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Family Support Factors in African American Families That Promote Academic Achievement for Male Middle-School Students

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Family Support Factors in African American Families That
Promote Academic Achievement for Male Middle-School Students

By

Reverend Osie Leon Wood, Jr.

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of The Claremont Graduate University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of Educational Studies.

Claremont, California
2012

Approved by:

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APPROVAL OF THE REVIEW COMMITTEE

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Reverend Osie Leon Wood, Jr. as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

Family Support Factors in African American Families That Promote Academic Achievement for Male Middle-School Students

by

Reverend Osie Leon Wood, Jr.

Claremont Graduate University: 2012

One of the most consistently reported challenges in the education literature is the underachievement of African American males at all levels of the education pipeline – from elementary and secondary schools through to postsecondary education. African American boys are falling behind and they are falling behind early. This research focuses on resources within the home environment that are available to support the educational achievement of African American boys. There are a number of mechanisms through which parental involvement in the home and at school may promote academic success that are being examined: parental involvement in school activities, expectations that parents share with their sons and for which they hold them accountable, and parental trust and support for both their sons and their sons' schools.

This research sampled families of African American boys in the eighth grade attending Middle Schools in the North Long Beach area of Southern California. It employed a mixed methods approach in using both questionnaires and surveys for collecting data. Thirty two parents were selected at random and completed questionnaires about attitudes and behaviors related to the home environment that impact their sons' educations. An

additional group of randomly selected parents were personally interviewed to gain more in-depth responses.

The sample was then divided into two groups according to the STAR Math scores attained by eighth grade boys in the families responding. This measure was used as an indicator of academic success because the STAR test score determines the Math class level for children in the local school district – with those scoring above 325 advancing to Geometry and those scoring below 325 taking lower level classes. The results of the questionnaires and interviews indicate an overall relationship in both groups showing trust and high expectations as being very important in fostering academic success in African American boys in the eighth grade. The consistency of positive home structural factors contributed to the academic success of boys in the families studied in spite of negative factors such as economic deprivation, parental unemployment, previous parental incarceration and lack of transportation.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Paula, my daughter, Stacey, and my three sons, Leon III, Anthony, and Stephen. Also, I would like to make a special dedication to my mother and father, who labored so hard, on my behalf, so that I would become the first in my family to obtain a doctorate degree. All of these wonderful people helped me with love and encouragement to reach my goal.

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This study would not have been started and completed without the encouragement, support, and assistance from numerous people whose patience and love and concern enabled me to finally accomplish this goal.

My loving wife, Paula Wood, was extremely supportive from the moment that I first decided, at the age of sixty-five to return to the university and complete the Ph.D that I had started thirty years ago. She prayed for me, read and edited my many research papers, and encouraged me when I was on the verge of quitting again. My daughter, Stacey, also read and edited my work and along with her mother continued to provide the much needed encouragement.

During these past five years, I have a host of wonderful university faculty members, university staff member and fellow students who not only supported my efforts, they virtually taught how to use the computer. I wish to thank Dr. William Crampon, Dr. Lourdes Arguelles, Dr. Gail Thompson, Dr. David Drew and Dr. Daryl for their patience, dedication and guidance in helping me through the process.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Education is the key that unlocks the door to social, economic, and political mobility in America. It is requisite to self-fulfillment, employability, and full participation in the rapidly growing informational and technological society (Reed, 1988). Successful academic achievement is in part attributable to attending a school where one feels accepted as a significant member of the school community, is respected in school by both students and faculty, and included in the school's social and extra-curricular activities. With such acceptance the student will be able to incorporate the school as a part of his or her self-definition (Gordon, et al., 2009).

While the school is an important factor in a child's success, the family is the basic institution through which children learn who they are and where they fit into society. It is from the base of the family that children explore and envision the possibilities for their future life patterns. Ethnicity determines much of the content and flavor of interaction within the family. If one is African American, he or she will develop a unique worldview based on a number of variables including parental priorities, which will be constrained by demographic variables, as well as the cultural and social capital available to the family unit. Because of these differing influences and constraints, the worldview developed by African American students will differ from that of their peers from different cultural backgrounds.

Self-identification is a critical developmental milestone faced by adolescents. It is achieved during these very challenging years through a process of crisis and commitment. Self-identity consists of many factors and draws from the adolescent's personal history and their place within that history. For most visible minorities, or those who can be physically identified as belonging to a minority group, ethnicity is likely to impact their interactions

regardless of the attention paid or value attached to their social and economic arrangements (Gordon, et al. 2009).

Some scholars focusing on families living in low-income socio-economical communities suggest that poor academic performance and antisocial behavior in young African American males surfaces during the early adolescent years. They assert that these behavioral and learning problems can be traced back to aspects of the social environments found in the home, school and neighborhood. An accumulation of negative experiences may serve to heighten the likelihood of these boys failing in school and possibly engaging with the juvenile and criminal justice systems (Monroe, 2005).

Other scholars disagree on the nature of the relationship between environment, experience and behavior. Some argue that it is the family belief system, social activities, and overall cultural style – rather than ethnic background, family composition and/or social status – that interact to produce the mental structures that affect a child's behavior and performance in the classroom (Clark, 1983; Miller, 1999). For the purpose of this study, the key definitions below are drawn from Clark's study:

Family composition refers to the number of parents in the home, the parents' marital status, family size, maternal employment, maternal education, ethnic background, family income and other demographic factors.

Family culture refers to home parental support networks (social capital), social relationships, family expectations, personal support systems, and parental supervision and guidance (Clark, 1983).

In the ongoing debate concerning the mechanisms through which the family impacts performance in the classroom, Conchas (2006) offers an alternative to Clark's (1983)

assessment by arguing that it is the parental ethnic background that generally predicts how individuals will fare against others in the competitive resource marketplace. Conchas (2006) asserts that the family's ideology, social class, and race often come into conflict with the dominant school culture. He further states that it is these conflicts, and how they are addressed, in the home, that will affect the student's academic progress.

While families and schools have worked together since the beginning of formalized schooling, the nature of this relationship has changed over time. Initially, families maintained a high degree of control over their children's schooling and were active in decisions such as the selection and hiring of teachers. The social and political changes of the mid 20th Century resulted in decreased parental involvement in school administration. School officials have now assumed most of the authority and responsibility for selecting the administrators and faculty, and determining the curriculum and how it will be taught.

Today, family involvement in schools has been largely reduced to matters of moral and cultural development, and religious education. At one time, families and schools worked closely together with parents preparing their children by teaching them school-readiness skills and then working with schools once their children started attending. In the context of contemporary economic reality and governmental regulation, schools and families have distanced themselves from each other and have assumed very distinct responsibilities in educating children (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Current parental involvement largely consists of activities such as volunteering at school for social and fund raising activities, assisting with academic activities in the home, and attending school events, meetings of parent-teachers associations (PTAs), and parent-teachers conferences.

Despite the trend toward demarcation between the home and classroom, parental involvement is assumed to have a positive influence on school-related outcomes and academic performance. Cross-sectional studies have demonstrated that an association between higher levels of parental involvement produces greater academic success in children and adolescents. For young children, parental involvement in the school is associated with early school success, ranging from academic and language skills to social competence (Hill & Taylor, 2004).

In December 1990, at the request of Marian Wright Edelman, founder and executive director of the Children's Defense Fund, a group of concerned African American leaders and intellectuals met to discuss the plight of African American children. Those persons attending that conference included Dorothy Height, president of the National Council of Negro Woman, James Forbes of New York's Riverside Church and noted child psychiatrist, James Comer, noted scholar and philosopher, Cornel West, and scholar/historian John Hope Franklin. At Dr. Edelman's request, Dr. John Hope Franklin was selected to write a manifesto to express the cares, concerns, and hopes that this distinguished group African American leaders had for African American children.

One passage from the manifesto prepared by Dr. Franklin, highlighted the spirit and intent of this historical endeavor:

Our desires and hopes for our children are reasonable to the point of modesty, but we wish no less and no more for them than we wish for every child in every land. We want them to grow up with healthy bodies and healthy minds, in a drug-free society, with ample tools for engaging in critical thinking and making sound judgments. We want them to have an opportunity to achieve success in school and

to understand fully the world of work, what is involved in acquiring marketable skills, and how important it is to make a significant contribution to the world. We want our children to learn that the greatest success lies not so much in amassing a fortune as in having a concern for others and in recovering and preserving the tradition of selfless service to family and community. We want them to appreciate fully the artistic, moral, and spiritual values that will bring them much of their heritage of the past and make it possible to pass these on to their successors. We want them to have an understanding and appreciation for family, for their own rich heritage derived from their African forebears as well as their American experience, the kind of understanding that will simultaneously provide them with roots and wings.

This manifesto concluded with the following pledge from the group:

We pledge ourselves to do everything humanly possible to strengthen the Black family, save Black children through succor as well as love, and to improve and modernize our schools in order to enhance significantly their chances for educational and life success. In this gigantic task, we shall utilize, to the fullest, the resources of our parent's children and the general public (Franklin, 2005, pp. 332-333).

In keeping with the dedicated spirit of this esteemed group of African American leaders and intellectuals, I will attempt to present research that will advance their pledge to the African American family, African American children and the general public.

The Problem

The Nation's young African American males are currently in a state of crisis. Those who live in the Nation's inner cities do not have the same opportunities as their male or female counterparts across the United States. Inner city African American boys are more likely to live in single-parent homes and are less likely to participate in early childcare programs than their suburban/rural counterparts (Garbarino, 1992; Gibbs, et al., 1988; Kunjufu, 1982; Lewis, et al., 2010). Children in households headed by African American women are five times more likely to be welfare dependent both in childhood and adulthood than those in two-parent households. They are also less likely to be raised in a household with a fully employed adult and more likely to live in poverty. Boys in families where the sole parent is an African American woman are not only reared without fathers as role models, but are also the products of families triply stigmatized by being African American, from a broken home, and being on welfare (Gibbs, et al., 1988).

Adolescent males in these families are more likely to live in substandard housing, attend poorly equipped schools, experience higher rates of chronic illnesses, exhibit more frequent and severe behavioral problems, and live in deteriorating neighborhoods with high crime rates, poor services, and inadequate public transportation (Gibbs, et al., 1988). As adults, these African American, males are less likely than their peers to find employment. At almost every juncture, the odds are stacked against these young Black men resulting in unfulfilled potential and too many fractured lives (Edelman, 2007; Garbarino, Dubrow, Kosstelny, & Pardo, 1992; Gibbs, et al., 1988; Lewis, 2010).

An achievement gap separating African American students from Caucasian students is well documented. This social divide continues to vex families, educators and policy

makers. This critical educational situation has led to one type of school reform after another. New reports focusing on African American males suggests that, overtime the situation has deteriorated and the resulting outlook for African American students, particularly boys, is far bleaker than generally acknowledged (Gabriel, 2010).

Researchers, policymakers, and educators recognize that low K-12 academic performances and depressed high school completion rates flow into declining participation levels for African American males in higher education and that this underrepresentation presents a national crisis (Rowley and Bowman, 2009). Family involvement in educational and social activities are central to any successful efforts aimed at reducing the current achievement gap between low-income African American children and their wealthier peers (Dearing, Simpkins, Kreider, and Weiss, 2006). Increasing evidence supports the linkage of high levels of family involvement in school activities to higher levels of academic performance (Dearing, Simpkins, Kreider, and Weiss, 2006). Some scholars argue that parents are the major force that determines the success of their children in school (Clark, 1983; Coleman, 1994; Cooper & Jordan, 2005; Kunjufu, 1982).

Robert Cooper and Will J. Jordan's 2005 study, *Cultural Issues and Comprehensive School Reform*, argues that American society remains stratified by both ethnicity and class. They assert that being African American continues to have negative connotations and consequences especially for young males. Cooper and Jordan (2005) reiterate the claims made by earlier researchers that cultural norms and values embedded within America's economic and political institutions have reduced African American males, especially the young, to what can be considered an "endangered species."

Within popular usage, an endangered species refers to a group in which the members have common attributes, are designated by a common name, and are in danger or peril of probable harm or loss. This description applies, in a metaphorical sense, to the current status of young African American males within American society. According to many socially-conscious experts, African American boys have been and continue to be failed by the education system, mishandled by the criminal justice system, mislabeled by the mental health system, and mistreated by the social welfare system (Edelman, 2007; Fashola, 2005; Clark, 1983; Kunjufu, 1982; Woodson, 1998; Woodson, 1933). Consequently, the label “endangered species” remains accurate in describing the plight of African American males in the 15-24 year old age group (Gibbs, Brunswick, Connor, et al., 1988). For effective social change to become a reality for this group of young men, something must be done in their formative years that will help them successfully move beyond the social stigma of failure and other negative identifiers which are currently being used when referencing poor outcomes and pessimistic predictions ascribed to African American males. American society must acknowledge and be willing to respond to the impact of racism, poverty, youth unemployment, poor family relations and inadequate human services, especially for those families that are being challenged economically, socially, politically, and economically. The cost of addressing these problems will be great, but the costs of ignoring them will be far greater (Conner, 1988).

Ferguson (2001) suggested that many of America’s inner city schools enact systematic biases against African American boys. He cites evidence of these biases in the uneven manner in which various school rules and regulations, systems of control and discipline, are administered in relation to African American boys. Ferguson (2001) argued

that African American boys are often punished for a variety of misbehaviors and school infractions that are frequently overlooked when committed by other racial groups. He asserts that these school violations frequently go unaddressed and unpunished and may even be excused when they involve non-African Americans. According to Ferguson (2001), these types of inconsistencies result in the early alienation and disenfranchisement of African American boys within the education system (Taylor, Casten, et al., 1994).

Today's Educational Problem

One of the most consistently reported topics in the education literature is the underachievement of African American males at all levels of the educational pipeline, elementary, secondary, and even postsecondary (Mandara, 2006; Mincy, 2006; Taylor et al., 1994). Several educators have reported that low teacher expectations and poor school tracking efforts place African American students into low-ability classes and underperforming schools that hire unprepared teachers. This results in the incorporation of individual African American students into underachieving peer groups that feed back into and reinforce these negative assessments of African American students, particularly boys (Murray & Jackson, 1999; Kershaw, 1992; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002).

Policy makers and education professionals point to the low academic performance and college participations rates of African American males as a growing national concern. While the overall graduation rates for African Americans males in higher education have grown steadily over the last two decades, African American enrollments continue to lag behind those of other ethnic groups. Where African American enrollments have increased, it is mostly attributable to the increased participation of African American woman in higher education (Rowley & Bowman, 2009).

The role of the school, in perpetuating these poor outcomes and expectations, presents only one side of the story, since other factors such as family expectations and elements of the home environment can contribute to student success. The impact of negative home and family environmental factors, undereducated and under-informed parents, families living in poverty, broken homes due to parental separation, and non-supportive relatives and friends must be taken into account in any attempt to comprehensively define the scope of the problem (Mandara, 2006; Miller, 1999; Ford, 1993; Clark, 1983). The need to examine the home environment when discussing issues of academic progress among African Americans boys was raised as early as 1983 by Reginald Clark and continues to be supported by other scholars such as, Murray & Jackson (1999) and Mandara (2006). A number of other studies have included parental attributes as critical variables that contribute to the successful developmental progress of children. These critical variables include: effective parental guidance in the home and the provision of a variety of academically enhancing experiences combined with high performance expectations and careful monitoring of the child's use of time and space in support of his educational attainment (Clark, 1983; Taylor, 1996; Toldson, 2008).

A 2010 *New York Times* article reporting the results of the National Assessment Test of Educational Progress (NEAP-A federally mandated national math and reading test) presents compelling evidence of the failure of African American boys within America's education system (Gabriel, 2010). Only 12% of African American fourth-grade boys are proficient in reading compared to 38% of Caucasian boys and the failure of African American boys seems to be persisting. By the eighth grade the gap has widened with only

12% of African American boys being tested as proficient in math, compared to 44% of Caucasian boys (Gabriel, 2010).

According to Gabriel (2010), poverty alone does not account for these differences in academic achievement between groups. One statistic that is somewhat puzzling is that the national data indicates that poor Caucasian boys do just as well in reading and math as African American boys who do not live in poverty. Further research is needed to determine the interaction between ethnicity and poverty in finding the answers to this dilemma. Gabriel's (2010) conclusions indicated that in addition to the poor performance of African American boys from low income families, African American boys from families that are not considered impoverished (who are not eligible for free and reduced-price lunches, which indicate low-income) are also falling behind their Caucasian counterparts. The key question to address is: why do boys from higher income African American families do no better than Caucasian boys from impoverished families that are eligible for free or reduced-price school lunches?

Cultural, economical, social, historical, and ethnic factors define a child's experiences before they enter school (Clark, 1983; Brofenbrenner, 1986; Benard, 1993; Berk, 2000). How parents and other significant adults communicate with children, the types of topics discussed in the home and the manner in which discipline and encouragement are presented impact a child's social and educational adjustment once at school (Clark, 1983; Brofenbrenner, 1986; Conner, 1988; Conchas, 2006).

Despite the popular tendency to focus on personal deficits when discussing the poor performance of African American males within the education system, research reveals a large number of external variables that are associated with this lack of academic

achievement and social success, including many structural factors that exist within the family, neighborhood, and school that influence individual adjustment (Brofenbrenner, 1994; Brofenbrenner, 1990; Brofenbrenner, 1979; Clark, 1983; Fergusson, 2001; Conchas, 2006).

Changes in national and neighborhood cultures associated with post-globalization have placed new strains on both African American parents and their children. These new social, cultural, political and economic pressures have systematically placed African American males further at risk in terms of psychosocial stress and school/community related difficulties. However, it is important for society to realize that there are still multiple levels of both support and protective factors available in the Black family, community, and school that if developed effectively and implemented appropriately could promote resiliency and create more successful academic, social and economic outcomes. These resources, starting in the homes, churches, and local civic community, could be used to mitigate socio-economic and political problems associated with poverty that are manifested in the stresses of welfare-to-work pressures, unemployment, underemployment, child support issues, spousal abuse, incarceration, and drug/alcohol abuse that persist as barriers to African American males negotiating life's daily challenges and responsibilities (Gibbs, 1988; Jewel, 2003).

As previously stated, African American males continue to academically perform significantly below their peers throughout the country on almost every academic assessment indicator. While a concerted amount of governmental resources have been expended in an attempt to address this major social challenge, there is no record of a unified national concentrated effort, over a designated period of time, focusing specifically

on the education and social improvement of African American males. There has never been a designated office within the United States Department of Education to specifically address this issue. No designated federal resources are in place to collect and maintain data focusing specifically on African American males; no legislative initiatives within local, state, or national budgets; no attention paid to collecting information on this set of issues outside of a few dedicated private organizations. There currently is no national policy in place or being considered that directs resources or attention toward this issue and no federal programs focus on the educational and social status of African American males in urban America, other than law enforcement data.

While educators, researchers, policymakers, governmental leaders, faith-based leaders, civil rights leaders, and others have expressed their concerns about improving the quality of life of African American males, there does not appear to be any data currently available which reports on their collective efforts in planning, developing and implementing any comprehensive programs to address this major educational, social, economical and political challenge. This multifaceted issue impacts American society on a number of levels. However, the most significant is education, because academic attainment is the foundation for social and economic advancement.

The problems facing this nation, as it relates to African Americans, are as follows:

- a) Academic achievement levels for African American males continue to be lower than other ethnic groups. Between 2003 and 2009, the average reading score of fourth grade African American males in large cities was 28 points lower than the average score of Caucasians. This difference extended to 29 points in the eighth grade.

- b) In 2009, at least 50% of the nation's eighth grade African American male students performed below basic levels.
- c) African American students in grades fourth and eighth grades scored significantly lower than both Caucasian, Asian and Hispanic students.
- d) Only 12% of African American males in national public schools are proficient in reading.
- e) Proficiency levels vary by region with ranging from 2% of the fourth grade African American males in Detroit reaching proficiency in to 24% in Charlotte Reaching proficiency.
- f) Fewer African American males take Advanced Placement Exams or enroll in two or four year colleges after high school.
- g) The average SAT and ACT test scores for African American males are lower than both Caucasian, Asian and Hispanic male students.
- h) In 2009, the gap between Caucasian, and African American students taking the SAT was 104 points in critical reading, 120 points in mathematics and 99 points in writing (The Council of Great City Schools Reports, 2010).

The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) reading scores for African American male fourth graders shown to be the lowest of any of the tested subgroups (Rashid, 2009). According to H. M. Rashid (2009), the literacy levels of African American boys are critical indicators of what is likely to transpire for them in their future educational options and activities. Early elementary school literacy predicts high school performance in reading, math, and science. The family environment can exert a pivotal impact on the child's early literacy. Research suggests that reading problems are

frequently connected to emotional problems that low-income children experience. Acknowledging the existence of this connection, Rashid (2009) suggests adopting a sociocultural perspective on literacy acquisition that situates the reading problems of young African American boys within their unique family, social, cultural, and historical contexts. His approach requires integrating the issue of literacy for young African American boys into both the family context and a broader political and economic environment (Rashid, 2009).

Many parents assume that the primary function of schools is to make their children literate and prepare them for success in life. Literacy is central to this expectation. *Literacy* is generally defined as the ability of a student to speak, write, and understand the English language at levels sufficient to achieve communication goals in various interpersonal encounters within the American society. Yet America's public schools have failed to meet the expectation of achieving literacy, effectively and efficiently, for the majority of African American students. In contrast to these global expectations of an effective education delivery system, some scholars maintain that public schools merely serve as institutions that select, sort, and control (Clark, 1983; Miller, 1999). Clark (1983) argued that public schools, especially urban public schools, teach most African American students just enough for them to enter occupational positions that replicate the status positions of their parents. According to this perspective, American schools function to reproduce the various ethnic divisions of labor that have always existed between competing family units from different ethnic groups (Clark, 1983; Gibbs, 1988; Woodson, 1933).

While some agree that the purpose of school should be to transfer socially and economically useful skills and not just cultural values, the current trend appears for schools

to stress predefined values and aptitudes for attaining specific socio-economic statuses rather than in providing a comprehensive education that prepares all students equally for opportunities provided within the global work place (Clark, 1983; Jewell, 2003; Kunjufu, 1982; Kunjufu, 2000). Career-related technical skills and/or literacy-based skills are not effectively incorporated into the learning experience. Millions of elementary, middle school, and high school students, in America's cities, are tested at levels that indicate that they are unable to read or write commensurate with their school grade levels (Taylor, et al., 1994). In addition, when school boards and/or school administrators attempt to implement programs to address differences in cultural orientation these initiatives have failed generally due to the lack of resources or community and political commitment (Clark, 1983; Kunjufu, 1982; Kunjufu, 2000).

