student demographics" (p. 2). The three overarching tenets of Level 1 were designed to determine why parents chose to become engaged in their children's education. Level 1 consisted of three primary characteristics: Personal Motivational Beliefs, Parents' Perception of Invitations for Involvement from Others, and Parents' Perceived Life Context (Chart 1).

Chart 1

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) Model Level One

Personal Motivation		Invitations			Life Context		
Parental Role Construction	Parental Efficacy	General School Invitations	Specific School Invitations	Specific Child Invitations	Knowledge and Skills	Time and Energy	Family Culture

(Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005 and Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sanders, & Hoover-Dempsey 2005.)

The elements of Level 1 and their associated characteristics were described to provide insight into the role of each in parent motivation. Understanding of the parents’ perceptions of personal motivation, invitation, and life context relative to parent involvement were discussed. Enhancing schools and policymakers’ understanding of these elements relative to parent involvement should increase appreciation of the assets all parents have to offer.

Role construction was an important psychological factor of motivation for parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; 1997; Walker et al., 2005). The role was based on parents’ beliefs about what they should do relative to the child’s education. The role construct was the guiding principle for parents relative to “who” should be responsible for the child’s education as well as whether education was a “shared” responsibility between home and school. Role construction was a social phenomenon based on beliefs and was grounded in a social context that evolved from self-expectations, the expectations of others in significant relationships, and the

expectations of society in general (Hoover-Dempsey & Jones, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1987). Role construction focused primarily on whether parents believed they should be involved in their child's education. The level of the parent's role construct was related to the parent's level of self-efficacy (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007).

According to Hoover-Dempsey and Jones (1997), role construction was characterized by three elements: group expectation, individual expectation, and role expectation. Group expectation indicated that one was influenced by the expectations certain groups hold for their members. Individual expectations arose from the person's understanding of what expectations a person in this role held for himself (self-expectations), and role expectation reflected the understanding of what a person in a role was expected to do—it outlined the actions to be taken in the role as defined by the role itself. Further, they suggested that the values, goals and expectations parents had for themselves motivated them to behave in ways that were driven by and consistent with these values, goals and expectations.

Hoover-Dempsey et al. (1987) differentiated the impact of Level 1 characteristics on parents of different socioeconomic levels. They suggested that parents in the higher socioeconomic levels might not be as reliant on school invitations to get involved. Parents in the higher socioeconomic levels tended to have higher levels of education which influenced their perception of their role and efficacy, thus provided them a sense of responsibility and level of comfort at schools and with teachers and other professionals that parents in the lower socioeconomic realm might lack.

A second element of parents' motivation to become involved in their child's education was parental self-efficacy. Hoover Dempsey et al. (2005) defined efficacy as the belief in one's ability to behave in such a way as to produce a desired outcome. The role of self-efficacy connected to the parent's decision to become involved and persist until the endeavor was achieved. They further suggested that the decision to get involved was determined by the far-reaching thoughts of success or failure. Parents who do not perceive themselves capable of accomplishing selected tasks were less likely to commit to them (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987). According to Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005), efficacy, like role construction, was a socially based construct and was influenced by personal experiences, school, family and other relationships.

Parent self-efficacy spoke to the issue of parents' beliefs about the importance of their involvement. Efficacy was closely connected to the parents' role construct. Efficacy suggested that parents who have strong beliefs about the impact of their involvement were more likely to engage with their children both at school and at home, according to The Family School Partnership Lab (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1992). Hoover-Dempsey and Jones (1997) suggested that the parents' belief that they could have a positive influence on the child's success through personal action impacted the parents' sense of efficacy. Parent's self-efficacy led parents to question their ability to produce the desired results. Self-efficacy was also influenced by social events in parents' lives. As well, personal experience and the opinions of others could influence parents' sense of efficacy (Green et al., 2007).

Invitation was very important if the parent's role construction was low and self-efficacy was weak. Invitations from important others at school served to improve parents'

beliefs about their involvement and about the effects of their involvement. The school environment (culture and climate) had influence on parents' ideas about parent involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). According to Green et al. (2007), the general school invitation reflected the culture and climate of the school. It communicated the overall feeling of warmth and openness that signaled the overall attitude that parents' were valued, welcomed, and expected. Further reflective of an attitude of a welcome environment were the daily school responses and management practices that served to support the school climate and culture. Trust was an outgrowth of a positive and inviting school climate (Green et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) explained that the general school environment included the overall structure and management practices within the school. This included mutual respect for the parents and communication with parents about student progress. Parents in low socioeconomic environments were impacted by positive school staff attitudes toward the students, families, and community. The school response to the needs of families was critical and this was demonstrated by how willing the school was to work with these families. Schools with good climate and culture reported a higher rate of parent involvement than those that did not have a general climate of value, welcome, and expectation (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Invitations at varying levels all served to motivate parent involvement.

Coupled with the general school invitation was the school specific invitation, which for the purpose of this discussion, was referred to as the "teacher" invitation. The teacher parent involvement practices as communicated by specific invitations to parents

to get involved had a greater influence on parent involvement than the general school invitation, according to Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005). Teacher invitations might take the form of invitations to school programs, school conferences, helping with homework, etc. and were credited with having a great impact across all grades and demographics (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Walker et al., 2010). Teacher invitations expressed a sense of concern about parents' need to know how their children were doing in school. These invitations contributed to the development of trust in the parent-teacher relationship and served to empower parents as they engaged in two-way communication across time. They also signaled the teacher's desire to partner with the parent for the benefit of the child. Such invitations signaled that the teacher valued the contributions of the parents, which served to improve parents' role construction and sense of efficacy over time (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Specific invitations to parents from the teacher were designated in the research as an effective tool and served to influence parent involvement. The teacher-specific invitation to parents to assist students with homework or to support a school program communicated that teacher's valued and encouraged parent participation and involvement. This sense of value of the parent's contribution to the child's education motivated parent involvement (Green et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987; Walker et al., 2010).

Further, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (1987) suggested that teacher efficacy also played a direct role in parent involvement. Their research suggested that high efficacy was evident by the teacher's display of competence and skills, which allowed for a better understanding of the role of parent involvement. This enlightened position of the teacher

created an environment in which role definition was clearly and comfortably articulated to parents. This combination of competence and role clarity allowed the teacher to develop stronger relationships with parents. Efficacious teachers were more likely to invite parents to engage in school conferences and other activities. Such interactions served to strengthen the parents' sense of value in their ability to impact positively the desired outcomes.

Another invitation that research highlighted as important was the invitation for involvement that came directly from the child to the parent. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) explained that the invitation from the child promoted increased motivation for involvement. The specific child invitation appeared to resonate with the parents' innate desire to be responsive to their children's needs as they developed and matured as well as to see them become successful. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005), further suggested the invitation from the child to the parent might take many forms. The forms included a direct invitation to a school function and a direct request for assistance, or it might be that the parent became aware of a need the child was experiencing and elected to become involved, as parents often respond to the unspoken needs of children.

Because parents tended to have a general wish to respond to children's needs, an explicit invitation also served, as an opportunity for parents to respond positively to students needs. Green et al. (2007) substantiated the research relative to the value of the specific child invitation as a powerful tool to motivate parents to become involved. They suggested that parents tend to want to be involved in the child's education and are motivated by the child's needs as signaled by a direct invitation from the child. They concurred that the child-specific invitation might be implicit or explicit. The invitation

could be generated from an identified need that the child exhibited with schoolwork or some other school issue, or it could be an explicit invitation in the form of a request from the child. Both had been shown to be strong motivators for parent involvement. The child-specific invitation was enhanced when coupled with teacher-specific and general school invitations (Green et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Life Context addressed the elements of Knowledge and Skills, Time and Energy, and Family Culture. According to Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005), life context involved elements of parents' lives that competed for the demands placed on parents and impact their general welfare. These elements might be characteristic of one's socioeconomic status, but in this model they were limited to those elements of the socioeconomic status that might be impacted by school structures and how they function as they related to parents and the design of parent involvement programs. The authors suggested that while schools could likely have very little impact on changing one's socioeconomic status, they could impact elements of the socioeconomic status that are associated with variables that impact parent involvement. These were identified as knowledge and skills, time and energy, and family culture. Recognizing that schools cannot respond to all related socioeconomic status issues, Hoover Dempsey et al. (2005) identified these as critical to understanding parent involvement decisions and recognized the impact socioeconomic status had on affording parents the opportunity to be involved.

Parents had a personal view of what level of knowledge and skills they bore on the child's education, and the parents' personal perceptions of their own assets tended to direct their level of involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Parents tended to weigh the likelihood of success against their self-perceived set of knowledge and skills.

There appeared to be a correlation between their perception of their skill set's adequacy for positive outcomes and their level of motivation to engage in their child's education. Parents with low perception of their knowledge and skills relied more heavily on other support systems such as family, friends, and resources they perceived to have adequate knowledge and skills. Further, their self-perception weighed heavily in their decision to get involved (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

According to Green et al. (2007), knowledge and skills represented a set of cognitive skills and resources that impact the parents' perception of their ability to engage in students' academic development. They point out that when parents perceived that they lack the skills to impact student success, they felt less motivated or comfortable getting involved. Parents' perception of their own level of knowledge and skill set might be altered, and they might be motivated to engage in the activities they feel are reflective of their strength, provided they have an appropriate level of self-efficacy.

Time and Energy was the second element that the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) model of parent involvement highlights as a critical life context element that explained why parents might or might not get involved in their child's education. Green et al. (2007) suggested that time and energy are coupled together as life context skills that influenced parent involvement because they are connected to parents' perception of other demands on these same two factors. These factors were also connected to other family issues, such as work responsibilities and demands on their time and energy from other spheres of life. Parents might in general have less control and less flexibility over these two elements than other elements and might not have the family

support systems to offset some of these demands such flexibility and support could allow for more involvement in their child's education.

Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) supported the notion that a parent's perception of the demands on their time and energy, especially as it was connected to work and other family obligations, influence decisions about getting involved in school. They further noted that there was a connection between parents' perception of their life context variables and the influence of the personal motivators of role construction and self-efficacy.

The third element of life context was Family Culture. Family Culture might serve as an umbrella to the other life context variables of Knowledge, Skills and Time, and Energy. Understanding family culture was critical for schools to consider as they seek to build strong family-school connections. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) suggested that schools must have a healthy respect for family culture. They must respond to family culture and family circumstances in positive ways in order to build meaningful partnerships. This required attention to the processes and program development that serve to strengthen other factors of motivation. Invitations must be considered in light of family culture and reflect the values, goals, and expectations of family culture. This was particularly critical for engaging parents of first and second-generation immigrants, as well as parents in low socioeconomic situations. Elements of motivation and life context could be definite barriers to parent involvement in schools for these parents. Additionally, other barriers such as language, understanding school expectations, policies, conflicting values, and perceptions of empowerment all could serve to impede parent involvement and to decrease parents' motivation to become involved (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

The focus on parent involvement was evolving from the traditional questions—whether parent involvement impacts student learning outcomes, what are the most effective parent involvement practices, and how parent involvement impacts students—to discovering “why” parents engage or do not engage in their children’s education.

Understanding why parents may or may not engage in their children’s education also required an examination of obstacles to parent involvement relative to family structures and demands on family time as well as school practices that might serve to alienate parents. Further, barriers that interfere with parent involvement include, but are not limited to, the language of families and the structure of communication that existed between the home and the school (Sheldon, n.d.).

The search for parent involvement models designed to explicate why parents get involved in their children’s education led to the selection of the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1992, 1997, 2005, revised) model of parental involvement, specifically Level One, which examined why parents get involved in their children’s educational performance. Understanding this research in light of this model provided a framework for identifying the motivations of parents engaged in the desegregation of the Nashville Public Schools in 1957, and for identifying potential strategies for parent involvement in today’s schools. Among the available models of parent involvement, this model most directly addressed the motivation factors that drive parents to become involved in their children’s education and in their schools.

While the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) Model best described from a psychological perspective why parents tended to engage in the education of their children, the nature of the action taken by the parents engaged in the initial process of

integration of Nashville Public Schools in 1957, as among the first to send their children to previously all-white schools, presented a more complex phenomenon than the contemporary activities associated with parent involvement or family engagement. According to Lee, Spencer, and Harpalani (2003), Spencer's (2006) Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) helped us better understand how individuals experience racism and cultural socialization and highlights developmental processes through which they cultivated stable strategies for coping with the challenges that make them vulnerable. Such challenges were present in 1957 during the integration process (Egerton, 2009). PVEST was influenced by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, a set of nested systems moving from the individual's innermost level of contacts and interaction to the outside. Bronfenbrenner (1994) was used to augment the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) Model. It expanded beyond the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) Model to promote greater understanding of the parents' motivations and expectations as part of the cultural context informing the individual's sense and interpretation of things; the Bronfenbrenner model helped to explain the environment that led the parents to get involved and persist through the 1957 integration process.

According to Lee et al. (2003) the PVEST Model had five components that form a dynamic integrative developmental model, as developed by Margaret Spencer in 1995. The components included: 1) the Net Vulnerability Level, which consisted of the contexts and characteristics that might pose potential risks during an individual's development; 2) Net Stress Engagement, which referred to the actual experience of situations that challenge an individual's well-being; 3) the Reactive Coping Method,

employed to resolve dissonance-producing situations; 4) Emergent Identities that resulted from the repeated use of various coping strategies, self appraisal, and desirable results for the ego; and 5) Coping Outcomes, which produced adverse or productive physical or behavioral stability over time. Combined, these frameworks, the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) model and the Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) (1995), could be used to help bring to the surface an understanding of why these parents elected to engage in the integration process of Nashville Public Schools in 1957.

### *Study Overview*

This study reflected the research related to parent motivation as a particular aspect of parental involvement in children's education. This study was designed to focus on specific factors that motivated parents to become involved in the process of educating their children. The goal of this study was to discover the research-based parent involvement factors relative to the motivation of parents who engaged in the 1957 desegregation process in the Nashville Public Schools.

This study was organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 contained a general discussion of parent involvement, including the research establishing the importance of and need for parent involvement in schools. Chapter 1 described the theoretical model that addressed this study's focus on parent motivation and "why" parents got involved in their children's education. It provided some background on the desegregation process in Nashville in 1957, with an emphasis on understanding the parents' perspective of the process. Chapter 1 included the general information that established an understanding of

the study. It included the introduction, background, problem statement, research questions, purpose, definitions, significance, conceptual framework, and overview.

Chapter 2 reviewed the literature related to parental involvement and parent motivation. This chapter examined pertinent research on parent involvement factors, including parent motivation, invitations, and life context, as determiners of parental choices about getting involved in their children's education. Chapter 3 offered an overview of the methodology used in this study, outlined the data collection, data management and data analysis processes, as well as the limitations and delimitations for the investigation. Chapter 4 provided the results of the research and presented the results in a manner that reflected the research questions, with analysis of the results. Chapter 5 presented the study's conclusions, giving detailed summary of the results of the research and discussion of the findings applicable to the research question of why parents may or may not choose to get involved; the chapter presented recommendations for future research and usage.

## CHAPTER 2

### Literature Review

This study sought to understand why parents were motivated to engage in the integration of schools in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1957 and what they expected as a result of their participation. To understand their involvement from their perspective it was important to examine the literature on the evolution of parent involvement in education in America. First, this study examined the research on parent involvement in terms of its development and policy perspective. Further, the review of the literature examined parent involvement overall, including the purpose and impact of parent involvement. There was also a review of the barriers to parent involvement and parents' motivation for involvement. Secondly, the study examined the research relative to the importance of parent involvement in the desegregation of schools nationally, within the state of Tennessee, and specifically in Nashville in 1957. To better understand the motivation of these parents, models of parent involvement were examined to enhance understanding of the complexities of parent involvement. Thirdly, the parent involvement model provided the theory of action for this study was examined. The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's Model of Parent Involvement (1995, 2005, revised) was used as the conceptual framework for this study because it offered a set of succinct characteristics that were associated with the research questions relative to the motivations and expectations of the parents involved in the desegregation of schools in Nashville in 1957. The research for this study used the boundaries of litigation cases to contextualize group efforts to achieve integration and explored the motivation and expectations of individual parents who participated in the initial year of integration in Nashville's public schools in 1957.

### *Historical Perspective of Parent Involvement*

Parent involvement in the welfare of children had long been a concern of public officials. Family involvement in the welfare of children in both health and education spanned decades. The recognition of the value family involvement played in the healthy development of children had origins spanning 30 years (Dokken & Ahmann, 2006). Relative to the care of children's health, PL99-457 required the development of individualized family service plans that mandated a family centered approach and family and professional collaboration.

Likewise, family involvement in education had a similar history. Hiatt (1994) highlighted the fluctuations in parent involvement over the decades and noticed changes in both the level and type of parent involvement in education, from the seventeenth century forward. In the early years, education of children was the primary responsibility of the parents, with little or no formal involvement from a structured educational entity. As the American population began to experience a swell in immigration, the large cities, like farming communities, began using children in the labor force until organized unions protested and disrupted the practice. This left a large population of youth roaming the streets with nothing to occupy their time and appeared threatening to some. This, coupled with the viewpoint from some that many of these parents were low-skilled, uneducated, and therefore unable to properly educate children equipped to improve society, caused parents to begin to lose control of educating their children, as more formalized public schools began to spring up across the nation. Continued formalization and standardization of the teaching and learning processes in education evolved over time, which caused parents to be more and more detached from the education of their children (Hiatt, 1994).

Over time, however, parents resisted this isolation and devaluing of their contributions to their children's education and pushed back by forming the National Congress of Mothers in 1897, the forerunner to the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA). This group's intent was to counter the exclusion of parents in the education of their children.

Martinez (2004) offered a chronology of parent involvement in education in America. She noted that post World War II (WWII), in 1945, parent involvement focus included parents' participation in school-based activities such as parent conferences, PTA meetings, fundraising events and serving as school monitors. Most was mother-focused, with roles like room mothers. During the 1960s, more policy evolved that touted parent involvement as a promising way to improve education for poor and disadvantaged children. This resulted in various parent involvement mandates and models of parent involvement that focused on movements for community control of education—integration of African American and Latino children. Coupled with a focus on compliance versus partnering with parents, the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s presented an era of research designed to address the federal mandates related to parent involvement, yet increased parent involvement did not translate into decision-making and governance roles for parents. During the same era, the Reagan administration withdrew federal mandates and best practices, and parent involvement models began to emerge. Presently, parent involvement mandates, movements for community control of education, and the continued quest to develop and implement effective parent involvement strategies continue (Martinez, 2004).

According to Pattnaik and Rajalakshmi (2010), the role of parent involvement was most often affiliated with the role of mother; however, beginning in the 1960s, more

attention focused on the father's role in childrearing and education. Over recent decades, the father's role in the family continued to be redefined by the era of expectations of the time. These roles evolved from the preindustrial era through modern time, to include clearly defined stages from moral teacher, breadwinner, and gender role model, to nurturing father. Pattnaik and Rajalakshmi (2010) also pointed out research that highlighted the evolution of fatherhood from the 1900s to present times, classified from the stern patriarch, to the distant breadwinner, to the co-parent or involved father.

Research confirmed that parent involvement had moved from education being the primary responsibility of the family to an almost hands off approach from the family and back again. Over time, parents have come to be viewed as critical partners in the education of their children. As parent involvement was defined and clarity regarding roles emerged, the dialogue between parents and professionals provided opportunities to develop new and effective strategies for innovative and authentic home-school partnerships (Hiatt, 1994). The creation of such partnerships served to fulfill the various policy mandates for parent involvement in the education of children.

#### *Parent Involvement: A Policy Perspective*

Parent involvement policy dated back as early as 1642, when the Massachusetts colony passed a law that required all parents to provide their children with an education in reading, religion, and trade. Given that all parents were not adequately equipped to comply with such a law, education soon fell under the purview of the government (Hiatt, 1994). According to McLaughlin and Shields (1986), efforts to involve parents of disadvantaged children in their child's education surfaced in the 1960s, despite earlier parent involvement policies. Project Headstart was enacted in 1964 and was the first

federally funded legislation as part of President Johnson's "War on Poverty," with explicit requirements relative to the involvement of parents; it was intended to support disadvantaged children in inner cities (Hiatt, 1994). This law was followed by passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965, which required that parents serve on school advisory boards and participate in classroom activities. Policy related to the handicapped was passed in 1974, which required parents to be active partners in educational decisions related to their children (Hiatt, 1994; Jones, 2010).

In addition to the Headstart Project in 1964, ESEA in 1965, and the Handicap Act in 1974, other policy related to the involvement of parents in education included the Economic Opportunity Act P.L. 88-452; Follow Through, 1967; and the Bilingual Education Act, 1968; all of which required parent participation in the development and implementation of school programs in advisory or collaborative roles (McLaughlin & Shields, 1986).

Parent involvement in education continues to be considered important. The America 2000 Act, mandating parent involvement, was signed into law in 1994 by President Clinton, (Coleman, 1991). While policy mandated for the inclusion of parents in the development of education programs for students had a history that spanned several decades, no policy was more specific than No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Section 1118, regarding the role families should play in education. This policy connected the development of parent involvement policy with the receipt of federal dollars more succinctly than any other policy regarding this issue (Webster, 2004).

Continued concern about the expanding roles required for schools to manage beyond education prompted policymakers to commission a policy paper on the

involvement of parents in education. Coleman (1991), the author of the commissioned policy paper, reported that the diminishing role of the family as both fathers and mothers migrated from the farm and home into the workforce left a void in the family's role relative to teaching things that in the past had been a primary function of the family. Character and skills, values that traditionally were taught in the normal execution of daily tasks and chores, were now being relegated to the schools unless there was conscious effort and structures in the home to address them.

Coleman (1991) further noted that among the benefits lost due to these changes were those personal characteristics that led to good school performance. These included learning work habits, responsibility for completing tasks, punctuality, and pride of craft. These dynamics have resulted in myriad families with diverse involvement and interactions, some of whom were deeply involved and had the skills necessary to help their children, others involved in ineffective and even harmful ways, and still others who had disengaged and relegated the task of education entirely to the schools. The changes in the family dynamics required schools to expand their role beyond just the academic development of children (Coleman, 1991). On the other hand, the statistical analysis of Dr. William (Bill) Sanders, which led to the development of the Tennessee Value Added Assessment System (TVAAS) in Tennessee in the eighties and nineties, held that it was what teachers do in the classroom that matters most in a child's education and superseded the impact of other factors like poverty and parent involvement (Tucker & Stronge, 2001).

While it was clear that policymakers see the need to include parent involvement in laws impacting education reform, there still remained work to be done in these areas as

parent involvement continued to be a challenge for some populations, according to O'Bryan, (2006). They contended that policymakers should also consider the role extracurricular activities such as sports play in connecting African American parents to schools. Their research demonstrated that this was a fertile opportunity to engage more African American parents and increase their level and type of involvement. Parents in their study revealed that they generally had conversations with teachers about academic issues while engaging in athletic and other after school functions.

### *Parent Involvement*

The research on parent involvement was clear about the positive impact it had on student achievement outcomes; the impact was seen in improved attendance, behavior, grades and efforts in completing homework, and it extended beyond elementary school and included the special needs population (Deslandes, Royer, Potvin, & Leclerc, 1999; Hornby, 2011; Morris & Taylor, 1997). According to Hoover-Dempsey et al. (1987), while great value was placed on improved parent-teacher relationships, research suggested that parent involvement remained a challenging goal to meet in today's schools.