Inner-city African American students are failing in school in large numbers (Crampon, 2006-2007; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2003; National Urban League, 2008). Scholars analyzing these negative trends within the educational system predicted that these persistent and pervasive failures are somehow reflected in the numbers of African American men who overtime have become involved in the Nation's prison system (Edelman, 2007). Edelman (2007) and Porter (1997) predicted that approximately 28.5% of African American men-more than one in every four-will become incarcerated in a state or federal prison at some point during their lifetime. As early as 1933 and as recently as 2005, scholars such as Woodson (1933), Kinjufu (1982), Clark (1983) and Fashola (2005) have insisted that the American education system is consistently and systematically programming young African American males for failure in school. These and other scholars, along with both community and faith-based leaders

have long suggested that a conspiracy is being enacted throughout America to undermine and destroy African American males, starting before they enter elementary school and continuing throughout their educational experiences (Dembo, 1988; Edelman, 2007; Ferguson, 2001; Gibbs, 1988; Kunjufu, 1982; Porter, 1997; Young, 2004). According to Porter (1997), the socioeconomic tragedies occurring in African American communities provide sufficient support for the conclusion that African American males are indeed an “endangered species”.

Not all scholars share these extremely pessimistic conclusions. Scholars, such as, Conchas (2006) and Hales (2004) provide a more optimistic assessment of the current status of education and anticipated future of education, as it relates to African American boys. They advocate the need for effective planning, development and implementation of an educational delivery system that would be capable of effectively addressing and countering the drawbacks of the current system. They support the notion that there is still time for effective change to take place. Both Conchas (2006) and Hales (2004) call for this proposed new system to be carefully researched and planned, thoroughly developed, completely funded, and for it to be designed to effectively utilize the strengths and resources already existing within the African American family and community. With commitment and sufficient resources, such a system could effectively remedy the negative predictions offered by other scholars who examine and evaluate the system as it now stands. Conchas and Hales assert that an effectively transformed educational system would open up avenues that would lead to successful achievement in higher education for all Americans without regard to ethnicity or socioeconomic status. Transformation in education would have positive flow-on effects that would lead to socioeconomic progress

and political acceptance as well as personal achievement and enhanced satisfaction for all those involved (Conchas, 2006; Hales, 2004; Taylor & Lopez, 2005). These progressive scholars are convinced that, without the benefits of an effective education system, any hope of higher education as a primary goal will be unobtainable in America regardless of ethnicity, economic or social status.

Role of Family and Peers

There is still much to be learned about the roles that family, peers and community relationships play in the academic achievement of African American males. Studies are needed that will help determine how these various family and peer relationships enhance or impede the ability of African American males to succeed in education and beyond. Some scholars are beginning to place a greater emphasis on the role of the family as the key to the success or failure of African American boys (Clark, 1983; Benard, 1993; Kunjufu, 2000; Boyd-Franklin, 2003). Others point to a strong mother as being critical to insuring the development of resiliency in African American boys. These scholars support the premise that the mother – whether the sole parent or not – influences the kinds of choices young African American males make and the activities that they become involved in (Clark, 1983; Allen & Doherty, 1998; Cantwell & Jenkins, 1998; Jewell, 2003; Salem, Zimmerman, Notaro, 1998). Another group of scholars argue that other family factors contribute to an African American child's progress, development and achievement. This group suggested that other factors be included, such as, the presence of the father in the home, the expressed high performance and achievement expectations of the father, supportive siblings, supportive extended family members (grandparents, aunts, uncles), and an active effective family social network (social capital) including the church and local community (Benard, 1993;

Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Garbarino, 1992; Jewell, 2003; Epstein, 1994; McAdoo, 1998).

Garbarino (1992) claims that these variables are as important for the academic success of young African American males as having a strong mother in the home.

In spite of differences of opinions among scholars regarding to the role of the mother, there are significant similarities between Clark's (1983) study and Garbarino's (1992) findings. According to Clark (1983) and later supported by Salem, Zimmerman and Notaro (1998), most studies discussing the impact of families on the academic achievement of children from economically impoverished communities have focused on the composition of the household, especially on whether or not there was a father present in the home. In many of these studies, a father's presence was considered one of the major determinants of how the children, especially the boys, would perform both academically in school and socially in the community (Salem, Zimmerman & Notaro, 1998). These studies support the contention that children from traditional two parent families perform better in school compared to the children from families where the presence of only one parent creates an automatic deficit in the children's academic performance. According to Clark (1983), not enough attention has been paid to other critical aspects of children's social development – such as being loved, receiving timely encouragement, expressions of high expectations concerning his/her future, and a healthy environment that includes timely corrective parental guidance. These factors also influence physical growth, social maturation, and academic achievement (Allen & Doherty, 1998; Epstein, 1994; Hrabowski, Maton, Greif, 1998; Woodson, 1998).

Clark (1983) argues that, regardless of the home's parental composition, the family's main contribution to a child's success in school is achieved through personal

parental individual qualities and the nature of the interpersonal relationships that occur within the home. Clark (1983) asserts that children receive both survival knowledge and the foundations for social and academic competence from their parents or other significant adults who serve in the capacity of parent. It was Clark's contention that the process of developing the skills necessary for academic and social survival and success, could be provided by one parents, two parents, or any other caring and loving individual with whom the child had positive sustained daily contact.

Several scholars have concluded that adolescent African American boys cannot be fully understood without consideration of family, peer and community associations (Bageley & Carroll, 1998; Benard, 1993; Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Taylor, 1996; Winfield, 1994). These scholars concluded that in African American boys, self-image is initiated through interactions with family members at home as well as with individuals at school and throughout their communities (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Clark, 1983; Taylor, 1996). Thus African American boys assume their social roles and attitudes from the adults with whom they most frequently interact. From these interactions, African American boys also develop self-confidence because these interactions provide them with the skills and sense of security necessary to negotiate a wide variety of challenges (Kunjufu, 2000; Salem, Zimmerman & Notaro, 1998).

Some researchers and educators focus on distinctions in social organizations relating to communication styles, family rituals, customs, and home environmental patterns in discussing ethnic, economic or social differences in students (Taylor, 1996; Clark, 1983). The intent of this study is to demonstrate that it is the overall quality of parental involvement, in the academic and social experiences of African American boys in

middle school that affects their academic achievement. The basic argument presented is that timely, consistent and effective parent involvement, both in the home and at school, are essential for the achievement of positive academic outcomes. This study supports the position that the social organization and home management provided by parents in a home environment can equip African American boys with the necessary survival skills, personal confidence and technical knowledge to achieve both academic and social success. The primary focus of this study is environmental factors in the home – including well articulated parental expectations and parent support factors for achieving those expectations –and their impact on the academic performance of African American boys in the eighth grade. Special attention is paid to identifying success strategies adopted by parents and/or guardians of sons performing well academically that can be generalized and replicated by other parents to positively impact other children’s success in both school and community. The underlying goal of this study is to identify successful parenting tools and actions that contribute to the academic successes of African American boys.

Research Question

This research seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the parental factors that affect the academic performance of African American boys in the eighth grade?
- 2) What roles do parents play in helping their eighth-grade sons achieve academic and social success?

This research attempts to identify and compare both positive and negative aspects of the home environment that influences children’s academic performance. The researcher contacted parents and guardians through the use of questionnaires and personal

interviews to obtain information concerning the quality of parental support and parental effectiveness in their eighth-grade sons' academic performance. The population selected for this study was a neighborhood located in the northern community (Council Districts 8 & 9) of Long Beach, California.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

National data reveals that African American boys are underperforming at alarming rates throughout the K-12 educational pipeline and that this systemic failure is feeding into lower college attendance and completion rates when compared to other ethnic groups across the Nation (Nation Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), 2003; Toldson, 2008). Education policy experts and practitioners point to the poor academic performance and college attendance levels of African American males as a growing national concern both for the African American community and the United States (National Urban League, 2007); Schott Foundation, 2008). While the overall high school graduation rates and college enrollment rates for African Americans have increased over the past twenty years, African American college enrollments continue to lag behind those of Caucasian, Asian American and Latino. Furthermore the bulk of the increase in college enrollments in the African American community are attributable to the college increased enrollments of African American women. Of those African Americans enrolled in college, 67% were women and only 33% were men (ACE, 2002; NCES, 2003). College enrollments for African American men aged 18-24 declined from 35.1% in 1996 to 25.1% in 2000. The economic impact of this net loss has dramatic implications for American society.

Racial and social background notwithstanding, some researchers report core dispositional and lifestyle differences between families of high-achieving students and those of low-achieving students (Cervantes, 1965; Clark, 1983). In examining educational trends in Caucasian high school students in Boston, St. Louis, New Orleans, Omaha, Denver, and Los Angeles, Cervantes (1965) discovered an association between positive family/home experiences and:

- a) a strong adolescent self-concept
- b) intellectual alertness, which was reflected in speech, vocabulary and academic performance
- c) a display of high quality skills in performing effectively in a variety of social situations

Cervantes (1965) was the first researcher to document the relationship between home environment and academic performance. Cervantes' research was later championed by several notable scholars from the fields of education and social psychology, including Urie Brofenbrenner (1979), Reginald Clark (1983), J. S. Coleman (1994), J. L. Epstein (1994), D. M. Gordon (2009) and N. E. Hill (2004).

Foundational to this dissertation is the 1983 study conducted by Reginald Clark who examined the academic performance of children from African American families in a Chicago housing development. Clark (1983) found that family habits and interactions within the family affected school performance. Clark concluded that patterns of parental interactions within the home constituted an area in which parents could inculcate skills within their children that would enhance their likelihood of academic achievement and social success in school.

The literature indicates a least three types of home activities that parents engage in that can help better prepare children for successful social adaptation and academic performance. These activities include tutoring subjects like reading, writing, basic health maintenance and in some cases mathematics. An emphasis on recreational activities based on the family unit can also help foster social competence (Cervantes, 1965; Clark, 1983; Taylor et al., 1994; Taylor & Lopez, 2005). Some of the home social activities allow the

parents and other family members, to serve as home-coaches, nurses, guides, and teachers (Clark, 1983). According to Clark, (1983), Taylor & Lopez (2005), Benard (1993), Brofenbrenner (1990) and Cervantes (1965), these three types of activities – academic tutoring, family recreational activities and other areas of guidance and coaching – should be initiated as early as possible, at least by preschool because the most basic of these encourage autonomy by teaching the child hygienic competence.

According to Clark (1983), children should also know their names, addresses and telephone numbers before starting school. Subsequent lessons should involve: complex verbal and social games; counting tasks and math computations; solving riddles and reasoning problems; reading and interpreting challenging and interesting books, newspaper articles, and magazines; actively participating in creative art projects; writing about experiences and ideas; telling stories and sharing ideas; analyzing the motivations of others; and interacting with nuclear and extended family members, other adults, and peers. Both Clark (1983) and Kunjufu (2000) advocate that the development of these kinds of social and educational skills prepare children to be effective when entering school and serve to enhance their competitiveness throughout their educational careers.

The literature focusing on the academic performance of urban African American boys indicates that numerous factors affect academic achievement. Many of these factors have been used to explain the performance gap between African American students and their Caucasian peers. According to some studies, one of the factors affecting African American student-performance is the continuous and pervasive inequality that persists in the American education system – especially as it relates to the participation of both African

American students and African American parents in the system (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Jewell, 2003; Kunjufu, 2000; Rumberger & Williams, 1992; Stevenson, 1994).

Educational scholars who focus on the relationship between academic performance and the family environment conclude that family life plays a significant role in preparing African American boys to function in settings outside of the home (Joe & Davis, 2009; Fashola, 2005; Hill, 2004; Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Coleman, 1994; Connor, 1988; Cervantes, 1965). In order to function effectively in school and other social environments within the community, African American boys require greater amounts of parental attention, control and support than African American girls (Fashola, 2005; Murray & Jackson, 1999; Kunjufu, 1982; Clark, 1983).

Census and other demographic data indicate that increasing numbers of children live in single-parent households. In response to this trend increased attention has been paid to how this particular family arrangement affects the growth and development of the African American child, particularly boys (Benard, 1993; Bush, 1998; Clark, 1983; Mandara, 2006; Salem et al., 1998; Winfield, 1994). Single parent families, and more specifically female-headed households, have become associated with a range of social problems including: delinquency, alcohol and drug abuse and low self-esteem. All of these can be reflected in deficits in social behavior, poor classroom performance, and in some cases, participation in criminal activities (Bush, 1998; Winfield, 1994; Salem, Zimmerman & Notaro, 1998). In contrast to these assumptions of the disadvantages of growing up in a female-headed household, Clark (1983) and Hrabowski, Maton, and Greif (1998) identify African American mothers as having the potential to guide their sons to academic excellence regardless of the family structure.

While some studies contend that two-parent homes have a positive effect on academic performance compared to one-parent homes that are associated with poor performance (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Cooper & Jordan, 2005; Reed, 1988; Clark, 1983), Clark (1983) challenged the efficacy of these findings by arguing that neither family composition nor the presence of a father was the primary determinant of academic performance. Clark (1983) insisted that the areas of parental involvement outlined in the Maccoby and Martin (1983) functioned independently of family structure. In other words, it was the quality of the home environment and nature of the time spent with the child that made the greatest impact on behavior and school performance.

Salem, Zimmerman, and Notaro (1998) argue that an additional family variable should be added to this parental equation in determining factors that impact student achievement. They suggest that extended family members should be included in the support system equation, particularly grandmothers, whether or not they reside in the home. These scholars contend that grandmothers play a significant and effective role in the development of appropriate social behaviors and academic successes in African American children. Salem, Zimmerman and Notaro (1998), Clark (1983) and Mandara (2006) support the role of grandmothers in the academic achievement of African American children.

Early studies of factors influencing the academic performance of African American boys failed to consider the impact of parents and the possibility that parenting styles form a distinct variable that may vary within and across ethnic groups. Although rare, some recent studies of African American students have brought the structure of inner city families into focus by shedding a more informed light on the relationship between family

structure and children's behavior outside of the home (Mandara, 2006). Insufficient attention has been paid to how the daily activities of family members influence African American boys both in school and in the community (Clark, 1983; Hrabowski, Maton, & Greif, 1998; Mandara, 2006). The relative neglect of family variables in evaluating the plight of African American boys in the education system has contributed to the lack of effective federal, state and local governmental policies, programs and social interventions that could help families by building on resources readily available to them. The majority of policy interventions, to date, have concentrated on demographic factors rather than family issues and this may have contributed to the failure of these policies (Mandara, 2006; Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Gibbs, 1988; Kunjufu, 1982).

Scholars focusing on the family in general have found that characteristics of relationships within the family both influence educational outcomes and can be modified to facilitate and support children's educational and social development (Cervantes, 1965; Brofenbrenner, 1979; Clark, 1983; Bernard, 1993; McLoyd, 1998; Bush, 1998; Cooper & Jordan, 2005; Conchas, 2006; Dearing, 2006). Some developmental psychologists also agree that development is enhanced when the child is immersed in an environment that offers supportive and effective nurturing, warmth and love. Firm guidance, parental control, and effective discipline, especially for African American boys seem to encourage positive social development (Bageley & Carroll, 1998; Conchas, 2006; Jeynes, 2003; Kunjufu, 2000; Mandara, 2006; Salem, Zimmerman & Nataro, 1998).

In examining how parenting styles influence academic performance and social competence, Macoby and Martin (1983) conducted a study which identified distinct parenting styles: *authoritative, authoritarian, permissive/indulgent, or neglectful*. Macoby

and Martin's *authoritative parenting* is characterized by the parent(s) displaying an interest in the child's home activities; consistent monitoring of the child's use of time and space; and maintaining an ongoing and consistent involvement in the child's intellectual activities, including study requirements, reading, writing, conversation, art and music. In addition, parents must establish and express consistently high expectations and standards for responsible behavior for their children. Mandara (2006) references these parenting styles in discussing academic performance and social competence. Mandara (2006) concludes that academic performance and school behavior of African American children are enhanced by a combination of *authoritative* and *authoritarian* parenting styles. The four critical areas of parental involvement identified by Mandara (2006) are: appropriate and timely physical discipline, racial socialization, direct academic involvement, and family time management.

A number of other scholars have highlighted the importance of family support factors in contributing to the academic performance of African American boys (Clark, 1983; Kunjufu, 2000; Mandara, 2006; Salem et al., 1998; Winfield, 1994). Four critical areas of recommended parental involvement are compatible with the *authoritative parenting style* described by Maccoby and Martin (1983). Authoritative parents are more likely to be actively and effectively involved in the educational experiences of their children compared to those who are not involved daily in their children's social and educational experiences, are overly permissive at home and passively delegate their responsibility for their children's educations to the school (Clark, 1983; Kunjufu, 2000; Mandara, 2006).

One of Clark's (1983) foundational findings is that parents contribute to their children's success through the home environment and the quality of the relationships

within the family. Since home is where children receive knowledge that will aid in their classroom performance, Clark contends that it is the responsibility of the parents and family to equip their children with effective skills based upon the knowledge and determination expressed by the parents, extended family, social relationships, and community institutions such as the church and family support networks (social capital). Other important parental factors include the comfort-levels the parents have themselves, and the parents' social relationships and how these relationships contribute to the structure and rules within the home. Clark's (1983) study was based on assumptions introduced in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) *ecological systems theory*. Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that individuals are affected by a vast series of environmental interconnections that both positively and negatively impact their psychological, social, political, and economic development.

Another educational scholar linking ecological systems theory to developmental processes and academic achievement is Dressler (1985) who studied educational achievement in children within an African American community in the South. Dressler (1985) found that extended family support networks have a positive impact on both the intellectual and social development of African American children within that community. Dressler's conclusions are supported by Taylor, Casten, and Flickinger (1993) who reiterate the importance of kinship support and social networks in creating and maintaining a sense of security for both children and their parents. However, Taylor, Casten, and Flickinger (1993) report that these supports networks appear to be more beneficial for mothers and fathers managing single-parent households and for adolescent mothers.

While on the surface it might appear that Taylor, Casten, and Flickinger (1993) are at odds with Clark (1983) who maintains that the parents' beliefs, activities and cultural styles, and not the family's composition or social status, produce the mental structures for effective and desirable behavior in a children's school experiences. Taylor, Casten and Flickinger (1993) did not directly address parental characteristics in their study. Therefore extended family networks might be viewed as a complement to Clark's (1983) assertions that parents who utilize an authoritative family management style have the greatest chance of enhancing the child's social and academic competence since the extended family network can support and reinforce the chosen parenting style.

The Role of Home Experiences

This dissertation hypothesizes that the most pedagogically effective educational experiences occur when the role demands and cognitive functioning of the classroom are compatible with the child's experiences at home (Benard, 1993; Cervantes, 1965; Clark, 1983; Conchas, 2006; Kunjufu, 2000). This study contends that the child will develop greater proficiency when presented with academic and social challenges if the activities and experiences in both the home and school are mutually reinforcing and are facilitated by an environment of mutual trust, shared goals, and personal autonomy. This allows the child to move easily between the home and school since the expectations are consistent between these two domains.

Clark (1983) argues that the home-community setting is where African American children first develop a range of abilities and express themselves socially and intelligently in a manner appropriate for their age. In this home-community setting, children learn to pay attention, concentrate, volunteer, comply, engage in constructive self-directed

activities, initiate productive interactions, enjoy orderly social interactions, accept responsibility, follow through and complete tasks, hold positive concepts of learning, manifest leadership skills, exercise self-control, develop sensitivity to the needs of others, and enjoy a sense of accomplishment when goals are achieved (Clark, 1983; Wilson, 1987). The mechanisms for transmitting these necessary skills are preparatory tasks that should be championed and implemented by family members in the home if they seek success for their children in school. There is virtually no disagreement among educators and social scientists over Clark's suppositions regarding the importance of family life when it comes to the academic and social development of African American children.

Reasons for Concern

The African American community and national policy makers should be concerned about the low K-12 academic performance of African American boys and the flow-on effects for postsecondary education, and their future places in the American political, social and economical system. The expanding academic achievement gap poses challenges to the future career options, family and socio-economic dynamics, and the overall stability of the African American community and potentially the Nation. The need for positive change within the African American home, community and in the education system are especially acute when negative educational trends are coupled with data showing the incarceration rates for African American men, state-level spending trends for higher education versus corrections, and the limited employment opportunities for African American males – from adolescence through to adulthood (Conner, 1988; Gibbs, 1988; Garbarino, 1992; Porter, 1997; Kunjufu, 2000; Edelman, 2007; National Urban League, 2008). An increasing number of researchers point to a wide range of factors that help to explain the education

gap for African American males that extends from K-12 on through to and including higher education (Clark, 1983; Conchas, 2006; Ferguson, 2001; Edelman, 2007; Gabriel, 2010).

Despite the popular tendency to focus on the personal deficits of individual African American men, a number of studies reveal a wide range of variables that contribute to the lack of academic achievement –including structural factors and other variables present in the home, neighborhood, school and other cultural and at the socio-economical level (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Hrabowski, Maton & Greif, 1998; Noguera, 2003; Rowley & Bowman, 2009).

Recent studies conducted in various American urban areas show that parental involvement has proven to have a positive impact on the academic achievement of elementary and middle school children in math, reading, language arts, and science (Fashola, 2005; Conchas, 2006; Dearing, Kreider & Weiss, 2006). These findings support Clark (1983) and Hrabowski (1998) who contend that parental involvement is pivotal to the academic achievement of African American males. To date only one study takes issue with Clark (1983) and Hrabowski, (1998). In a study funded by the Milken Family Foundation, Lareau (1994) found that in families with low levels of education and high levels of socioeconomic constraints, parental involvement has little positive impact on the educational outcomes of their children. However, this is an isolated finding that has not been replicated in the literature.

A current trend in the literature is the renewed focus on the complex social ecology of families and how this helps to shape the educational outcomes for African American boys. With this renewed emphasis on social ecology, attention is being given to the structural constraints related to psychosocial risks and the sociocultural protective factors

that contribute to positive behaviors and performances in the home, school and community (Bowman, 2006; Bronfenbrenner, 1986). In the context of post-industrial globalization, family stressors experienced by both African American fathers and mothers may systematically place African American boys at risk for a unique pattern of psychosocial stress that contributes to school-related difficulties. However, protective factors within the family, school, and community have the potential to promote resiliency and contribute to successful academic and social outcomes. This multilevel role strain and adaptive approach suggests that intervention strategies with individual African American students and families should be combined with broader public policy actions that consider family, school, and community socioeconomic issues (Rowley and Bowman, 2009).