It was also clear that policymakers and school practitioners recognized parent involvement's importance to the success of school programs; it was included in policy at the state and national levels and mandated at local levels ("United States," 2004). Hiatt (1994) posited that though parent involvement policy extended back as far as the seventeenth century, parent involvement policies that focused on disadvantaged children surfaced in the 1960s with federally funded policy and continued today. The Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965, which was reauthorized as the No Child Left Behind

legislation of 2001, clearly indicated that parent involvement was a significant factor in improving educational outcomes for students (“Parent Plus,” n.d.).

Price (2002) addressed the importance of parent involvement in the lives of children. He reported that according to the Carnegie Task Force on Learning, the primary grades, the early years from three to ten, were a crucial age-span in a young person’s life. For most children, long-term success in learning and development depended to a great extent on what happened to them during these potentially promising formative years (Lau, Li, & Rao, 2011; Price, 2002). Price (2002) went on to say that even though many parents believed the school system was not set up to prepare their children for academic success, enough research and pockets of successful schools existed to show that children could be educated well if there was a commitment to them, regardless of unfavorable odds. African American parents, like other parents, must realize that their involvement in school was crucial to their child’s development and engagement in the act of learning, and that these are critical years in the child’s life.

Research suggested that when parents took a personal interest in the education of their children, several things happened. The child got a strong message that education was important to success in life; it was not something that parents dump in someone else’s lap. Caring, involved parents usually instilled in their children a love of learning—a love that translated into a sense of pride and achievement as knowledge was accumulated and put to good use (Jackson, 2010; Williams, 2000).

For the purpose of this study “parent involvement” was defined as parents taking a personal interest in the education of their children, through action that communicated education was important to success in life, which instilled a love of learning that

translated into a sense of pride and achievement as knowledge accumulated and was put to good use (Williams, 2000).

The characteristics of parent involvement were multi-faceted and included school-based and home-based activities and initiatives, parents serving as advocates, and parents as teachers and encouragers (“National,” n.d.). Research consistently demonstrated that increased parent involvement yielded increased student achievement (Jesse, n.d; Ramirez, 2001; Trotman, 2001; Weiss et al., 2003; Zellman & Waterman, 1998). There was sufficient evidence that suggested when there was a school-family-community partnership students’ benefited (“National,” n.d.). Specific types of parent involvement appeared to offer considerable benefits to student achievement: programs that were linked to learning, programs that allowed parents to speak up for their children, programs that allowed families to make contributions to students’ learning, and programs that included organizing community resources and support.

Over a period of time and across many studies, parent involvement surfaced as a critical benefit to child and adolescent school achievement (Hoover-Dempsey-Walker & Sandler, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). According to Peterson and Kreider, (n. d.), students with involved parents, no matter what their background, were more likely to earn higher grades and test scores, enrolled in higher-level programs, be promoted and earned credits, adapted well to school and attended regularly, had better social skills and behaviors, and graduated. Such students were apt to participate in some form of post-secondary education.

According to Lee and Bowen (2006), there was a positive relationship between family demographic characteristics and achievement outcomes. Parent involvements at

school and parent education expectations reflected the strongest association with children's educational achievement. Further, parents' higher educational expectations for their children were associated with higher academic achievement across demographic groups. This was consistent with other findings that indicated the importance of high expectation, although it was weaker for children who participated in free and reduced lunch programs; it was indicative of lower levels of human, cultural, and social capital in lower income homes (Lee & Bowen, 2006).

Epstein (2005) discussed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirement of parent involvement in schools; the discussion was from a sociological perspective, which suggested that parent involvement should be revamped to allow for more equitable and effective programs of school, family, and community partnerships. State, local, and school authorities must be engaged in professional development programs designed to equip teachers and employees to meet the task of engaging parents on all levels to develop effective partnerships. Any school that received Title I dollars was required to include parent involvement as a part of the school and classroom organization. Parent involvement plans must articulate how parents will be involved as partners in the design and decision-making stages of these programs. Parent involvement programs must recognize parents as partners with shared responsibilities for children learning, and parent involvement must be designed to reach the hard to reach parents, those not typically or easily engaged in the act of schooling. NCLB required that communication with parents was clear, useful and in languages that all parents understood. It stressed equity for all parents.

Though parent involvement positive impact on student achievement for children was widely accepted by researchers, educators and policymakers, parent involvement by definition continued to be inconsistent, according to Jesse (n.d.). Jesse (n.d.) went on to say that parent involvement continued to be challenging because of the lack of understanding of the barriers and feasible solutions to those barriers. A critical barrier, according to Jesse (n.d.), was the absence of a consistent definition for parent involvement. He indicated that many researchers have offered up a variety of definitions for parent involvement for all populations of students of all ages (Jesse n.d.).

Contributing to this issue was the lack of clarity relative to the when, what, and how of parent involvement. Schools tended to dictate when parents should be involved, in which activities they should be engaged, and how they should be engaged in those activities (Zellman & Waterman, 1998). On the other hand, some parents wanted full involvement in the management and decision-making of the school operations relative to programs, staffing, and budgeting (Jesse, n.d.). There had to be a meeting of the minds, and the concept of parent involvement must be evolved to reflect the changes in today's familial and societal structure and viewpoints (Jesse, n.d.; Price-Mitchell, 2009).

The article, "Literature Review," (2007) raised questions about the empirical data supporting overwhelming claims of the positive impact parent involvement had on student achievement. This issue also raised questions of how parent involvement and achievement were defined and whether any studies offer empirical evidence to support a generally accepted claim that parent involvement was supportive of student achievement. Other researchers, such as Moorman and Pomerantz (2010), suggested that parent involvement could have a negative impact on student achievement. Their research treated

as critical the mother's mindset relative to the child's malleability to parents' influence. Their position was that an entity mindset, which suggested that ability was fixed, spurred interactions that were controlling and more directives, produced situations in which challenge was threatening and negatively impacted the child. These parents saw children's poor performance as a permanent deficit that led to unconstructive involvement. On the other hand, an incremental mindset produced a positive outcome for children because the premise was that children's abilities were malleable and could be developed. Parents with an incremental mindset engaged in constructive involvement that encouraged children to develop competence. The parents' view of poor performance by their child was that it could be changed and focused to help children become mastery oriented. They were supportive and encouraging, which taught their children to generate their own strategies.

In general, parent involvement addressed all populations and substantiated the positive outcomes for all students; however, there was an emerging body of research designed specifically to address the involvement of minority and low-income parents and how they interact with schools (Zellman & Waterman, 1998). Given the focus of this study—the motivations and expectations of African American parents involved in the desegregation of Nashville Public Schools in 1957—it was important to examine parent involvement literature in the framework of Urban and African American parents in order to provide a context for addressing the research questions.

In "Involving the African American Parent: Recommendations to Increase the Level of Parent Involvement," Trotman (2001) noted that African American children were failing at record rates and parent participation was low, but he concurred with other

researchers that parent involvement significantly impacted urban schools, which accounted for 43% of the minority school population that usually resided in poverty. Parent involvement for these students had a significant impact on student achievement and cognitive development, and it could have a positive impact on the parent-child relationship and student behavior. Frazier (1997) found a significant inverse correlation between parent involvement and student suspension—as parent involvement increased, student suspension decreased, yet parent involvement outreach efforts in Urban settings continued to meet with minimal success (as cited in Trotman, 2001).

The multiple responsibilities of work, school, and family had converged to create a dilemma for minority and low-income families (Weiss et al., 2003). These families had a strong desire to be involved in their children's education. Specifically noted by Weiss et al. (2003), women appeared to be more affected by this dilemma than men because they bore the primary responsibility for managing work and family. This might be true of both single and married women. Weiss et al. (2003) suggested that working mothers utilized a variety of support strategies such as creating a system of support among family and friends, utilizing supports from work, such as free books, time to have conferences to compensate for their inability to be involved, which spoke to these mothers' initiative and self-efficacy.

Trotman (2001) suggested that contributing to the problem of low parent involvement in urban schools was the inconsistency of the definition of parent involvement, which represented a plethora of definitions that included parents being active with ongoing participation in a child's education. She noted Epstein's classification system, which included school and home interactions and activities,

communication, providing home learning activities and parents serving as decision-makers. Further, she highlighted Weitock's notation of "'high' parental involvement," defined as parents who attend PTA meetings and school programs. Additionally, Trotman (2001) noted as a barrier the disparities between parents' perception of parent involvement and schools and policymakers' perception of parent involvement. Other barriers included school-imposed barriers such as not taking time to contact parents until there was a problem. Parents indicated that this approach was problematic for parents and did not serve to encourage meaningful parent participation.

To improve involvement of African American and urban parents in schools, there needed to be deliberate outreach strategies designed to include hard to reach and disconnected parents (Trotman, 2001). This was part of the Goals 2000 legislation, which mandated parent involvement of minority and hard-to-reach parents. Success with increasing the parent involvement of African Americans might depend more on how schools sought to engage them than on their response rates in general (Hollifield, 1995, as cited in Trotman, 2001).

School choice for urban students had been offered as a remedy for improving parent involvement and student achievement through both magnet and charter school options (Hiatt, 1994). Some 15 states, Tennessee and Utah included, specifically stated in their Charter School Law that one purpose of Charter Schools was to afford and provide parents substantial, meaningful opportunities for parent involvement, yet it remained a struggle. Smith and Wohlsetter (2009) examined whether these choice options themselves served to eliminate barriers and increase parent involvement. Their research

suggested that charter and magnet schools continued to struggle to overcome the same barriers as traditional public schools.

There was no shortage of evidence that parent involvement was important to the academic welfare of students in all populations and at all levels (Epstein, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; “Parent Plus,” n.d.; Ramirez, 2001; Trotman, 2001). More than 20 years of research indicated that children benefited from parent involvement. Parents, teachers, and schools identified it as the most important factor in the success of children. Strong parent involvement in education was one of the elements essential for cognitive, social-emotional development and success of children in education. Effective parent involvement depended on various factors, which included culture, socio-economic status, and personal experience of parents (Cakiroglu, 2004).

#### *Purpose of Parent Involvement*

According to Trotman (2001) parent involvement was designed to create a partnership that allowed for greater collaboration between home and school for the expressed purpose of improved student outcomes. It was intended to enhance the school’s capacity to understand and appreciate values and cultures of families and be more effective in meeting student needs. Parent involvement in education was important because it added value to the educational development of students of all ages and populations (Ascher, 1988; Hickman, Greenwood, & Miller, 1995; Rhine, 1981, as cited in Wehlberg, 1996; Montesinos, 2004). Wehlberg (1996) also indicated that parent involvement programs might require making opportunities available for some parents while having to provide knowledge and skills for other parents so they could learn how to

be involved and feel comfortable taking advantage of the opportunities to be involved. Parent involvement was by definition ambiguous and was often discussed in terms of inconsistent categories or types of parent involvement. Wehlburg (1996) cited Hoover-Dempsey et al. (1987) who defined parental role in the two categories of home based activities such as helping with homework and school-based activities such as tutoring and volunteering in schools. Parental role was defined in six categories: (a) traditional (parent as audience or bystander-observer), (b) parent as a decision maker (PTA), (c) parent as a classroom volunteer, (d) parent as a paid paraprofessional or teacher's aide, (e) parents as learners (participants in child development or parenting classes), and (f) parents as teachers of their own students at home (Gordon, 1977; Bauch, Vietze, & Morris, 1973, as cited in Wehlberg, 1996).

According to Wehlberg (1996) and Epstein (1988), parent involvement was: (a) basic obligations of the parent (health, safety, etc.), (b) basic obligations of the schools (schools communicate to parents about programs/progress), (c) parent involvement in schools (volunteering and participating in extracurricular activities, sports, plays, etc.), (d) parent involvement in learning activities in the home (parents initiating activities with their child or child initiating help through questions), and (e) parent involvement in Governance and Advocacy (parents assume decision making roles). Jasso (2007) indicated there were still other definitions of parent involvement; however, he pointed out that often while social factors had been blamed for children's school failure, more in-depth examination revealed that parental intervention had a greater impact on student success than socioeconomic status and family dynamics. Further, he suggested that parental involvement extended beyond simply ensuring homework was completed

successfully or attendance at Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings. Luneburg and Irby (2002) reported that parental expectation for their children's achievement—participating in school activities, offering encouragement, and providing home learning environments—produced more positive outcomes for children.

Capitalizing on parent involvement, according to Luneburg and Irby (2002), required strategies to help parents decide how they will become involved in the school, how they will receive support from the school, and how school, family, and community partnership could better enhance student achievement. Schools must recognize there was no one-size-fits-all model for school-parent partnerships, but the model chosen should reflect site-based goals for revitalization and student success. Parents varied in their beliefs about their role in the education of their child (Jasso, 2007; Ritblatt, Beatty, Cronan & Ochoa, 2002). However, Wehlburg (1996) pointed out that parent involvement had a positive effect on the achievement of students and that all parents should be viewed as having valuable resources to contribute to increased student learning.

#### *Impact of Parent Involvement on Student Success for All Students*

When parents chose to become involved at school, they were showing their children how important education was to them and gave value to their child's education (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Jasso, 2007; Price, 2002). Student benefits were evident when there was a positive partnership between home and school (Cakiriglu, 2004; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Trotman, 2001; Zellman & Waterman, 1998;). The school also benefited from having supportive parents (Trotman, 2001).

Promoting child welfare was also a critical point as children were more likely to thrive when parents were involved and built supportive relationships as adults and

caretakers. Parent involvement served to reverse disappointing school performance and created an emotionally supportive environment. There was data on the impact of parent involvement substantiating improved academic and non academic outcomes for children, which included longitudinal studies relative to parent involvement at home (; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Jasso, 2007; Wehlberg, 1996).

### *Barriers to Parent Involvement*

Barriers to parent involvement could be attributed to school practices and perceptions as an institution and the perceptions parents brought to bear relative to their role and life situation (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Schultz, 2001; Trotman, 2001). Trotman (2001) asserted that the schools were required to assume more and more responsibilities that were once performed by parents, and often this became a barrier, which could contribute to a school's less-than-positive approach to parent involvement. Additional issues stemmed from changes in the family dynamics, which might limit involvement due to busy schedules, childcare issues, dual family employment, role perception and role construct. Jasso (2007) suggested that parents' perceived barriers could be partially to blame for any inconsistencies that might exist between parental involvement beliefs and behaviors. Effective communication, efficacy, lack of adequate information, and perceptions of whether teachers want them to be involved contributed to the problem.

Jasso (2007) pointed out that parent involvement varied between ethnic groups because differing home experiences and parenting styles impacted involvement. He reported that African American and Hispanic parents were less involved and had less knowledge about their children's need than their Caucasian counterparts and suggested more research should be done to determine why and develop remedies. He further posited

that variables such as low academic achievement, poverty, lack of resources, etc., and “teacher’s negative attitudes” might contribute to the problem, but does not explain this parental gap. Jasso (2007) grouped barriers into four categories: (a) Communication; (b) Personal/Life factors affecting availability of resources; (c) Role of Construction, Efficacy and School Environment; and (d) Socioeconomic Status.

Bracey (2001), on the other hand, suggested that the working poor had less time to devote to their children because they lacked paid sick time. Smith and Wohletter (2009) suggested that educators could lack awareness and appreciation for the invisible strategies minority or low-income parents used to support their children’s education. Such things as making sacrifices so children could attend better schools, limiting children’s chores to allow for more study time, and transmitting the lessons of hard work, all demonstrated that cultural narratives were a form of parent involvement that might not be recognized by traditional models.

Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001) explored ideas and attitudes about education, with a focused on factors that contribute to parents’ participation in home and school based activities; they examined the source (e.g., culture, community, institutionalized norms) and nature of parents’ ideas about schooling. They reported that the low instance of parent involvement does not reflect parental lack of interest; instead, such factors as time, distance, and daycare obligations were cited.

In essence, the inclusion of parents was left up to the schools; parents’ voice could easily go unheard, and this could lead to a negative impact on the family-school dynamic. How parents perceived their roles could be a function of how the school organization treated them. Swap (1993), as cited in Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel, 2001,

suggested that despite high verbal support for parent involvement, parents continued to be kept at a distance in most schools. Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001) contended that parents' valued education and would like to be more involved, but their involvement was limited by the sense that their roles were distinct from those of schools. School officials assumed that parents were too lazy, incompetent, or preoccupied to participate in school programs; such enduring beliefs that limit communication between the home and school led to bitter confrontations about academics and behavior. Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001) suggested the need for democratic classrooms (Henry, 1996), as a concept of mutual, communal and equitable exchange, which will benefit the students' achievement. They contended that the more "democratic" classroom concept would diminish conflicts, closed the gap between parents and schools and offered more choice in the ways families could demonstrate participation. This fact was supported by Morris (2004) examination of two high-performing, high-minority elementary schools and the strategies they used to achieve success, which included parent outreach. These schools made room for alternate types of parental involvement and met with success. According to Comer (2005), dysfunctional schools themselves tended to serve as barriers to parent involvement.

#### *Motivation for Parent Involvement*

Research on parent involvement was moving from the "what" of parent involvement to the "why" of parent involvement. Understanding why parents may or may not choose to become involved in their child's education provided a framework to help schools develop effective parent involvement programs (Sheldon, n.d.). Green et al. (2007) reiterated the notion that parent involvement was associated with improved

student outcomes, but noted that much less was known about the factors that motivated parents to become involved.

According to Sheldon (2002), parent involvement was now commonly accepted as essential to improve education, and many resources and policies had attempted to increase parental involvement, but it remained elusive and challenging in some schools. Sheldon's examination of the impact of parent social networks as predictors of involvement indicated that parents benefited from the social capital derived from being a part of such networks; benefits included increased efficacy, knowledge, and skills. Walker et al. (2010) reported a conceptual model that provided insights needed to understand why parents may or may not choose to become involved (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). This model was based on the Social Learning Theory of Bandura (1986) and examined the parents' perceptions of their role, their ability, the outcome, the invitation to be involved, and the availability of other resources such as time, energy, knowledge, and skills.

Martinez, Thomas, and Kremer (1994) suggested that research on school choice could shed some light on why parents got involved in schools, as choice was viewed as a form of parent involvement that affects student outcomes. They suggested, based on their research of who chose and why, that parents' primary reasons for choice were education quality, followed by learning climate, discipline, and the general atmosphere of the school. School Choice, in theory, gave parents a wider range of options to influence the quality of their child's education but was not an automatic lever to increase parent involvement (Lee, Croninger, & Smith, 1994).

Parent motivation might be affected by the parent's sense of roles relative to personal motivation, invitation, and life context (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Hoover-Dempsey & Jones 1997; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). These three aspects of parent motivation might be further specified according to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997). Personal motivation could be seen as what Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) described as parental role constructs and parental efficacy. Parental role constructs referred to the "parents' beliefs about what they are supposed to do in their children's education," a parent's sense of responsibility (p. 2). Parental self-efficacy was, according to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997), "the extent to which parents believe that through their involvement they could exert positive influence on their children's educational outcomes," a parent's sense of empowerment (p. 2). Invitation referred to the origin of the invitation—whether it was a general school invite, a specific school invite, or a specific child invite—which they described as "parents' perceptions that the child and school wanted them to be involved" (p. 2). Life context examined the parent's perception of their time and energy, knowledge, and skills (Hoover Dempsey & Sandler, 2005). To effectively involve parents in the education process will not just require knowledge about why parents chose whether or not to engage, but educators must deliberately identify and remove barriers to parent involvement (Jesse, n.d ; Trotman, 2001).

#### *Parent Involvement and School Integration Nationwide*

Parent involvement had been widely accepted as being a positive force in children's education and related to the study of the motivations and expectations of parents engaged in the desegregation of Nashville public schools in 1957. Understanding

the motivations and expectations of these parents required an examination of parent involvement across the desegregation process as a whole. According to Anderson (1988), African Americans emerged from slavery hungry for an education and the opportunities it held. Even while enslaved, Blacks found ways to learn to read and write under the cloak of darkness. Society debated how much education was necessary for African Americans, if any at all. Throughout this discourse, the impression established for African Americans was that they were docile and not attuned to what they needed. This idea was soon shaken to its core as Blacks began to demonstrate that they had very clear and concrete ideas about what being educated would mean for their future. Blacks viewed education as the vehicle to self-improvement. Further, as opportunities such as those that came with the Civil War emerged, Whites were astonished at the Black man's thirst for knowledge and appetite for learning.

According to Jarmon (1994) African American parents had always borne some level of responsibility for ensuring their children were educated whether in formal or informal schools. The impetus for parents' involvement in the act of securing an education for their children had always been a priority for parents, who engaged a variety of mechanisms to accomplish this goal (Jarmon, 1994). As education involved schooling, many parents utilized tutors, sent toddlers to "dane schools" for ABCs, joined other parents, supported subscription schools, sent their children to mission or charity schools, or voted in town meetings to support schools on a year to year basis through a combination of parental fees and town support. Some parents simply did nothing. This resulted in families with wealth and race having a strong influence on how much formal education a child received. Early on, the influential—usually males who owned property

—thought it best to leave the issue of education in the hands of families and churches (Tyack, 2001).

While African Americans were not usually found to be among the affluent, according to Fairclough (2007), African American parents sought to secure an education for their children by contributing their available resources as needed and to the degree possible. African American parents often contributed to the cause of education by supplying labor to build or repair schools, and providing such things as fuel for schools. The Negro Parent Teacher Associations (NPTAs) raised money for supplies. Private sector supported by sympathetic White contributors was also crucial to funding education for African Americans. African Americans performed as singing groups, such as the Fisk Jubilee Singers, and relied heavily on Black churches to support the education of Black children. African American parents influenced the standards of education by exerting influence through the Negro PTA organizations, which communicated the expectations for teachers to serve as role models for their children. One example would be the expectation that teachers spent time with parents, engaged in community activities, and refrained from religiously offensive behaviors. African American communities viewed teachers as advocates of the community in the quest for education opportunities for Black children (Fairclough, 2007).

Stulberg (2008) suggested that schooling in the United States had always been about something other than just academics, and it had always served a number of political, social and economic purposes. As major institutions at the center of the country's economic and state building efforts and at the heart of many communities, public schools had historically been central sites of political struggles. As politically and

personally charged spaces, public schools had been institutions through which Americans had envisioned their future and dreamt their legacy (Tyack & Cuban, 1995 as cited in Stulberg, 2008). Schools, then, had always been about hope, or at least the promise of hope (Lewis, 2003 and Noguera, 2003 as cited in Stulberg, 2008).

As a further example of parental determination, Cooper (2005) found that the educational decision-making of mothers reflected their quest for equal educational opportunity, something that the majority of urban public schools and market-based school choice options failed to offer them. Mothers strived to gain the power, resources, and educational opportunities their children needed to compete successfully and advanced in society. Consequently, school choice making served as a form of sociopolitical and cultural resistance for these mothers.