Fordham (1996) highlights particular challenges in rearing African American boys. He suggests that some of the reasons why African American boys appear to be more difficult to raise than girls is because the parents of boys are forced to consider both their racial status within the larger American society and also the variations of patriarchal principles that exist both in the larger society and the African American community. African American parents are compelled to inculcate their sons according to a two-fold and internally inconsistent formula: to concurrently accept ethnic/racial subordination and its attendant humiliation for survival in the larger society, while at the same time trying to teach him to preserve his gender respect and domination for survival in the African American community (Fordham, 1996; Kunjufu, 2000).

Fordham (1996) concludes that families of high-achieving African American boys in urban schools are primarily from stable families, generally meaning there are two parents in the home. While within her sample the majority of underachieving boys were living in

single-parent homes, with mothers serving as the head of the house, receiving little or no support from the fathers. She also found that most high-achieving African American boys looked to their mothers or other female relatives as the closest and most influential adults in their lives, regardless of the presence of a father in the home. One of Fordham's (1996) interesting findings is that many of the parents of high-achieving students were ambivalent about the value of education and did not necessarily make college a priority for their sons. These parents placed greater emphasis on their son's behavior and personal values. For example, it was more important for their sons to be respectful and honest than to be high achievers in school. The parents in this study indicated that they used a variety of approaches to shape their sons' behavior ranging from corporal punishment (spankings) to placing various restrictions on their sons' social activities.

Fordham (1996) also discusses underachieving children who received the types of family support typically identified with student success – including a stable home environment and involved parents. She found that in some cases, parents were over indulgent of their children and placed few, if any, performance demands on them. In contrast, single mothers, who participated in Fordham's study and were successful in helping their sons achieve combined both the traditional paternal and maternal roles in their parenting styles, especially when setting goals, house rules, social rules of conduct and applying discipline. These findings were consistent with the works of other scholars, Clark (1983), Bush (1998), Hrabowski (1998), and Kunjufu (2000). Fordham's (1996) study found that single mothers of underachieving boys tended to become increasingly childlike in their interactions with their sons as they transitioned into puberty. These mothers appeared to adopt relationships styles with their sons that closely approximated

the relationships they had with adult males who were objects of their affection (Clark, 1983; Fordham, 1996). Regardless of the level of their son's academic achievement, the primary concern of single African American mothers for their sons was concern for the safety (Fordham, 1996).

Much of the literature indicates that there were two major mechanisms by which parental involvement promotes school achievement. The first is by increasing the effective use of social capital – such as being involvement in and with their children's schools. Such involvement can increase parental skills and information acquisition (i.e. social capital), and better equip parents to assist their children in school-related activities. As parents establish relationships with school personnel, they acquire information about the school's expectations regarding social conduct and academic requirements. They also learn how to effectively assist their children with homework and how to augment their children's learning in the home (Coleman, 1994; Epstein, 1994; Hill & Taylor, 2004). The data show that when parents are involved in their children's schooling, they are likely to meet other parents who can provide a variety of useful information and insights about school policies and practices, as well as extracurricular activities. In other words, parents will and can learn from other parents about the styles of different teachers and how difficult situations have been handled successfully in the past. In addition, when parents and teachers interact, teachers learn more about the parents' expectations for their children and also the expectations the parents have for their children's teachers and the role of the school in educating their children. Involved parents are able to develop more complex strategies for effectively working with their children's schools. The literature suggests that parental

involvement with the staff and school is reflected in the academic progress of their children (Clark, 1983; Hill & Taylor, 2004).

Social control is the second mechanism through which parental involvement promotes academic achievement. The research indicates that social control occurs when families and schools work together to build a consensus concerning appropriate behaviors that can be effectively modeled and communicated to children both in the home and at school. In addition to creating social capital, where parents from different families come to know each other and agree on specific goals – both behavioral and academic – social control creates accepted social constraints that reduce problem behavior because the expectations are consistent between home and school. When children receive consistent messages about what is appropriate across a variety of settings and from different sources, the messages they receive become clear and salient. This creates a sense of security and reduces confusion as to what is expected. Moreover, when families do not agree with the school or each other about what is appropriate, the authority and effectiveness, both in the school and in the home, is undermined. By utilizing social capital developed between parents and school, children acquire a sense of personal security, competence, motivation to learn, and feelings of encouragement from the school, their parents, and the community (Bronfenbrenner, 1990; Clark, 1983; Benard, 1993; Coleman, 1994; Epstein, 1994; Fashola, 2005; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Scott-Jones, 1994).

There appears to be a tendency in American society to place most of the responsibility for the education and development of American youth on the school system without references to what should take place in the home and the kinds of mental aptitudes and worldviews that students are exposed to on a daily basis. Several studies indicate that

African American parents have relatively low academic aspirations for their children, particularly their sons (Hrabowski, Maton, Grief, 1998).

In the last thirty years studies have recognized the important contributions and impact of mothers on the lives of African American boys (Clark, 1983; Hrabowski, Maton & Greif, 1998). There is also recognition that even in two-parent homes, the mothers appear to generally assume the greater responsibility for rearing and educating the children, both male and female, especially when the children are in elementary or middle school (Clark, 1983). The role of fathers has also been shown to be important in raising socially and academically competent children, especially in providing encouragement, establishing rules for behavior in the home, and setting high expectations for academic and social achievement. However, even with the recognition of the importance of the father in the home, mothers generally assume the primary responsibility for daily activities directly associated with success in school – such as supervising academic activities in the home including homework and reading, and regulating social conduct (Billingsley, 1992; Clark, 1983).

One of the expected outcomes of this research is to highlight the significance of the family and the home environment as a potent resource for promoting the academic success of African American boys in school. This study seeks to identify specific attitudes, family habits, behaviors, and strengths that will shed light on how parents can effectively impact the academic progress of their middle school age sons.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

This study draws on research conducted by Clark (1983) and Brofenbrenner (1979, 1994) as the foundation for examining the role of the family in the academic performance of eighth grade African American boys in the northern area of Long Beach, California. Although family composition is considered, the focus falls on family culture as defined by Clark (1983) in examining parental support networks, social relationships within the home and community, and parental supervision and guidance in relation to the academic performance of African American boys. For the purposes of this study, math scores reported on the state of California's Standardized Testing and Reporting Program (STAR), were used as the criteria for determining academic success. Twenty African American families with sons in the eighth grade were selected at random and interviewed. An additional thirty-two parents completed a written survey. A mixed method approach was adopted to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data in addressing the research questions:

- 1) What are the parental factors that affect the academic performance of African American boys in the eighth grade?
- 2) What roles do parents play in helping their eighth-grade sons achieve academic and social success?

In attempting to identify both positive and negative aspects in the home environment that influence children's academic performance, two different methods were used to provide perspectives from different levels within the study (Creswell, 2003). Quantitative analysis compared the distributions of responses to questions related to various family variables

when the sample was divided into two groups according to academic achievement as determined by standardized test scores attained by eighth grade boys in the families sampled. The survey design and small sample size precluded testing for statistical significance, so these results are displayed graphically. Qualitative data analysis presents trends in parental responses to interview questions. The objective of using this mixed method approach was to provide a richer explanation in addressing differences in school performance while the results obtained using one method validate the results from the other.

Participants

This study was conducted in the northern area of the city of Long Beach, which is located in Los Angeles County in the Fall of 2011. This area of Long Beach has one of the largest populations of low-income African American families in the city. The African American boys attending Middle Schools in this area of the city were reported as having the lowest math test scores in the Long Beach public school system. Table 1 contrasted students attending the North Long Beach Middle Schools with those enrolled in the Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) in general across a number of demographic and educational variables.

Table 1: LBUUSD Demographic and Performance Variables in 2007

	North Long Beach	LBUUSD
Total students	3,374	20,419
Ethnicity		
African American	23%	18%
Asian	3%	8%
Latino	66%	53%
Caucasian	2%	16%
Other Ethnic	6%	6%
Socio-Economic		
Disadvantaged	91%	70%
Not disadvantaged	9%	30%
GATE	4%	13%
Parent Education		
Less than High School	42%	24%
High School Graduate	38%	27%
Some College	12%	19%
College Degree	7%	22%
Graduate Work	1%	8%
Grade 8 th Math Proficiency		
African Americans	16%	21%
Asians	n/a	43%
Latinos	29%	30%
Caucasians	n/a	48%
Other Ethnic	n/a	46%

Source: California Department of Education

Children enrolled in North Long Beach Middle Schools were more likely to be economically disadvantaged than the average Long Beach Middle School child. Their parents were twice as likely to have left High School before completion and only one third as likely to have a college degree as the general Long Beach Middle School population. Most telling was the gap in math proficiency across ethnic groups. While almost half the Caucasian children in LBUUSD Middle Schools had tested at a proficient level in math, only 21% of African American students in LBUUSD had tested at this level. This number dropped

to one in six when focusing on African American students enrolled in North Long Beach Middle Schools.

According to the LBUSD's Office of Planning and Evaluation one hundred and twenty African American boys were enrolled in the eighth grade for the 2010/2011 school year in the four Middle Schools in North Long Beach: Lindbergh Middle School, Hamilton Middle School, Colin Powell Academy for Success, and the Lindsey Academy. As shown by Figure 1, Hamilton Middle School and Lindbergh Middle School had the largest enrollments of African American boys. While these two schools had lower levels of English proficiency among African American students than the other Middle Schools in the area (see Table 2), Lindbergh Middle School had the highest levels of Math proficiency across all grade levels among the four Middle Schools.

Figure 1: African American Boys in North Long Beach Middle Schools

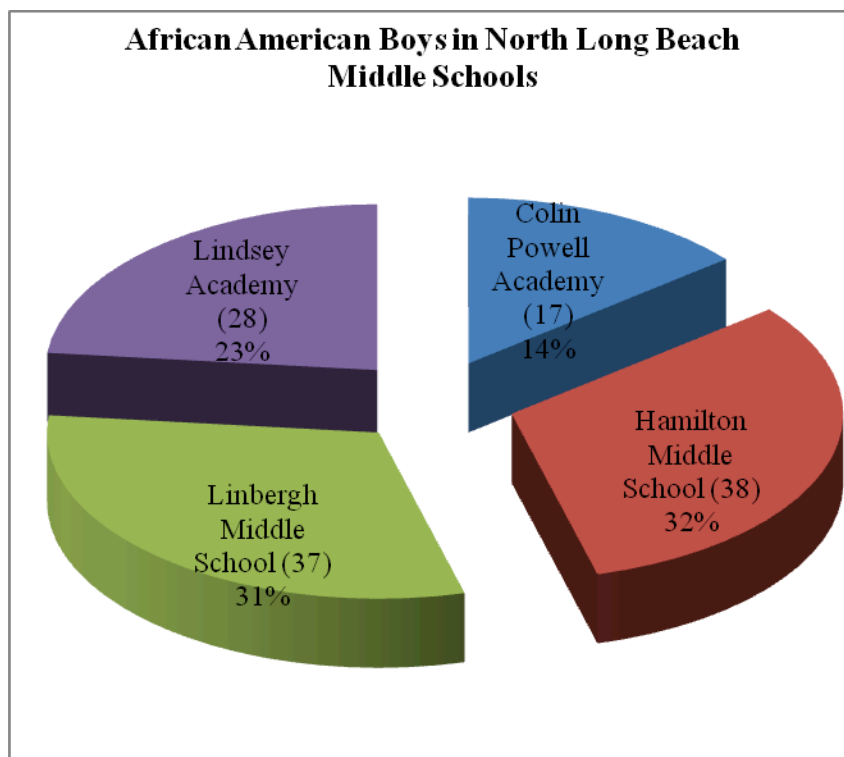


Table 2 presents the levels of student proficiency for English and Math in the four North Long Beach Middle Schools. Data was broken down for African Americans and Latinos only because of the small proportion of students from other ethnic groups enrolled in these schools. In all but one case, African American students tested below the their grade level average in both Math and English. The range of proficiency levels between the schools and between grade levels within some schools, particularly in Math, while disturbing, lay beyond the scope of the current study. It is interesting to note that differences in the data presented in Tables 1 and 2 captured the change in the proficiency cut-off for STAR Math score. This might also reflect some improvements made at particular Middle Schools in the area. For all Middle Schools in North Long Beach, except Lindbergh Middle School, Math proficiency levels for African American students ranged from less than one in five students (and in one case, one in eight) to one in three.

**Table 2: Math and English Proficiency Levels for Middle Schools in North Long Beach
in 2010**

	Lindbergh Middle School	Hamilton Middle School	Colin Powell Academy	Lindsey Academy
English - Grade 6 Total	24%	28%	39%	34%
African American	16%	26%	33%	44%
Latino	25%	28%	42%	28%
English - Grade 7 Total	26%	28%	33%	33%
African American	25%	21%	39%	24%
Latino	25%	28%	30%	31%
English - Grade 8 Total	34%	31%	42%	35%
African American	25%	26%	41%	29%
Latino	38%	31%	40%	31%
Math - Grade 6 Total	45%	32%	28%	26%
African American	36%	16%	17%	26%
Latino	46%	36%	30%	25%
Math - Grade 7 Total	45%	38%	41%	33%
African American	41%	29%	37%	21%
Latino	44%	39%	41%	31%
Math - Grade 8 Total	52%	31%	51%	16%
African American	41%	24%	36%	12%
Latino	54%	32%	49%	16%

Source: California Department of Education

Lindbergh Middle School was relatively consistent with proficiency in both Math and English across grade levels suggesting that something was occurring at the policy level in addition to the differences in the aptitudes of individual students.

The LBUUSD Office of Planning and Evaluation reported that ninety-three (77%) of the one hundred and twenty households with eighth grade boys in North Long Beach were identified by the School District as being headed by a single parent. In keeping with this, sixteen of the twenty parents interviewed reported being the only adult of the household.

Instruments

A survey consisting of thirty-four questions using multiple choice responses and likert scales was designed to collect data regarding demographic, educational and occupational information from the primary parents of African American eighth grade boys in North Long Beach as well as data related to family factors likely to impact academic performance. A number of questions had an additional component asking for open-ended responses in order to elaborate on areas such as the range and type of community activities parents participate in with their sons (question #13), or not to limit or guide responses as in the case of parental expectations for their sons (question #30). Appendix A includes the survey with a summary of responses.

An interview protocol was developed based on eleven open-ended questions selected to provide details of the parents' involvement in the sons' academic activities in the home and at school. These questions sought to determine if the expectation that parents articulate for their children, personal involvement with the school's staff and home behavioral patterns have any effect on the academic achievement of their boys in middle school. The following questions were used to structure the interviews:

- A. What are your expectations for your son's school academic performance?
- B. How often do you discuss your expectations with your son?
- C. How often do you visit your son's school?
- D. Describe your relationship with your son's teachers, principal, and counselors.
- E. What are the parent's role and responsibilities in the education of their child?
- F. What is the teacher's responsibility for educating your child?
- G. How many hours per week does your son watch television?

- H. How many hours per day do you require your son to study?
- I. What factors do you attribute to your son's success in school?
- J. How many books does your child read a month?
- K. Do you tutor your child?

The design of both the questionnaire and interview protocol considered questions used by the studies discussed in the literature review and in particular drew from Bronfenbrenner's (1994) theoretical framework and the comparison table taken from Clark's (1983) study, p.200 (see Appendix B). The survey and interview questions were developed to assess how and to what extent parents influence the academic performance of African American boys in Middle School and determine whether mutually reinforcing expectations between the home and school environments facilitate trust and shared goals that encourage and promote academic success.

Dependent Variable

The California State Department of Education requires all seventh grade students to complete standardized assessments in English, Mathematics and Science prior to entering the eighth grade. Proficiency in Math is indicated by a score of 350-415 on the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program, with a score between 416 and 600 identifying a student as advanced. Within California, students demonstrating proficiency are eligible to enroll in geometry at the ninth grade level. According to the data received from the LBUUSD Office of Research, Planning and Evaluation, none of the African American boys enrolled in the eighth grade in the four North Long Beach Middle Schools selected for this study scored 350 or above on the STAR Math assessment. In response to low STAR Math scores, LBUUSD lowered the required standards for enrollment in ninth grade

geometry to 325 and above, thus allowing some African American eighth grade boys to enroll in ninth grade Geometry who otherwise would have had to take Algebra upon entering high school their freshman year. Even under this new standard, Math proficiency rates among African American boys varies widely across the four North Long Beach Middle Schools as shown in Table 2.

This study used STAR Math assessment scores as the indicator of educational success – STAR scores are the dependent variable for this study. Given that none of the population of eighth grade African American boys in North Long Beach achieved proficiency under the original standard of 350, the lowered standard of a STAR Math score of 325 was used in separating the study participants into high versus low academic performance groups.

Independent Variables

Surveys

The independent variables examined in the surveys focused on four primary areas of parental influence on the academic performance of eighth grade boys that measure aspects of Clark's (1983) family culture:

- 1) parental support in the home and at school
- 2) parental involvement in the child's schooling
- 3) parental home requirements related to daily required study time, weekly television viewing and the number of books read per month.
- 4) parental expectations for their child's future

Five survey questions were designed to assess general *parental support* (questions #9, #10, #11, #12 and #13). These questions focused on social engagement within the community,

such as church attendance and participation in community activities. *Parental involvement in their child's schooling* was measured by questions relating to parental knowledge of the names of their children's teachers (question #14), knowledge of the topics their child is currently studying (questions #15 and #16), attendance at school events (question #19), assistance with and monitoring of homework (questions #17 and #18), and discussions with their children concerning their academic performance (question #33).

Efforts of the parent in providing structure in the home were addressed by questions relating to the behavior of both the parent and the child in the home environment. Child habits related to television (question #22), free time (question #21) and time spent unsupervised outdoors (question #24) were assessed. In addition, two questions directly examined parental behavior and what parents might be modeling to their children. Question #20 asked if the child has seen the parent reading and question #23 asked about the parental television habits. Four additional questions (#25-#28) focused on relationships of trust within the home and between the home and school. These were included to assess general attitudes and trust as a possible barrier to achievement since Cervantes (1965), Clark (1983), Conchas (2006) and Kunjufu (2000) infer a role for trust in bridging the home and school environments to provide consistency and support common goals. Responses to these questions were analyzed with variables examining structure within the home, since trusting relationships are difficult to maintain in the absence of structure or social control – to use the term used by Brofenbrenner (1979) and Clark (1983). These questions also formed a possible bridge between behavior in the home and aspirations for the future – since trust is also needed in order to create a shared vision.

Four questions assessed *parent expectations for their children's futures* including: educational goals (question #29); career goals (question #30); general expectations (question #31); and factors that they believed would contribute to their sons' success (question #34).

Interviews

Interview questions were designed to elicit more detailed, qualitative information regarding:

- the parental role in their sons' education progress
- the expectations of the school's responsibility for educating their sons
- parental home management styles as they relate to the sons' habits at home i.e. reading time, television viewing hours and unsupervised free-time

The *parental role in the child's educational progress* was addressed directly by asking parents to assess their role in their sons' education (question *B*). Parental behaviors and attitudes that might support their role in contributing to their sons' academic success were assessed through question *B* that asked how often expectations were discussed in the home and question *A* that asked parents about their expectations for their sons' academic performance. Question *I* asked parents to specify factors they thought contributed to their sons' success. This question (*I*) also provided further insights into how parents perceived the roles of the home and school in contributing to their children's success.

Parents were asked directly for their opinions on the *responsibility of teachers in educating their children* (question *F*). Their expectations of the school were approached less directly through questions about the frequency of visits to the school (question *C*) and the nature of the parent's relationship with school personnel (question *D*).

Four questions address the *parental management style and structure within the home*: question *H* asked the number of hours per day the child studied; question *G* asked the number of hours per day the child watched television; question *J* asked how many books the child reads per month; and question *K* asked if the parent tutored the child.

There was significant overlap between the questions asked in the survey and those in the interview protocol. The goal in adopting a mixed methods approach was to provide a richer explanation in addressing differences in the academic performance of African American boys and identify factors in the home environment that might foster academic success.

Procedures

Following approval to proceed from Claremont Graduate University's Institutional Review Board, permission to review student records was received from the Long Beach Unified School District Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation. The Long Beach District Office of the Superintendent provided the names of the students and their guardians, their home addresses and the students math scores from the STAR assessment.

The names and addresses of one hundred and twenty African American families and their eighth-grade sons was provided by the Long Beach Unified School District's Office of Planning and Evaluation. This list of parents and their sons represented the entire eighth-grade class of African American boys enrolled in the four North Long Beach middle schools selected for the study. One hundred and twenty questionnaires were mailed; ten were returned due to lack of a forwarding address.

Thirty-two out of the one hundred and ten questionnaires (29%) were completed and returned. It took three mailings and several telephone calls, over a period of two

months, to obtain these thirty-two responses. Each household that completed and returned a survey received a \$35 gift card.

The families of twenty-eight African American boys in the eighth grade from the four North Long Beach area middle schools were randomly selected for interviews. Out of these, twenty-one African American family members agreed to be interviewed. The interviews were conducted in a variety of locations deemed acceptable to both the parents and the researcher. Each interviewee received a \$50 gift card after completing an interview that took approximately 45 minutes.

The researcher conducted the interviews, supervised mailing and collected the questionnaires. All of the study data collected has been personally kept in the care of the researcher.

Protecting the Participants Rights

Particular attention was paid to protecting the rights of the parents, during both the gathering of questionnaires conducting the interviews. The researcher used the following safeguards to protect the parent's rights and privacy:

1. The research objectives were articulated both in writing and verbally so that the parents clearly understood what was being requested of them.
2. Written permission requests preceded any action requested of the parents.
3. An Institutional Review Board approval document was filed and approval and approval was received prior to the conducting of interviews or mailing of surveys.
4. The parents and the Long Beach Unified School District were informed of all

data collection activities that were being conducted and devices used to obtain the information.

5. The Long Beach Unified School District Superintendent's Office and the Long Beach Unified School District Office of Planning and Evaluation was contacted for approval to review student records and conduct the study.
6. The parents were informed that the verbatim transcripts and written notes would be made available to them upon request.
7. The parent's rights, interest and wishes were carefully considered as to when decisions were being made with regard to how the data was going to be written and reported.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

Overview

The primary focus of this study was to identify the key factors that parents provide that appear to make the greatest contribution to the academic achievement of African American boys in Middle School by focusing on the following research questions:

- 1) What are the parental factors that affect the academic performance of African American boys in the eighth-grade?
- 2) What roles do parents play in helping their eighth-grade sons achieve academic and social success?

In addressing these questions, the research focused on four areas of parental influence:

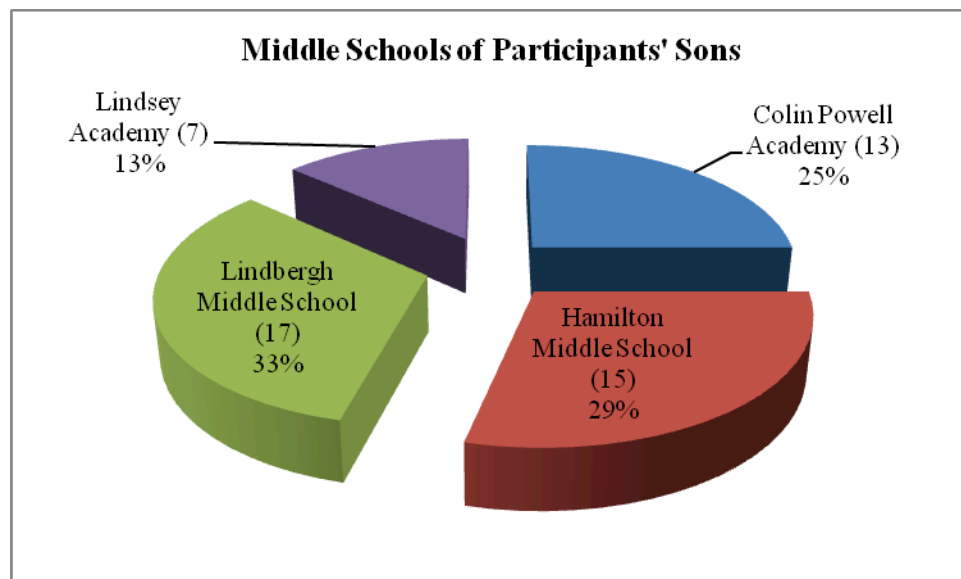
- 1) parental support in the home and at school
- 2) parental involvement in the child's schooling
- 3) parental requirements in the home related to daily required study time, weekly television viewing and the number of books read per month.
- 4) parental expectations for their child's future

The subjects selected for the study were the parents of African American boys enrolled the eighth grade in the four Middle Schools in the North Long Beach community. According to the enrollment data received from the LBUSD Office of Research, Planning and Evaluation, the total eighth grade enrollments for African American students in these four schools during the Spring 2011 semester was one hundred and twenty.

This chapter presents the results and analyses of surveys mailed to families and interviews that took place with the parents whose sons attended one of the four North Long Beach Middle Schools identified in the previous chapter. The multiple choice surveys

sought to determine if the expectations expressed by parents for their sons, their personal involvement with their son's school activities, and their home activities – such as requiring study time and placing restrictions on television viewing – had any effect on their sons' academic performance. Proficiency in math was determined by STAR math scores. This was the indicator of academic success selected for this study and thus formed the dependent variable. Figure 2 gives the breakdown of Middle Schools attended by the sons of survey respondents and interviewees.

Figure 2: Middle Schools Attended by Survey and Interview Participants' Sons



The distribution of Middle Schools represented by parents participating in either surveys or interviews was similar to the distribution of African American boys in the eighth grade in North Long Beach Middle Schools shown in Figure 1, although Colin Powel Academy was over-represented (with 13 of the 17 households of African American boys in their eighth grade participating in this study in some way) and Lindsey Academy was under-represented.

Nine of the twenty boys (45%), whose parents were interviewed, scored 325 or above on the STAR Math assessment and eleven of the thirty-two boys (34%) from households completing the survey had mathematics test scores below 325. Approximately two thirds of the eighth grade boys whose parents returned the survey had attained the adjusted level of proficiency at 325 on the STAR Math assessment. This is well above the proficiency levels given Table 2 and while it may reflect a greater importance placed on educational matters by the responding parents, it offers an additional insight into the relationships these parents may have with institutional structures, since they felt sufficiently empowered to respond and participate. Table 3 breaks down the STAR Math results for eighth grade boys from the households completing either the survey or interview according to the Middle Schools attended.

Table 3: STAR Scores for Eighth Grade Boys in Survey and Interview Households by School

	Survey		Interview		Overall		Overall %	
	< 325	> 325	< 325	> 325	< 325	> 325	< 325	> 325
Colin Powell Academy	5	1	6	1	11	2	85%	15%
Hamilton Middle School	3	6	2	4	5	10	33%	67%
Lindbergh Middle School	2	10	1	4	3	14	18%	82%
Lindsey Academy	2	3	2	0	4	3	57%	43%

The final columns give the breakdown of those boys scoring below 325 and those scoring above 325 for each of the four schools. In general, parents who completed the survey were more likely to have a son who scored at a level considered proficient on the STAR Math assessment than the general population of the schools represented as shown in Table 2 – with the exception of Colin Powell Academy. Given the low success rates as measured by

STAR Math scores of boys who attended Colin Powel Academy for Success, the high proportion of households from that school completing either the survey or interview is surprising. The high level of variance in academic success across grade levels within this school, as shown in Table 2, may reflect a cause of alarm among parents that prompted engagement with an outside authority; however, factors specific to individual schools lie outside the scope of this study.

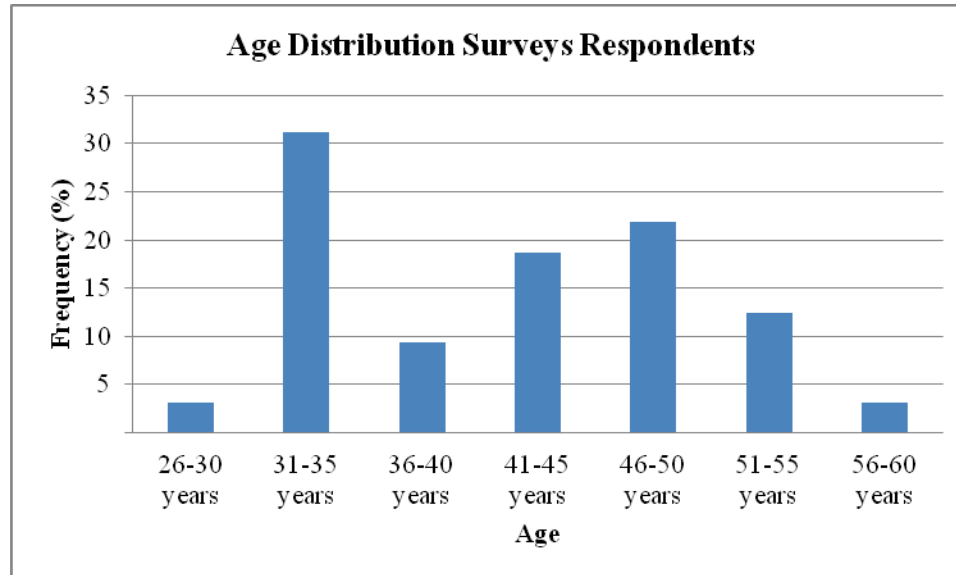
Overall 56% of the total sample – whose parents either completed the survey or were interviewed – could be considered academically successful according to the STAR criteria. Apart from Colin Powell Academy for Success, those parents who opted in, by either completing the surveys or participating in the interviews, were more likely to have sons who were academically successful than the average for the schools they attended as shown in Table 2. While this high proportion may reflect selection bias, it may also be attributable in part to the schools the eighth grade boys attended. Among those parents completing the surveys, ten had children attending Lindbergh Middle School, and all but one of those students tested achieved STAR Math scores of 325 or better.

Survey responses

General Demographics

Demographic information was collected among the survey data. Figure 3 presents the age distribution of parents who completed the survey. Although 120 surveys were mailed out, completed surveys were received from only thirty-two parents.

Figure 3: Age Distribution of Parents Completing the Survey

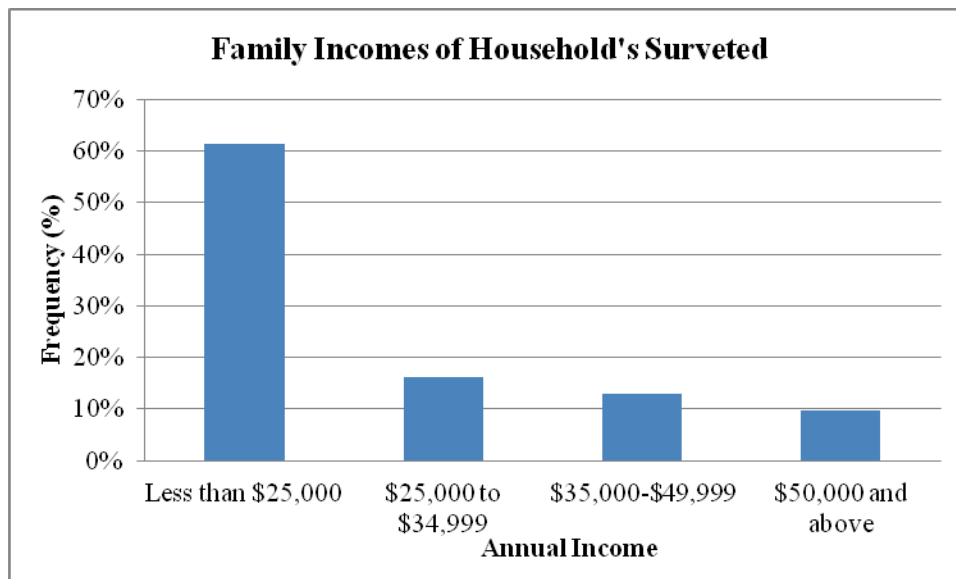


Eighteen (39%) of the responding parents were forty years of age, or older. One parent reported their age as being over sixty and commented that in addition to her youngest children who live in the home, at times she had custody of some of her grandchildren.

Of those completing the survey, twenty-six were women and six were men. This parallels the interviews, where fifteen of the parents responding were women and five were men (with two being single fathers); although, in four cases both parents were present during the interview and it was not always the father who took the lead in responding to questions about their homes and their sons' educations.

Figure 4 provides the distribution of household income for those families whose parents completed the surveys.

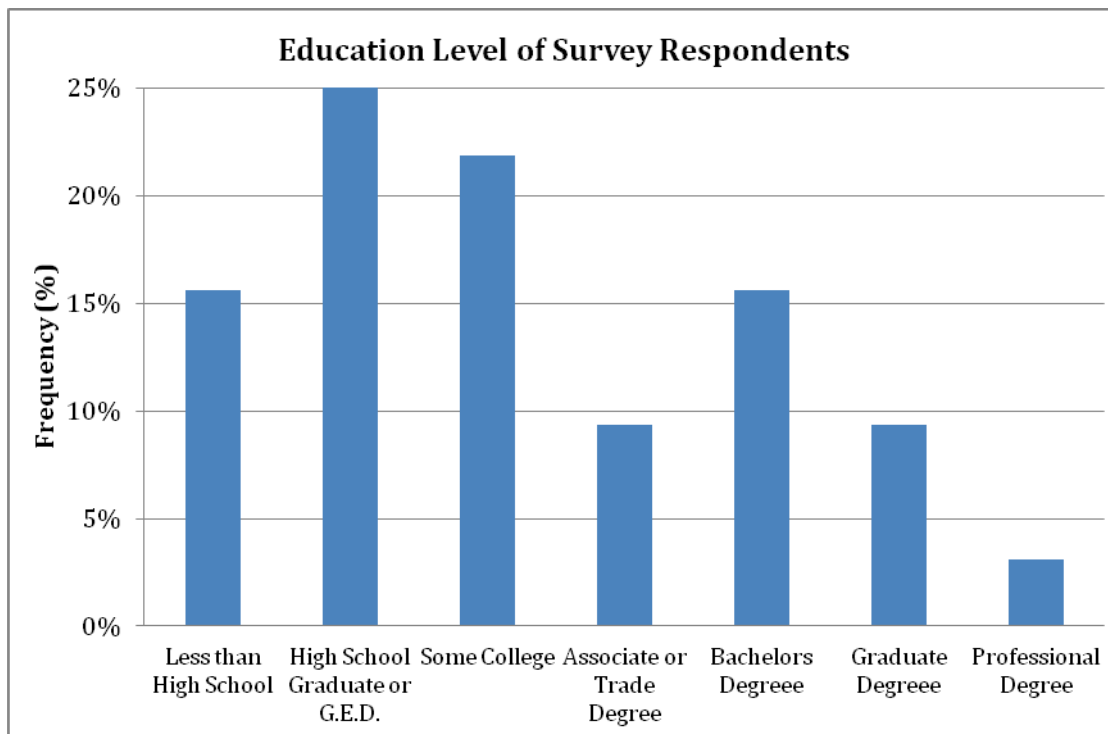
Figure 4: Income Distribution of Families Completing the Survey



Nineteen parents (63%) responding gave their annual household income as less than \$25,000 per year and twenty-four of parents (80%) earned an annual income of less than \$35,000. These numbers reflect the economic disadvantage among families in the area reported by LBUSD. Twenty-three parents (72%) stated that they were employed at the time of completing the surveys, indicating that the majority of households covered by the surveys were subsisting on or near minimum wage. Only seven parents (20%) reported incomes exceeding \$35,000 per year, with three reporting annual income exceeding \$50,000. Of these, one household reported income in the \$50, 000 to \$64,999 range; one reported income of \$65,000 to \$99,999; and one reported income in excess of \$100,000. The eighth grades sons of these families attend three different Middle Schools.

Figure 5 gives the frequencies of the educational attainment of the most educated adult in the households completing the survey.

Figure 5: Education Levels of Parents Completing the Surveys



Five of the thirty-two respondents had not completed High School or a GED equivalent qualification. Three respondents had attended and completed a work preparation program. Nine respondents held a Bachelors Degree or higher. Seven of the thirty two respondents reported themselves as being unemployed at the time they submitted the surveys – this group was evenly split between those who had not completed High School and those who had completed some College credit, but had not completed a degree. The surveys indicated that none of the twenty-three working parents held professional positions at the time they submitted the surveys.

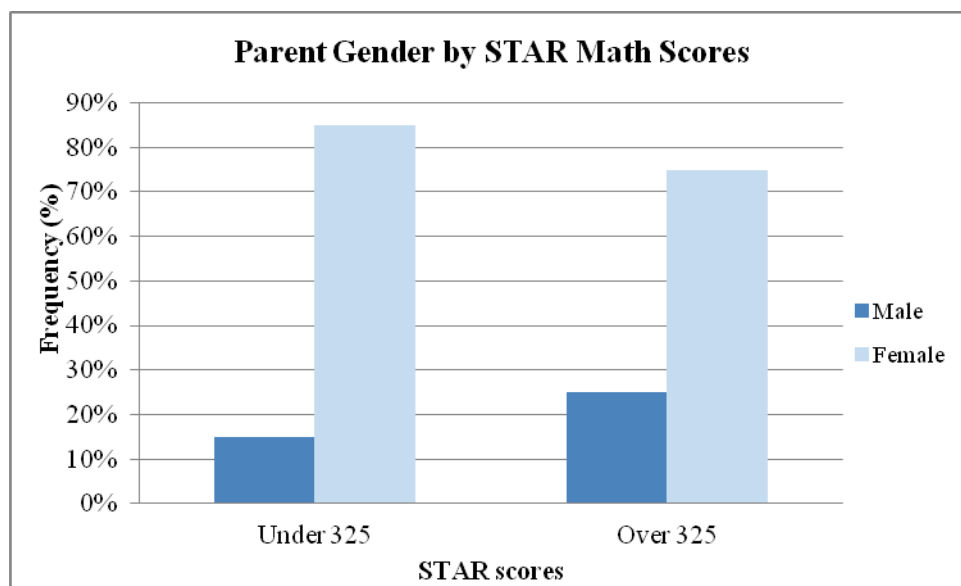
Parental education levels among those completing the surveys appear a little higher than the average for North Long Beach as shown in Table 1. This may reflect a selection bias among those who opted in and chose to participate in this study. Although the

education levels appear higher, parental education did not mitigate the economic disadvantage suggested by household income levels.

Demographics and STAR Scores

In analyzing the results from both the surveys and interviews, the data was divided into two groups: those whose eighth grade sons achieved proficiency according to STAR Math scores and those whose eighth grade sons did not. Figure 6 gives the gender of parents responding to the survey according to Math proficiency.

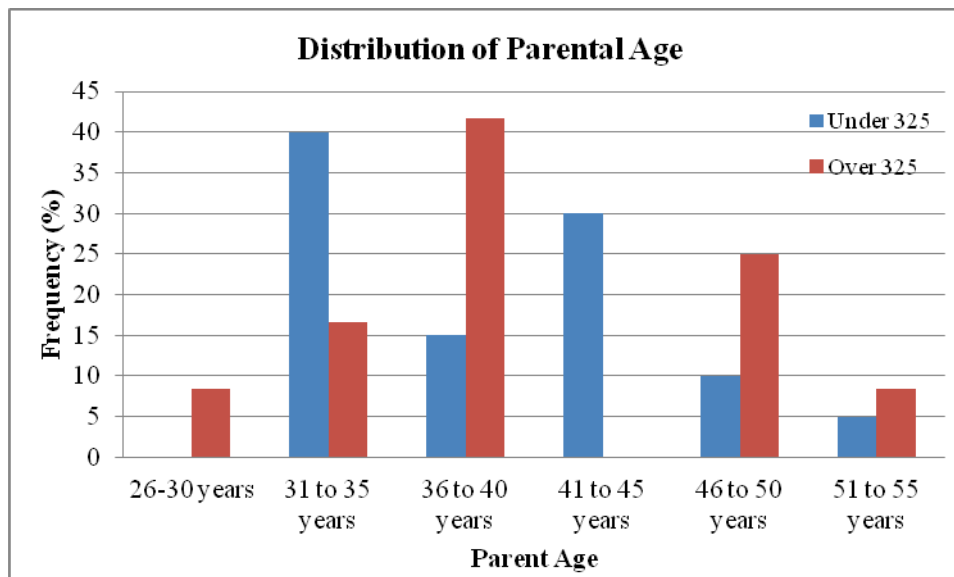
Figure 6: Parent Gender According to STAR Math Scores



Of those parents completing the survey, twenty-six were women (81%) and six were men (19%). This was paralleled when the sample is broken in to subgroups according to STAR Math scores, suggesting that in this sample the gender of the primary parent did not affect their sons' academic achievement.

Figure 7 compares the age distributions of parents whose sons tested proficient on the STAR Math assessment compared to those whose sons did not.

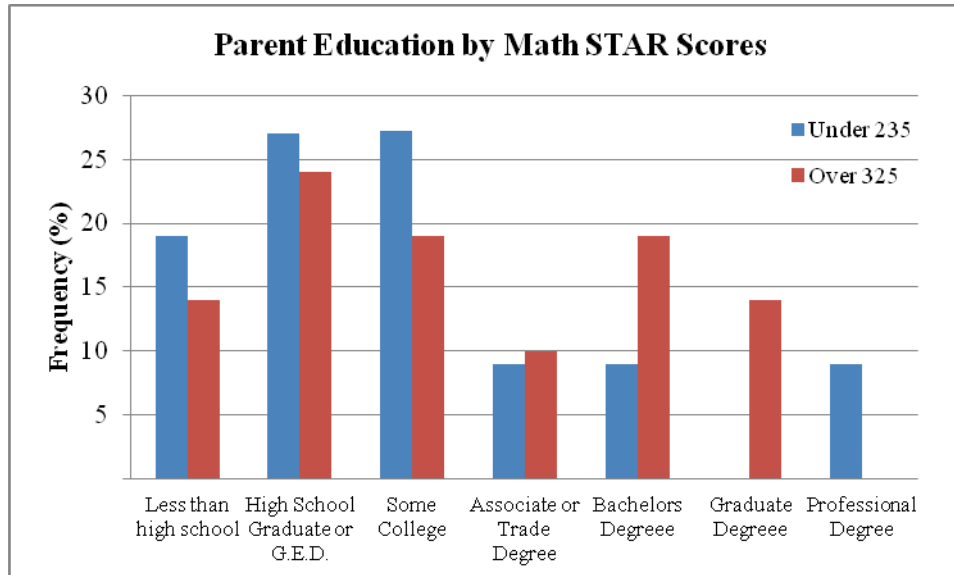
Figure 7: Comparison of Parental Age According to STAR Math Scores



It appears that the parents of eighth grade sons with STAR Math scores allowing them to advance in Math were older than those whose children were less successful. However, the youngest parent amongst those responding had a son who was performing well in school according to the STAR criteria.

Figure 8 gives the educational achievement of the most educated adult in the household broken down by STAR Math scores.