As time passed, many African American families began to take legal action seeking better, equitable and convenient educational experiences for their children. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) led the fight to engage the legal authorities to put an end to state sanctioned segregation. The premise of the most notable litigation for equality of education, *Brown v. Board of Education*, was that desegregation of public schools would offer equal and better life opportunities for African American children (Bell, 1978; Burk, 1984; Green, 2004). Denying African Americans access to equal education opportunities had served to limit opportunities for African Americans to compete effectively with Whites in key social, economic, and political arenas (Nelson, 1978).

Research suggested that before, during, and after the 1954 ruling, parent involvement in the desegregation of schools focused primarily on litigation efforts to gain

access to quality education opportunities (Hiatt, 1994). Tompkins' (1978) review of various models used by communities to engage parents in the planning process for school desegregation shed light on how policymakers engaged or failed to engage parents and communities in meaningful dialogue in preparation for school desegregation. She noted that preparations vary from city to city and ranged from community input into the development of plans, to the community hearing about a plan designed by others. She highlighted three models; one was the school-initiated model, such as in Minneapolis where hundreds of hours were spent engaging parents and citizens, answering questions and being sensitive to their fears and concerns. A second model was categorized as situations where school officials were responding to court-ordered integration, the engagement of parents and communities was less than enthusiastic, and where parents and communities were engaged primarily to ensure a peaceful implementation of a desegregation plan (de Forest, 2008). A third model was the court or community initiated engagement process.

Brown and Muigai (1983) cited another instance such as in the Dalton Public Schools, where school administrators and the school board solicited parents' input, opinions and assistance in the planning process, through meetings with parents and community groups, the use of Hotlines, and mass media campaigns to facilitate two-way communication during the design phase.

Regardless of the method used to design desegregation plans across the nation, desegregation of schools was primarily accomplished through busing African American children out of their neighborhoods (Pride, 2000). Busing, according to Kimble (1980), might contribute to an even greater gulf between home and school. Over time, however,

as school districts began to seek unitary status, there had been a reversal in the trend to use busing, and school boards begin to resort to redistricting so that students were able to attend neighborhood schools. A return back to neighborhood schools had been touted as the vehicle to boost community attachment to schools, encouraged resource sharing, and increased parent involvement and social capital (Goldring, Cohen-Vogel, Smerkar, & Taylor, 2006).

Despite the inconsistent involvement of the parents and communities in the planning of school desegregation, African American parents had a history of supporting education (Edwards, 1993). Edwards (1993) asserted that prior to the desegregation of schools, African American parents were an integral part of the education process. Parents, teachers and principals were a part of the same social structure, where parents felt comfortable inserting their opinions about education, and schools welcomed and responded to their input. Parents, teachers and communities shared ownership of the children's future. Together they fostered the notion of high expectations and the value of a quality education (Bell, 1978; Edwards, 1993; Halberstam, 1998; Walker, 2000). Walker (2000) further noted that African American parent involvement from 1866 through 1930 highlighted several forms of involvement, such as "founding new schools, providing financial and other support to existing schools, organizing institutions and using existing institutions to support education, petitioning governmental agencies, convening conventions, participating in demonstrations and school boycotts, and using lawsuits to achieve educational equity" (pp. 257-58).

Edwards (1993) noted that overall, things changed with desegregation. Policymakers in their discussions of desegregation largely ignored African American

parents' voices. At the same time, integrated schools held the notion that African American parents did not support and reinforce their children's school achievement.

*Parent Involvement and School Integration in Tennessee*

Tennessee, like other southern states, grappled with efforts to desegregate schools and, like other states, failed to include African American parents in the discussion and development of the plan ("Massive Resistance," n.d.). School integration in Tennessee was fraught with many of the same ills as in other states, cities, and communities across the nation. Tennessee was one of seventeen states along with the District of Columbia where segregation in public schools was required by law, and intervention was required from federal courts (Mauney, 1982).

At the time of *Brown v. Board of Education*, Tennessee had an uneven distribution of the Negro school-age population in the state. Some regions in the eastern part of the state had counties with no school-age Negro children, which created an imbalance in the state's school-age children and would make a statewide top-down approach to school integration impossible. The control of the public schools in Tennessee rested with the Local Education Agency in all 95 counties and 57 special and municipal school systems. Further, the Tennessee Constitution of 1870 had on its books that White and Negro children were forbidden to be received together in the same school. Further, a 1925 statute passed by the legislature provided local school boards in the counties the authority to designate schools that students should attend, but expressly prohibited school boards from allowing White and Negro children to attend the same schools. The same prohibition was issued again in 1931, when the junior and senior high schools were established. Tennessee's existing state statutes would eventually be challenged by the

*Brown* decision; however, Governor Clement stated that as the Supreme Court had handed down this law but invited states to participate in further deliberation, there would be no change to the Tennessee school system in the near future. Tennessee, like other states, saw smatterings of efforts to integrate public schools prior to the *Brown* decision (“Massive Resistance,” n.d.).

The process of school desegregation in Tennessee rested primarily with policymakers, school boards and activist groups. Parents were not marshaled together to provide input in the process. Parents participated in the desegregation in Tennessee primarily as litigants. During the period from 1952 to 1980, parents were provided the option to send their children to all-White schools through the “freedom of choice” plan, a plan that placed the burden of integration on Blacks. This “freedom of choice” plan was later determined to be an unacceptable method of desegregation, as in the 1968 case of *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County*. These plans failed to adequately integrate schools and was soon challenged and rendered unconstitutional (Brown & Valk 2004; Howard, 2007; Mauney, 1982).

Just as *Brown II* relinquished to the states the responsibility for desegregation, Tennessee relinquished to the local school boards the responsibility for desegregation (“Massive Resistance,” n.d.). Mauney (1982) reported that 90 school districts in Tennessee implemented “441 plans” after complaints were filed in the Department of Health Education and Welfare. He further stated that in Tennessee most of the school districts did not face court challenges to integrate their schools; 25 school boards ended their dual systems voluntarily. Nonetheless, segregation policies of 32 school boards were at one time or another brought before federal judges. Litigation to accomplish

school desegregation was supported by findings from the Tennessee Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights (2008), which reported that 29 active school districts in Tennessee were involved in desegregation litigation. The first case was in Anderson County, Tennessee, when African American parents used the federal courts to challenge the lack of high-school education for African Americans in the county. In August 1950, African American youths who were eligible to attend Clinton High School attempted to enroll but were rejected by school officials. In December 1950, a group of citizens filed a lawsuit, which became known as *McSwain et al. v. County Board of Education of Anderson County, Tennessee*. The lawsuit received its hearing on February 13, 1952, in the U.S. District Court of Knoxville, with Judge Robert L. Taylor, who in April of the same year ruled in favor of the Anderson County Board of Education (Van West, 2002).

The years following the *Brown* decision found Tennessee, like other Southern states, grappled with the “how” of integration. Even as a few laws were overturned and African American parents and students enjoyed small victories, they were often fraught with trouble (Belknap, 1987; Halberstam, 1998). African Americans also continued to petition for enrollment to public state Institutions of Higher Education at Memphis State and Murfreesboro Teachers College. Other schools such as the University of Tennessee and the University of the South had opened their graduate schools to African Americans (“Massive Resistance,” n.d.). Even so, local school boards independently grappled with the issue of the “how” of school integration across the state. In Chattanooga, Tennessee, the school board was the first to come up with a definite plan to integrate schools; the plan included parents and the community. Chattanooga’s plan indicated its intent to

comply with the law and stated it would be careful to engage the widest possible counsel from the community to determine the best possible method for achieving integration, one that would be fair and just for all. Their plan included the appointment of an interracial advisory committee and provided opportunities for other groups of citizens to present for consideration their viewpoints and proposals. Hearings were held to allow both individuals and groups to contribute to the planning process.

*Parent Involvement and School Integration in Nashville*

The state's first large urban city to integrate was Nashville, Tennessee. In the midst of turmoil, resistance—primarily from white anti-integration organizations, including parents opposed to desegregation—and litigation from African American parents, Nashville began a multi-year planning process to integrate its schools (Egerton, 2009). According to the “Massive Resistance,” (n.d.) article, no formal attempts or structures were designed to solicit parent and community opinions for the design of the plan until late summer, when Nashville's first public discussion in the Negro community took place. Some 100 parents gathered to hear speakers who primarily encouraged them to cooperate as a safeguard against trouble. They were encouraged to go with the idea of cooperation and have faith in the school board.

African American parents' involvement in the politics and planning of school integration centered on the engagement of group efforts such as those by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which provided the legal expertise in school related court cases, and by the Negro Parent Teacher Association (NPTA). These groups were usually engaged by school communities to build interest and

support from the African American communities for the proposed integration plans (Holden, 1958 ; “Massive Resistance,” n.d.).

Initial attempts to integrate schools in Nashville were seen on the K-12 and the post-secondary levels. According to the “Massive Resistance,” (n.d.) article, the first attempt to integrate Nashville public schools post-*Brown* came on June 10, 1954, when two Fisk University professors petitioned the Nashville School Board for the enrollment of their children to a single-race school. These were both White professors seeking to enroll their children in Negro elementary schools, rationalizing that these schools were the closest to their homes. Both were denied enrollment by Negro principals who cited the Board of Education directives prohibiting enrollment of children of a different race until a plan was developed by the state. The father of one of the children was also the vice president of the Tennessee Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and threatened a lawsuit (“Massive Resistance,” n.d.).

The Catholic Diocese of Nashville announced that it would open school in the fall of 1954 on a non-segregated basis, and the NAACP petitioned the Nashville School Board to do the same (“Massive Resistance,” n.d ; Pate, 1981; Ramsey, 2008). Although the Board refused the request, it did appoint a special committee of four to study the matter. *Kelly v. Board of Education of Nashville* was one of the most prominent and long running legal battles for school desegregation in Tennessee (Mauney, 1982; Sarvis, 2003).

According to the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights Report (1977) the initial action that sought school desegregation had little immediate impact, and efforts for the next decade were slow and of minimal impact. Several years later, parents’ attitudes

toward integration were divided along racial lines: white parents wanted things to remain as they were while African American parents favored integration and wanted a “quality education.”

According to Frankenberg (2007), research demonstrated benefits of integrated schools. Parents agreed that integrated schools held benefits for students relative to the acceptance of people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds and believed it was important for children to learn about other groups. They felt that diversity produced a higher quality of education for their children. Other research demonstrated the benefits of parent involvement, which included how to involve parents and why parents chose to become involved. This study’s focus was on the combined subject, specifically related to why parents chose to become involved in the integration of Nashville Public Schools in 1957, and examined several parent involvement models that might contribute to the answers.

#### *Typologies and Models of Parent Involvement*

Research supported the claim of improved academic outcomes when parents were involved, yet it did not limit this involvement to a one-size-fits-all model; rather, it suggested that the models used by schools should be customized to the needs of a particular school (Luneberg & Irby, 2002). Further, Luneberg and Irby, 2002 examined a variety of models that offered strategies that might be useful as schools design parent involvement models. Some models include: Gordon’s systems approach, the Systems Development Corporation study, Berger’s role categories, Chavkin and Williams’ Parent involvement roles, Honig’s early childhood educational model, Jones’s levels of parent involvement, Epstein’s typology, and the minority language parents approach. Luneburg

and Irby (2002) suggested strategies that were suitable for all levels, from the school readiness level through high school.

Moore and Lasky (1999) examined the parent involvement models of Epstein, Ogbu, Comer, Cummins, and Hargreaves and noted that these models all provided scaffolding in which collaborative relationships between parents and teachers could develop. While they each had their strengths and needs, they all shared an important common concept, which was the practice of effective two-way communication between home and school. Further, Cakiroglu (2004) highlighted the Family School Relationship Model, which outlined those features of the family that enhanced school success and posited that the family had the most immediate connections to school success because it had the greatest influence on students. Though there were many models of parent involvement available for use by schools, according to The Home and School Partnership Page, two have substantiated much of the prior research in the field with their models: the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's work, which focused on the "why" of parent involvement, and Joyce Epstein's framework, which focused on the "how" of parent involvement.

The Epstein Framework provided a structure for how schools could design a scaffold approach to parent involvement and stressed a school and family community partnership concept (Epstein, 1995). It included school-based and home-based processes. Epstein outlined six types of activities schools could focus efforts on to increase parent involvement:

Type I: Parenting—Focused on helping parents structure home environments that support student learning,

Type II: Communicating—Focused on strategies for effective two-way communication,

Type III: Volunteering—Provided opportunities for parents to volunteer in school-based activities,

Type IV: Learning at Home—Provided both information and strategies parents could be use to help students at home with school work and other school related functions,

Type V: Decision Making—Engaged parents in decision-making processes at school; developed parent leaders and representatives,

Type VI: Collaborating with Community—Integrated community services into the school to strengthen school programs and family practices that supported student development.

The Epstein model had been adopted by state education agencies and built into state policies in many places; one such state is Hawaii. Epstein’s typology and terminology permeated much of the literature on parent involvement in middle schools research (National Middle School Association, 2000). As well, Epstein’s typologies provided the principles upon which the National Standards for Parent and Family Involvement were based. Despite the need to know how parents could be effectively engaged in school and student education, there was also the need to better understand “why “parents may or may not choose to become involved in the academic development of their child. To learn more about this aspect of parent involvement, the revised work of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) was critical. This model examined the parents’ perspective of parent involvement.

The Hoover-Dempsey model consisted of five levels of parent involvement. Level 1 included Personal Motivation, Invitations, and Life Contexts and was bridged to Level 2 by parent involvement forms. Level 2 discussed Parent Mechanisms of Involvement. Level 3 identified encouragement, modeling, reinforcement, and instruction as Mediated by Child Perception of Parent Mechanisms. Level 4 looked at Student Attributes Conducive to Achievement, and Level 5 addressed Student Achievement. These five levels cascaded from Level 1 to Level 5, and the success of each subsequent level was contingent on the success of Level 1; therefore, Level 1 will serve as the theoretical foundation of this study.

Level 1 had three guiding principles: Personal Motivation, Invitation, and Life Context. Personal Motivation highlighted Parental Role Constructs and Parental Efficacy. Invitation discussed the General School Invite, the Specific School Invite, and the Specific Child Invite. Life Context dealt with the Parent's Knowledge and Skills, Time and Energy, and Family Culture.

Role construction was an important psychological factor of motivation for parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Walker et al., 2005). The role was based on parents' beliefs about what they should do relative to the child's education. The role construct was the guiding principle for parents relative to "who" should be responsible for the child's education as well as whether education was a "shared" responsibility between home and school. Role construction was a social phenomenon based on beliefs and was grounded in a social context that evolves from self-expectations, the expectations of others in significant relationships, and the expectations of society in general (Hoover-Dempsey & Jones, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et

al., 1987). Role construction focused primarily on whether parents believe they should be involved in their child's education. The level of the parent's role construct was related to the parent's level of self-efficacy (Green et al., 2007).

Self-efficacy, the second element of parents' motivation to become involved in their child's education, was the belief in one's ability to behave in such a way as to produce a desired outcome (Hoover Dempsey et al., 2005). The role of self-efficacy positively connected to the parent's decision to become involved and persist until the endeavor was achieved (Waanders, Mendez, & Downer, 2007). They further suggested that the decision to get involved was determined by the far-reaching thoughts of success or failure. Parents who did not perceive themselves capable of accomplishing selected tasks will be less likely to commit to them (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987). According to Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005), efficacy, like role construction, was a socially based construct and was influenced by personal experiences, school, family and other relationships.

Invitation was very important if the parent's role construction was low and self-efficacy was weak. Invitations from important others at school could serve to improve parents' beliefs about their involvement and about the effects of their involvement. Three types of invitation impacted parent involvement: general invitation, teacher specific invitation, and child specific invitations. The school environment (culture and climate) had influence on parents' ideas about parent involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). According to Green et al. (2007), the general school invitation reflected the culture and climate of the school. It communicated the overall feeling of warmth and openness that signaled the overall attitude that parents were valued, welcomed, and expected. Further

reflective of an attitude of a welcome environment were the daily school responses and management practices that served to support the school climate and culture. Trust was an outgrowth of a positive and inviting school climate (Green et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

As well as the general school invitation, there was the school-specific invitation, which, for the purpose of this discussion, will be referred to as the “teacher” invitation. The teacher parent involvement practices as communicated by specific invitations to parents to get involved had a greater influence on parent involvement than the general school invitation, according to Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005). Teacher invitations to school programs, school conferences, helping with homework, etc. were credited with having a great impact across all grades and demographics (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Lupiani, 2004; Walker et al., 2010). Teacher invitations expressed a sense of concern about parents’ need to know how their children were doing in school. These invitations contributed to the development of trust in the parent-teacher relationship and served to empower parents as they engaged in two-way communication across time. They also signaled the teacher’s desire to partner with the parent for the benefit of the child. Such invitations signaled that the teacher valued the contributions of the parents, which might serve to improve parents’ role construction and sense of efficacy over time (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Yet another invitation that research highlighted as important was the invitation for involvement that came directly from the child to the parent. Hoover- Dempsey et al. (2005) explained that the invitation from the child promoted increased motivation for involvement. The specific child invitation appeared to resonate with the parents’ innate

desire to be responsive to their children's needs, as they developed and matured as well as to see them become successful. This research further suggested the invitation from the child to the parent might vary from a direct invitation to a school function and a direct request for assistance, to a parent's awareness of a need the child was experiencing and election to become involved, since parents often responded to the unspoken needs of children. Because parents tended to have a general wish to respond to children's needs, an explicit invitation also served as an opportunity for parents to respond positively to students needs.

Life Context highlighted the elements of Knowledge and Skills, Time and Energy, and Family Culture. According to Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005), life context involved elements of parents' lives that competed for the demands placed on parents and impact their general welfare. These elements might be characteristic of one's socioeconomic status, but in this model they were limited to those elements of the socioeconomic status that might be impacted by school structures and how they function as they related to parents and the design of parent involvement programs. These had been identified as knowledge and skills, time and energy, and family culture. Recognizing that schools cannot respond to all related socioeconomic status issues, Hoover Dempsey et al. (2005) identified these as critical to understanding parent involvement decisions and recognizing the impact socioeconomic status had on affording parents the opportunity to be involved.

Parents had a personal view of what level of knowledge and skills they brought to bear on their child's education, and the parents' personal perception of their own assets tended to direct the parents' level of involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Parents

tended to weigh the likelihood of success against their self-perceived set of knowledge and skills. There appeared to be a correlation between their perception of how adequate their skill set was to positive outcomes and their level of motivation to engage in their child's education. Parents with low perception of their knowledge and skills relied more heavily on other support systems such as family, friends and other resources they perceived to have adequate knowledge and skills. Further, their self-perception weighed heavily in their decision to get involved (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Time and Energy was the second element that the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) model of parent involvement highlighted as a critical life context element that explained why parents may or may not get involved in their child's education. Green et al. (2007) suggested that time and energy were coupled together as life context skills that influenced parent involvement because they were connected to parents' perception of other demands on these same two factors. These factors were also connected to other family issues, such as work responsibilities and demands on their time and energy from other spheres of life. Parents might in general had less control and less flexibility over these two elements than other elements and might not have the family support systems to offset some of these demands, which could allow for more involvement in their child's education.

The third element of life context was family culture and might serve as an umbrella to the other life context variables of knowledge and skills and time and energy. Understanding family culture was critical for schools to consider as they sought to build strong family-school connections. The research suggested that schools must have a healthy respect for family culture. They must respond to family culture and family

circumstances in positive ways in order to build meaningful partnerships. Elements of motivation and life context could be definite barriers to parent involvement in schools for these parents. Additionally, other barriers such as language, understanding school expectations, policies, conflicting values, and perceptions of empowerment, all could serve to impede parent involvement and to decrease parents' motivation to become involved (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

*Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST)*

Spencer's chapter in *The Handbook of Child Psychology* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.) (2006) entitled, "Phenomenology and Ecological Systems Theory: Development of Diverse Groups," suggested that the PVEST acknowledged both the contemporary and historical impact of social policy, such as *Brown v. Board of Education*, in the social, cultural, and political contexts for diverse youth and families. She went on to suggest that the theory's value came from its simultaneous attention to several crucial elements that impacted behaviors and decisions: multiple layers of the environment, normal human processes that unfolded in varied settings with multiple others, historical factors and social policy that were associated with long-standing and contemporary structural conditions, and social relationships and cultural sensitivity to the traditional ways the authentic everyday experience of human development in context was interpreted. It took into account the individual's perspective, or manner of interpretation, relative to a specific context and how it influenced the individual's processing of information about the environment.

According to Spencer (2006), PVEST was a life-span model of human development; as life unfolded over time, stage-specific coping outcomes contributed to the next period's level of vulnerability. PVEST was described as a system of

experiences, the interpretation of patterned outcomes (culture), which had important implications for group processes or individual supportive models for emulation. Being recursive in nature, PVEST exemplified the connectedness between individual characteristics and context interaction. Spencer went on to say that policy changes played a role in determining long-term youth experience. Furthermore, context and culture interactions impacted reaction.

The PVEST suggested that there were life Risk Contributors that impacted our self-appraisal processes, and these risk contributors produced stress that triggered a reactive coping method that could be maladaptive or adaptive. Though temporary, the reiterative process of engaging this coping method led to a stabilizing of coping responses in which we see the identity began to emerge. The emergent identity solidified itself into life outcome staged or coping products resulted in either adverse or productive Behavioral and Health Relevant Outcomes. The PVEST espoused that the life experiences of an individual served to shape the perception one had of one's self. Knowledge in-take and meaning-making were generally associated with the value one had of him or the perception of the value one believed others have of him. Further, these life experiences shaped how one gave meaning to and gauged the significance of abilities, physical attributes, behaviors and actions (Spencer, Dupree, & Hartmann, 1997). In addition, beyond the experience itself was the perception of the experience, which influenced the perception of self. Perceptual processes were determined by the social-cognitive process and determined the way one developed variant responses at different developmental stages of life (Spencer et al., 1997). Resulting meaning-making processes included the responsive coping methods or corrective problem-solving strategies pursued

and were grounded in the current life-stage, summed up by life-experiences that had served to shape perceptions of self and the significance of one's abilities, attitudes and behaviors, and activities. These conditions contributed to decision-making regarding whether to engage or not engage in activities and extended beyond the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) model, which placed these beliefs and attitudes in the realm of personal motivation and self-efficacy as drivers of motivations to get involved.

Spencer et al. (1997) noted that as context-linked corrective problem-solving occurred corrective action on the part of the participant becomes repetitive, and this constancy of actions shaped up as a stable coping response and marked and identified the sense of self—of who you are—and influenced reactions to varying cultural contexts across the life span of the individual. It further influenced whether one will use or downplay certain abilities, draw attention to or away from certain physical attributes, adopt or suppress certain behaviors, and engage or shy away from certain activities. The current question was how self- perception organized the behaviors, thoughts, and actions for the parents engaged in the 1957 desegregation process in the Nashville Public School system, as they participated in this life threatening and life-altering decision (Egerton, 2009). Understanding how these parents' life experiences evolved over time and shaped their perception of their ability to resist responding to the antagonistic crowds at the previously all white schools will be paramount in understanding their motivations and expectations for engaging in this process. This theory will help to deepen the understanding of how these parents processed or made sense of this experience for themselves and for their children.