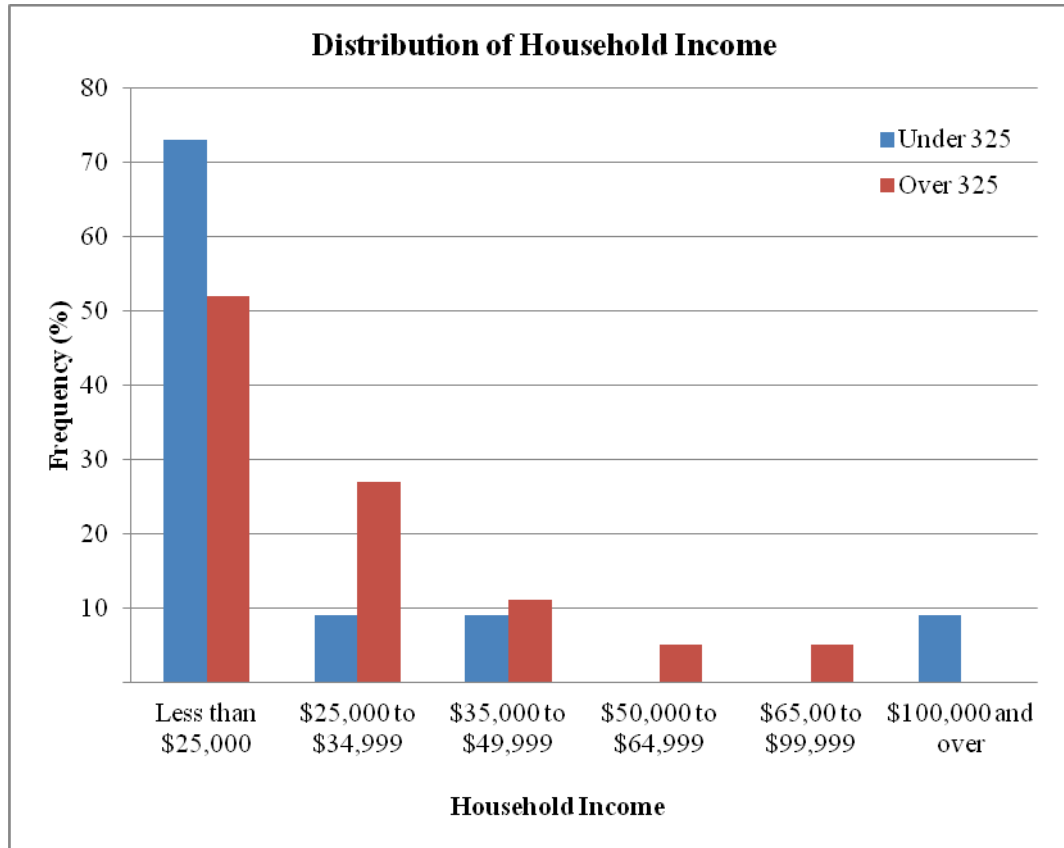
Figure 8: Distribution of Parental Education According to Math STAR Scores



Eighth grade boys scoring above 325 on the Math STAR assessment were more likely to live with an adult who had completed a bachelor's or graduate degree than those who scored below 325. Among this sample, the lack of parental education did not appear to impede the academic success of African American boys, since parents who did not complete High School were almost as likely to have sons with high scores on the STAR Math assessment as those with sons who did not score as well. While it might appear that boys scoring above 325 were more likely to live with an adult who had completed a graduate degree and those scoring below were more likely to have a parent with a professional degree, the sample size was insufficient to draw meaningful conclusions about the impact of these higher levels of parental education.

The possibility that low levels of parental education were not an impediment to academic achievement in African American boys was consistent with household income data for those completing the surveys.

Figure 9: Household Income According to STAR Math Scores

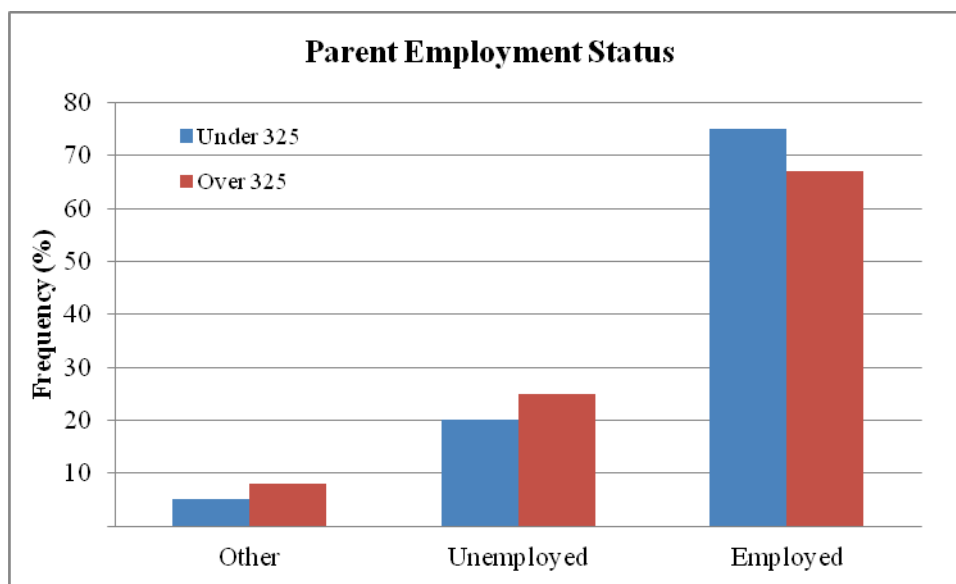


Over half of African American boys in both groups lived in households with incomes of less than \$25,000. Over 70% of the households in both groups reported annual incomes less than \$35,000. This suggests that low household incomes were not necessarily an impediment to the academic success of African American boys as measured by STAR Math scores. While children scoring above 325 on the STAR Math assessment were more likely to live in households with annual incomes above \$25,000 than their lower scoring counterparts, only three parents that completed the survey reported annual household incomes of over \$50,000 and the highest earning household (over \$100,000 corresponding to the single professional degree in the sample) had a son who scored below 325 on the STAR Math assessment.

The higher proportion of parents with bachelor's degrees among the high STAR scoring households did not translate to greater family income, suggesting that parental education was more important than family income in contributing to the academic success of the African American boys in the sample.

Figure 10 gives the employment status of the parents completing the surveys broken down by STAR Math scores.

Figure 10: Parent Employment Status According to STAR Math Scores

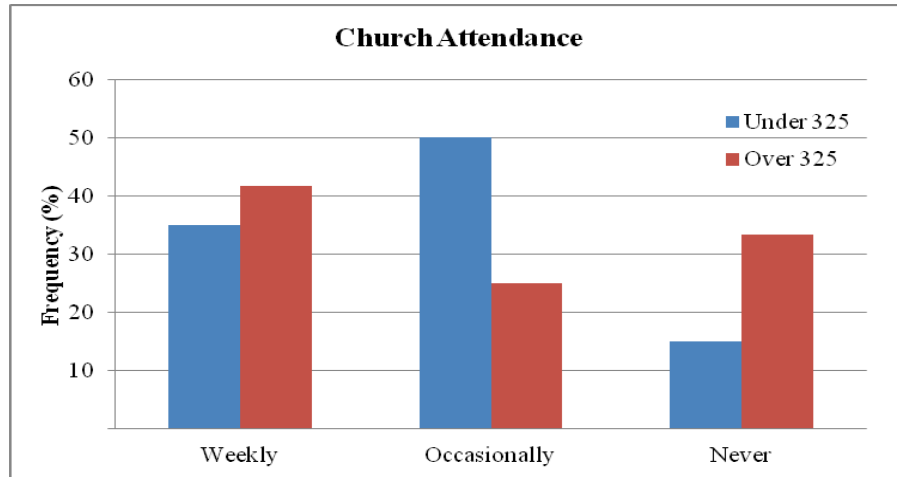


Parental unemployment appeared to have no impact on the STAR Math scores of eighth grade boys within the household.

Parental Support at Home and School

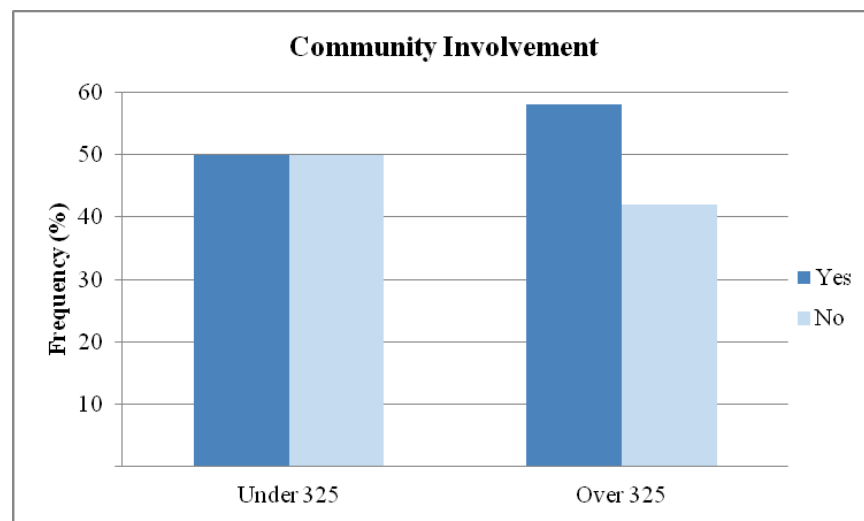
In designing the survey, a number of questions were included that focused on church attendance as an indication of social engagement and the social support available to the family. Figure 11 gives the breakdown of church attendance according to STAR math scores.

Figure 11: Family Church Attendance According to STAR Math Scores



African American families with boys who achieved higher scores on the STAR Math assessment were almost as likely to attend church regularly as those whose boys who did not score as well.

Figure 12: Community Involvement According to STAR Math scores



The parents of students achieving proficiency on the STAR Math assessment were slightly more likely to involve their children in community activities as determined by question #12. In examining the kinds of activities these families took part in (as reported in question #13), community involvement of the high scoring students tended to focus on

church or community outreach activities such as feeding the homeless, while in addition to church activities parents of the lower scoring students also reported sports and Community Center activities, that may not require the same level of parental involvement, among their sons' activities outside the home. A full list of all community activities given by parents is available in Appendix A, question #13.

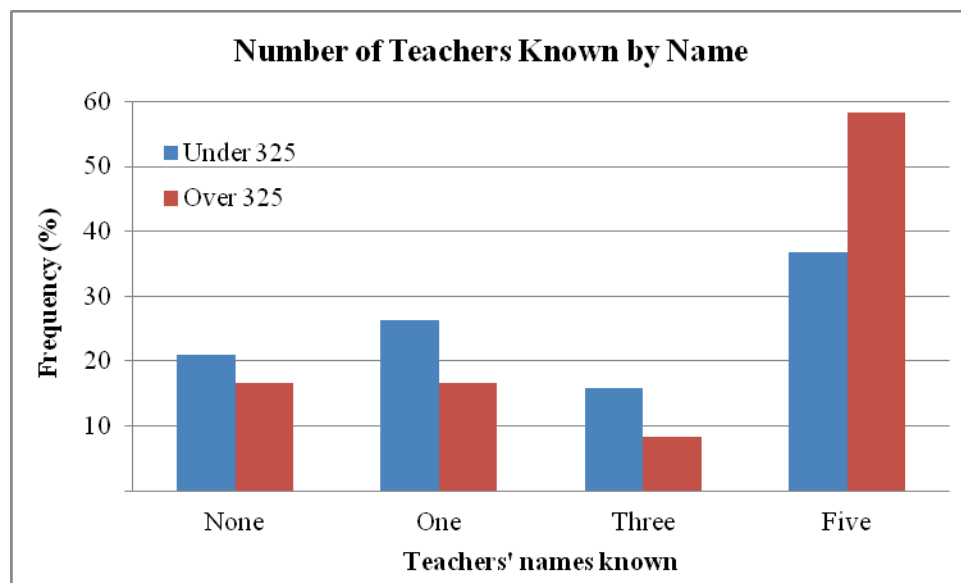
Overall, general parental support, social engagement and the availability of social capital within the community through church activities and community involvement had little impact on the academic success of eighth grade African American boys in the families covered by the surveys returned.

Parental Involvement in the Child's Schooling

In examining the impact of parental involvement on the academic success of African American boys in Middle School, this study looked at variables operating within the home and reflective of relationships with school personnel. When focusing on the working relationships that parents maintained with the school, this study looked not only at parental involvement in school events, but also the quality of relationships with teachers in particular – as indicated by recall of the names of those teaching their eighth grade sons. In examining factors promoting educational success within the home, the survey focused on implicit understanding by asking the extent of parental knowledge of the topics their eighth grade sons were studying across four domains of learning, in addition to questions about parental behavior concerning homework.

Figure 13 gives the number of names that parents could recall when asked about their eighth grade sons' teachers.

Figure 13: Number of Child's Teachers Names Known to the Parent According to STAR Math Scores

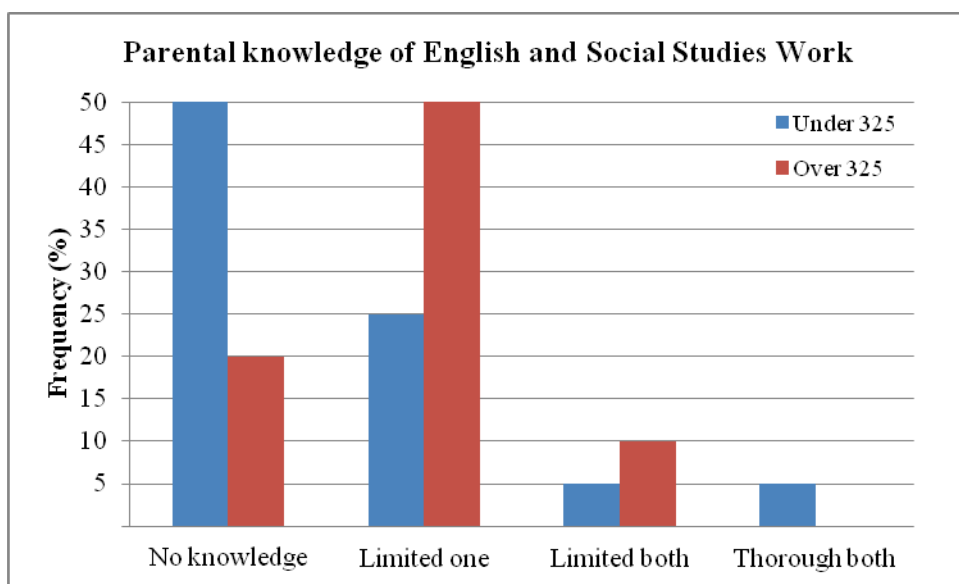


Parents of sons achieving high scores on the STAR Math assessment were more likely to be able to recall the names of five of their eighth grade sons' teachers than those with sons who tested at below a proficient level. Survey results showed no difference in the involvement in school events for parents of students attaining proficiency on the STAR Math assessment, compared to those who didn't. Responses to question #19 reveal that in both groups 80% of parents regularly attended school events and 20% did not. This suggests that it may be the quality of involvement in school events, rather than the involvement itself that translates to student performance. However, involvement in their eighth grade sons' educations through interactions at school may not have reflected parental involvement in educational activities at home.

Figures 14 and 15 documents the extent of parent knowledge about what their eighth grade sons are working on in English and Social Studies, and Math and Science respectively. The similarities and differences between these two domains of learning are

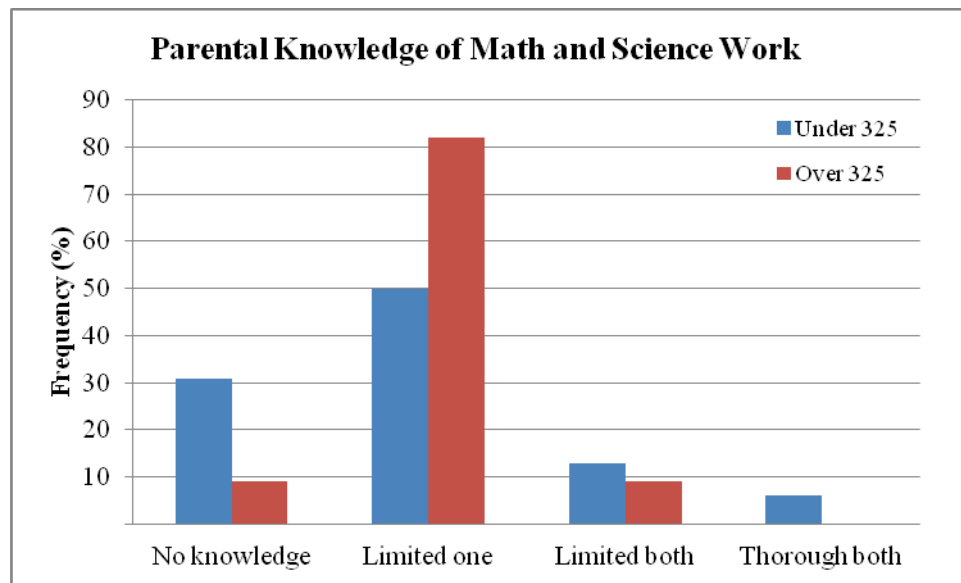
interesting both within the STAR Math score groups and between them. Half of the parents of the low performing students had no knowledge of their sons' English or Social Study topics and activities compared to only 20% of those whose children preformed well on the STAR Math assessment.

Figure 14: Parental Knowledge of Child's Math and Science Work According to STAR Math Scores



By comparison, Figure 15 shows a different pattern of knowledge of their eighth grade sons' schoolwork in Math and Science among parents whose children scored well on the STAR Math assessment. While the vast majority (70% or more) of both groups had at best limited amounts of knowledge of two out of four subjects that their eighth graders are studying, 80% of parents in the high achieving student group knew at least something about what their eighth grade son was studying in Science or Math compared to 50% in that same group who know at least something about what their student is studying in English or Social Studies.

Figure 15: Parental Knowledge of Child's Math and Science Work According to Math STAR Scores



This within group difference suggests a greater importance placed on Math and Science among all of the parents surveyed, since over half of both groups knew at least something about their sons' learning in Math and Science. It is interesting to note that only one parent reported comprehensive knowledge of her sons studies in all four subjects. This mother had a child who scored below 325 on the STAR Math assessment, but was also from the highest income family among all of those surveyed.

Figures 16 and 17 document parental involvement in the homework activities of their sons as determined by responses to survey questions #17 and #18 respectively. An examination of which parents provided their eighth grade sons with homework assistance when taken in isolation yielded results that might appear counterintuitive. Of all of those surveyed, twenty parents (65%) stated that they helped their children with their homework and twenty three parents (71%) indicated that their son completed and turned in all of his weekly homework assignments.

Figure 16: Homework Assistance

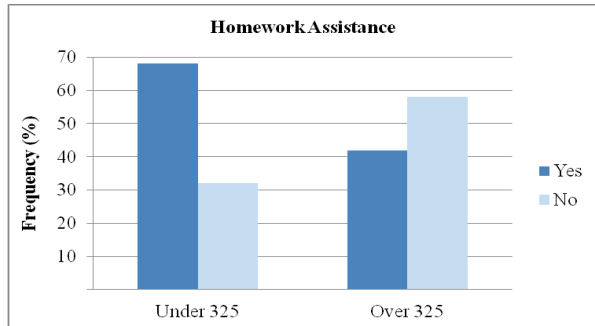
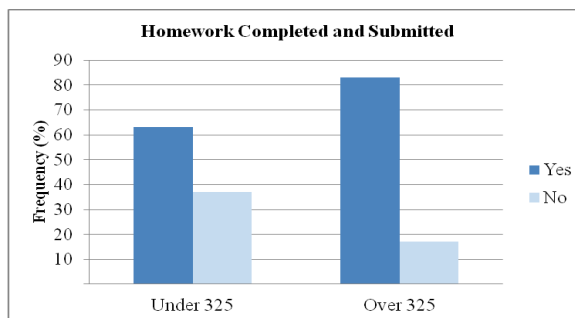


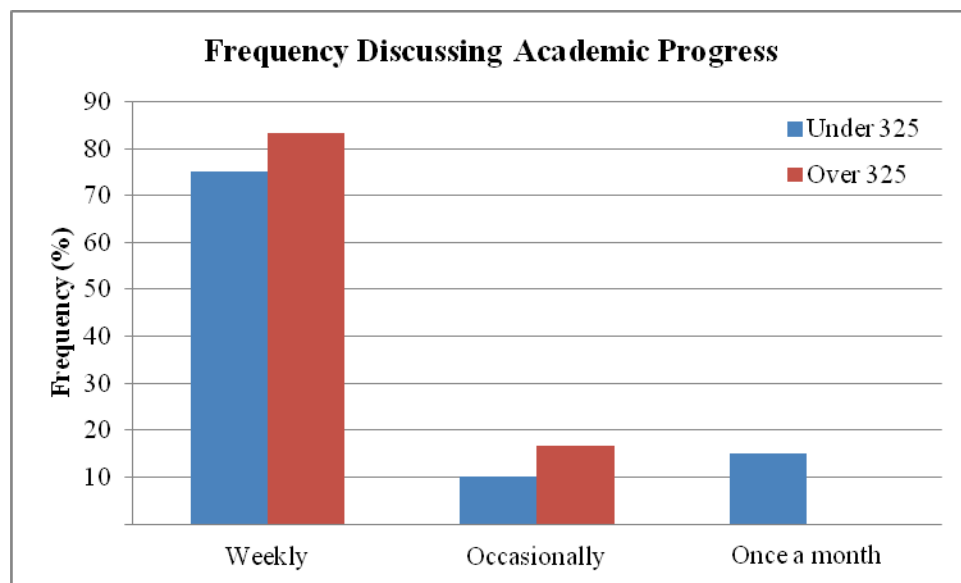
Figure 17: Homework Submission



While these numbers appear consistent, a different pattern emerges when the sample is divided by STAR Math score. Although parents of children who did not achieve proficiency on the STAR Math assessment were more likely to help their children with their homework, they were less likely to follow through and ensure that all homework assignments were completed and submitted on time. Given the lack of knowledge expressed by parents of low scoring eighth grade boys regarding the topics their sons were studying (as outlined above), this disconnect may not be so surprising. These results suggest not only qualitative differences in the homework assistance given by the two groups of parents, but also that the way in which the parent is involved in the child's schooling may interact with the structure and control mechanisms within the home to promote academic success.

When asked if they discussed their sons' social and academic progress with him (question #33), over 80% of both groups said they did. Only five of the parents said they did not regularly discuss this. Figure 18 gives the frequency of discussion between parents and their sons concerning academic and social progress.

Figure 18: Frequency of Discussion of Academic and Social Progress According to STAR Math scores

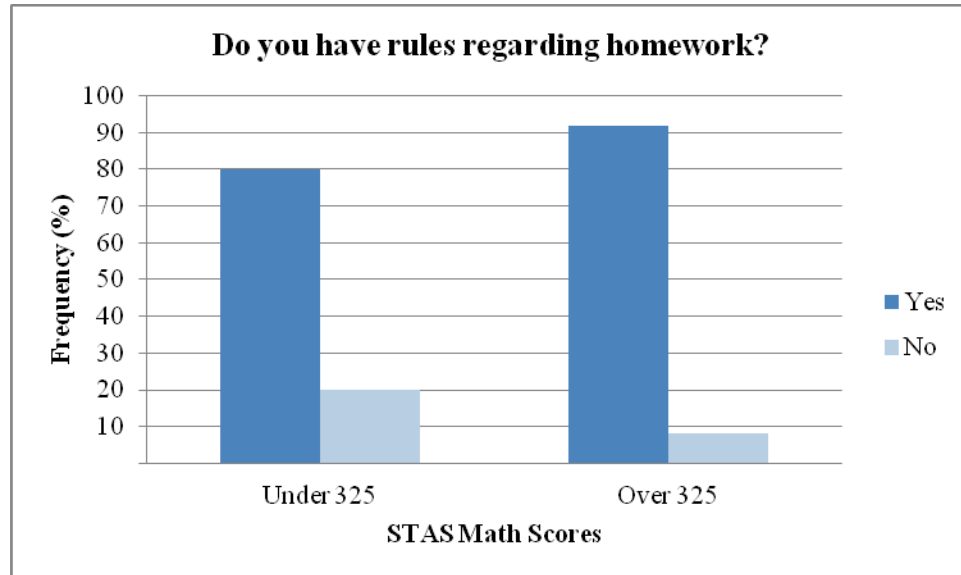


Structure within the Home Provided by the Parent

This section examines variables related to the home environment and how proactive the parents were in establishing an atmosphere that might allow their son to succeed. Central to this exploration was guidance and time management within the home as experienced by the son in terms of both guidelines established and behavior modeled by the parent.

Figure 19 outlines responses to the question of established rules for completing homework within the household.

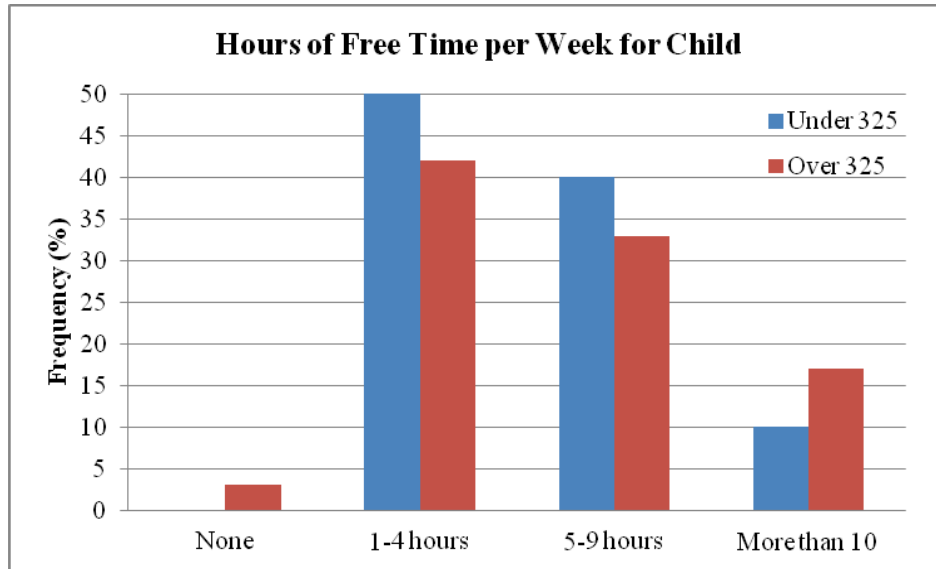
Figure 19: Existence of Rules Regarding Homework According to STAR Math Scores



Over 80% of all parents responded positively regarding rules for completing homework; however, as discussed earlier the parents of eighth grade boys who tested proficient on the STAR Math assessment were more effective in ensuring that their son's homework was completed and submitted on time.

Figure 20 shows the amount of free time eighth grade boys in the sample had per week. Only one child had no free time at all according to his parent, and that child was in the high STAR Math score group; however, of the four boys whose parents reported ten hours or more of free time per week, two scored above 325 on the STAR Math assessment and two scored below.

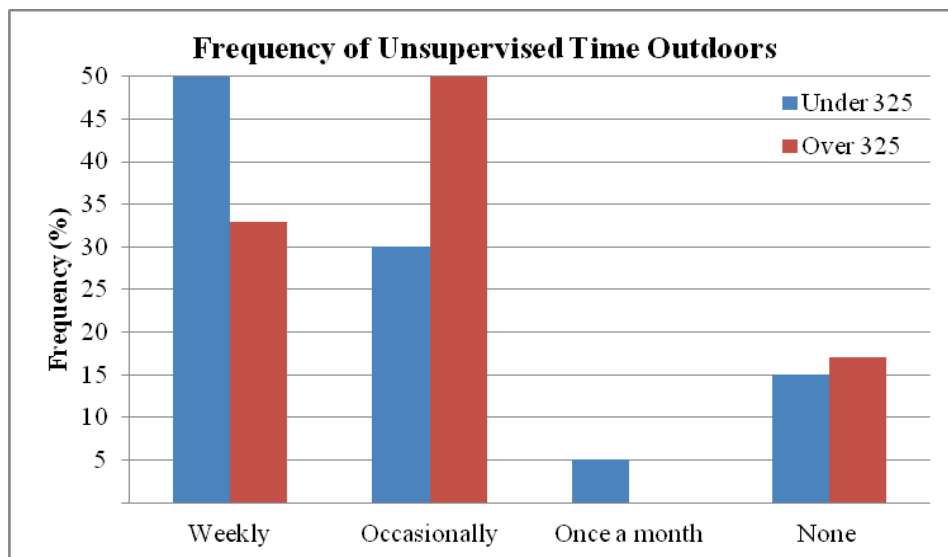
Figure 20: Hours of Free Time per Week According to STAR Scores



Thus it may not be the amount of free time that influenced academic achievement, but rather how the remaining time was spent that was important.

Figure 21 documents the amount of unsupervised time the eighth graders spent outdoors.

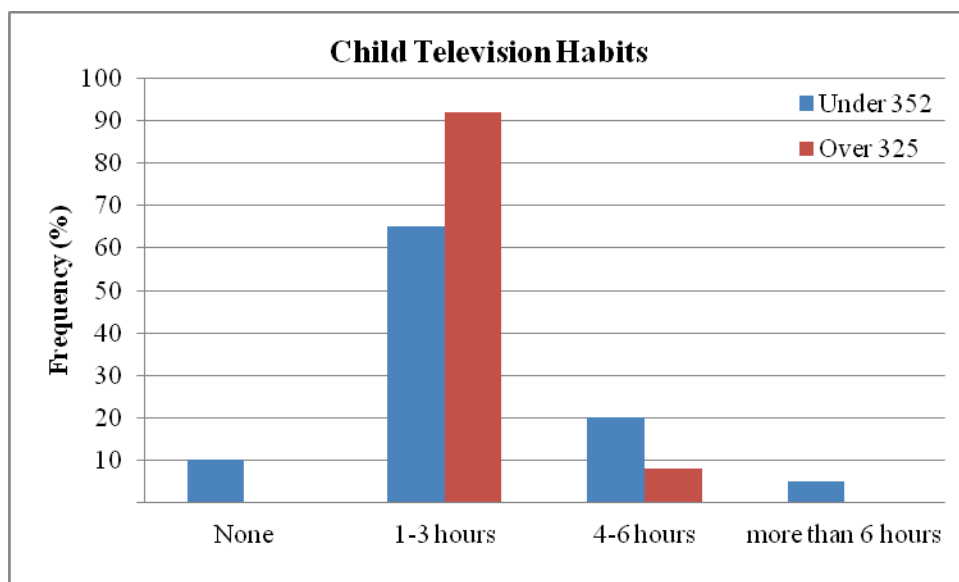
Figure 21: Frequency of Unsupervised Time Eighth Graders Spent Outdoors



Boys with lower STAR Math scores were more likely to spend a greater amount of unsupervised time outdoors with half of those boys spending time outdoors and unsupervised weekly compared to one third of those with higher STAR Math scores.

Figure 22 shows the television watching habits of eighth grade boys in the families completing the survey.

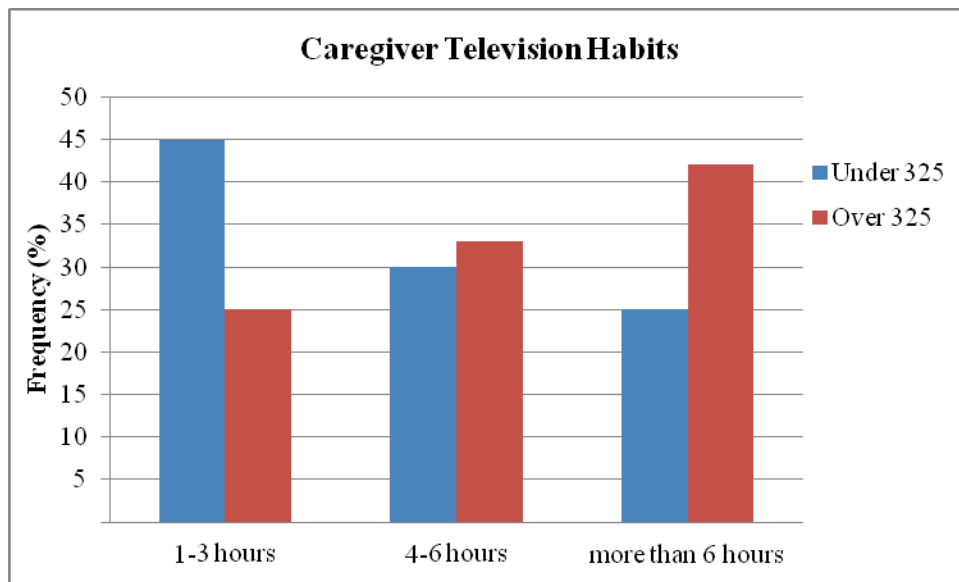
Figure 22: Number of Hours of Television Watched Daily by Eighth Graders According to STAR Math Scores



The majority of boys covered by this study watched one to three hours of television daily according to their parents. Two parents responded that their children did not watch television and both of those boys scored poorly on the STAR Math assessment. Eighth graders in the low scoring group were likely to watch more television, with 25% watching more than four hours daily compared to 8% (one boy) in the high scoring group whose parents reported four to six hours of television daily.

Figure 23 summarizes parental television viewing habits. The parents of eighth grade sons with high scores on the STAR Math assessment were likely to watch more television than those whose children had lower scores.

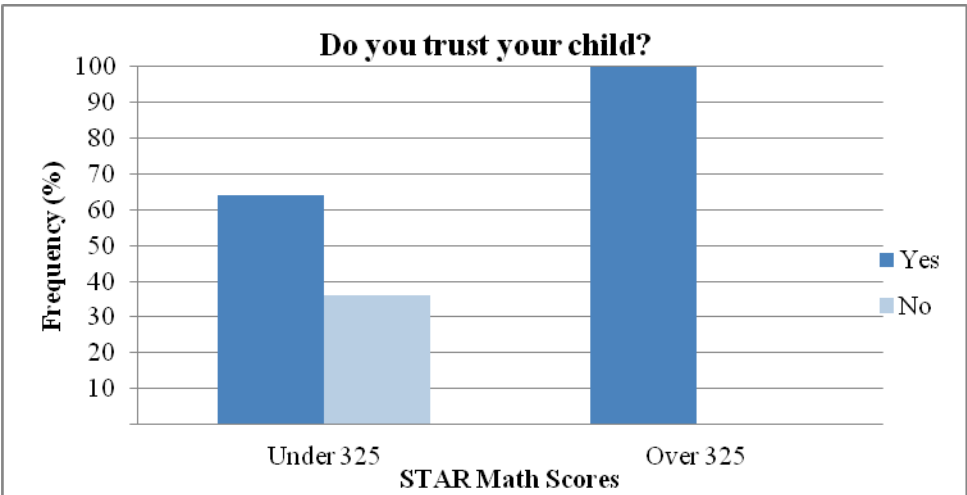
Figure 23: Parent Hours of Television Viewing per Week According to STAR Math Scores



When asked to specify a book, if any, that their eighth grade sons had seen them reading for pleasure in the previous week (question # 20), 63% of parents could name at least one book. There was no difference in this percentage between the groups whose sons scored highly and those whose sons did not on the STAR Math assessment.

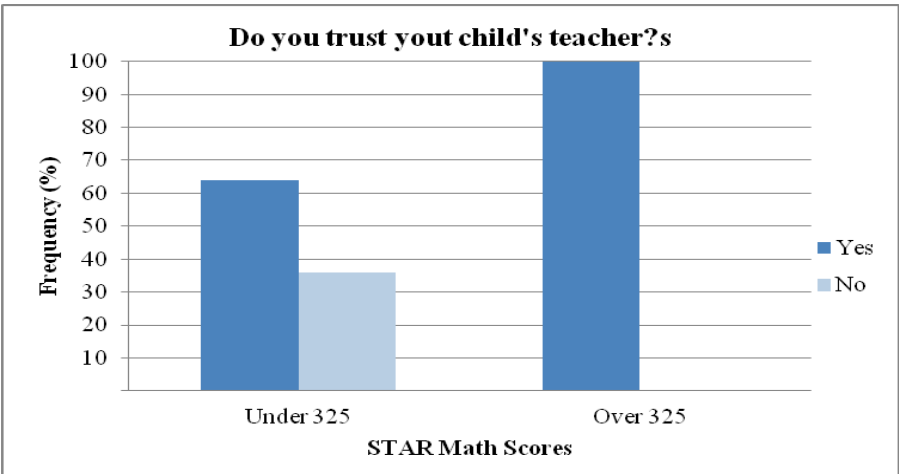
A potential indicator of the effectiveness of structures and discipline within the home was evident in trust between family members and the trust the child was able to develop with individuals and institutions outside the home. In responding to question #27 – Do you think your Middle School child trusts you – only one parent responded negatively, and that child scored below 325 on the STAR Math assessment. Figure 24 gives the breakdown of parental trust in their children by STAR Math scores.

Figure 24: Parent Trust in their Eighth Graders According to STAR Math Scores



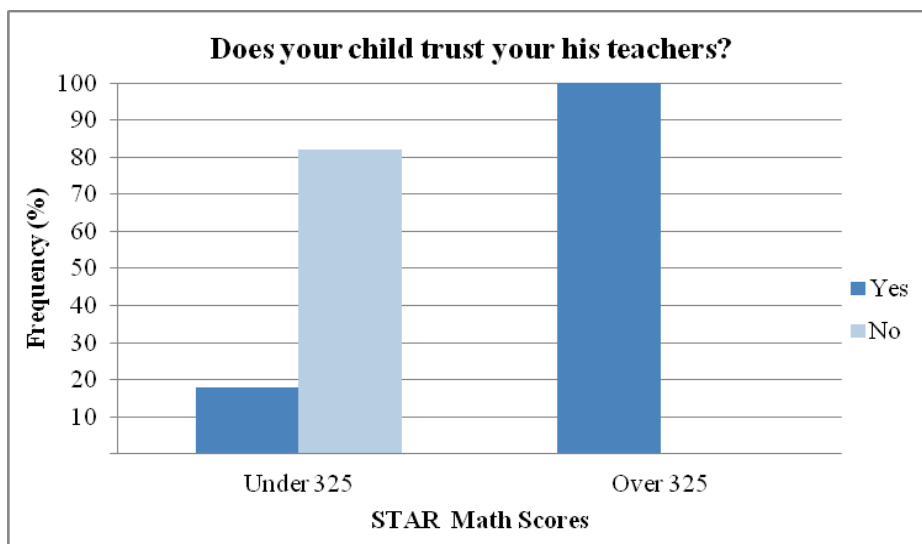
The four parents who did not trust their eighth graders had sons who did not perform well on the STAR math assessment – this made up over two thirds of this low performing group. By comparison, all of the parents of high performing eighth graders trusted their children. The distrust shown by those four parents was consistent with both their perceptions of their sons’ ability to trust outside the home. These four parents also stated that they did not trust their sons’ eighth grade teachers and believed that their sons shared this distrust.

Figure 25: Parent Trust in their Eighth Graders’ Teachers According to STAR Math Scores



The parents of children who achieved high scores on the STAR Math assessment all expressed trust in their sons' teachers.

Figure 26: Parental perceptions of their eighth graders' trust in their teachers



Parental perceptions of their eighth grade sons' trust in their teachers are outlined in Figure 26. Parents expressed the highest levels of perceived distrust when asked if their eighth grade sons trusted their teachers. All nine parents responding negatively to this question had children who tested below 325 on the STAR Math assessment.

Parental expectations for their child's future

The final set of variables examined in the surveys focused on parental expectations and aspirations for their sons' futures. Only one parent stated no explicit goals for her son's future. Table 4 breaks down the responses offered by parents when asked about the educational goals they held for their sons by STAR Math assessment scores.

Table 4: Educational Goals Held by Parents for their Sons

STAR Math assessment scores < 325	STAR Math assessment scores > 325
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finish middle-school with a "B" or better • I really want him to graduate from middle school and pass the exit exam and graduate from high school • Keep up assignments, Learn good note taking • Maintain a "B" average and complete all assignments • Whatever he chooses • To complete and understand, complete and graduate • To pass 8th grade with 3.0 GPA. • Whatever he chooses to do. • Success at the highest level • Graduate from High School go to Navy • To attend a four year college or community college or Trade Tech 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bachelors of Arts or Science Degree • College • College bound • College Degree • Complete High School and attend college • Doctors Degree in Social Justice • Excel in their studies, go to college and obtain a graduate degree • Finish High School and go to college • Finish School, go to college, get a job and move out • Graduate from College, get a trade • To go to college. Don't become an unwed father • Ph.D Robotics or Engineering • Through graduate school • To attend college • To be a doctor • To finish high school and attend UCLA • To graduate with high honor from college • Bachelor's Degree at least • To go to college

Parents of eighth grade sons who scored above 325 on the STAR Math assessment were more likely to have targeted goals for their children and specify college completion as an educational goal. Parents of eighth grade boys scoring below 325 were more likely to have general goals such as “Keep up assignments, learn good note taking,” and “Whatever he chooses to do.” Only one out of the parents with an eighth grader with a low STAR Math score specified college as their educational goal for her child.

Table 5 breaks down responses offered by parents when asked about the career goals they held for their sons according to their sons' STAR Math assessment scores.

Table 5: Career Goals Held by Parents for their Sons

STAR Math assessment scores < 325	STAR Math assessment scores > 325
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do what makes him happy • I never thought about it • Study Hard Do his best • To become a basketball or football player • To become a basketball player • To get a good job • Whatever he chooses to do • Whatever makes him happy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become a medical doctor • He wants to play baseball. I want him to be a doctor or dentist. • Finish high school, go to college • A career area he's comfortable with-a lucrative job that he can support a family with • Be successful • Firefighter or General in the Marines • I just want him to become successful • I want him to go to college or trade school • I would love for my son to become a lawyer, Judge or doctor • Successful at whatever he chooses • To be a community activist • To become a dentist • To continue on to high school passing each grade and improve, to complete and graduate. Learn from challenges. • To pursue a high demand career • I want him to be a productive citizen • Pick an interest and make a career • Whatever he wants to be I will support • I just want him to be productive and happy • To do whatever he wants in life

In examining career goals held by parents for their eighth grade sons, six responded that they held no specific career goals for sons. All of these six parents had sons who

scored below 325 on the STAR Math assessment. Another two parents in the low scoring group gave sports as the career goals for their eighth grade sons.

There was a qualitative difference to the aspirations and expectations for their sons' futures expressed by parents of eighth grade boys who attained high scores on the STAR Math assessment compared to parents of eighth grade boys with lower scores. These qualitative differences may spill over into the other areas addressed in the survey such as parental involvement in their children's schooling and the nature and effectiveness of the structure provided by the parent within the home.

Survey Results Summary

Overall the variables examined in relation to parental support through community engagement and activities in the church and community showed little difference between the household habits of those with eighth grade sons who scored above 325 on the STAR Math assessment and those with eighth grade sons who scored below.

The quality of parental involvement in their sons' school revealed possible areas in which parent activities might produce results in terms of their sons' educational outcomes. The variables examined suggest a different quality to parental interactions, both at the school and with their sons in the home, of parents of academically successful eighth grade African American boys. Parents of eighth grade boys who scored above 325 on the STAR Math assessment were likely to have greater knowledge of both their sons' teachers and what their sons were currently studying. In addition, although these parents may not have been as involved in homework activities, they held their children more accountable for the completion and submission of homework assignments than parents whose eighth grade sons scored below 325 on the STAR Math assessment.

Interview responses

Twenty interviews were conducted with parents of eighth grade African American boys attending Middle Schools in North Long Beach who did not complete the survey. As with the surveys, parent interviewees are divided into two groups according to the STAR Math scores of their sons. Nine of these parents (45%) had sons with STAR Math scores above 325 and eleven had sons whose scores fell below 325 and were, for the purposes of this study, considered less successful academically. Sixteen of the parents interviewed (80%) were women and four (20%) were men. Of those men interviewed, two were single fathers who were raising their sons with little or no contact with the mother.

Sixteen of the twenty parents interviewed (80%) indicated that they were raising their sons by themselves. Two mothers stated that their son's fathers had limited contact with their sons because they had remarried and had "another family and responsibilities."

Table 6 offers an overview of the parents interviewed and notes whether or not their sons achieved proficiency on the STAR Math assessment.

Table 6: Summary of Interview Participants

Parent #1	STAR Math score below 325
An unemployed mother with two sons, her eighth grader was enrolled at Colin Powell Academy for Success. She had older son is from a previous marriage. Her husband worked three jobs and had very little time to be involved with his son or the school. She stated that she wanted her son to become a 'professional,' but was unsure of which profession.	
Parent #3	STAR Math score below 325
A single mother with an older daughter, her eighth grader attended Colin Powell Academy for Success. Her older daughter assisted her son with his school work. Although her son's father lived in the community, he had remarried and was supporting another family. The father shared custody of the son which allowed him to spend time with his father, step-mother and other siblings. This parent was attending community college with the objective of becoming a registered nurse. Her daughter also aimed to become a nurse.	

Parent #6	STAR Math score below 325
A single working mother who expressed high expectations for her son, her eighth grader attended Colin Powell Academy for Success. She stated that she placed responsibility for her son's academic success with his teachers. Her job did not allow her much time to spend with her son whose father was not around.	
Parent #7	STAR Math score below 325
Had remarried and her husband was helping raise her son. Her eighth grader attended Lindbergh Middle School. Both the mother and her husband were employed, and purchasing a home. They had a daughter attending elementary school.	
Parent #8	STAR Math score below 325
Married with three sons, the youngest attended Colin Powell Academy for Success. The mother was bilingual and appeared to take the lead in relation to her sons' educations. The father answered the interview question, but the mother appeared in need of dental work and may have been reluctant to speak to someone unknown. The parents were homeowners and regular church attendees. The father indicated that their oldest son had survived being shot five times in North Long Beach when discussing violence in their community.	
Parent #12	STAR Math score below 325
A single mother of nine children – all with different fathers – her eighth grader attended Lindbergh Middle School. In addition to her youngest children, she periodically cared for her grandchildren. There were times when there are fifteen children living in a three bedroom apartment. She was a CAN nurse and often worked seven days per week. She participated in union activities. Her son was having difficulties at school and in the neighborhood. She admitted there were times when she lost control.	
Parent #15	STAR Math score below 325
Were a married couple with an eighth grader attending Lindbergh Middle School. The mother had completed college, but the father had not finished High School. The mother took the lead in responding to most interview questions. She was very active in all aspects of her son's school experience and has established a study routine for her son.	
Parent #16	STAR Math score below 325
A single father who divorced from his son's mother, his eighth grade son attended Hamilton Middle School. He had an older son who had problems growing up and did not want his younger son to face the same challenges.	
Parent #18	STAR Math score below 325
A single mother of two children, her eighth grade son attended Hamilton Middle School after being home schooled after being hit by a car at seven. Her son had largely recovered from the speech problems that resulting from the accident.	