Supporting the PVEST, Bandura (1978) as cited in Spencer et al. (1997) suggested that self-system development was reciprocally determined from self-others appraisal processes, that was, what one thought others thought of him, and was linked to stress. Stressful situations required a response. One must determine whether a reactive coping response had its intended effect, and we tended to look to others to gauge our actions and ourselves. He went on to say we will have either a maladaptive or an adaptive reaction or corrective problem-solving response to stress, reactive or stable.

In addition, relative to self-organization, resilience was the ability to utilize self-regulating tendencies during sensitive periods or in response to negative feedback. Understanding the parents' responses was critical to understanding why these parents elected to participate in the desegregation process. Self-organization was determined by both context and the phenomenological experience of race, gender, physical status and other factors. Lewis (1995), as cited in Spencer et al. (1997), stated that emotional and cognitive appraisals of the environment influence the moment-to-moment patterns of self-organization. As these situational response patterns manifested themselves as personality structures, one was considered stabilized. PVEST extended the self-organization into the larger realm of society, highlighted the feedback from the environment especially as it related to Risk Contributors, to explain the interactive effects of culture and context with life span ontogenesis.

#### *Parent Involvement in School Integration in 1957 vs. Traditional Contemporary Parent Involvement*

Juxtaposition of parent involvement in the context of the 1957 Nashville public schools desegregation program over against traditional contemporary parent involvement

highlighted a contrasting set of decisions and behaviors required of parents. Traditional contemporary parent involvement, with its varied definitions, could easily be misconstrued to convey the idea of involvement in school-based and home based activities designed specifically to address student success in school (Trotman, 2001). On the other hand, parent involvement as the subject of this study involved parents deciding to take a calculated risk to engage in life threatening social activities—to participate or not participate—in the initial desegregation process of the public schools in 1957 in Nashville, Tennessee (Egerton, 2009). The primary focus of this study of their involvement was the examination of their decision to engage in this process. It was a study of why they elected to become involved, what led to that engagement, and what expectations they held for their children.

### *Summary*

To better understand the motivations and expectations of the parents who persisted through the first year of the integration of the Nashville Public Schools in 1957, parent involvement was examined from an historical and policy perspective that allowed for the better understanding of the purpose, motivations, barriers, and impact of parent involvement on student education and development outcomes. It was also important to understand the roles parents, especially African American parents, played in the development of one of the most critical aspects of improving education—the integration of schools—listed as the most viable way to equalize education and life outcomes for African American children. Lastly, the examination of various models of parent involvement supported the understanding of the complexities of parent involvement and supported the parent involvement model that provides the theory of action for this study.

The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's Model of Parent Involvement (1995, 2005, revised), as the conceptual framework for this study, offered a set of succinct characteristics that were associated with the research questions relative to the motivations and expectations of the parents involved in the desegregation of schools in Nashville in 1957. This study sought to explore, from the parents' perspective, the motivation and expectations of individual parents who participated in the initial year of integration in Nashville Public School in 1957.

## CHAPTER 3

### Methodology

#### *Introduction*

This study utilized the qualitative research design to explore the motivations and expectations associated with parent involvement in the integration of Nashville Public Schools in 1957. It investigated why parents chose to become involved in their children's education during this initiative.

#### *Qualitative Research*

Qualitative research was an investigative process that was descriptive in nature and designed to provide an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, in this case, that of parent involvement. For this study, the goal of qualitative research was to shed light on a situation to enhance understanding and connections between similar situations (Hoepfl, 1997). Smith (1987) posited that qualitative research was empirical. According to Ambert, Adler, Adler, and Detzner (1995), qualitative research must be explicit and detailed about strategies in order to ensure rigor was evident.

According to Hoepfl (1997), qualitative research had certain characteristics that differed from quantitative research, so that qualitative research lended itself more to descriptive, expressive and interpretative aspects of natural settings. In qualitative research, the researcher had the role of "human instrument" in the collection of data. Qualitative research relied upon inductive rather than deductive reasoning. There were no preconceived notions about outcome or hypotheses to be proven or disproven; the theory tended to emerge from the research itself. Peshkin (1988) suggested that qualitative research was designed to allow for the understanding and grasping of complex

phenomena and might range in nature from very complex, multifaceted ethnographic studies to a single, in-depth case study. He suggested that the role of the researcher in qualitative research was to develop or deepen understanding. He also pointed out that qualitative research, like quantitative research, withstood the test of validity and reliability. It must demonstrate trustworthiness through applied triangulation processes. Qualitative research design provided the opportunity to illuminate phenomena from the perspective of the local population it involved. It was particularly suited to developing an understanding of culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social context of particular populations (Family Health International, n.d.).

According to Ambert et al. (1995), the results of qualitative research should contribute to our understanding, challenge or enlarge an existing theory, and be presented in such a way that the readers see the evidence from which the researcher drew inferences and conclusions. Likewise, validity and reliability must be assured. Validity could be obtained through the triangulation of data from multiple sources and methods of data gathering. The researcher might also use the “member validation” technique, whereby the respondent was provided with a copy of the completed interview to provide feedback (McRoy, n.d.). Reliability checks could be accomplished through comparative methods of checking each datum or case against the selected theory or conceptual framework (Ambert et al., 1995).

Ambert et al. (1995) further discussed sampling and ethics in qualitative research. Sampling might be dependent on the type and purpose of the study. Studies designed to make generalizations to the concept or theory could be achieved through small samples that might be generated by conditions such as access or other researcher imposed

parameters. Ethics were very important to the research process and might be accomplished by ensuring confidentiality by using pseudo-names as appropriate and engaging in honest and transparent research practices.

### *Case Study*

This qualitative research study was designed as a case study. Yin (n.d.) and Tellis (1997) noted that the case study design for qualitative research was gaining ground in its usage in education and had become an accepted method for doing education research. Yin (n.d.) and Soy (1997) further described case study as being best suited for research that was descriptive or explanatory in nature. Soy (1997) noted that case studies were complex and might involve multiple cases that might be useful to build on current theory, challenge current theory, or produce new theory. Case study research might also be used to further explain a situation, provide applicable solutions to situations or explore and or describe an object or phenomenon. Yin (n.d.) also suggested that case study designs could be involved a single case to be studied or a multiple-case study approach. Narratives in case studies, help to make sense of the experience, construct meaning and communicate meaning. Further, it draws on and is constrained by the culture in which it exists or is embedded (Chase, 1995, 2003). Tellis (1997) noted that the case study method did not require the researcher to have a minimum number of cases or to randomly select cases, but rather to work with the selection that presented itself for each case. Tellis (1997) further suggested that while a single case approach weakens the researcher's ability to make generalizations about the findings, the findings should be generalized to the theory rather than the population.

While case studies were designed to answer descriptive or explanatory questions, they should carefully be designed for the purpose of triangulation.

This study used the multiple person case study method. The multiple person case study approach as described by Soy (1997) required that each case be treated as a single case; however, each conclusion could then be used to contribute to the findings of the whole case. This case study was based on Chase (2003) narrative case development process to construct participants' stories in a Narrative Case presentation format. In this study, data was collected from parents known to be still living and who were accessible to the researcher. These parents were a subset of the African American parents involved in the first year of the integration process in Nashville Public Schools in 1957. To identify a population for the integration of schools, Nashville Public Schools engaged in the process of rezoning school boundaries to identify African American families with students entering first grade in 1957. Based on the account given by Egerton (2009), the rezoning process identified 126 African American families eligible to participate in the integration process. Many of the 126 eligible parents sought and received immediate transfers back to their segregated schools. Thirteen parents registered their first-graders for entry in the integrated schools on August 27, 1957; however, 19 students actually showed up for their new integrated school on September 9, 1957, the first day of school. Sixteen were admitted, and the other three could not be enrolled for technical reasons. On day 2, 11 of these students returned to the integrated schools, but only 9 persisted throughout the 1957-58 school year and returned for the second school year. In this study, data will be collected from four of the 11 identified parents known to be still living and who are accessible to the researcher. These four parents are a subset of the 11 African

American parents who persisted through the first year of the integration process in Nashville Public Schools in 1957.

Four of these parents were profiled in the case studies; however, participants had not been contacted, but they had been identified. The participants were four African American mothers and fathers who engaged in the process of school integration. The researcher identified each participant from a review of the literature as well as through other participants. Each participant was contacted by telephone and invited to participate in this study. A pre-visit was conducted, as permissible, to further explain the purpose, nature and process of the study and discussed the logistics of their participation. Participants were provided a synopsis of the purpose and use of the information to be gathered. Participants were asked to affix their signature to a letter of consent to participate in the study and to allow their information to be used in the written project. Following the conclusion of the second interview, the researcher reviewed with the participants their individual interview commentary prior to its inclusion in the study. Participants were provided an opportunity to clarify any information attributed to their individual interview.

The researcher collected data relative to these parents. The data was collected through several processes, including the interview, image elicitation, archival data, and a review of available personal papers. For the parents who were no longer living, the researcher relied upon secondary sources such as archival data and oral histories. Prior to the start of this study, the researcher sought IRB approval (see Appendix A). Due to the current historical public profile of the participants, actual names were used in this study. Participants were required to give consent for the publication of their names in this study.

The participation consent form signed by each participant was provided explicit information regarding the use of real names and participant information.

*Participants*

The participants in this study were four of the African American parents who were participants in the 1957 integration of Nashville’s public schools. These parents represented four families, four African American females and one African American male. Three of the four African American females did not work outside the home. They ranged in age from 70 to 92 years of age. They primarily represented dual parent homes. The selected parents continued to reside in Nashville, Tennessee. The four identified parents were selected based on their accessibility to the researcher. These four families were a subset of the 11 African American parents who persisted through the first year of the integration initiative in Nashville Public Schools in 1957 (Table 2)

Tablet 2

Participants

Participant	Age		Occupation	Family Unit	Student	School	Registered / Enrolled		Returned Year 2
	1957	2011					R	E	
Iridell (Hersall) Groves	22	76	Home-maker	Dual Parent	Erroll	Buena Vista	Yes	Yes	Yes
Maude Baxter	23	77	Nurse	Single Parent	Marvin	Jones	Yes	Yes	Yes
Harold & Sorena Street	29	83	Home-maker	Dual Parent	Lajuanda	Glenn	Yes	Yes	No
Mary L. (Hugh) Watson	38	92	Home-maker	Dual Parent	Barbara	Jones	Yes	Yes	Yes

The parents included in this study are:

Iridell Groves and Herschell (deceased) enrolled their son, Earl Groves, in Buena Vista Elementary School as one of 8 first-graders eligible through the rezoning process. Three of them registered on August 27, 1957, and actually enrolled on September 9<sup>th</sup>, and two (2) returned on day 2, September 10<sup>th</sup>, stayed the entire year and returned in year two, 1958. Iridell Groves was in her early 20s at the time of school integration and lived around the corner from the school. She was recently honored by the Freedom Sisters of Nashville, sponsored by the Ford Motor Company (Egerton, 2009).

Maude Baxter Moore enrolled her then 6-year-old son, Marvin Moore, as one of the 14 first-graders eligible through rezoning to attend Jones Elementary School. Four of them registered on August 27, 1957, and actually enrolled on September 9<sup>th</sup>; they returned on day 2, September 10<sup>th</sup>, and stayed the entire year. He was among the three children who returned in year 2, 1958 (Egerton, 2009).

Harold and Sorena Street, parents of Lajuanda Street, registered her as one of the 25 first graders eligible to attend Glenn Elementary School. She registered on August 27<sup>th</sup>, reported on September 9<sup>th</sup>, the first day of school, returned on day 2, and persisted throughout the year. Lajuanda also returned in year 2, 1958 (Egerton, 2009).

Mary Louise Watson is now 92 years old; she continued to reside in the same neighborhood and house occupied by the family in 1957. Mrs. Watson was married to Hugh W. Watson (deceased) and was in her early 30s during the desegregation process. The family was a two-parent home with 5 children: 2 girls and 3 boys. Only one of their children, their second daughter, was eligible to attend integrated schools in this initial year. Mary Watson was a stay-at-home mom who worked to supplement the family

income by taking in washing and ironing for whites who lived in the neighborhood. Losing her own mother at an early age and having to walk long distances from North Nashville to South Nashville—Cameron—to school in the winter time interrupted her ability to attend and complete school, so she left school as a youngster at the age of 12. Barbara Watson, their then 6-year-old daughter, was one of 14 first-graders eligible through rezoning to attend Jones Elementary School. Four of them registered on August 27, 1957, and actually enrolled on September 9<sup>th</sup>, returned on day 2, September 10<sup>th</sup>, and stayed the entire year. She was among the three who returned in year 2, 1958. She lost her husband when the children were small. She had since been the subject of documentaries and awards as a result of her involvement. She was recently honored by the Freedom Sisters of Nashville, sponsored by the Ford Motor Company Fund and the Smithsonian (Egerton, 2009).

### *Data Collection*

The primary data collection process included structured in-depth interviews using open-ended interview questions administered both in person and via telephone as needed. Seidman's 2006 Qualitative Interview protocol guided the interview segment of the data collection process. This interview protocol engaged participants in three-interview sessions about 90 minutes in length. Interview session one permitted the researchers to focus on the participants' life history; interview session two moved the focus to the details of the participants' experiences; and interview session three engaged the participants in the reflective process regarding the meaning of the experiences. In-depth interviews enabled data collection from individuals, focused on their personal involvement, behaviors, feelings and perspectives of the integration process. Interview

questions were developed by the researcher and submitted for approval (see Appendix D). The researcher conducted the interview process one-on-one with each participant individually. The interviews took place in the environment of choice for each individual participant, including the homes of the participants. With their permission, interviews were electronically recorded to ensure accuracy. When the participant might not be available for an in-person interview, interviews were conducted via the telephone. Telephone interviews were conducted for those persons whose schedule did not accommodate a face-to-face interview. Follow-up interviews designed to clarify and substantiate information were conducted with each participant. Each interview was expected to last approximately 90 minutes.

For the purpose of determining the motivations and expectations of parents engaged in the integration process of Nashville Public Schools in 1957, the researcher also examined public archival records inclusive of print, video, oral histories as well as, collect and review documents from the era that included the subject of the integration initiative. Thirdly, the researcher utilized image elicitation processes with participants' personal papers and other documents owned by participants, where available (Thygesen, Pederson, Kragstrup, Wagner, & Mogensen, 2011). This information was gathered from the participants themselves and from the Nashville Public Library, Special Collections—the Nashville Room, the Civil Rights Collection.

### *Data Analysis*

The aim of the data analysis process was qualitative research using the “social anthropology” approach, which lends itself to case study design was to provide rich descriptions across multiple data sources. It aimed to look for patterns of human

behaviors in data. This involved sifting, coding and sorting data as it were collected, and follow up analysis with ongoing observations and interviews designed to explain and refine patterns. As was mentioned in McRoy's (n.d.) discussion of qualitative research, careful attention must be given to the design, procedures and analysis of data. This study utilized the structured interview approach technique to collect data from identified participants. The structured interview allowed the researcher to ask all the participants the same series of standardized questions; these questions were created prior to the interview and were asked of participants in a manner consistent and common in each interview session (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006)

Data was gathered from primary sources, participants, first hand information such as the testimony of an eyewitness, original documents, and interview notes—thoughts and impressions gathered during the interview process. Secondary sources, second-hand information, such as a description of historical events by someone not present when the event occurred, were examined. The most important primary data will come from the interviews.

The major primary sources were collected from individual participants. Primary data was collected from the individual interviews during taped interview sessions of not more than two hours in length. Pertinent sections of the interview were transcribed to written format and were supplemented with interview notes.

Interview questions were grouped by categories for data retrieval purposes. Further, they were aligned to the research questions relative to the motivations and expectations of parents engaged in the desegregation process of Nashville Public Schools in 1957. Data reduction was conducted to ensure manageability and to retain a focus on

the research questions. To accomplish this, the researcher engaged in various processes to compare, contrast, sort, and order data, looking for patterns, links and relationships that supported the categorization of data into themes or domains. This recursive process might also lead to follow-up or review interviews to clarify or strengthen the results.

Initially, data was reviewed, organized and grouped by the following pre-determined categories of the parent involvement concept model of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 1997, 2005, revised): role construction, invitation, and life context. Following this categorization process, the data was examined to identify themes coded as follows: 1 = role construction, 2 = invitation and 3 = life context. Themes might be collapsed or expanded as determined by the data as it was examined. The coding served to make the mounds of data more manageable and enabled the researcher to more succinctly relate it to the research questions. Coding of the data was descriptive and provided for labeling, sorting and retrieving data in a manageable fashion. These data was reviewed, organized and grouped according to both pre-established themes and those themes that emerged from the collected data. These themes were reviewed to determine their relationship to the research questions, other respondents' views, oral histories and document reviews, as well as to the conceptual model guiding this study and to the reviewed literature. Each case was treated as a single case. The data from each case was summarized independently. These data findings were summarized as a unit to inform the conclusions to be drawn from the study. The data presentation summary was provided in narrative case format, which presented the alignment of the interviews with field notes, image elicitation, the document review and the literature review to components of the

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) Parent Involvement and the Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) concept models.

Data was also gathered from secondary sources. Secondary sources as described here included second-hand information, such as a description of historical events by someone not present when the event occurred—in this case, oral histories and other public and personal historical documents. Capturing this data required the researcher to review transcripts of oral history tapes for the purpose of identifying themes corresponding to the data collected through the interview process.

To accomplish this process, the researcher completed the identical process for data analysis as conducted with the interview processes. Specifically, initial data was reviewed, organized and grouped by the following pre-determined categories based on the parent involvement concept model of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler: role construction, invitation, and life context. Following this categorization process, the data will be examined to identify themes coded as follows: 1= role construction, 2= invitation and 3= life context. Themes were collapsed or expanded as determined by the data as it was examined. The coding served to make the mounds of data manageable and enabled the researcher to more succinctly relate it to the research questions. Coding of the data was descriptive and provided for labeling, sorting and retrieving data in a manageable fashion. These data was reviewed, organized and grouped according to both pre-established themes and those themes that emerged from the collected data. These themes were reviewed to determine their relationship to the research questions, other respondents' views, oral histories and document reviews, as well as to the conceptual model guiding this study and to the reviewed literature. Each case was treated as a single

case. The data from each case was summarized independently. These data findings were summarized as a unit to inform the conclusions drawn from the study. The data presentation summary was provided in narrative case which presented the alignment of the interviews with fieldnotes, image elicitation, the document review and the literature review to components of the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) Parent Involvement and the Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) concept models.

### *Limitations*

One limitation of this study was that information gathered from a small group of participants engaged in the quest for social equality in education in 1957 might not be generalized to the larger audience of today's parents. Further confounding the issue was the perception parents today might have about their role in the task of educating their children. Likewise, the context of the parent involvement in 1957 was different from that of today and might not provide information that could be seen as relevant to the parents' need to get involved to ensure a high quality education for African American students.

Several other limitations impinged upon this study. The nature of this study involved factors related to the recollection of the events experienced by the parents who were actual participants in the 1957 integration process of Nashville's public schools. These parents now range in age from 70 to 92 years old and might suffer from health issues that could affect how succinct and coherent their recollections of the events of 1957 were. Factors such as mental acuity, recall, and fatigue impacted both the collection of data and the interview process with some of the participants. Consideration must also be given to the fact that reflections of these events might be somewhat emotional and

strenuous for these parents as they recall the difficulties of the time, thereby impacting the accuracy and consistency of the information gathered through the interview process.

### *Delimitations*

Because this study investigated parent motivations for engaging in the desegregation process, it was limited to the initial year of school desegregation in Nashville; that was, 1957. This study was limited to the parents of 1957 first-grade students. According to Egerton (2009), 11 parents persisted throughout the 1957-1958 school year; this study was limited to a subset of these 11 parents. It was limited to profiling this subset of parents directly involved in the initial school desegregation process in order to gain information related to parent involvement and motivation.

The researcher was also cognizant of the fact that the social context of parental involvement—in this particular instance, high stakes for both the individuals and the communities vested in the initial integration of public schools in 1957—was different from the context of contemporary parent involvement issues. However, it was assumed that factors such as parent choice represented commonalities that served to inform general parent involvement practices in today's schools. Therefore, this study served to communicate general suggestions about why parents may or may not be motivated to get involved in the education process but was limited in providing a set of specific principles that could be characterized as a guiding structure on which to build sound parent involvement initiatives.

This study did not seek to answer questions related to the impact of parent involvement, nor did it seek to discuss the effectiveness of particular strategies for parent involvement; rather, it sought to provide better understanding of why parents chose to get

involved in their children's education. The intended purpose was to gain a better knowledge and understanding of how to think about the various aspects of parent involvement when structuring parent involvement programs.

Lastly, relative to researcher bias, this study could be influenced by the researcher's familial relationship with some of the participants. The researcher must guard against self-perceptions and the researcher's predispositions in interpreting the findings impacting the research method and data analysis. Also, the emotional memories this study evoked within the participants could influence the outcomes.

### *Summary*

The three-fold process of data collection—interviews, document analysis, and image elicitation—provided a level of reliability, and supported the triangulation process to substantiate the findings. This use of the qualitative research method, utilizing a descriptive approach to gain insight into the motivations and expectations impacting parent involvement in the Nashville Public School Desegregation process in 1957, was designed to provide a better understanding of factors that influence and motivate parents of today to get involved in their child's education.

## CHAPTER 4

### Research Findings

#### *Introduction*

This chapter contains the findings and analysis of data. Data from this study were gathered from four surviving participants of the 1957 Nashville Public Schools integration process. The participants were selected based on their current availability and willingness to participate in this multi-case study process.

A review of the research questions, a summary of the research methods and a brief description of the participants along with a synthesis of the findings from the sources of data collection are presented in this chapter. The data that were collected enabled the researcher to study what led the parents to participate in the Nashville Public Schools 1957 integration process and to persist throughout the first year of integration. Findings from this study will highlight the parents' perspective of why they participated and will shed light on elements of parent involvement programs that may be of benefit to policy makers, school practitioners, parents, and students in today's urban schools.

#### *Research Questions*

This study examined the motivations and expectations of African American parents who placed their first-grade children in integrated schools during the first year of integration of the public school system in Nashville, Tennessee in 1957. This study was guided by an overarching question and two sub-questions.

#### *Overarching Research Question*

Why were the African American parents of the 11 students engaged in the integration of the Nashville Public School system in Nashville, Tennessee in 1957?

### *Sub-questions*

1. What led the African American parents of the 11 students engaged in the integration of the Nashville Public School system in Nashville, Tennessee in 1957?

2. What were the expectations of the African American parents of the 11 students engaged in the integration of the Nashville Public School system in Nashville, Tennessee in 1957?

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) and Spencer's (1995) A Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST)—influenced by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems—serve as theoretical models to guide the interpretation of findings for this study.

### *Summary of Methodology*

Qualitative research employing the multiple person case study method was used for this study. Each case was treated as a single case; however, each conclusion was used to contribute to the findings of the whole case. In this study, data were collected from parents known to be still living and who were accessible to the researcher. These parents were a subset of the African American parents involved in the first year of the integration process in Nashville's public schools in 1957.