Parent #19	STAR Math score below 325
A single mother who has had some success in encouraging her son who attended Hamilton High School, she had established house rules for studying and monitored her son's free time in order to help him stay focused.	
Parent #20	STAR Math score below 325
A single mother whose son attended Lindsey Academy, she stated that work left little time to establish relationships with people at her son's school. Instead she relied on the teachers that she did not know to develop her son's knowledge.	
Parent #2	STAR Math score above 325
A single mother with an older daughter who attended community college, her eighth grader attended Lindbergh Middle School. She stated that although she is not actively involved in her son's activities, her daughter spent time with her younger brother assisting him with his school work. However, she also stated that she required her son study two to three hours nightly and that he always completed his homework. This may not be accurate, since she also stated her son watched 20 hours television per week. It seemed that her older daughter took the lead in assisting with her son's learning activities and may have had a better understanding of how the eighth grader spent his time. She stated that her son was a gifted musician who performed publically in concerts.	
Parent #4	STAR Math score above 325
A single mother who worked as an intake supervisor at a drug treatment center, her eighth grader attended Hamilton Middle School. She worked long hours and this precluded involvement in her son's school activities or meeting with his teachers.	
Parent #5	STAR Math score above 325
A single mother who was unemployed and living in section 8 housing on a government stipend of only \$495 per month, her eighth grader attended Hamilton Middle School. She was unemployed with few marketable skills. Her son's father sent a minimal amount each month to contribute to his upbringing. He had remarried and his new wife had five children. He had very little contact with his son and called only every few weeks. At the conclusion of the interview I gave the interviewee an additional \$40 to help with her utilities.	
Parent #9	STAR Math score above 325
A single, unemployed mother, her eighth grader attended Lindsey Academy. This interview was conducted in her apartment because she had no transportation. The apartment was neat and well maintained. The mother was a former member of the Insane Crips and had served three years in prison on a drug conviction. Her mother was able to keep her son while she was in prison. Both her brother and her son's father were deceased. She was attending school to complete her GED and expressed interest in making a career in human services. She still had family members in the Crips, Grape-Street and the Bloods.	

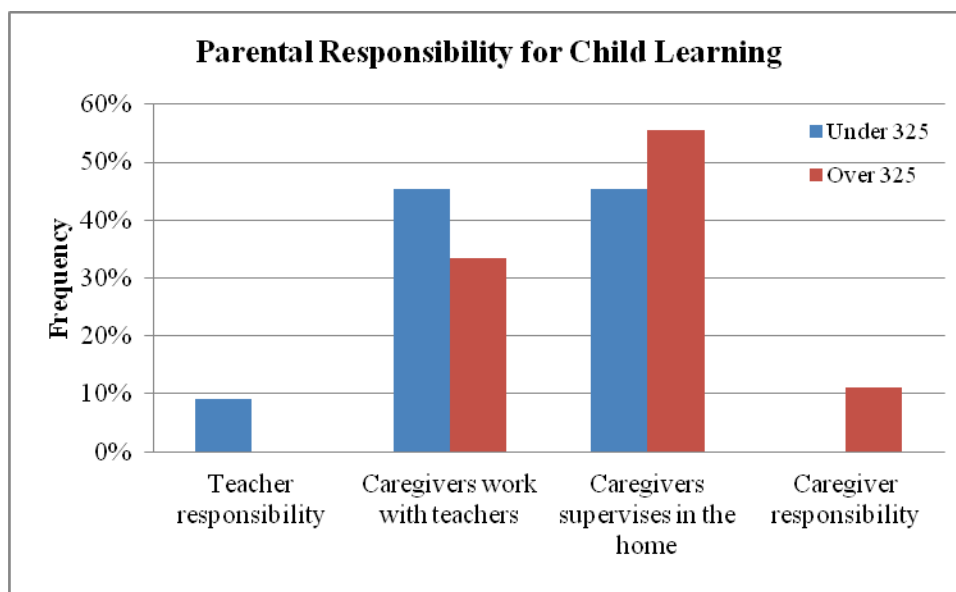
Parent #10	STAR Math score above 325
A single mother and high school graduate from South Central Los Angeles, her eighth grader attended Hamilton Middle School. Her son's father had remarried and was supporting a new family. Because she had no transportation, she was having difficulties securing employment. Before she lost her car she regularly participated in her son's school activities. She said she would like to return to school.	
Parent #11	STAR Math score above 325
An unemployed single father, his eighth grader attended Hamilton Middle School. The father completed two years of college and when working, worked in construction. The father did not fit the profile of an inner-city single father living in a low income community. He was well-read with an extensive vocabulary and appeared to have skills from a variety of trades. Although he had a number of certificates that would allow him to work in differing roles within construction, he had not been consistently employed. This situation had lead to the loss of his home and he and his son now lived in his mother's home.	
Parent #13	STAR Math score above 325
A married couple with two daughters and a son, their son attended Lindsey Academy. One daughter had a hearing problem. The mother was not present during the interview. The father was born in Belize and did not have a green card and thus was ineligible for government assistance. He had served time in prison. As a result, the mother worked and the father raised the children. The father had lived in the U.S.A for twenty years and in North Long Beach for six.	
Parent #14	STAR Math score above 325
This mother recently lost her husband to a heart attack. She has an older son and daughter. Her youngest attended Lindbergh High School. She depended on her oldest son for financial assistance with the bulk of the family income coming from Workman's Compensation.	
Parent #17	STAR Math score above 325
A married father with two daughters and one son, his middle child was in the eighth grade at Colin Powell Academy for Success. The father appeared to take the lead in creating discipline and structure in the family – including making sure the children were serious about school. The mother did not participate in the interview. The father grew up in the Long Beach area in a home that did not include his biological father. He indicated that he wanted to provide a different childhood for his children.	

Responses to some of the interview questions were coded to allow for graphical representation of results.

Parental roles in their children's academic progress

During the interviews parents were asked directly what they saw as their roles and the roles of teachers in educating their sons. Beyond the expressed statements of parents regarding their roles in their children's academic progress, this section also examines behaviors and attitudes that integrate the school and home.

Figure 27: Parents Expressed Roles in their Children's Academic Progress According to STAR Math scores



The range and distribution of parental responses given when interviewed regarding their role in their sons' learning and academic success are displayed in Figure 27 according to the scores gained by their eighth graders on the STAR Math assessment. When asked what they saw as their role in their sons' academic progress, the parents interviewed gave a range of responses from total abdication, placing responsibility solely with the school and teachers, to total responsibility. The majority of parents (eighteen out of twenty, including all of those with high achieving sons) saw their role as either working closely with teachers or supplementing the work completed at school through supervision at

home. *"The parents' role was to be supportive. When they see a problem, contact the teachers,"* made by Parent #10, is a comment typical of those parents who see their role as working closely with their children's teachers. Parents who viewed themselves as providing supervision and support in the home generally made comments like that made by Parent #17: *"A parent's role is to provide faith, strength, nourishment and guidance and just help him whenever he needs help. And, give him the incentives to look forward to what he has or see into the future as to what he can achieve on the academic level where he could be."* This blending of current parental responsibilities with a long-term vision of their sons' futures reflects a pattern of success found in the surveys.

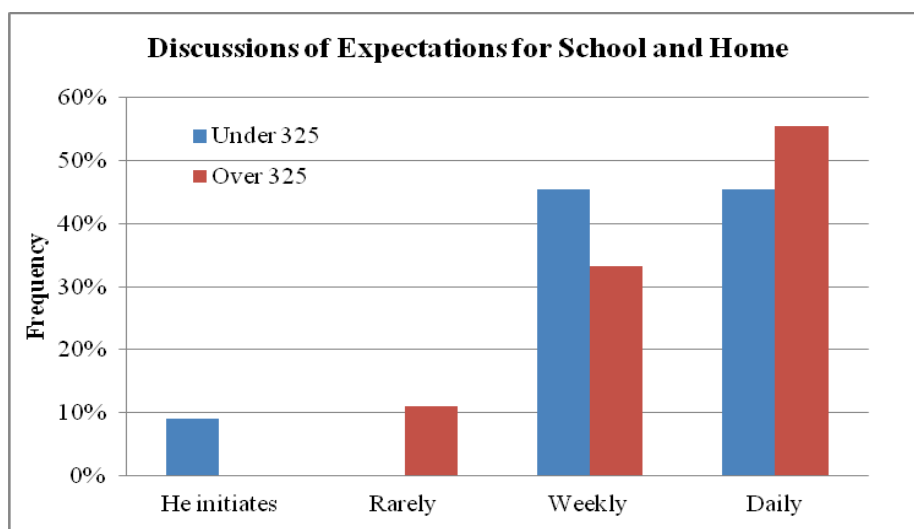
Parents whose eighth graders scored above 325 on the STAR Math assessment were more likely to integrate home and school by supervising school work in the home. The parent who placed sole responsibility on teachers and the school had an eighth grader who scored below 325, while the parent who assumed total responsibility had child who scored above 325.

Discussions between parents and their sons concerning the expectations for school and home helped crystallize the parents' roles in their sons' educations by regular communication of goals and assessment of progress. Ten of the parents interviewed (including the nine whose sons scored about 325 in the STAR math assessment) stated that they discussed their expectations regarding their sons' behavior and achievement with them on a daily basis. Eight parents stated that these types of discussions took place in their homes weekly, while one said the only time she discussed her expectations with her son was when he initiated the discussion, and another admitted seldom if ever discussing expectations. Parent #1 stated: *"I do not discuss my expectations concerning school or*

anything else with my son.” Both this parent and the one who never initiated discussions about goals with her son had sons who scored below 325 on the STAR Math assessment.

Figure 28 gives the breakdown of the frequency with which parents who were interviewed discuss their expectations of their children according to STAR Math scores.

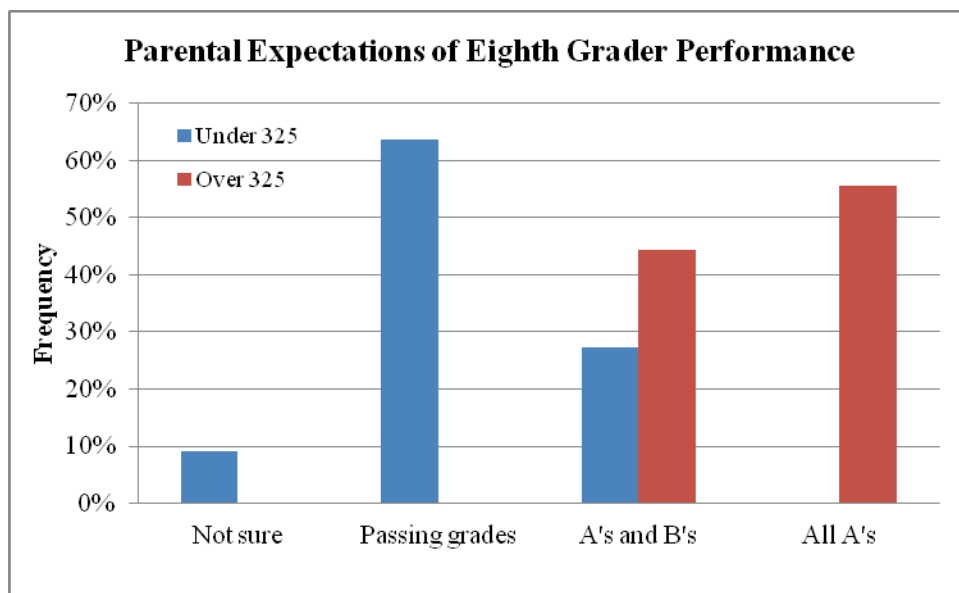
Figure 28: Frequency of Parental Discussions with their Eighth Graders Concerning Expectations for School and Home According to STAR Math Scores



There appears to be little difference in the frequencies with which parents in the two groups discuss their expectations with their sons. Those discussing their expectations less frequently gave the pressures of work or not having enough time as reasons for not talking about their expectations more frequently.

While the frequency of discussions about expectations for home and school varied little between parents whose eighth grade sons scored well on the STAR Math assessment and those whose sons performed poorly, the nature of those expectations differed by the two groups of parents. Figure 29 documents the expectations that the parents interviewed held for their eighth grade children.

Figure 29: Parental Expectations for the Academic Performance of their Eighth Graders According to STAR Math Scores



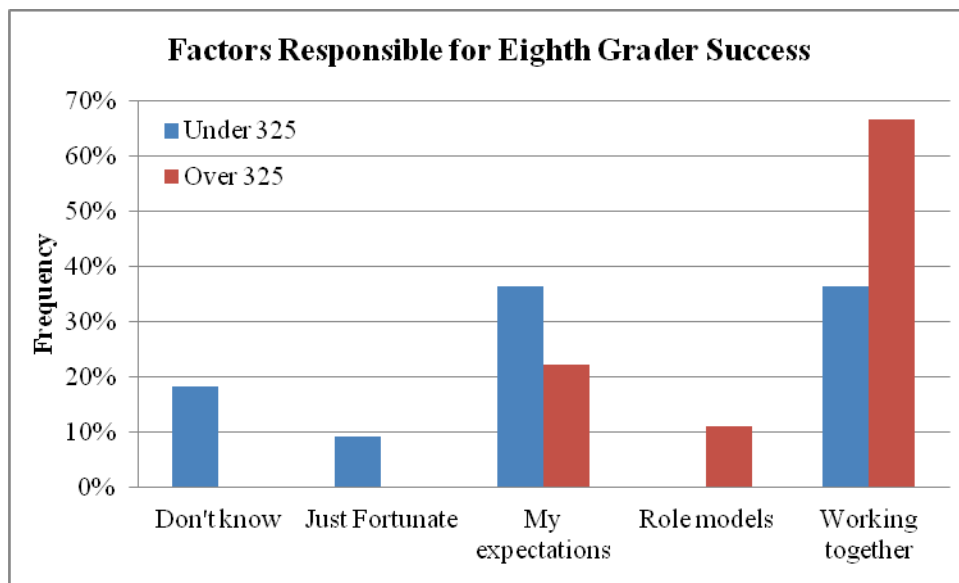
There was a clear demarcation between the two groups of parents regarding their expectations of the academic performance of their sons. Those parents whose eighth graders scored above 325 on the STAR Math assessment expected nothing less than a B from their sons, and five of the nine expected all A's. By comparison, none of parents of eighth graders who did not test as well expected their children to achieve all A's. The majority of this group expected only passing grades from their eighth grade sons. In addition to differences in the grade point expectations of the two groups of parents, there was a qualitative difference in the responses of the parents of high performing eighth graders. They were more likely to express their expectations within a long term time frame – into college and beyond. These are examples of the expectations of the parents of high performing students:

I expect him to excel, I expect him to do his best at all times and never give up and to become whatever he wants to become and be the best at whatever he chooses (Parent #17).

I want him to graduate from high school. Hopefully he will go to college. He wants to play ball so I am all for him playing ball (Parent #10).

As part of the interview, parents were asked about the factors they considered important to their children's success. Figure 30 shows the breakdown of responses given.

Figure 30: Factors to Which Parents Attribute their Eighth Graders Academic Achievement According to STAR Math Scores



The responses ranged from showing little consideration of factors that might contribute to the success of their sons to detailed discussions of the parents' plans. It is interesting to note that the majority of those interviewed specified factors within the home as contributing to their children's academic performance. None of the parents interviewed mentioned schools or teachers as factors contributing to their children's performance. A factor outside the home that was mentioned in relation to academic performance was role

models; however, this was not a common response as it was given by only two parents. Both of these parents were single parents. The majority of parents emphasized the work that they did with their children as important for success at school. The second most common category of responses focused on parental expectations.

Parents whose sons attained high scores on the STAR Math assessment were more likely to attribute their sons' success at school to work they did together at home. It appears that actions and time spent working with their sons were more important for academic success in this group than merely discussing goals. Additional comments made in response to this question by parents with sons scored above 325 on the STAR Math assessment included:

He is a smart boy and I know when he was in elementary school teachers would say how good he was in math but something just happened between that time which the doctors claim that's when the ADD starts when they are about the age when he stopped focusing. But when he puts his mind into it, and concentrates and he wants to make me proud and pleased with, he really buckles down and does his thing. (Parent #2)

I know that it is his love for me, his father. (Parent #11)

Just get him to believe in himself; that he can do it. You can do it. (Parent #11)

In examining the role of parents in their children's academic progress, the parents of eighth grade boys who scored above 325 on the STAR Math assessment were more likely to integrate school and home activities by providing supervision and guidance. Although the frequencies with which parents discussed their expectations with their children were similar for the two groups, the actual expectations for the academic performance of their

children differed markedly. Parents of children who performed well on the STAR Math assessment were more likely to set the bar higher in the academic expectations they held for their children. Additionally, such discussions of goals and expectations were less effective in translating to academic performance than time spent working with their children to hold them accountable.

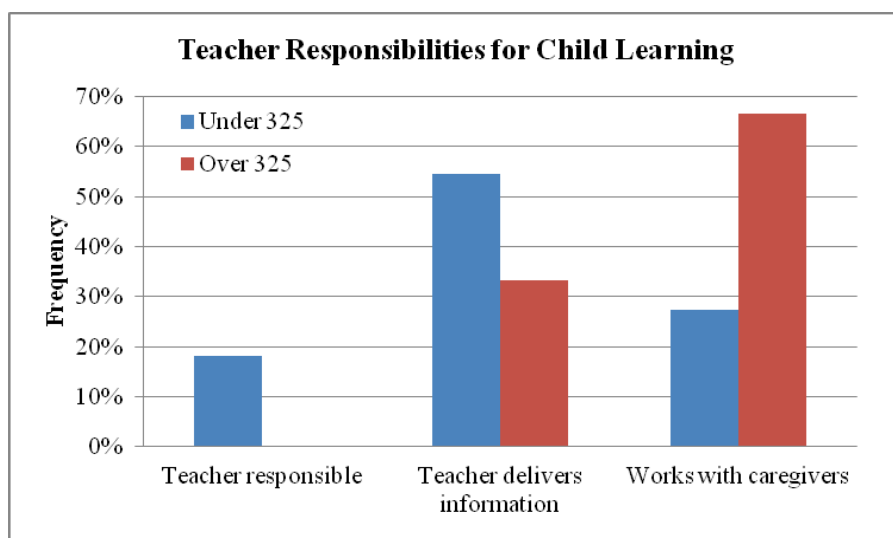
There was congruence amongst parents with sons who scored above 325 on the STAR Math assessment in the responsibility they expressed for their children's learning – and how they perceived their responsibility as supervising their sons' learning activities in the home – and how they saw their efforts with their sons leading to academic success. These results suggest that an informed and supportive home environment with high expectations and accountability combine with a working relationship between child and parent to create a possible cycle of successful academic achievement.

Parent expectations of the school's role in their sons' academic success

As with the role of the parents in their sons' academic performance, during the interviews parents were asked directly how they perceived the role of teachers in their sons' academic progress. Beyond the expressed statements of parents regarding the roles of teachers in ensuring their sons' academic progress, this section also examines parental behavior and interactions with school personnel. Only two parents stated that educating their children was the sole responsibility of teachers and both of these parents had eighth grade sons who performed poorly on the STAR Math assessment. The remainder of parents saw the teacher as either delivering information – and having the majority of responsibility for their children's educational success but little role in their social development – or working in partnership with the parent to attain the best result for the

student. Figure 31 gives the interviewed parents' expressions of the teachers' responsibility for their sons' academic progress.

Figure 31: Parents' Expressed Roles for Teachers in their Children's Academic Progress According to STAR Math scores

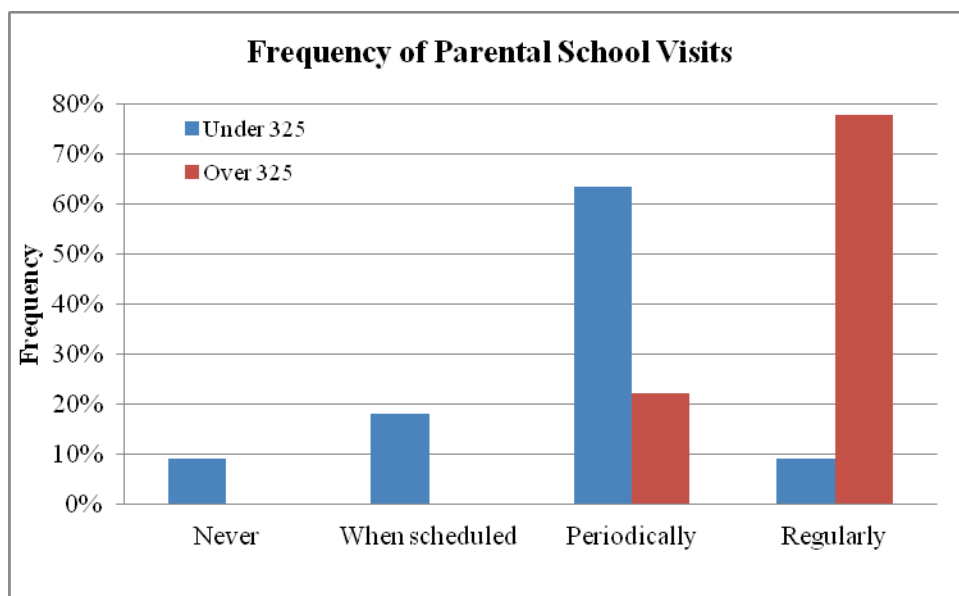


Parents of children who achieved high scores on the STAR Math assessment were more likely to view their sons' teachers in a collaborative role, working together with the parent. Parent #10, of a high performing eighth grade son, specified the teachers' role as: *"Teaching them as much as they can. Just stay on the children, just like us parents, we need to stay on them too. But I expect the teachers to teach them as much as they can."* It is interesting to note that when articulating their academic expectations for their children, these parents were more likely to describe the relationship with teachers in terms of future goals. For example another parent (Parent #11) of a son who scored above 325 on the STAR Math assessment stated: *"The teachers are to work with the parents, in getting the child to where he needs be which is in this day and age is getting them into college."* This comment once again demonstrates the way in which parents of sons that scored well on

the STAR Math assessment perceived their sons' current educational challenges and achievements within a long-term perspective leading to higher education and beyond.