Prior to conducting the research, IRB approval was sought and granted for this study which resulted in an IRB Approval Letter. A Sample Consent Letter (Appendix A) was also approved. Each participant received a pre-visit designed to further explain and describe the purpose and nature of the study, present credentials—IRB Approval—outline the process, establish the interview site, set a calendar, schedule the interviews and secure signatures on the Consent to Participate form (Appendix B). Each participant

was provided a copy of the questions to be used in the interview process (Appendix C). The interview protocol consisted of three individual interview sessions designed to be 90 minutes in length. Interviews were conducted in the participants' home. Interviews were electronically captured with the participants' consent. Pertinent segments of the interviews were transcribed for analysis purposes. Data was analyzed as described in chapter three and information was used to build an individual narrative case on each participant, which resulted in a cross-case analysis presentation of the data findings.

The researcher collected data through several processes, including the interview, archival data, and image elicitation from available personal papers. Participants were engaged in three 90-minute individual interview sessions conducted in their homes. Interviews were conducted during the Fall of 2011 and were audio recorded to ensure accuracy. Pertinent sections of the audio recording were transcribed, coded, and analyzed to address the research questions. Transcripts were compared to document analysis, image elicitation notes, and field notes to identify relevant themes and respond to the research questions. Image elicitation notes and field notes were recorded during the interview sessions. The response to each question, the field notes, image elicitation, and document analysis data were aligned with each research question. Data were coded and charted to identify recurring themes. These themes were then aligned to the pre-determined themes outlined from the theoretical model of Hoover Dempsey and Sandler, 2005, revised. Further, similar themes were collapsed to make the data more manageable. These themes were then summarized and synthesized to draw conclusions needed to answer the overarching research questions and each sub-question.

### *Brief Description of Participants*

The participants included 4 African American females and 1 African American male who ranged in age from 70 to 92 years old. Due to the current historical public profile of the participants, actual names were used in this study. Participants were required to give consent for the publication of their names in this study. The participation consent form signed by each participant provided explicit information regarding the use of real names and participant information.

These four parents were a subset of the 11 African American parents who persisted through the first year of the integration initiative in Nashville Public Schools in 1957. The parents included in this study are:

Iridell Groves and Hershall (deceased), who enrolled their son, Erroll, in Buena Vista Elementary School as one of 8 first-graders eligible through the rezoning process. Three of them registered on August 27, 1957, and actually enrolled on September 9<sup>th</sup>, and two returned on day 2, September 10<sup>th</sup>, stayed the entire year and returned in year 2, 1958. Iridell Groves was in her early twenties at the time of school integration and lived around the corner from the school. She was recently honored by the Freedom Sisters of Nashville, sponsored by the Ford Motor Company Fund and the Smithsonian (Egerton, 2009).

Maude Baxter Moore enrolled her then 6-year-old son, Marvin Moore, as one of the 14 first-graders eligible through rezoning to attend Jones Elementary School. Four of them registered on August 27, 1957, and actually enrolled on September 9<sup>th</sup>; they returned on day 2, September 10<sup>th</sup>, and stayed the entire year. Marvin was among the three children who returned in year 2, 1958 (Egerton, 2009).

Harold and Sorena Street, parents of Lajuanda Street, registered her as one of the 25 first-graders eligible to attend Glenn Elementary School. She registered on August 27<sup>th</sup>, reported on September 9<sup>th</sup>, the first day of school, returned on day 2, and persisted throughout the year. Lajuanda did not in 1958, year 2 (Egerton, 2009). Mrs. Street later became a teacher in the Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools.

Mary Louise Watson, who is now 92 years old; she continues to reside in the same neighborhood and house occupied by the family in 1957. Mrs. Watson was married to Hugh W. Watson (deceased) and was in her early 30s during the desegregation process. The family was a two-parent home with 5 children: 2 girls and 3 boys. Only one of their children, their second daughter, was eligible to attend integrated schools in this initial year. Mary Watson was a stay-at-home mom who worked to supplement the family income by taking in washing and ironing for whites who lived in the neighborhood. Barbara Watson, their then 6-year-old daughter, was one of 14 first-graders eligible to attend Jones Elementary School. Four of them registered on August 27, 1957, enrolled on September 9<sup>th</sup>, and completed the first year. She has since been the subject of documentaries and awards as a result of her involvement, including the Freedom Sisters of Nashville Celebration, sponsored by the Ford Motor Company Fund and the Smithsonian (Egerton, 2009).

### *Presentation of Data*

Data presented in this section through the individual Narrative Cases and the Cross-Case analysis are inclusive of data collected from the structured interviews with each participant, field notes which were incorporated into the interview responses, document analysis of public and private records, and the image elicitation process. Data

findings are interwoven to tell the story of each participant and answer the question, “Why were the African American parents of the 11 students engaged in the integration of the Nashville Public School system in Nashville, Tennessee in 1957?” The findings are represented in each story as guided by the way the participants spoke in their Narrative Case. The participants’ language was allowed to remain as spoken, to reflect the fidelity of the participants’ voice.

#### Narrative Case 1

##### Iredell Groves

#### Choosing Equality: Parent Participant in the Initial Desegregation Process in Nashville Public Schools—1957

Mrs. Groves was a 24-year old homemaker and mother of 5, with a high school education when she and her husband, Hershall (deceased), enrolled their six-year-old son in the previously all white school. Mrs. Groves described herself as “not much of a talker” and suggested throughout the interview that her husband was the one out front engaging in most of the conversation. Since her biological mother was a domestic worker, at around the age of 9 years old, much of the homemaking responsibilities fell to young Iredell, including being caretaker of an older and younger brother daily after school. She was taught to be independent and emerged from this childhood as a very determined and independent woman, traits that served her well as she participated in the desegregation of Nashville Public Schools in 1957.

*Choosing Buena Vista because it was closer to home: the school was in the neighborhood*

Mrs. Groves and her husband, though having already registered Erroll at his zoned all-Black school, learned of the opportunity for Erroll to attend the previously all-

white school closer to their home and immediately made the decision for him to do so. The all-Black school he was zoned to attend was on Eighth Avenue, some distance from their home. To get to that school meant Errol would have to maneuver several very busy and dangerous streets. Because it prevented Erroll having to walk across these two streets to get to and from school, Mrs. Groves saw this new school opportunity as a wonderful thing. The family did not need to discuss it with anyone, and they did not participate in community meetings to be persuaded to participate; it was just the most intelligent decision to make and they did so:

*I registered on the day school started, because I had already registered at Elliott--I had already just registered him at Elliott. I think--let me see, school started in September--I think the best I can remember, it was in August and I might be kind of wrong on the day of the month or something, but I think it was about August.*

*No, not that I can remember, not that I can remember--it's been a long time, some years ago. My husband and I talked about it and we talked about the school was in the neighborhood, and where he was zoned to go was on Eighth Avenue, and that particular area, he would have had to cross Eighth Avenue to get to the school; it was dangerous and since they decided to integrate the schools, it was best for him to go to the neighborhood school. We decided that, and that was the way it was and what I was thinking [they had better books]. [Also] if I could not pick him up, then he did not have far to go; he could just come around the corner across the street and he'd be at home. I guess it was about two blocks.*

*I walked him to school and picked him up every day for the whole year. There may have been a few days that I would drive and pick him up. I learned to drive, so some*

*days I drove and picked him up. I would go get the car from my husband; I would carry him to work, and then I would pick Erroll up from school. I wanted Erroll to go to Buena Vista because it was closer to home.*

*Better Education—a gift to be the kind of person that he wanted to be in life: they just had more than the blacks did*

Mrs. Groves saw this also as an opportunity to provide for Erroll the educational assets previously denied African American children—it was generally believed that the whites' schools had more and better books than the blacks' schools. Mrs. Groves believed that simply being present in the same classroom with the White students had its advantages for her son. She recognized that it would likely not be possible for teaching to take place in the integrated space in such a way as to leave her son out of the learning process. She spoke very frankly about the resources perceived to be unavailable to Black schools but present in the White schools.

*Well, I think by him going to integrated schools, I thought maybe that that would give him more of a gift to be the kind of person that he wanted to be in life. I wanted him to get the kind of education that everyone else had, something more, and so I was willing to make the sacrifice, yes. Yes, it was just true, it's true, and then I think back when I was in school, you know, and I was taught, but I just knew, well, I really didn't know, but I just thought maybe that by him going to the school where the white kids were, they just had more than the blacks did in their schools, and I wanted him to have that. So I believed that I could make that happen by participating in this process, yes, I did. I thought maybe that he would learn more by attending [the integrated school] because of the kids--the white kids had more books, and they have more books than the black kids. I*

*felt that he would learn more, and they would teach him more by him being in there with the white kids and everything. Because they had to teach; whatever they taught them, he had to learn from it, too, so they would be teaching him also.*

*To get a better learning at the school: I bent down so I could get past them*

Mrs. And Mrs. Groves immediately took full advantage of their right—under the law—to attend integrated schools; so they participated in the desegregation process. Without hesitation and without consultation, this family recognized the advantages of Erroll attending the previously all-White school. The Groves probably recognized the long-term impact attending integrated schools could have on future opportunities for Erroll. Though maybe not in specific terms, in general, however, it would likely suggest that he was a better educated African American than his counterparts who had not attended integrated schools. To ensure his success, Mrs. Groves had the sole responsibility of getting Erroll to school safely each morning. She walked him to and from school daily. Each morning for a period of time, Mrs. Groves would walk Erroll through large, jeering, taunting crowds of white protesters carrying hate signs touting the separation of the races with Bible verses and often attempting to block their entrance into the school building.

*It was our right. They [the officials] had been talking about it. They really had not made it official. They had been talking about it, but when they did make it official, I just knew that this is where I was going to carry him. I did not discuss it with my neighbors or anything; I had just made up my mind. I wanted him to go to that school. I didn't want him to go down there to Elliott, crossing the dangerous street. Plus, I knew he was going to get a better learning at the school.*

*They [protesters] were trying to block the door and keep us from getting in the school. They didn't want me to come in, so when Erroll and I walked up the steps, they were blocking the door of the school, because we had to go up the steps of the school. So they blocked the door, standing in front of the door. So when Erroll and I went in, we had to bend down and go in the door like that (bending over), we couldn't stand up straight, we had to bend down. I bent down; Erroll didn't have to, but I bent down so I could get past them, going into the school*

[There was a determination to take advantage of the opportunity presented by the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, which had made attending integrated schools a real possibility for African Americans.]

Mrs. Groves' narrative depicted a kind of self-determination often found in pioneers or first responders. Her story communicated a sense of quiet, unassuming tenacity as she employed various non-combative coping mechanisms to accomplish her goal of getting her son into the school building daily. Throughout the discourse with Mrs. Groves, it was evident this is the story of a great mom that wanted something better for her son, a woman who had courage enough to go through—all the way through—not as a hero, but just being a proud mom who wanted something better for her son. While disappointed that more first grade parents did not participate, she would not be swayed from participating herself. In her story, she constantly referred to “not being afraid” and having no fear about participating or about going to and from school daily with her son. The discourse makes it clear that Mrs. Groves operated with a sense of silent defiance, courage, determination and tenacity, which she credits to her upbringing in a single

family home. Mrs. Groves, at 76 years old, currently continues a career as a caregiver in a private childcare agency.

## Narrative Case 2

Maude Moore

Obeying the Law First: Participation in the Initial Desegregation Process in Nashville

Public Schools—1957

Mrs. Moore began her story by highlighting her parents' education. Though Mrs. Moore's family did not attain post-secondary education status, she saw her mother's high school educational attainment and her mother's involvement in education through Parent Teacher Association (PTA) activities as significant accomplishments to be emulated. The ownership of the responsibility a parent has to the education of their children is evident throughout this dialogue with Mrs. Moore. Her sense of self and her determination to accomplish her lifelong goal were echoed consistently throughout this discourse. She spoke of how Nursing was from her heart—it was “my thing”—and she did it with pride. Serving many years as a nurse in various capacities, Mrs. Moore was able to draw upon a compassionate and calm disposition, so as to engage in the desegregation process of Nashville Public Schools in 1957. Mrs. Moore, a 20-year-old mother, worked as a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) at the time of the desegregation process. The same determination that kept Mrs. Moore on track to fulfilling her lifelong dream to become a nurse was a driving force enabling her to participate in the desegregation process without wavering or fear. Though not an activist, as such, Mrs. Moore recognized the nature of the opportunity that was before African Americans for the very first time. Being from a strong family, she understood what was legally the right thing to do, which was, as she

stated, to “follow the law.” Further, she recognized this would provide to her son the host of advantages that accompany an equal opportunity to a firsthand, high quality education, the same moral right as the white children had.

*they said it was the law: it’s safer—they don’t slow up, and that’s what made me go there*

Ms. Moore’s discourse indicated that her decision to send Marvin to the neighborhood school was not predicated on whether other families in the neighborhood would take advantage of the opportunity. She spoke emphatically of her intention to follow the law, make sure her son was able to get to and from school safely, have access to a better education, and observe what was to her the right thing to do.

*Well, when the thing came about it, when it was time for him to start his school, the government had passed a bill or law that you could go to any school in the neighborhood. But at first Marvin was supposed to go to Wharton School, which was in a dangerous situation, for them to have to travel so far on a busy street to try to get to Wharton. But we all were getting them ready to go there because we were going to have to walk with them or drive them to school or something until they learn well on their own. But then this law came up. I wasn’t paying any attention because I knew that Marvin was supposed to go to Wharton, but then they said it was the law that you go to the closest school in your community, and Jones School was the closest to us. Now, I need to add something about the walk they would have to take to get to Wharton. Across 18th Avenue—that was very busy—you never know who’s going to be going too fast for a child to cross the street, cause they don’t slow up, and that’s what made me go there. [Wharton] wasn’t as high or as good a level as the whites: he would be more advanced than we were*

Throughout Mrs. Moore's dialogue was the constant theme of the integration process as an opportunity for the African American students to have higher quality firsthand education. She focused her examples primarily on the quality and quantity of books available to African American students. It appears that her personal segregated education experiences had prepared her to fight for an opportunity for her son to achieve at a more advanced level. Mrs. Moore often compared her perceived level of learning to what she expected to see Marvin attain; each time, she expressed the belief that by attending integrated schools, Marvin would be learning at a higher level than that at which she had she learned. Mrs. Moore described interacting with a neighborhood family who also engaged in this process and whose child attended the same school; however, their interaction was not as a matter of determining whether to participate and persist through these years.

*I knew that when we were in school, books were not the best. We did not have the up-to-date books to learn like the kids in the white school, and that was a buzz to me. Well, he will be better off in that situation than going to Wharton, which I know is not as sufficient as these other schools were. We always got the books that white schools had had a year or two before us because their names were in the book sometimes. We learned, but it wasn't as high or as good a level as the whites were getting, [so] I thought that he would get a better learning than we did. I thought he would have the opportunity to learn firsthand. When I was in school we had secondhand books, we would get the old books from the white schools, and I figured that the books would be on the level for him to learn. They were ahead of us, and we were held back because we didn't have the books. I felt like he would be more advanced than we were. I felt that it would go a long*

*way, and as he got older, he would know how to do things that's ahead of us because he would have that teaching that we were held back from. Things we didn't get until we were about in the fourth grade of our learning, you know, with the books and all, and I just felt like that this would be a help to him. Mrs. William and her son said the effort was worth it to get him a good education.*

*something that needed to have been done years ago: it was better for the kids—the time to show them that we were ready*

While Mrs. Moore did not elaborate extensively on the movement itself, throughout her discourse was threaded the notion that time was past due for the schools to be integrated. She noted it as her civic duty to participate in this process of change. Mrs. Moore's interaction with threatening callers demonstrated her commitment to improve things for her son and her disposition that we are all equal. She often used medical analogies from her work regarding blood types and spiritual examples to dispel the myth of white superiority.

*Now that part I feel good about, we were doing something that needed to have been done years ago. They didn't talk to us about it [the desegregation plan]; first it was in the paper and on TV that it was going to take place. They emphasized that word law. They probably figured some of them wasn't going to do it because they were afraid of protesters. But I didn't think of the protesters myself; I just knew that it was better for the kids and whatever it took to go, I was going with a free mind. Yes, [I feel good about what I have done] I really do, and yes [I would do it again] because I feel like it is my citizen's duty to do it. I think that if they had let us know when they first passed the law for us to go to school, we could have been in there fighting for it [before 1957], but for us*

*it happened right on time because our children were getting ready to go to school. That was the time to show them that we were ready for it. And then I think that's why it did go off as well as it did.*

Mrs. Moore's narrative depicts a strong-willed, self-directed African American woman and mother. Mrs. Moore's story suggests the possibilities for all mothers. It provides inspiration and hope. It speaks to being determined and not allowing for or accepting limitations from yourself or others to construct the boundaries of one's life. Mrs. Moore conveyed a message of informed participation in the process of gaining and providing an education for her son and society as a whole. This is the story of a successful African American family steeped in culture, beliefs, traditions and the faith to persist through uncertain times, highlighting the need to act on one's beliefs in a way that supports changes for the greater good of self and society. It revealed the strength of parents to make personal and family sacrifices, to take advantage of promising or promised opportunities, and to make a difference in society. As a 77-year-old retired Registered Nurse of 40 years and a 17-year veteran caregiver in the Foster Grandparent Program, Mrs. Moore continues to stress the importance of standing up for personal rights and making one's voice heard.

### Narrative Case 3

#### Harold and Sorena Street

#### Joining In: The Initial Desegregation Process in Nashville Public Schools—1957

Mrs. Sorena Street, an 87-year old African American female and retired school counselor began her story by describing her birth family as being steeped in education and a belief in the power of education to change lives and circumstances. Her immediate

focus on the educational legacy of her father, who in 1969 was probably one of the first blacks to get his masters from the University of Michigan, suggested her pride in the family's educational heritage. Mrs. Street proudly conveyed the principle that obtaining an education was an expectation in their family. Throughout the interview, Mrs. Street's family's educational pedigree was illuminated as she discussed the education they sought for their child by participating in the integration process of the Nashville Public Schools in 1957. Mr. and Mrs. Street's shared powerful stories related their participation in the process regarding why they elected to participate in the genesis of this new process.

*Glenn was just right around the corner: something that should be done*

As conveyed by Mr. and Mrs. Street (mostly Mrs. Street), throughout the narrative was the enticing opportunity to attend school in their community, which was closer to home and safer. Previously this opportunity appeared to be out of reach for African American families.

*In 1957, I had one child in first grade and one in second grade. The reason we separated them--my first two children, who are very close together, one year and three days, they were both born in February, so naturally they were very close--was because I (we) felt that it was the right thing to do. We decided that we would allow her [Lajuanda] to go with some other children in the neighborhood to Glenn [School] because it was closer than Meigs was at that time. Then the way the streets were arranged, they had to cross a railroad track--they were too close to catch the bus, so they had to cross the railroad tracks--to get to Meigs, but yet it wasn't that far away. And Glenn was just right around the corner, just across the street [from where] we lived on North Fifth. And yes, decided that it was close and she could walk. Well it [September 9, 1953] [the first day of*

*school] was a pretty day; they walked up to the school, and she smiled and looked like she sees the camera. She thought the jeering crowd was actually a parade. As I stated, we were interested in her attending the school that is in her community, the nearest school, that was our intention. Well, especially at that particular time, I considered it something that should be done, and that we had a daughter at that time, and to be able to go to school, and to be able to walk to school in the neighborhood without any trouble or anything [was the reason.]to have an excellent education by going there: new books, excellent libraries and facilities,*

*and . . . excellent teachers . . . a superb, superb education*

Central to the belief of the nation as a whole and for African Americans was the suspicion of disparaging inequities between the high quality of education afforded white students in segregated schools and the absence of such quality in segregated black schools. These inequities were attributed to the nature of the resources, primarily books, and facilities. Mrs. Street acknowledged attending the neighborhood, all-white, school as an opportunity for the girls to have a ‘superb’ education, yet another reason to participate in the integration of the Nashville Public School system in 1957.

*And, then you begin to wonder if maybe there might be some other reasons that there would be for her to have an excellent education by going there because you had always heard that things were better, things the others had. Then you must think in terms of the era, the year that this took place. [From] everything you heard, students in the white schools would have new books, excellent libraries and facilities, and we thought, excellent teachers. Because this era that we lived in at that time lifted up anything that was of the other race as[being] superb to our race, because African American schools*

*would have to wait for their textbooks or they would get the used text books, and, well, we thought that she would get a superb, superb education. As they were called, we were called Negroes at that time, in a sense, they were kept from attending better schools, and theirs has got to be so much better than what we had. It is kind of like an experience into the unknown. You know, the grass is greener on the other side kind of thing.*

*you wondered what would happen here: something that we had to do*

The Streets' belief in the right to attend the community school factored into their decision to participate in the integration process of Nashville Public Schools in 1957, which required them to separate the Street girls, who Mrs. Street described as being "very close" both in biological age and emotionally. The commitment to take advantage of the opportunity offered by *Brown v. Board of Education*, coupled with the desire to access the perceived better educational opportunities, made it the perfect time to strive for change in a system that had been anything but 'separate and equal.'

*I felt like it was something that should be done, being that we had a daughter at that time, to be able to go to school and to be able to walk to school in the neighborhood without any trouble or anything. Frankly, being integrated at the time, I didn't consider that so much as a big thing, as being more or less the ability for our daughter to have to walk to school rather than walk across the tracks. As the subject came up in the neighborhood that pushed me too to help try to get this done. At that time we had heard how the kids were treated down in Arkansas--that was common on the news and everything--and you wondered what would happen here, especially with little kids.*

*One segment of the Nashville Blacks was pushing it along, but it wasn't a citywide thing at that time, and so therefore, you know, our little neighborhood where we were*

*stayed at that particular time. We had folks who were people who were educated and came out of Tennessee State and Fisk and things and were just able to buy houses in that neighborhood where we were staying, so that kind of helped to get the word around.*

*As I remember, Mr. Griffith's older daughter had applied to attend East High School two years before or something like that and was denied. The Griffiths joined in the Kelly v. Board of Education litigation to desegregate Nashville Schools. And that's when the integration thing first began in our neighborhood. And so I felt like it was something that we had to do, at that time. At that particular time, it wasn't because I thought she would be better educated than where she would have gone to school, but to be able to walk to school and to be able to get her to school safely and everything. I thought we had done just about everything that we could to get her prepared for school, and at that particular time as we got into [it], the integration move was coming along much faster, so that made you think a little bit more about it, and well, it didn't seem like things were changing that much. Now see, I remember going to hamburger places and having to stand to get the hamburger; I couldn't sit down and eat it. These were some of the things that needed to be changed at that particular time. I felt it was the right thing to do at that particular time.*

The Streets' decision to participate in and persist through the first year of the integration process was explained by them as seeking to attend school in the neighborhood, and gaining access to a better educational opportunity for their daughter, coupled with the belief that this change was necessary and the opportunity was available, recounting segregated experiences from childhood that may have served as an impetus for their involvement. Like other participants, they were proud to have played a small

role; they felt like it was worth it and that it made a difference for both races as well as opened doors beyond education for African Americans. The Streets, like other participants, expressed very strong feelings about participating and indicated they would likely be more involved if they had it to do again than they were in 1957. The Streets' story conveyed a message of informed participation in the education process for their daughter and society as a whole. This is the story of a successful African American family steeped in the tradition of education, acting on those beliefs in a way that supported change for the greater good of self and society. It revealed the strength of parents to make a difference through personal and family sacrifices, laying claim to a promising or 'promised' opportunity.

#### Narrative Case 4

Mary L. Watson

#### Inalienable Rights: Participating in the Initial Desegregation Process in Nashville Public Schools—1957

Mrs. Watson began her discourse with the description of her husband as the “breadwinner,” a fact she reiterated throughout the story. She exuded pride in his having a job working in a company where he had enjoyed a position of stature, as the only African American person working in the company. She indicates he had a good relationship with other employees of the company who supported the family periodically by sending surplus supplies to Mrs. Watson to help the family with their basic needs. Unlike some of the other families, Mrs. Watson's job was not compromised or jeopardized by the family participation in the desegregation of Nashville Public Schools in 1957.

*the closest school for us . . . it was turbulent . . . you were scared to death: the right thing  
for the children*

The family had a stable home environment and welcomed the opportunity to attend the neighborhood school, partially because of safety and also to access a higher quality education for the children. The decision was not a hard one for Mr. and Mrs. Watson. They were more concerned about how to create the opportunity for Barbara's older sister to go with her to the newly integrated school. The family, through counsel, determined that attending the integrated school would be the best decision because it was close to home and was thought to offer a higher quality of education; as well, they could see no reason why their children should not be able to attend the neighborhood school.

*We had a cousin that was a principal at Wharton, and I can't think of his name right now . . . but anyway, he [Mr. Watson] and the professor talked a lot because they were cousins and when the desegregation time came, we talked to him about whether we should take Nay [Nadene] out of Wharton and enroll her in Jones so Barbara would have somebody to start with, and they said " naw" [no] that would be the wrong thing to do, so let Nay [Nadene] stay where she's at and let Barbara go to Jones" and so they did. Well, at that time, why that was the closest school for us and of course it was a turbulent time but we had made up our minds that we were going to let my daughter go, so we stuck to it and went ahead on and tried to make the best of it.*

*Well, at that time, why that was the closest school for us and of course it was a turbulent time but we had made up our minds that we were going to let my daughter, go so we stuck to it and went ahead on and tried to make the best of it. So we just struggled through it and with God's help we made it. So it wasn't easy, it wasn't anything you really*

*was all excited to do. You might have been excited but you were scared to death: but each day was a new day, and you would just pray for a better day, so we was just doing what we knew, we felt, was the right thing for the children. People were all in an uproar, for what I really don't know, but it was a change and everybody was not accustomed to change, so we went on and as time went on, it got a little better.*

*a better opportunity to understand and mix and see: get the same education and be exposed to the same teachings . . . even the balance*

Like the other participants, Mrs. Watson saw attending integrated schools as an opportunity to provide for Barbara Jean the educational assets previously denied African American children. Mrs. Watson, expressed the trauma of participating in this process, but because of the opportunities afforded the African American children, Mrs. Watson suggested that it was worth it. Through repeated utterances of thanksgiving for safety, her discourse continually referenced her faith. This suggested that Mrs. Watson is a woman of strong faith and relied on that faith to participate in this process.

*Well, it [integration] was something different happening and we thought it would be a better opportunity [for the children] to understand and mix and see, and we always thought that the white kids got a better education than the black kids, so if they were going to the same place maybe we will get the same education and be exposed to the same teachings. A lot of times they didn't have everything the white kids had in their school. And maybe that would provide them better materials, better books and all; maybe that would even the balance and they would have the same education and could go forward. I didn't want my children to be behind, because we felt like after going to school and all, we didn't have the opportunities and all like the others, like the white kids have*

*had, so we thought maybe we would have a better opportunity with our children by sending them to integrated schools. That was all the talk you know. What we were trying to do was something to better educate the children and to try to see that they had a better start, and it was closer. So we just decided and went on; by the grace of God, we continued.*

*for the betterment of the young kids: to see that they had a better start*

Not surprisingly, many of their white neighbors were not in favor of integrated schools and thought it was unnecessary. Most of their African American neighbors were silent on the matter; neither group's opinions deterred the Watson's from participating in the process. Mrs. Watson took great pride in the fact that they were purchasing their first home and felt that attending neighborhood schools should simply be a by-product of living in the neighborhood.

*It was a time and a challenge for us to try to do something for the betterment of the young kids' start into school. It was a time of change and I wanted--I didn't want my children to be behind, because we felt like after going to school and all, we didn't have the opportunities and all like the others, like the white kids have had, so we thought maybe we would have a better opportunity with our children by sending them to integrated schools.*

*What we were trying to do was something to better educate the children and to try to see that they had a better start, and it was closer. As far as I can remember, it was about helping to make it better for the children to have access to different types of learning and things of that nature.*

*We just made a plan and stuck with it, we just knew we had to make the best of it; it was emotional for all of us, but I figured we would be able to overcome. It was a stressful time for all of us because we were all scared, and you know we had our doubts and fears, but we had to just trust God and do what you thought was the best thing for your child and for her growth.*

Mrs. Watson's story is one of a faithful woman and her husband, both determined to do whatever it took to seize the opportunity to improve the future for their children. It tells of a mother who faithfully discharged her duties to her children and husband in a very traditional role and was respected and trusted by her husband to do so. Hers is a story of hope in what the future holds and faith in her ability to make it happen through her spiritual strength in God. Her story is marked with determination at every turn. She spoke of being very humble, very humble to have had the opportunity to do something that affects so many people in a positive way. She wonders whether she did enough. At 92 years old, she continues to stress that no matter what opportunities are placed before a person, individual determination is the key to success. Her story suggested that through faith, one must be personally responsible and accountable for one's own life.

#### *Cross-Case Analysis*

This study examined what led African American parents engaged in the integration process of Nashville Public Schools in 1957, from the perspective of four families that were a subset of the 11 families who completed the first year in the integrated schools. The participants in this study represented two-parent homes at the time of the integration process. Only one of the mothers was employed outside the home. The fathers worked a combination of federal government jobs and private industry

companies, the latter of which made them vulnerable and subject to sanctions from their companies for their participation. All of the families lived in single-family neighborhood homes. Their education levels ranged from eighth grade to post-secondary completion. The mothers in these families ranged in age from 20 to their mid 30s at the time of the desegregation process. The overarching research question guiding this research study was, “Why were the African American parents of the 11 students engaged in the desegregation of the Nashville Public School system in Nashville, Tennessee in 1957?”

Structured interviews with each family revealed their individual reasons for participating in the desegregation process; these will be combined to create a cross-case analysis to address the research questions. Individual participants’ narratives evidenced common stories told in similar ways related to the findings, which were: attending the school closest to home, seeking better educational opportunity, and supporting change. In all of the cases, safety was grouped with the proximity issue, and the one factor that was uniquely confined to one case was the notion of “following the law as the primary reason for participating.” In the third area, while the general theme was the same, the discourse was unique across each of the participants’ stories.

### *Connecting the Cases*

Overall, the participants cited as their primary reason for participation in the integration of Nashville Public Schools in 1957, that the previously all-white schools were closer to their homes; they were in the neighborhood and thus safer for their six-year-olds. A parallel finding was that they wanted to access better educational opportunities for their children. Often participants cited as evidence to justify their decision their belief and expectation that the resources in the all-white schools were

superior to the resources found in the all-black schools. With the exception of one participant, all participants compared the education they received to a level of education they hoped would be better for their children, noting that opportunities were linked to education. Additionally, all of the participants expressed their awareness of the need for change and their willingness to impact such a change in their unique way by participating in this desegregation process.

Without fail, within the first discussion of the desegregation process, each participant began to discuss the school location issue. Whether by design or not, most of the African American schools were located quite some distance from the families' neighborhoods and required the children to walk unsafe routes and distances to school. In families where there were older children, this may not have posed such a problem, but for these families most of the children were the first or second children and were likely first- or second-graders. Having the opportunity to attend school in their neighborhood would still require a walk, but not include crossing one or more major thoroughfares. This distance and safety factor alone made the prospect of the integrated school worth considering.

*Groves: My husband and I talked about it and we talked about the school was in the neighborhood, and where he was zoned to go was on Eighth Avenue, and that particular area he would have had to cross Eighth Avenue to get to the school; it was dangerous, and since they decided to integrate the schools, it was best for him to go to the neighborhood school . . . it was my responsibility to see that he got the education that I wanted him to have at that particular time. He was supposed to go to another school when this came about; that was on Eighth Avenue, and after they decided that they were*

*going to desegregate the schools, then Buena Vista was the best school for him to go to because it was closer to her house, about two blocks from the house . . . We rounded the corner; just before you get to the school, we had to go around the corner; I saw all these people everywhere... just everywhere and I really didn't, it really didn't hit me what was going on. As we got closer to the schools, and the name-calling and everything, the closer we got the more names was called, so I just kept walking, and I just said no, that's not me, that's not me, that's not who I am.*

*Moore: Marvin was supposed to go to Wharton school, which was in a dangerous situation, for them to have to travel so far on a busy street to try to get to Wharton. Now I need to add something about the walk they would have to take to get to Wharton, across 18th Avenue that was very busy. You never know who's going to be going too fast for a child to cross the street, cause they don't slow up, and that's what made me go there . . . I knew that Marvin was supposed to go to Wharton, but then they said it was the law that you go to the closest school in your community, and Jones was the closest school to us and that's what made me go there . . . In our neighborhood I don't think there were many other kids at that age to go and most of them that were in that neighborhood, the parents did enroll them in the schools closest to them. I guess they also felt like that would be better for them because going to that school was not as dangerous as going way up to Wharton.*

*Street: We were interested in her attending the school that is in her community, the nearest school, that was our intention. We decided that we would allow her [Lajuanda] to go with some other children in the neighborhood to Glenn [School] because it was closer than Meigs was at that time. Then the way the streets were*

*arranged, they had to cross a railroad track; they were too close to catch the bus, so they had to cross the railroad tracks to get to Meigs. But yet it wasn't that far away. And Glenn was just right around the corner, just across the street [from where] we lived on North Fifth. And, yes, [we] decided that it was close and she could walk.*

*Watson: Barbara would go to Jones. Well, at that time, why that was the closest school for us. Some [children in the neighborhood] went to Wharton and some went to Haynes, but since the opening came up for my child to go to Jones, my husband and I decided that we would take a shot at it and we did . . . we were trying to do something to better educate the children and to try to see that they had a better start, and it was closer.*

All of the participants saw it as advantageous and safe to enroll their child in the integrated neighborhood school closest to their homes. Research in general substantiated these parents' notion of attending schools close to home as a reason they chose to participate, even though some children did not complete the first year.

Defending the low enrollment of Negroes on registration day in August of 1957, one official explained: *there were four apparent reasons why those 58 children have not registered. One of which was that some did not register because their parents preferred that they attend the Negro school closest to their home* ("Take up books," 1957). One of the other participating parents, Mrs. Rucker, said, *"the reason I sent my child to the school was that there is no mother patrol for the nearest colored school [Wharton]. The child would have to cross the main street and walk along the street some distance where there is no sidewalk. The white school is closer"* ("First grade," 1957). These parents were consistent in their preference for neighborhood schools for their children, particularly for the schools' safety and convenience.

Educational opportunities were the second common sentiment among the study's participants, as they stressed a prevailing desire that their children have access to improved resources. Each participant expressed their thoughts about what they perceived as the difference in the quality of education afforded whites as compared with the education afforded blacks. There was a distinct belief that 'separate was not equal,' and these families conveyed a shared belief that to get the equal into education the students would need to be in the same school. Although one participant implied that the idea of a superior educational opportunity in the white schools may have been a bit misguided, the others apparently sustained a belief that the integrated school offered better educational outcomes for their children, as noted in their response to the question, "What did you believe your child would get out of attending the integrated school?"

*Groves: I thought maybe that he would learn more by attending [the integrated school] because of the kids; the white kids had more books . . . than the black kids. I felt that he would learn more, and they would teach him more by him being in there with the white kids and everything. Because they had to teach, whatever they taught them, he had to learn from it to; so they would be teaching him also . . . he talked about how nice she [the teacher] was and how nice she treated him and that she treated him like he she treated everybody else; she did not make the difference between him and the others.*

*Moore: I thought he would have the opportunity to learn firsthand; when I was in school, we had secondhand books, and I figured that books would be more on the level for us to learn, whereas we get the same type books, some of it, that the whites. They were ahead of us and we were held back because we didn't have the books. I felt that it would go a long way because I felt like as he got older he would know how to do things that's*

*ahead of us because he would have that teaching that we were held back from . . . yes, I felt like he would have a first hand shot at learning . . . and he would be more advanced than we were. Griffin, an employee of the US Justice Department, stated, "I want my children to get a good education, and this wasn't always available at the Negro school" [Moore, reading a newspaper article in her documents] ("Rocky Road," 1969). Both Mrs. Williams, another participating parent, and her son said the effort was worth it to get him a good education ("Rocky Road," 1969).*

*Street: Then you must think in terms of the era, the year that this took place; whereas everything you heard, students in the white schools would have new books, excellent libraries and facilities, and we thought excellent teachers. Because in that era, at that time, [it was] lifted up that anything that was of the other race was superb to our race, because a lot of schools would have to wait for their textbooks or they would get the used text books, and I feel that we thought that we would get a superb, just superb education . . . and it paved the way for all of these things, these other things which have been good for both races. Employment, as well as education . . . so that in itself, having that experience, would position her in life, future life.*

*Watson: It was a time of change and I wanted . . . I didn't want my children to be behind, because we felt like after going to school and all, we didn't have the opportunities and all like the others, like the white kids have had, so we thought maybe we would have a better opportunity with our children by sending them to integrated schools. What we were trying to do was something to better educate the children and to try to see that they had a better start, and it was closer. As far as I can remember, it was about helping to make it better for the children to have access to different types of*

*learning and things of that nature . . . I just want[ed] to get my children a decent education . . . Well, [my role was] to continue to have her going, and to teach her that she was going to learn, to not show out, and to try to accept what they gave and not to be a bully or anything like that. Just try to go to learn and get what she could so she could have a better education, and in a word be a good role model, not somebody they'd want to put out of school.*

As a like-minded unit, the participants saw attending integrated schools as both a vehicle to better educational outcomes for the children and an opportunity to change social practices between races. The families all recognized the integration process in the schools as signaling a change that would require willing participants. Said Mahlon Griffith, a Civil Rights activist in an interview with the author of *Nashville: The Faces of Two Centuries*, (Egerton, 1979) *"after the Brown Decision, my wife Mary tried to enroll our daughter Belinda at Glenn School near our home in East Nashville, but they wouldn't admit her . . . That was in 1955. So we became plaintiffs in the lawsuit against the Nashville Schools."* The school system offered immediate transfers to any parent who would choose to remain in their previously zoned segregated school. Having 126 first-graders identified as eligible, many of whom took advantage of the transfer policy, created the dilemma of how many African American parents would opt to have their children attend the integrated school in their neighborhood. In general, parents embraced the opportunity for change. A. Z. Kelly, being self-employed, was touted as a hero for stepping forward. He indicated he was no more a hero than anyone else but that this had to be done, it was time, and the only question was who would do it. *"The decision was relatively easy, says Kelly, because his son, Robert, had for many years asked him the*

question about why he could not attend the school down the street; now was the time and opportunity to change things. Kelly noted that in 1955, the NAACP encouraged lawsuits in many communities in the aftermath of *Brown v. Board of Education*. He realized as did many others that theirs was “the place to end segregation and we had the tools to do it with” (Ivy, 1979).

The participants in this study all phrased it differently, but they all understood their decision’s gravity for African Americans as a people, as well as the seriousness of their immediate choice. Phrases such as a “need to change the system,” “it needed to be done,” “it was necessary,” and “to do it was our right,” all spoke to the participants’ understanding of the impact their actions could and should have on society.

Groves: *It was our right. They [the officials] had been talking about it; they really had not made it official; they had been talking about it, but when they did make it official, I just knew that this is where I was going to carry him. I did not discuss it with my neighbors or anything; I had just made up my mind.*

Moore: *Now that part I feel good about; we were doing something that needed to have been done years ago. They didn't talk to us about it [the desegregation plan]; first it was in the paper and on TV that it was going to take place. They emphasized that word law. They probably figured some of them wasn't going to do it because they were afraid of protesters. But I didn't think of the protesters myself; I just knew that it was better for the kids, and whatever it took to go, I was going with a free mind . . . People make the vote, you just can't say that's right and be a stay-at-home; you better speak up so you can be heard.*

Street: *I felt like it was the right thing at that particular time. When the integration thing first began in our neighborhood, I felt like it was something that we had to do at that time. At that particular time as we got into [it], the integration move was coming along much faster, so that makes you think a little bit more about it, and well, it didn't seem like things were changed that much. Now see, I remember going to hamburger places and having to stand to eat the hamburger; I couldn't sit down and eat it. These were some of the things that needed to be changed at that particular time . . . we think about this period of time, this era; a lot of time when we applied for certain jobs, employment, we were told that we were not—how would you say this—properly prepared. Or made to feel that way, that we were not properly prepared to be called because there was a comparison between what we had and what we could see from looking over—even though we could not experience it by going to the place—that their things were, their libraries were, that [they] were just really star . . . At that time we couldn't even go to the public library, we couldn't go there. At that time, right over here at Centennial Park where you had the Parthenon, we couldn't go there except on special days, at special times. The Negro children, as they said, couldn't go there except on special occasions.*

Watson: *As far as I can remember, it was about helping to make it better for the children to have access to different types of learning and things of that nature. Well, it [integration] was something different happening and we thought it would be a better opportunity [for the children] to understand and mix. It was a time of change. In a letter from Mayor Karl Dean of Nashville, commemorating Mrs. Watson's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, Mayor Dean stated, "It took determination, faith and belief in how things ought to be for*

*you to enroll your daughter Barbara Jean in Jones Elementary school on the heels of the landmark Brown versus Board of Education court ruling. You didn't just consider yourself, you considered all Nashville children, thank you." I was really shocked to have received it, because once you do something, you think it's over. You say, 'umph' I wonder why . . . you wonder why you did it and you wonder what happened, what made you do it; just all kinds of thoughts come to your mind. You just don't know what to think, you look back and you say, "I don't believe how I did . . . and made it through" . . . and the children, we hope, are better off by it. The challenge seemed to be a matter of life and death at times. H. W. Watson, 2103 Twelfth Ave. N., said he had received "a gang of calls but they hang up when I answer." He said he would not have registered his child Barbara Jean in Jones school if he had not intended for her to attend school there ("First grade," 1957).*

There was general consensus among the participants that by choosing to participate, they elected to engage in the school integration in 1957 for like reasons, which were: attending neighborhood schools close to home, accessing better educational opportunities for their children, and supporting the law which dictated change. However, one of the participants reversed the notion of supporting the law by participating to that of following the law and participating. According to the participant, the first decision-point was to follow the law. Because it had become the law, there was not an option in her mind. She felt very strongly that no matter what the outcome of the law, it was her belief that she should follow the law.

In general, other African Americans, such as Mahlon Griffith, voiced similar thoughts about the decision to become involved in the initiative. Griffith, who worked for

the Post Office, felt somewhat secure in his job, but he also said of his own motivation, “*it was a strong conviction that my children should get an equal education*” (Ivy, 1979). According to Ivey, “*at that time most persons interviewed, mostly black citizens of Nashville and the county, believed such an education could not be achieved in their segregated schools, which most observers thought did lack the amenities available to white children*” (Ivy, 1979). “*We could see the conditions in our own buildings were clean but dilapidated,*” said E. T. Carothers (Carothers, 1979).

### *Data Analysis*

The data revealed three primary themes from the 4 African American parents who participated in the integration of Nashville Public schools in 1957.

Findings were consistent throughout the data. Overall, the participants cited as their primary reason for participation in the integration of Nashville Public schools in 1957, the desire to be able to attend schools closer to their home, the desire to secure a high quality, equal education for their children, and the desire to orchestrate societal changes that would eradicate separate and unequal rights for the African American citizen in education and other arenas. The data analysis will be discussed according to the finding relative to the three themes.

### *Attending Neighborhood Schools*

The schools that were in the neighborhood and closer to their homes were safer for their 6-year-olds to walk to daily. In the case of these participants, proximity to previously all-white schools was a motivating factor in their decision-making. The capacity to walk students to school safely was very evident throughout the data. A. Z. Kelly, the litigant named in the first legal action taken in Nashville to create equal

educational opportunities for African Americans, said “*the decision was relatively easy,*” because he had the chance then to answer his son, Robert’s, insistent demand for a reason “*he not attend the school down the street, now was the time and opportunity to change things.*” This appears to be the sentiment of the parents participating in this study as they recount their experience and seek to recollect their reasons for fighting to integrate Nashville Public School—it was closer! The parents spoke passionately about taking advantage of this opportunity.

According to Mr. Street, “*to be able to go to school and to be able to walk to school in the neighborhood without any trouble or anything . . . Frankly, being integrated at the time, I didn’t consider that so much as a big thing, being . . . more or less the ability for our daughter to have to walk to [Glenn] school rather than walk across the tracks.*” Mrs. Groves noted that Elliott, the all-Black school was across Eighth Avenue, a very busy street, while Buena Vista, the all-White school, was a few blocks away, right around the corner from her home, which also made it convenient for her to walk her child to school every day and to pick him up from school every day, which she noted that she did without fail. Mrs. Watson indicated that Wharton was much farther than Jones was from their home. Mrs. Moore discussed how busy the street was where the children would have to cross to get to Wharton. She talked about how there were no ‘crossing guards’ on duty to assist the children to cross the street, and there was only a teacher posted in front of the school; she spoke of the traffic patterns and the likelihood of speeding cars. Based on the data findings, these parents appeared to be somewhat plain in their motives: by attending schools within their immediate neighborhood, they were simply seeking convenience and safety within their rights as citizens.

### *Better Educational Opportunities*

Data revealed that almost immediately after the discussion of proximity, participants cited their belief and expectation that all-white schools offered better resources. They noted without fail that it was generally known that all-white schools had resources that were superior to the resources found in the all-black schools. With the exception of one participant, all participants compared the education they had personally received to the level of education they hoped would be better for their children, noting that opportunities were linked to education. Participant responses and the research represented the determination to take advantage of the opportunity presented by the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, which had for the first time in Tennessee made attending integrated schools a real possibility for African Americans. Their willingness to take a stand was predicated on the belief that, although they may have received an education, that education was inferior to the education white citizens received:

Mary Watson stated, *“I wanted my children to have a good chance to succeed, the same as everybody else (Egerton, 2007).”* Mr. Griffiths said, *“my children are not going to be handicapped as you and I were”* by attending segregated schools. Mrs. Groves stated, *“they couldn’t teach their children without teaching mine.”*

Throughout the data the findings reflected the participants’ belief that educational opportunities and resources in all-white schools were superior to that received in all-Black schools. Their primary reference was related to the quality, quantity and condition of the books. Mrs. Street discussed the perception of inferiority as the driving force that whetted the African American’s appetite for attending all–white schools.

## *Change*

The participants uniformly cited the need for change as a major factor in their decisions to participate in the desegregation of Nashville Public Schools in 1957. Opportunity to attend integrated schools as part of the need for societal change was a goal echoed by the study's sources: Mrs. Griffiths said, as she enrolled her child in the integrated school, "*I didn't come up here to upset anyone; I didn't come up here to be upset; I came because I want my children to have every opportunity due them.*" This was a clear indication of the African Americans' desire to see change in the processes that were impeding their progress. The quest for change was articulated by the plaintiff in Nashville's first litigation, *Kelly v. Board of Education*; Kelly said, "*all I wanted was for people to be able to do what they want to do as long as their choice is good.*" This statement is symbolic of the energy driving the desegregation movement. Maxwell, a (litigant in a later desegregation case), stated, "*I think he fought to make sure that all of those things were—there was a level playing field for everybody*" (Maxwell, 2003).

It appears that these parents were not seeking noble status of any kind, but simply the opportunities any citizen of Nashville would expect and were willing to challenge the status quo to accomplish necessary integration of Nashville's public schools. Ms. Street's comments about the segregated era and its accompanying impact on African Americans, summed up the reason change was necessary: in brief, she denoted segregated libraries, parks, and employment as sources of disadvantage for African Americans. She discerned the negative consequences of blacks being perceived as "*not properly prepared to be called*" for jobs; at the same time, the perception of self was just as negative when "*we were told that we were not . . . properly prepared. Or made to feel that way.*"

### *Summary of Findings*

Collection and examination of the data from participant interviews-inclusive of field notes, image elicitation, document analysis, and the literature allowed the researcher to determine the motivations and expectations of the 11 parents who participated in the integration of Nashville Public Schools in 1957 as represented by the subset comprised of the four parent participants in this study. Each participant spoke candidly about the process and their engagement. Most notable in the interview sessions was the humility and pride with which each participant spoke of the events, although with strong convictions about the integration of Nashville Public Schools in 1957. Ultimately, their motivations and expectations for participating in this process were centered around three central themes: the option to attend the school closest to their home; the notion of attending a school that offered better educational outcomes; and the belief that the process of integration was overdue and this was the appropriate time and opportunity to begin to make needed change. Being obedient to the law emerged as an additional reason but was not part of a prevailing theme. Based on these findings, Chapter Five will provide the researcher's conclusions, discussion, implications and summary.

## CHAPTER 5

### Conclusions, Discussion, Implications and Summary

#### Conclusions

This study utilized the qualitative research design to explore the motivations and expectations associated with parent involvement in the integration of the public schools in Nashville, Tennessee in 1957. It investigated why parents chose to become involved in their children's education during this school integration initiative. More precisely, this study used the multiple-person case study method. Each case was treated as a single case; however, each conclusion was used to contribute to the findings of the whole case. Data were gathered within a process comprised of structured interviews-inclusive of field notes, image elicitation, and document analysis; these were the primary sources of evidence for this study. In this study, data were collected from parents who were known to be still living and who were accessible to the researcher. These parents were a subset of the African American parents involved in the first year of the integration process in Nashville's public schools, which was 1957.

Data from these primary sources were used to formulate personal narratives on each participant based on their responses relative to the research question: "Why were the African American parents of the 11 students engaged in the integration of the Nashville Public School system in Nashville, Tennessee in 1957?" The researcher used the individual personal narratives to construct the cross-case analysis, which was designed to answer the research question. From the parents' perspectives—as represented in their personal narratives—three themes emerged from the data. These themes were:

1. Parents wanted their children to have the right to attend schools in their

neighborhood, so that their children would be able to walk to and from school safely;

2. Parents wanted their children to experience the same quality of education as was available to white children, and included in this was also a desire for sufficient access to up-to-date, high quality textbooks and better facilities; and

3. The notion that it was time for change away from the separation of the races in education and other places, which was a policy that had persistently denied them and their children access to educational opportunity and the development of personal potential.

These findings show that African American parents participating in the Nashville, Tennessee school integration initiative in 1957 were motivated by a desire for their children to attend schools nearer and safer for them; to achieve a higher quality of education than was available in black schools; and to gain the potential more available to them in a changed, more integrated, American society. A fourth, more secondary, finding, as given by one of the participants, was the fact that the law had been passed, and it was her desire and intent to follow the law. Such motives were perhaps as critical as any could be for parents concerned about their children's future.

*Proximity: Attending Schools Closest to Home as Not Just About Access to Neighborhood Schools, but About Access to Individual Rights*

As participants discussed attending schools closer to home, it was striking that in this study there was not a distinction made about whether it made a difference that these close-to-home schools were all-black or all-white schools. The significant variable was proximity to home on the surface, but embodied a much bigger principle. Parents in this study suggested the nonsense and illogic in the circumstance of African American

children being required to walk a greater distance under more dangerous conditions to access an inferior education: the nonsense appeared over against the education they would gain from attending a school closer to their homes, as perceived by many.

The opportunity to attend the closest and perceivably best school possible did not require much forethought on the part of these parents. It appeared they were eagerly awaiting the opportunity. Some of them wondered why more of their African American counterparts did not see the logic in going to school closer to their homes and clearly felt a sense of betrayal; They had right as taxpaying citizens to attend the school in their neighborhood. Price (2002) addresses the importance of parent involvement in the lives of children. He reports that according to the Carnegie Task Force on Learning, the primary grades, the early years from three to ten, are a crucial age-span in a young person's life. For most children, long-term success in learning and development depends to a great extent on what happens to them during these potentially promising formative years (Lau et al., 2011). This study's participants consistently noted the distance students had to travel to get to their assigned all-black school and the safety factors associated with attending their zoned all-black schools. Notably, children from the neighborhood tended to walk to school together, but it was clearly the preference of the parents for the children to attend school closer to home. Safety was the primary factor associated with why parents wanted their children to attend school in the neighborhood. Closeness to home made it more convenient for parents to escort or transport their children to school, a circumstance that was also identified as contributing to the need for students to be close to home.

Closeness to school and the sense of a neighborhood organization impact one's sense of inclusion. Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001) focus on factors that contribute to parents' participation in home and school based activities; they examine the source (e.g. culture, community, institutionalized norms) and nature of parents' ideas about schooling, and they report that low instances of parent involvement did not reflect parental lack of interest; instead, such factors as time, distance, and daycare obligations were cited.

The study's parents took ready advantage of this unique opportunity to exercise their choice, particularly as it gave them such a rare chance to enhance their children's futures. Martinez et al. (1994) suggest that parents get involved in schools and view choice as a form of parent involvement that affects student outcomes. They suggest parents' primary reasons for choice are education quality, followed by learning climate, discipline, and the general atmosphere of the school. School choice, in theory, gives parents a wider range of options to influence the quality of their child's education (Lee et al., 1994).

As a further example of parental determination, Cooper (2005) found that educational decision-making of mothers reflected their quest for equal educational opportunity, something that the majority of urban public schools and market-based school choice options fail to offer them. Mothers strive to gain the power, resources, and educational opportunities their children need to compete successfully and advance in society. Consequently, school choice-making serves as a form of sociopolitical and cultural resistance for these mothers. This study's mothers did, however, agonize over whether their choice might injure their 6-year-olds. These parents endured harsh

treatment, and some wondered what they might be doing to their-six-year-olds by subjecting them to these harsh circumstances. Were they exposing them to circumstances that may cause them to be embittered for life? One of the participating parents received a threat that the child would be kidnapped; another received a threat that they would throw acid in the child's face; others were forced to walk through crowds with dogs; and others were forced to bend over to walk through the hostile crowd just to get into the front door of the school—all for the sake of choosing a better education for their children and a better society. In response to a white protester who shouted, “if you loved your child, you wouldn't do this,” one of the parents responded, “it is because I love my child that I do, do this!” As one parent indicated, for the African Americans not to have taken advantage of this opportunity would have in essence meant “volunteering for segregation.” Most of the parents noted that “somebody had to do it.” So they braved the storm and chose for their children a new society in America.

*Dismantling Disparities of Separate and Unequal Educational Opportunities: Meant Dismantling the Walls of Segregation 'Brick-by-Brick'*

This study's second finding suggested that parents recognized that the disparities associated with attending all-black schools extended to a much deeper place than equal education, limited resources or lack of quality resources. Desegregation was like a brick wall, which could only be dismantled 'brick by brick'. Separate and unequal education was the first and most important brick that needed to be removed to from the wall. There was no misunderstanding that the root of these disparities as manifested in education and society was reflective of an ingrained notion and the long-held attitude that the African

American was far less than equal and was not deserving of the same rights and privileges as White America.

These disparities, when challenged, threaten the status quo of society and established positions of superiority. While the African American knew the access to equal opportunity would not signal the end of society's racist behavior, African Americans understood that to dismantle the oppressive position imposed by society would require literally addressing issues one at a time; however, African Americans also recognized that the most critical and most powerful tool to combat the issue of segregation was knowledge. Consequently, educating African American children equally as well as White children would be a major step in the right direction and would equip the African American to challenge other elements of an integrated and unfair society. For this opportunity, the parents in this study were willing to endure the challenges that came along with participating in the integration process in Nashville Public Schools in 1957. It was through this process that they were publicly staking their claim to equal educational access, thus equalizing their opportunity to lay claim on the "promised" American Dream. It was basically a symbolic throwing down of the gauntlet, or issuing a clarion call to society to "recognize, respect and respond" to African Americans as equal citizens of the great country.

This finding focused on the child's prospects for gaining a better education and the parents' ownership of their power to influence these prospects. At the same time, these parents noted the context of their own educational experiences, whereby they were denied opportunities because of social and legal restrictions that were matters of public policy. Aware of such a detrimental climate for themselves, they were eager to expose

their children to more liberal and rewarding learning environments. The research findings in this study reinforced the concept of parental support: the participating parents desired to increase the chances of success for their children. These participants were convinced that attending the segregated schools would improve educational outcomes for the children. Their motivation was expressed in terms of putting their children in a better position for success than they perceived had been available for them. One participant noted that even with an education, the African American's opportunity was limited professionally; she noted that the "best of the best" African American professionals were relegated to teaching because other professions were not open to them as a part of an integrated society.

Participants unanimously agreed that having the opportunity afforded to white students in all-white schools was a critical factor in their decision. Parents spoke of the dismal quality and quantity of the books, the second-rate facilities, and the prevailing perception that a superior education was available in the all-white schools. This perception was also one sustained from their personal experiences as students a generation earlier, when in the black schools students were given books handed down from the white schools: the material was outdated, and the books still had in them the names of the white students who had used them! The perception that the facilities and materials were inadequate was not a myth, therefore, and these parents wanted their children to advance competitively in society rather than being disadvantaged by the low self-esteem that accompanies being treated as second class and held back by social attitudes. Their children's preparation on a competitive level was a critical factor in their decision. Nelson (1978) points out that denying African Americans access to equal

education opportunities has served to limit opportunities for African Americans to compete effectively with whites in key social, economic, and political arenas. So while education was the arena in which they struggled for equality, this study's participants expected the impact of integration to expand beyond the school walls.

Further, participants felt that the child's being in an integrated environment was of benefit because it would provide the children with the opportunity to grow socially by learning how to interact with one another. One parent felt like just occupying the same space with the white student would add value to the child's experience and development, because if the white students were being taught and their child was in the same room, it would automatically mean that their child would be taught as well. All of the parents spoke in positive terms about the nurturing atmosphere waiting for the children inside the school despite the continual protest outside the newly integrated schools. As well, the parents praised the principals and teachers, who were all white, for embracing and nurturing their children once inside. Such a positive reception from the school authorities led to the parents' expectation that their children would be treated well and taught well. All of the parents felt it was their duty and responsibility to support the teachers in educating their children. While they felt that sending their child to an integrated school would increase educational outcomes for the children, they were not content leaving it all up to the teacher. Rather, they felt it necessary to engage with the school and teacher to make sure the child received a high quality of education and was indeed learning. Thus they influenced the child's learning environment and context of experience both socially and educationally, for they retained direct lines of contact between their homes, their communities, and the schools.

### *Denouncing Second Class Citizenship Required Supporting Change*

Additionally, all of the participants in one way or another indicated segregation was no longer acceptable. Their participation in the integration initiative signaled their refusal to “volunteer” for segregation. It suggested their willingness to embrace choice and change and to accept the challenges of integration; notably their actions communicated that it was time for a change; a change was needed, it was overdue, and it was their right to attend the integrated schools in their immediate neighborhoods and receive a high quality equal education. The study revealed a strong desire on the part of the parents to break down the restrictive walls and disengage the cycle of segregation. As the data suggested, the participants in this study sought equal access and believed that that access would benefit the African American child beyond education: they believed it would “expose” the children to other races and teach them how to interact with other people and cultures, thereby putting them in position to experience more well-rounded lives as adults. Stulberg (2008) suggests that American schooling has always been about something other than just academics, serving a number of political, social and economic purposes. Being major institutions central to the country’s economic and state building efforts and situated at the heart of many communities, public schools have historically been central sites of political struggles. Public schools have been politically and personally charged spaces through which Americans have envisioned their future and dreamt their legacy (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Schools, then, have always been about hope, or at least the promise of hope (Lewis, 2003; Noguera, 2003).

Each of the parents in this study presented themselves as tenacious and strong-willed. They were no longer willing to accept the status quo. They did not feel obliged to

wait for an invitation to interact with the schools. While they felt that attending the previously all-white school would produce better educational outcomes for their children, they were committed to doing whatever else it took to ensure their child was well treated and well educated. They presented themselves to the school as interested, cooperative and informed parents, but in a congenial manner. They all indicated they would not hesitate to confront head-on any issues related to their child's well-being at school.

All of the participants indicated they were determined to persist through the school year in spite of the personal threats and challenges of getting to and from school, and all but one returned for the second grade the next year and remained for the duration of the child's elementary school career. Finally, one of the participants, though she was the only one with such a focus, indicated that it was the law. She indicated that if it was the law, then the law was made to be followed, and it was not a matter of a question, but instead, it was her intent to follow the law. She saw this law as being equally as important as other laws and set forth to abide by the law which said the child should attend their identified, integrated school in the neighborhood for which they were zoned. Perhaps her view was as profound as any other, for legislated change was indeed a giant step forward for the nation's African Americans as well as the society as a whole.

### *The Research Questions and the Literature*

This study was guided by an overarching question and two sub-questions.

#### *Overarching Research Question*

Why were the African American parents of the 11 students engaged in the integration of the Nashville Public School system in Nashville, Tennessee in 1957?

### *Sub-questions*

1. What led the African American parents of the 11 students to be engaged in the integration of the Nashville Public School system in Nashville, Tennessee in 1957?
2. What were the expectations of the African American parents of the 11 students engaged in the integration of the Nashville Public School system in Nashville, Tennessee in 1957?

Data collected from participants in this study were examined in light of the literature pertinent to the themes emerging within the research factors. The literature examined during the course of this study indicated that historically parent involvement has been seen as pivotal to educational outcomes for children across all races, ages and demographics (Martinez, 2004). Parent involvement research highlighted the involved parents' and families' positive impact on children's academic and non-academic performance (Coleman, 1991). Among the many positive outcomes is a general sense of providing better educational opportunities for children, including improved academic achievement, increased advocacy, quality education, a better learning climate, a safe and orderly learning environment, self-improvement, and a generally positive school atmosphere. As the findings of this study indicate, parents shared that belief. Participants repeatedly indicated that they were interested in seeing a change in the education practices of Nashville and saw their involvement in the integration of Nashville Public Schools in 1957 as a vehicle to cause that change. Clearly in their own ways, they were serving as advocates for their children. Walking the children to and from school and

bending over to get through crowds of protesters blocking the door to the school while tightly holding on to the hand of her 6-year-old demonstrated one mother's intent to fight for this change.

Williams (2000) defined "parent involvement" as parents taking a personal interest in the education of their children, through action communicating that education is important to success in life—instilling a love of learning that translates into a sense of pride and achievement as knowledge accumulates and is put to good use. Further, the literature highlighted the many years of policy changes that reflected the efforts to inform parental influence in the design of school policy, efforts especially to compel local states and municipalities to address parental involvement directly and to include parents in the process (Hiatt, 1994). *Brown v. Board of Education* indirectly changed the manner in which municipalities addressed education. In a few cases, parents were directly involved in the development process of desegregating schools; however, that was not the case for the participants in the Nashville integration process in 1957. The data revealed that the plan was developed by the school board and a special Curriculum Committee and presented to the court for approval. Upon approval, parents were encouraged by local activist groups such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) to participate in the plan. This study's participants did not report having been invited to voice opinions during the design of the plan. However, authorities in the desegregation process in Nashville's public schools made no effort to gain input from the parents of the first-grade students who were rezoned to attend the first integrated schools, a policy enactment that was reflected in the literature regarding parent involvement in the desegregation initiative across the nation,

in Tennessee, and in Nashville. One participant reported that they were made aware of the details of the plan about two weeks before school registration, which was about two weeks before the Nashville Public Schools would for the first time in history open its doors to integrated schools.

The literature suggested that the goal of parent involvement is to create a partnership between school and home for the express purpose of improving academic outcomes for students. The multi-faceted characteristics of parent involvement include school-based and home-based activities and initiatives, parents as advocates, and parents as teachers and encouragers (“National,” n.d.) Evidence suggested that increased parent involvement yields increased student achievement (Jesse, n.d; Ramirez, 2001; Trotman, 2001; Weiss et al., 2003; Zellman & Waterman, 1998). When there is a school-family-community partnership, students benefit (“National,” n.d.). Programs that are linked to learning, that allow parents to speak up for their children, that allow families to contribute to students’ learning, and that include organizing community resources and support—such specific types of parent involvement appear to offer considerable benefits to student achievement.

This study’s second sub-question asked what the parents expected as a result of participating in the desegregation process of Nashville Public Schools in 1957; they were the first set of parents to engage in breaking down racial and social barriers in public education in a large urban district. According to Peterson and Kreider (n. d.), students with involved parents, no matter what their background, are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores, enroll in higher-level programs, be promoted and earn credits, adapt well to school and attend regularly, have better social skills and behaviors, and

graduate. Such students are apt to participate in some form of post-secondary education. Moreover, Luneburg, and Irby (2002) report that parental expectation for their children's achievement—expressed in the parents' participating in school activities, offering encouragement, and providing home learning environments—produces more positive outcomes for children.

*Examination of the Research Questions Relative to the Theoretical Model*

The data were analyzed using predetermined themes from the theoretical framework of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) and Spencer's (1995) A Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST), as informed by Bronfenbrenner. In an effort to understand what led parents to become involved in the desegregation process, the researcher explored the manner in which the information from parental participation in the integration initiative aligned with the predetermined themes of the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) model. These themes were: Personal Motivation elements of role construction and self-efficacy; Invitations from the school, parent or child; and Life Context elements of knowledge and skills, time and energy, and family culture.

These findings were filtered through themes of the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) model, which was used to extrapolate possible alignments between the model and the participants' responses. Elements of the model were embedded in the data collected from the parents, especially as it related to the interview questions regarding a particular parent's active role in educating their 6-year-old child who they enrolled in the newly integrated schools.

This study's findings, as reflected from all three sources—individual narratives, the case-analyses, and the cross-case analysis—suggested that these parents' sense of efficacy, that is, their belief that their actions would lead to positive outcomes, was intact and strong. In addition, relative to the PVEST, these parents demonstrated the use of adaptive coping mechanisms, which led to positive identity development over time both before and during this process. This resulted in positive life outcome behaviors, placing the parents in a position to persist through this process, with what Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) model termed strong role constructs and a high sense of self-efficacy. Walker et al. (2010) refer to insights needed to understand why parents may or may not choose to become involved, based on the Social Learning Theory of Bandura (1986); the model examines the parents' perceptions of their role, their ability, the outcome, the invitation to be involved, and the availability of other resources such as time, energy, knowledge, and skills.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005, revised) position that efficacy is related to parental role construction, which addresses the belief and sense of responsibility one holds for oneself in a given situation, supports the notion that the involvement of these parents was driven by a sense of responsibility and a belief in their power to impact positively a situation's outcome. An examination of this phenomenon through the lenses of Spencer's PVEST (1995) theory suggests these parents were exposed to risk factors that produce high levels of stress. According to the PVEST theory, these stressful situations required a reaction. The reaction would naturally be accompanied by a coping mechanism which would be either adaptive or maladaptive in nature and result in what Spencer termed temporary identity. Spencer theorized that constant exposure to a context

or environment whose character and content is high risk requires the development of multiple coping strategies, and that the repetitive engagement of these coping mechanisms results in an emerging identity leading to practices that have adverse or productive physical and behavior life outcomes.

By virtue of their race and gender, which Spencer describes as Risk Contributors, and coupled with the segregated cultural context of the time, these parents were placed in a position to react to such stress. The coping mechanisms employed by these parents were more adaptive than maladaptive in nature, as none of them resorted to negative physical reaction in response to the constant threats and taunting hurled at them and their six-year-olds. Consequently, the identity that emerged as a result of their many life experiences before and during these times resulted in productive rather than adverse life outcome practices. PVEST, informed by Bronfenbrenner's (1994) Ecological theory, can be seen in these parents' social contexts. Their Microsystems—the immediate family, home, school, church and community supports—played a primary role in their actions. Many of the parents reported that they had support from spouses, family members, churches, neighbors and friends in general. Having interactive relationships between these microsystems created a mesosystem designed to further nurture and strengthen the parents' resolve to persist through this first year of school integration. Parents reported both positive and negative reactions of these systems as a result of their participation in the integration process of the Nashville Public Schools in 1957. Interactions between such systems had directly impacted the parents' sense of well being but did not alter their determination to persevere. Some parents reported that the workplace became tense during these times; some were dismissed from employment as a result of their

participation in the desegregation initiative, while others reported a sense of support from the workplace during these times.

While the research suggested that role construction is a social construct, the parental role construction and efficacy of these parents did not appear to suffer as a result of the character or content of the turbulent environment, as reported by CORE, an interracial non-violent support group offering assistance to parents. CORE reported that parents were constantly bombarded with a myriad of risk contributors, and they faced stress daily, which required them to make spontaneous decisions relative to their choice of responses to insults and threats being directed at them and their children in these negative situations. However, these parents were steadfast. It was noted that morale may have ebbed and flowed throughout the process, and some considered quitting from time to time, yet they never relented (Holden, 1958). The theoretical underpinning of the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) model of Parental Involvement and PVEST, (1995) informed by Bronfenbrenner's (1994) Ecological theory, are further substantiated by the participants' individual narratives, the case-analyses, and the cross-case analysis of participants' response to the research questions.

### Discussion

The findings of the overarching research question of why the African American parents engaged in the desegregation of the Nashville Public School system in 1957 can be viewed as parent involvement because the parents' electing to engage in the desegregation of Nashville Public Schools in 1957 was a way of 'getting involved' in the process of educating their children and influencing the environment in which their children were being reared. As the literature has established, parent involvement has

multiple positive benefits for students, including improved academic outcomes such as grades, and non-academic success such as attendance and behavior. The literature further substantiated parent advocacy as one of the most influential roles parents can play in a child's education, since it has a profound impact on student success. Participating in the integration process to impact change can be associated with the parents' roles as advocates for their children.

### *Theoretical Motivation for Parental Involvement*

The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) model of parental involvement suggests that parent involvement is associated with characteristics of the parents' personal motivation to become involved. This personal motivation is evidenced through parents' role constructs and their sense of self-efficacy. Parents are motivated to become involved if they have a strong role construct; that is, they see themselves as having a responsibility in the education of their child. The participants in this study all held a sense of positive role construct, but to varying degrees. There was no apparent evidence that the parent's level of education directly influenced the level of their resolve about their responsibility; however, there was a difference in parts of the conversation about parental involvement. To a degree, parents with post-secondary education were more grounded in the theoretical notions about parent involvement; that is, these parents with post-secondary education not only felt a responsibility for helping their child, but along with parents without post-secondary education, also felt more inclined to create the conditions needed for the child's success, such as making sure she was at school and prepared to learn on a daily basis. It is important to note both are forms of parent involvement, and school authorities should understand and acknowledge non-traditional

forms of parental involvement based on the family culture, as discussed in Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, (2005, revised) Level One, Life Context.

Wehlberg (1996) indicates that parent involvement programs may require making opportunities available for some parents while having to provide knowledge and skills for other parents, teaching them how to be involved and feel comfortable taking advantage of the opportunities to be involved. Parent involvement is by definition ambiguous and is often discussed in terms of inconsistent categories or types of parent involvement. Jasso (2007) refers to definitions of parent involvement; he points out that often while social factors have been blamed for children's school failure, more in-depth examination reveals that parental intervention has a greater impact on student success than socioeconomic status and family dynamics.

Parent self-efficacy is the second part of the parent's personal motivation and was evident for each of the parent participants in this study. In the discussion of integrated schools offering better educational opportunities for the child, parents felt very strongly that through helping their child, they had the ability to provoke positive outcomes. They each discussed how they were prepared to create the home environment to ensure there was support for learning. They had established in their homes routines for studying, and they were available to assist their child with homework as needed. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) also suggest that an important element of why parents choose to get involved is connected to whether they receive an invitation and from whom.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) discuss three types of invitation:

1) one is the general invitation from the school, which relates to how the school in general sets an inviting and welcoming culture and climate and how they communicate with parents;

2) the second invitation, which has more drawing power, is from the teacher specifically; and

3) the third invitation is from the child specifically and, when coupled with the teacher invitation, is the most powerful.

Parents in this study had varying recollections of being invited to participate in the schooling process, even within the same school. It was noted that even at the same school, the principal set the tone that was followed by the teachers. Both the school practices and perceptions as an institution, and the perceptions parents bring to bear relative to their role and life situation, can be barriers to parent involvement (Hornby, 2011; Schultz, 2001; Trotman, 2001). Smith and Wohletter (2009) suggest that educators may lack awareness and appreciation for the invisible strategies minority or low-income parents use to support their children's education. Such things as making sacrifices so children can attend better schools, limiting children's chores to allow for more study time, and transmitting the lessons of hard work, all demonstrate that cultural narratives are a form of parent involvement that may not be recognized by traditional models.

Swap (1993; as cited in Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel, 2001) suggests that despite high verbal support for parent involvement, parents continued to be kept at a distance in most schools. Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001) contend that parents value education and would like to be more involved, but their involvement is limited by the sense that their

roles are distinct from those of schools. School officials assume that parents are too lazy, incompetent, or preoccupied to participate in school programs.

The parents in this study recalled strong relationships with individual teachers for various reasons. The parents felt a comfortable connection to teachers, yet they noted that they were not specifically invited or encouraged to help the child with schoolwork. The school officials primarily took or welcomed the children into the classroom and attempted to make them a part of the learning environment. The parents were invited to hold membership in the PTA, but they were not engaged in any leadership roles. In some cases, a general call for officers was given, but no specific effort was made to invite or encourage the African American parents to hold an office or join in the decision-making process.

Most of the participants in this study felt a strong connection to the school. Two of them spoke of the multiple ways the school connected with them. One spoke of checking on her child through unannounced visits to the school; another spoke of interacting with the teacher daily, as she deposited and collected her child from school; another spoke of a mutually beneficial relationship she developed with her child's teacher that gave her a sense of comfort if she needed to talk with anyone at the school; and still another spoke of having access to the school through the principal. None of the parents, however, felt it would be necessary to wait for an invitation; instead, they felt very strongly that if they sensed the need to contact and visit the school without an invitation, they would not hesitate to do so.

Relative to Life Context and Family Culture, which Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) identify as impacting the parents' decision to get involved, the

participants did not appear for the most part to see time and energy as barriers. Issues stemming from changes in the family dynamics may limit involvement due to busy schedules, childcare issues, dual family employment, role perception and role construct. Jasso (2007) suggests that parents' perceived barriers may be partially to blame for any inconsistencies that might exist between parental involvement beliefs and behaviors. Effective communication, efficacy, lack of adequate information, and perceptions of whether teachers want them to be involved contribute to the problem. Jasso (2007) further points out that parent involvement varies between ethnic groups because differing home experiences and parenting styles impact involvement. He reports that African American and Hispanic parents are less involved and had less knowledge about their children's need than their Caucasian counterparts and further posits that variables such as low academic achievement, poverty, lack of resources, etc., and "teacher's negative attitudes" may contribute to the problem, but do not explain this parental gap (p. 11). Jasso (2007) grouped barriers into four (4) categories: (a) Communication; (b) Personal/Life factors affecting availability of resources; (c) Role Construction, Efficacy and School Environment; and (d) Socioeconomic Status. Bracey (2001), on the other hand, suggests that the working poor have less time to devote to their children because they lack paid sick time.

Though some of this study's parents were working parents and had less flexible schedules than others, they were clear about the fact that if the school needed them, they would make themselves available. All of the parents indicated they were in a position to help their child through their knowledge and skills set, and they indicated they had both

the time and energy to support their child with homework and were willing and able to provide support at school as needed.

The cultural context of the desegregation of the Nashville Public Schools in 1957 prompts a more sociological analysis to capture the essence of these parents' decisions and behaviors during this time. The researcher examined the participant's responses against the premise of Spencer's (1995) Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST)—influenced by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems—relative to how parents responded to a stress-producing environment, which triggers a multitude of coping mechanisms. Consequently, Spencer's Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) helps provide a cultural context that explains the actions of these parents during this time.

These coping mechanisms may be adaptive or maladaptive, and as they are employed by the participants repeatedly, they shape the emerging identity that result in life outcome behaviors either positive or adverse. These parents demonstrated behaviors associated with positive life outcomes, as none retaliated with negative behaviors towards the protestors. This supports Bronfenbrenner's theory of having clearly established support systems or well established Microsystems and Mesosystems. Most of the parents noted that their spouses, other family members, friends, and church members were identified as persons to turn to for support.

This study contributes to the existing body of related literature by supporting research that highlights the positive impact of parent involvement as well as the different genres of parent involvement that can be effective. Traditionally, parent involvement has been relegated to the realm of parents coming to school for various activities or working

with their children at home, Epstein (2005) referred to these as school-based and home-based parent involvement models. The research suggests that many minorities and first time immigrants' parents practiced a more diverse array of parent involvement activities—such as limiting the child's workload to provide time to study—that should be recognized, acknowledged, and valued by the school (Smith & Wohletter, 2009). The study findings suggested that parent involvement takes many forms, including instances of traditional parent involvement as well as practices that may not be viewed on the surface as parent involvement. Current research suggested that parents as advocates are a most powerful form of parent involvement (“National,” n.d.). Parents engaged in the desegregation initiative served as advocates for their children by participating in the process and by regularly engaging with the school to ensure students were successful. Further, this study supported the notion that school authorities should be cognizant of the various ways parents elect to engaged, honor, and support processes that may be outside the traditional model of parent involvement; this is especially important when working with minorities and low-income populations. This study also suggested that parents' mechanisms for getting involved can be revealed in parents acts of encouraging and admonishing their children to engage in appropriate conduct in school. The study confirms the parent-teacher relationships as impacting student-teacher relationships. These parents each had positive relationships with their children's teachers and reported positive teacher-student relationships. Parents indicated that their child's teacher appeared to have had a special relationship with the child since the child continued to speak highly of the first-grade teacher even into the first-grader's subsequent adulthood. This study confirms the research relative to the strength of the parent involvement model

of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised). Throughout the data the elements of the model can be identified. Parent involvement programs must recognize parents as partners with shared responsibilities for the children's learning, and parent involvement must be designed to reach the hard-to-reach parents, those not typically or easily engaged in the act of schooling. NCLB requires that communication with parents is clear, useful, and in languages that all parents can understand. It stresses equity for all parents. The funding requirement is a crucial change in this policy, adding impetus for more responsive program development.

### Implications

It is implied by the study's findings that there are behaviors parents may adopt in order to positively impact their children's education; such behaviors may be delineated in terms of specific actions parents and others might take on behalf of the children's learning process. These behaviors can be incorporated into policies and programs intended to improve the schools' efforts toward developing effective parent involvement in the process of educating their children. Conclusions drawn from this study's data findings can be applied to the theory of parent involvement across various sectors that include parents, students, schools, and policymakers. Relative to parent involvement in schools, implications emerged within the parents' responses to the structured interview questions and sub-questions, which were designed to capture the parents' perceptions of their responsibilities as parents; their perception that they could positively impact outcomes by being involved; their perceptions of whether an invitation was required and from whom in order for them to become involved; and how they navigated life context elements that may have served as barriers to parent involvement.

The results of the study's cross-case analysis identified three primary themes dominating the data sets. These themes revealed the answer to the research question of what led the African American parents engaged in the 1957 integration process in Nashville's public schools. These themes were consistent among participants and identified reasons for their participation in desegregating the Nashville Public Schools in 1957. The reasons given by participants were: the child's ability to attend the school closest to their home, which was coupled with safety; the child's opportunity to attend integrated schools, which were perceived to offer a higher quality of education; and the impetus to impact change, which they described as being overdue.

The study's parents indicated that one reason for engagement was their desire that their children attend schools close to their homes. The implications of this finding are represented in the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) model, as indicated in the factor called Life Context, which is related to knowledge and skills, time and energy, and family culture—elements impacting the parents' decision to get involved in their children's education. These parents from the 1957 integration initiative demonstrated they were committed to enabling their children to obtain the highest available opportunities in life. They were confirmed in their objective of getting their children to school daily, for example. They daily walked their children to school and often conversed with teachers and principals to ascertain the child's progress. It should be noted that not all of the parents were homemakers and apparently free to go to school at will. Even those who were homemakers had one or more younger children at home at the time, yet that did not prevent them from making the opportunity to engage their child's school experience. Also, one of the mothers was a working mother, but she made the necessary

arrangements to ensure the child's needs were being met. Life Context for this study's parents was revealed in the sacrifices they made to create safe learning experiences for their children, implying that parents must take actions that benefit their children if they desire the children to strive and achieve their best.

*Parent Involvement Implications for Parents/Caretakers*

*1. Raise your hand and let your voices be heard!*

Parents must serve as advocates for children. In addition to the traditional and normal engagement of parents and their responses or inquiries regarding students' academic progress, this study's findings suggests that parents must seek to be deliberate in the act of improving opportunities by being engaged in the development, implementation and evaluation of school structures and processes that serve to educate children. They must challenge the status quo through questions and dialogue- For every reason "why" something is in place, parents must also ask questions about what else is possible or why not something else, if it has merit and provides more and better opportunities for students' success.

*2. Establish Expectations*

Parents must ensure that the schools know the expectations you have of the school relative to your child's success. Share with schools that you support the development of personal characteristics that lead to good school performance. These may include learning work habits, responsibility for completing tasks, punctuality, and pride of craft. These characteristics extend beyond the traditional parent involvement structures outlined in other models.

### 3. *Confront the Issues*

Parents must communicate, check and collaborate on behalf of their child such that all possible opportunities provided by the educational system are made available to your child in a fair and equitable manner. This requires frequent engagement with schools both formal and informal and through various means, such as personal visits and other forms of communications. Be knowledgeable of policy and practices which may require collaborating and networking with others inside and outside of schools to seek guidance and support if necessary on how to navigate bureaucratic and social systems.

The study's participants identified improved educational outcomes for their children as another reason for their participation in the integration initiative. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) point to parents being actively engaged with their children at home and at schools; such engagement supports the notion that coupled with a healthy sense of self-efficacy these parents had a strong role construct or sense of responsibility; this study's parents believed that it was their duty to help the school educate their children. The interviews represent a sense of joint ownership of the education responsibility, expressing the belief that their involvement in the desegregation process would result in a positive outcome for their child. The parent's sense of responsibility for the child's achievement in education as well as in life can imply actions that the child performs when coached by the parents

#### *Parent Involvement Implications for Students*

##### 1. *Share in the shaping of your future: serve as a conduit between home and school.*

Strive to keep your parents abreast of what was going on in school; be positive

but honest about school when speaking with your parents about your successes and your needs.

2. *Be proactive: help to prevent problems.*

Seek the support and guidance of your parents and caretakers with difficult situations before they reach critical points.

Be responsible and accountable to yourself, your family, and your school.

3. *Share your school life.*

Invite your parents and caretakers to visit your school and participate in school functions or activities. Market your school to your parents.

The third reason for engagement common to the parent participants' perception is the notion of advocating for change, which is also demonstrated in the personal motivation elements of the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) model of parent involvement. The second element of the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) model of parent involvement speaks to the parents' response to invitations issued from the school, teacher and child. All of this study's participants indicated a strong sense of entitlement when asked what they were prepared to do had they not been invited to the child's school. Most indicated they would not have waited for an invitation from the school, teacher or child if they had deemed it necessary to address an issue on behalf of their child. All of the findings suggest that parents can make a difference by getting involved in the education of their child.

Perhaps one of the least convincing yet typically serviceable claims made by authorities on the subject of change is that they must observe policy and program structure. When one of the study's parents pointed to "the law" as a factor motivating her

participation in the integration initiative, it perhaps was not altogether obvious what was hidden in this observation. Indeed, “the law” is a persuasive motivator. The implication here is that change occurs when it is authorized, yet authorization can also stand as a reason not to change. Not just the black parents but also the school authorities were implicated in a law requiring school desegregation. Therefore, the call for change implies revolutionary attitudes and actions assumed by legislators and policymakers as they develop programs and guidelines for ensuring an educated society.

*Parent Involvement Implications for Schools and Teachers*

*1. Treat parents as stockholders and paying customers!*

Create a warm and welcoming environment indicative of high expectations.

Engage in constant, honest and open two-way communication with parents frequently in a proactive manner.

Volunteer to be held accountable by parents and to hold parents accountable- promote joint responsibility for student success.

*2. Think globally about what parent involvement entails.*

Create opportunities for parents (stockholders) to determine what parent involvement is and what support can look like from multiple perspectives;

opportunities should be aligned with the family’s background and culture.

Encourage, accept, and honor non-traditional renditions of parent involvement and praise parents for the efforts.

*3. Seek to understand and compensate for barriers parents may face in getting involved in schools.*

Develop teachers’ sense of self-efficacy regarding parent involvement.

Regard, respect and respond to parent needs, relative to getting involved in school.

Identify ways to extend teacher and student invitations to parents; they are powerful tools of parent involvement.

*Parent Involvement Implications for Policymakers*

1. Provides a seat at the table of decision-making; honor and respect the voice of parents in policy development.
2. Establish a policy to never establish a policy impacting parents without engaging with parents in a meaningful, thoughtful and honest manner with the intent to incorporate their input.
3. Evaluate and revisit policies regarding the implementation of parent involvement policies through the eyes of the parents (stockholders) end-users systematically.

These observations are not intended to serve as a blueprint for developing or engaging effective parent involvement programs, but the findings do offer information that can be used to craft effective parent involvement structures. For many years, parent involvement has been a part of the education landscape, especially as it relates to low-income and minority students. Coupled with the millions of dollars expended annually to engage parents and the plethora of policies supporting parent involvement, there is a rich body of research that strongly indicates that parent involvement is important to helping students meet with success in schools. To that end, the implications drawn from the data findings in the study of why African American parents engaged in the desegregation process in Nashville Public Schools in 1957 represent the participants' viewpoint as critical insight for school program development related to parent involvement.

## Implications for Further Research

This study was limited to the initial year of the integration process; it did not address the subsequent years of these students' educational experiences. Additional research regarding life outcomes would be warranted to answer questions about whether participating in integrated schools throughout their K-12 school life made a measurable difference in the professional lives of these students. Further research should also investigate the social and emotional impact of attending integrated school, answering questions of whether there were for these students long-term residual social implications associated with attending integrated schools. A richer understanding of distinctions between parent involvement practices in rural versus urban schools would be useful, as the prevalence of schools performing in the bottom five percent relative to student achievement and graduation are located in urban settings, serving largely minority populations with very high poverty rates. Lastly, as schools become more and more diverse, there is much room for continued research to further explore the notion of non-traditional parent involvement practices among the various populations and the impact those practices have on student outcomes.

## Summary

In summary, in 1957 this study's participants engaged in an unselfish act of enabling their first-grade children to integrate Nashville, Tennessee's public schools. Across the four case studies, the notion was consistent that what they were doing would be beneficial to all African American children. Further, they believed it would be beneficial to both races and would expand beyond the realm of education to integrated

employment opportunities. It is important to note that neighborhoods were already integrated at the time of the integration of Nashville Public Schools in 1957.

African American parents of the students participating in the integration process of Nashville Public Schools in 1957 faced many of the same challenges faced by today's parents—which are some of the same challenges associated with the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005, revised) and the PVEST (1995) theoretical models. Parents in 1957 encountered obstacles as their children attended schools integrated for the first time. Some of those obstacles included: not being invited to participate as a parents in the education of their children; having multiple children at home; working; not having transportation; and single-family incomes. For the study's participants, layered on top of these ordinary barriers was the persistent resistance of pro-segregationist mobs making every possible effort to interfere with the children's matriculation through the schools: these people interfered by blocking the doors of the schools, threatening to do harm to the children, and constantly expressing antagonism. In spite of these challenges, the parents persisted through the first year, with strong will and a determination to have their children attend the integrated schools. The lessons for parents facing these and other barriers today is to be persistent, identify a support system that can provide assistance, and identify conventional and unconventional ways to be involved in the child's education. The research shows that parent involvement produces positive outcomes in the lives of children.

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## APPENDICES

### *Appendix A*

#### Sample Consent Letter

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Gwendolyn L. Watson and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Leadership at the University of Memphis. I am conducting research for my dissertation on the motivations and expectations of African American parents involved in the desegregation of the Nashville Public School System in 1957. I would like to request your participation in this study.

This is a qualitative study, which includes interviews with actual parents of students who entered first grade in 1957, a review of document, newspaper articles, video tapes and oral histories of participants and others regarding the actual event.

As a participants you will be asked to participate in a series of three (3) interviews in a location of your choosing, i.e. your home, or a public library, or some other quiet venue. Each interview session will last approximately ninety minutes. These interviews will be tape recorded with your permission to ensure accuracy. I will conduct a pre-visit, as permissible, to further explain the purpose, nature and process of the study and to discuss the logistics of your participation. You will be provided a synopsis of the purpose and use of the information to be gathered. You will be asked to affix your signature to a consent form indicating your willingness to participate in the study and to allow your information to be used in the written project.

I am requesting your participation in this study because of your participation in the desegregation of the Nashville Public School System in 1957. A list of questions will be provided for your review prior to the interview session.

Because participation is voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to you or others who chose not to participate. The University of Memphis does not have a fund set aside for compensation in the case of study related injury.

If you chose to participate, please read and sign the consent form and return it to me. Your name and interview information in general will be used in the published document; however your individual transcripts will be kept confidential.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you can contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board for Protection of Human Subjects at 901-678-2533. If there are questions about the study, please contact Dr. Larry McNeal, Professor, University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee, at 901-678-3009 or [lmcneal1@memphis.edu](mailto:lmcneal1@memphis.edu) or you may contact me at 615-870-1141.

Sincerely,  
Gwendolyn L. Watson, Doctoral Student  
University of Memphis

IRB ID#: 091311-841

Expiration Date: September 16, 2012

*Appendix B*

Sample Participation Consent Form

I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate in a study titled “A Study of the Motivations and Expectations of African American Families Engaged in the Desegregation of Nashville Public Schools in 1957.”

I agree to participate in a minimum of three interviews with truthful and accurate information to the best of my ability. I understand that there is no financial payment associated with my participation in this study

Further, I agree that the information I provide, which includes my actual name, may be used and published to satisfy the requirements of this study.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## *Appendix C*

### Research Interview Protocol Questions

#### Overarching Question

Why were the African American parents of the 11 students engaged in the desegregation of the Nashville Public School System in Nashville, Tennessee in 1957?

#### Sub-question 1:

What were the motivations of the African American parents of the 11 students engaged in the desegregation of the Nashville Public School System in Nashville, Tennessee in 1957?

1. Did you think it was the school's responsibility to properly education your child or did you feel you had joint responsibility with the schools for their education?
2. If your child did not understand their homework, did you think you should explain it or let the teacher explain the work?
3. Were teachers in general interested in discussing your child's progress with you on a regular basis?
4. How did teachers alert you when your child was having difficulty at school?
5. How did teachers alert you when your child was failing to learn at school?
6. How often did your child's teacher ask you to attend an event at school?
7. How often did your child's teacher encourage you to help your child with homework?
8. How often did your child's teacher request your assistance with something at school?

9. What were you prepared to do if the teacher did not invite you to school functions involving your child, and why?
10. How often did your child ask you to help them with their homework?
11. What were you prepared to do if your child invited you to participate in their school experience, and why?
12. How often did your child ask you to come to school with them?
13. Did you know how to contact your child's teacher when you needed to speak with them?
14. How did you adjust your schedule to accommodate your child's special needs resulting from attending the integrated school?
15. What kind of support groups did you have to help with the various situations your child might encounter in attending the integrated school?

Sub-question 2:

What were the expectations of the African American parents of the 11 students engaged in the desegregation of the Nashville Public School System in Nashville, Tennessee in 1957?

16. Did the school seek your input into how to best meet your child's needs?
17. What did you believe your child would get out of attending the integrated school?
18. Do you think your child did better because you were able to help them with schoolwork?
19. Were the actual schools/classrooms welcoming, safe, and nurturing places, despite the social objections voiced by the protesters?

20. How did schools attempt to engage you and your child's culture to help you feel a level of comfort in the new school?

Demographic Information

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age:(1957)\_\_\_\_\_(2011):\_\_\_\_\_ Ethnicity:\_\_\_\_\_

Education:(1957)\_\_\_\_\_(2011)\_\_\_\_ Occupation:(1957)\_\_\_\_\_(2011)\_\_\_\_\_

Married: (1957) \_\_\_\_\_ (2011)\_\_\_\_\_ Single: (1957)\_\_\_\_\_(2011)\_\_\_\_\_

Divorced: (1957) \_\_\_\_\_(2011)\_\_\_\_\_ Widow(er): (1957) \_\_\_\_\_(2011)\_\_\_\_\_

Number of children:(1957)\_\_\_\_;School aged\_\_\_\_; in 1<sup>st</sup> grade\_\_\_\_ above 1<sup>st</sup> grade\_\_\_\_

Role: (Check one)

Parent:\_\_\_\_\_ Student:\_\_\_\_\_ Supporter\_\_\_\_\_ (Activist):\_\_\_\_\_ Reporter:\_\_\_\_\_

Citizen:\_\_\_\_\_ Attorney:\_\_\_\_\_ Teacher:\_\_\_\_\_ Administrator\_\_\_\_\_

Other:( Specify):\_\_\_\_\_