Since ten of the twenty parents interviewed (including the nine whose sons scored above 325 on the STAR Math assessment) stated that their relationship with their eighth grade sons' teachers should be collaborative, the nature of the parents' relationships with school personnel should have supported the expectation of collaboration. Figure 32 breaks down the frequency and nature of parents' visits to their sons' schools according to STAR Math scores for those who were interviewed.

Figure 32: Frequency of Parental School Visits According to Eighth Grade STAR Math Scores



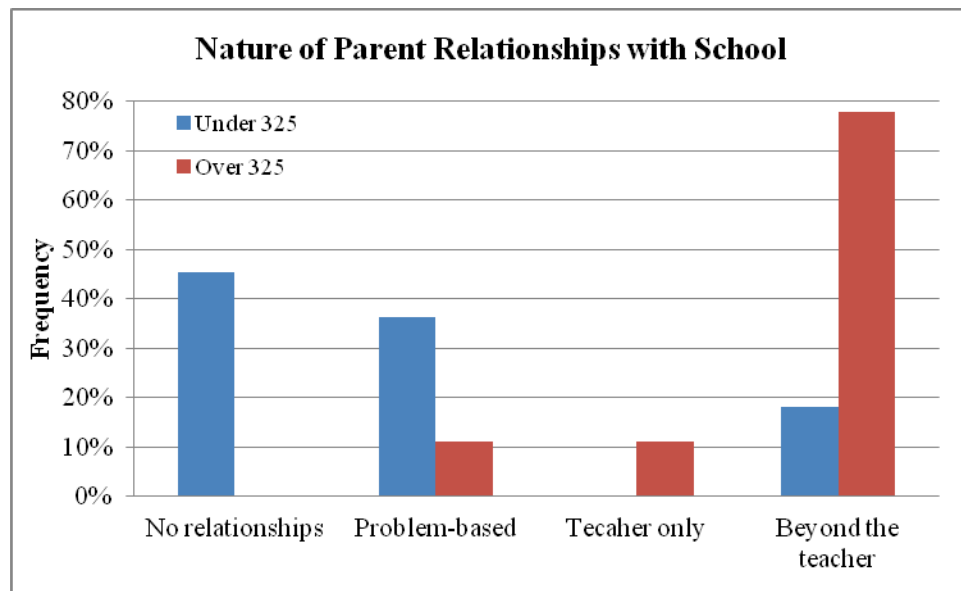
Nine of the parents interviewed stated that they periodically visited their sons' schools for scheduled appointments, special events and programs. Eight parents reported a more proactive approach and regularly visited their sons' schools. Regular school visitors were more likely to be among the parents whose eighth grade sons scored above 325 on the STAR Math assessment. By comparison, the parents of children who did not perform as

well offered reasons for not visiting their sons' schools. Parent # 6 stated: *"I am kind of busy. I try but I got discouraged because the teachers were not trying to work with me."* Her son attended Colin Powel Academy for Success and her comment may reflect issues with the school in addition to her own time limitations.

Complementing the frequency of parental visits to their sons' schools, the nature of the relationships the parents maintained with the personnel at their sons' schools gave an indication of their support for the role of teachers and the school in their sons' educations. Only nine of the parents interviewed characterized their relationship with school personnel as positive. The remaining eleven parents indicated very limited relationships with school personnel – and no contact with either their sons' Principals or school counselors.

Figure 33 shows the breakdown of parental relationships with school personnel according to STAR Math scores for those interviewed. The pattern evident in the quality and nature of school visits as discussed above was mirrored in the extent of relationships that parents of eighth graders who performed well on the STAR Math assessment had with school personnel. These parents were more likely to have relationships at school with personnel other than their sons' teachers.

Figure 33: The Nature of Parent Relationships with School Personnel According to STAR Math Scores



Comments made by the parents of high performing eighth grade sons suggested that they were more proactive in their relationships with personnel at the school. The following remarks made by parents of high performing sons demonstrated the nature of the partnerships they built, particularly with their children's teachers, even when their family resources are limited:

With the teachers I have a real close relationship because I always follow through with them. (Parent #2)

Well to be honest, when I had a car, I'd be at school... I'd just pop up and speak with his teachers or I would make an appointment, but my not having transportation, I just email the teachers and talk to them over the phone. (Parent #10)

In contrast, the parents of eighth grade sons who scored poorly on the assessment were more likely to have either no relationship with school personnel or relationships that were

reactive and defined by the problems and challenges facing by their children. Parent #12 stated:

You know it's a funny thing, you mentioned that because I was having so many issues.

He was constantly being suspended, constantly being sent to the office and let me tell you, I had to go to court.

In examining parental expectations of the roles of teachers and the school in the academic success of their eighth grade sons, parents of students who performed well on the STAR Math assessment were more likely to characterize that role as one of collaboration between the school and home. In line with this collaborative stance, these parents visited their sons' schools more regularly and were more likely to have proactive and productive relationships with school personnel than parents of eighth grade boys who performed poorly on the STAR Math assessment.

Parental home management style

During the interview, parents were asked three questions related to how they structured the home environment and managed their families' home lives. These questions focused on homework requirements and the television viewing habits of both parents and their eighth grade children.

Figure 34: Parental Requirements Regarding Eighth Grade Homework Assignments According to STAR Math Scores

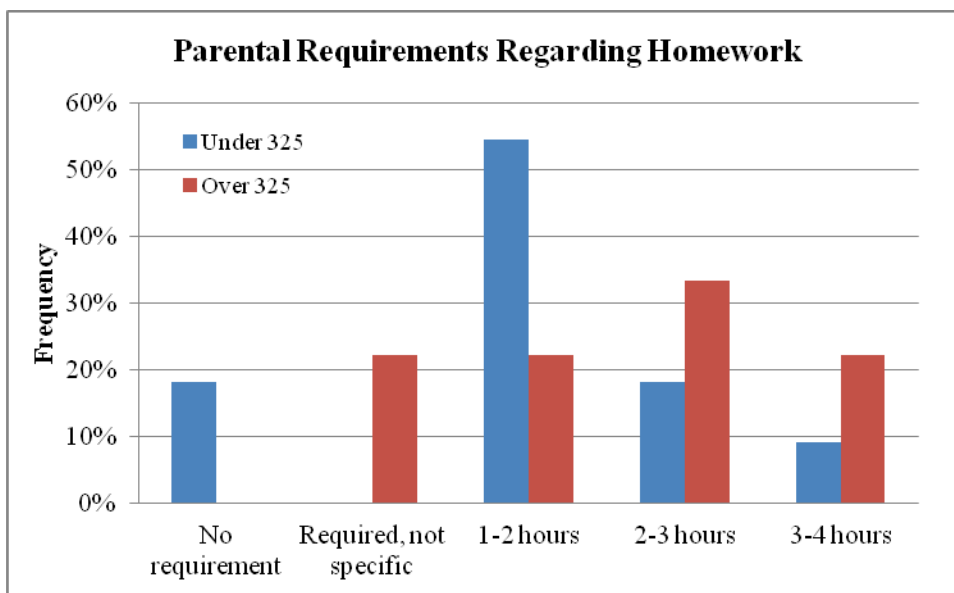
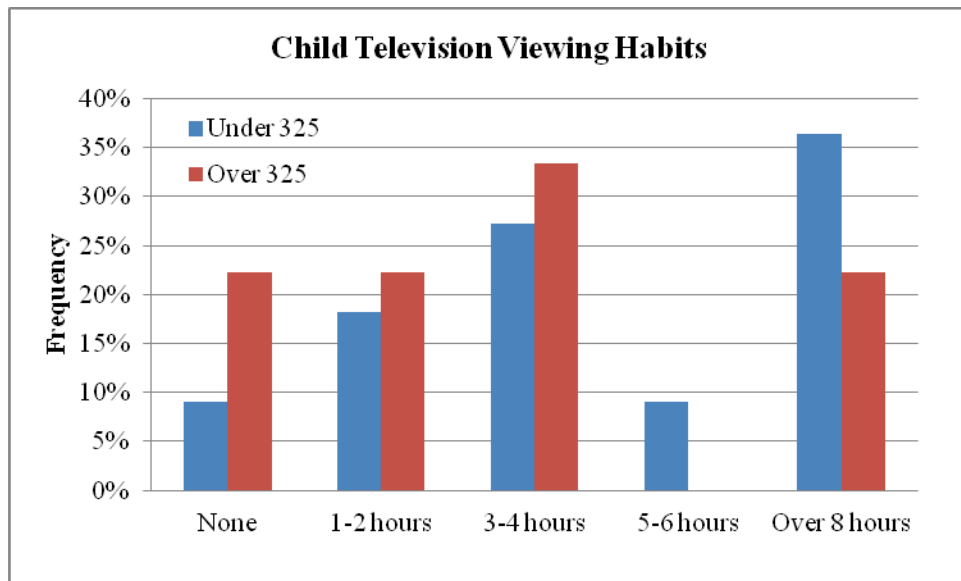


Figure 34 gives the distributions of the number of hours per day parents expected their eighth grade sons to spend studying and/or completing homework assignments according to student score on the STAR Math assessment. Five of the nine of parents of high STAR Math scoring sons interviewed required more than two hours of homework per night from their sons, compared to eight of the eleven parents whose sons scored below 325 who required two hours of homework or less. Parent #10, whose eighth grader who scored above 325 on the STAR Math assessment stated: *“Everyday, I have to push him. I am a single mother. My son comes home around 3:30 pm so from 3:30 pm until around 6:00 pm he don’t watch television; he does his homework and read books. So at least three hours of studying and then I’ll give him a little break.”* A number of parents spoke of wanting to push their children to do more, but of being limited by time.

When asked if they tutored their children, only one parent responded positively. Her child had not scored above 325 on the STAR Math assessment, but she had previously home schooled him while he was recovering from an accident.

Figure 35 shows the television viewing habit of the eighth grade sons of the parents interviewed.

Figure 35: Eighth Grader Television Viewing Habits According to STAR Math Scores



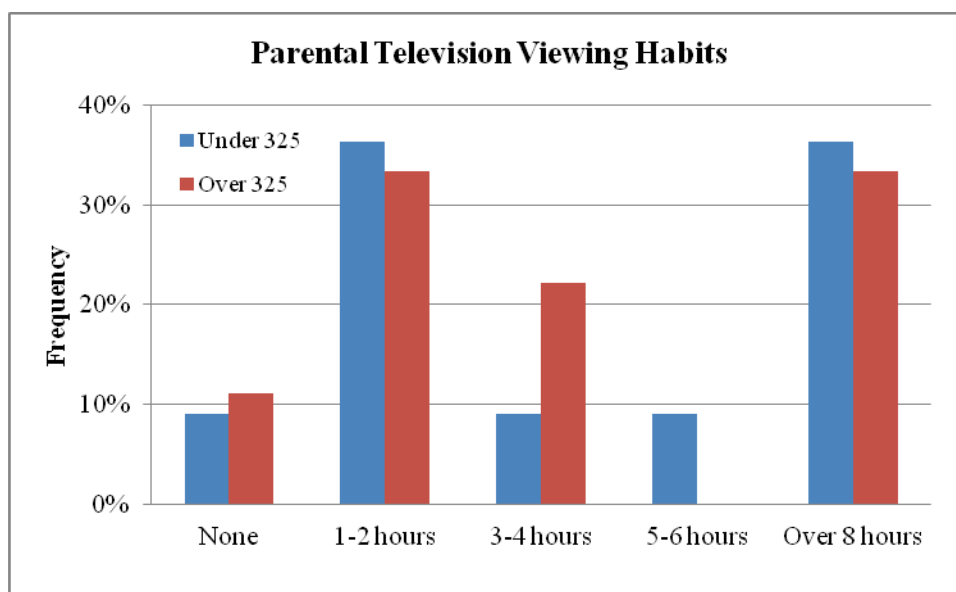
Eighth grade boys with low STAR Math scores were more likely to watch more than three hours of television per week compared to eighth grade boys with higher scores, who were more likely to watch less than four hours of television per week.

When asked about their children's reading habits, all of the parents of eighth grade boys who received low scores on their STAR Math assessment interviewed stated that their children had read no books in the last month. The majority (six out of nine) eighth grade boys who received higher scores on the STAR Math assessment had read one to two books in the last month as reported by their parents. Only one of the parents interviewed

repoerted a child who had read more than two books, and that child who had read five books in the past month had scored above 325 on the STAR Marth assessment.

Figure 36 shows the television viewing habits of the parents interviewed broken down by student STAR Math scores.

Figure 36: Hours of Television Watched Daily by Parents According to STAR Math scores



There appears to be little difference between the television viewing habits of the two groups of parents.

In examining the structure in the home provided by parents, eighth grade boys who scored above 325 on the STAR Math assessment were likely to spend more time on school work and less time watching television. These boys read books compared to their counterparts who did not score as well on the STAR Math assessment.

Interview Results Summary

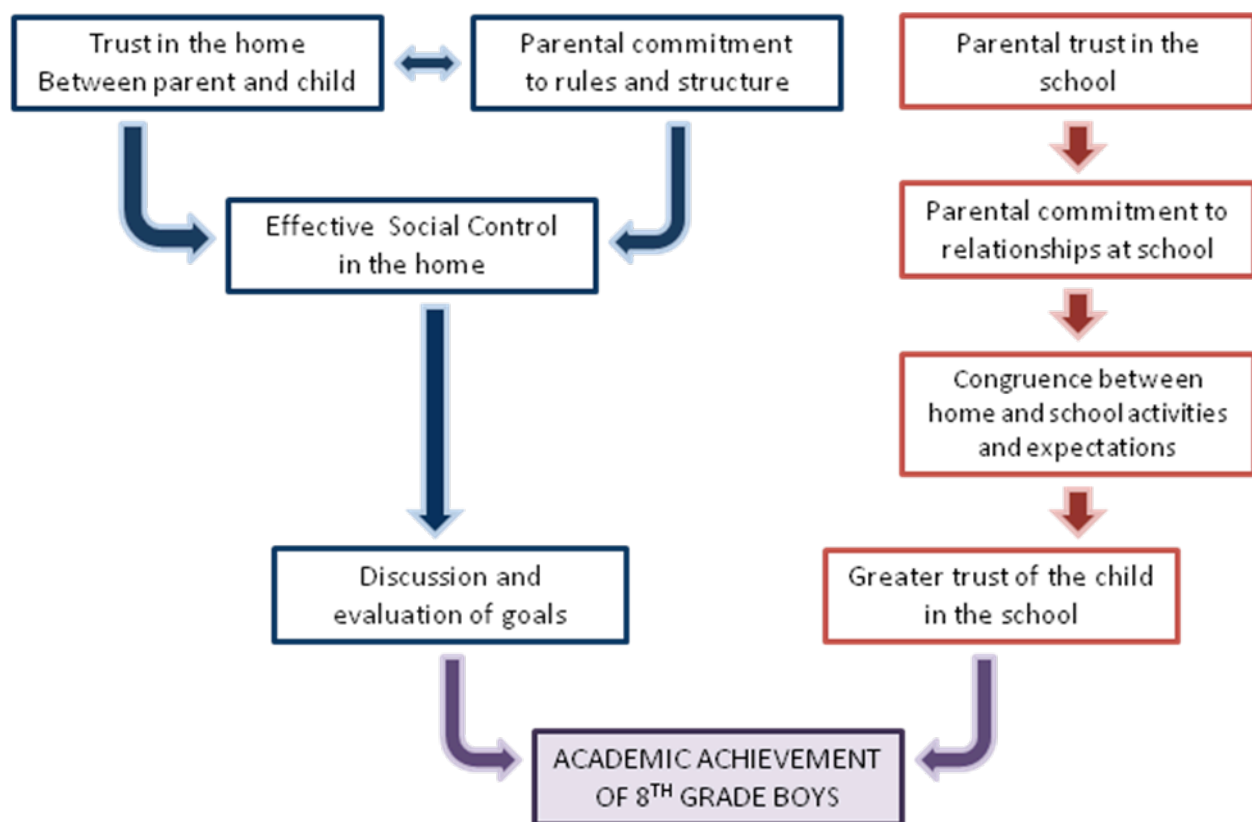
The interview process created some overlap in the responses, with the parents being interviewed often building on some of their earlier responses when answering later questions. In examining parental factors that contributed to the success of African American boys in the eighth grade, parental responsibility was the greatest factor to emerge from the interviews. Parental responsibility and commitment to their sons' academic success was evident in their reported actions within the home and at school. Parents of boys who scored above 325 on the STAR Math assessment were more likely to perceive their responsibilities and the responsibilities of their sons' teachers as a working relationship involving collaboration with the parents building on the teachers' efforts at home. At home they discussed their expectations for their sons with them daily and worked with them to achieve those goals.

There were both quantitative and qualitative differences in the relationships these parents have with their sons' school: They visited the schools more often and were more likely to know personnel at the school beyond their sons' teachers. Another qualitative difference between parents of boys scoring above 325 on the STAR Math assessment and those whose sons scored below was the future orientation common in many of the interview responses. Parents of eighth grade boys who achieved high scores on the STAR Math assessment consistently referenced their sons' futures in responding to the interviewer. When addressing her role in her son's educational achievement, one mother referred to the importance of giving him *"incentives to look forward to what he has or see into the future as to what he can achieve."*

Combining Results: Finding the Patterns

In combining the results from the interviews and surveys, a number of patterns emerged concerning factors within the home and relationships between home and school that were associated with the academic success of African American boys in the families studied. These associations are outlined in Figure 37.

Figure 37: Family Support Factors Promoting Academic Success in African American Boys



In Figure 37, the left-hand side (in the blue boxes) documents elements within the family and the home – including aspects of the relationships between parents and their sons – that are associated with academic success. Elements in red, on the right-hand side, reflect relationships between the home and the school that also contribute to academic performance. Social control – as defined by Clark (1983) – and parental commitment to

rules and structure combined with reinforcement of goals through discussion and regular evaluation to produce the authoritative parenting style outlined by Macoby and Martin (1983) and cited by Mandara (2006) as contributing to the academic success of children in African American children. Thus the left-hand side of the figure outlines aspects of the authoritative parenting style – including appropriate and timely discipline, maintaining rules and regular evaluation of goals.

The two sets of factors – focusing on relationships within the home, and between the home and school – worked together to promote academic success in the homes studied in North Long Beach. Although not necessarily connected, results of this study indicate a possible correlation between the two sets of factors. The common denominator bridging home and school relationships in the survey results was trust. Trust supports relationships within the home and between the home and school. It helps to create an environment of collective understanding where shared goals and expectations mutually reinforce each other so that efforts in the school and home work in concert to promote the academic performance of boys in the household. Further discussion of the connections between these results and a possible intervening variable contributing to academic success are offered in the discussions and conclusions in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Study Overview

In addressing the crisis of African American boys in the education system, this research sought to identify factors within the family that can foster and support the academic development of these children. Since the role of the school in perpetuating the documented poor outcomes presents only part of the problem, this research sought to develop a more comprehensive portrait of the complex interactions between child, parent and school in order to identify resources that might be available within the family and the school by examining family factors and attitudes, and the ways in which these factors and attitudes impede or build on the educational efforts made by schools.

Using both surveys and interviews, this study specifically focused on factors within the home and the nature of relationships between the home and school that might impact the academic performance of eighth grade African American boys in the northern area of Long Beach, California. For the purposes of this study, academic achievement was determined by Math scores on the State of California's Standardized Testing and Reporting Program (STAR). Twenty African American parents with sons in the eighth grade were selected at random and interviewed. An additional thirty-two parents completed a written survey. A mixed method approach was adopted to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data in addressing the research questions:

- 1) What are the parental factors that affect the academic performance of African American boys in the eighth grade?
- 2) What roles do parents play in helping their eighth-grade sons achieve academic and social success?

In attempting to identify both positive and negative aspects of the home environment and relationships between the home and school that influence the academic performance of African American boys, both the surveys and interviews focused on:

- 1) parental support in the home and at school
- 2) parental involvement in the child's schooling
- 3) parental home requirements related to daily required study time, weekly television viewing and the number of books read per month

The survey included one additional area of inquiry:

- 4) parental expectations for their child's future

Economic disadvantage can form a barrier to social success for families with fewer social and material resources. This can result in greater despair, pathos, lethargy and psychological confusion in the behaviors of the family members. Parents in disadvantaged families often feel hurt, embarrassed, and/or ashamed about the circumstances of their home lives, which may result in resistance to participation in social and community activities. They are also often reluctant to open themselves to school officials or other perceived authority figures.

Economically disadvantaged families are generally not as cooperative or receptive to participating fully and openly in any form of research, as this researcher can confirm. As a result, the data was more difficult and time-consuming to obtain. Although some parents were somewhat cooperative, many parents either refused to complete and return the surveys, or refused the mailed invitations and direct telephone requests for interview. The trend of unresponsive behavior provided clear clues to the researcher that they were either

suspicious or uncomfortable with what was being requested of them and/or anything that might be perceived as external scrutiny on their families.

While the response rate was consistent with those of other studies, it may have resulted in selection bias, since the proportion of parents returning the surveys whose children had scored above 325 in the STAR Math score was much higher than for the North Long Beach Community in general as seen in Figure 2. Although outside of the scope of this investigation two trends in response rates are notable. Firstly, Colin Powel Academy for Success was over represented in respondents. This poses an interesting anomaly because of the low academic success rates of the sons attending Colin Powel Academy in the households represented in this study as documented in Table 3. By contrast, response rates were low for households with sons attending Lindsey Academy, another school with high variance in academic achievement between grade levels documented in Table 2.

The relative over-representation of households with sons attending Colin Powel Academy suggests a different dynamic of parents at this school who may feel more empowered in relation to their sons' educations in spite of their sons' low achievement levels. The second trend in response rates found was the higher levels of academic success in the sons of respondents who attended Lindbergh Middle School and Hamilton Middle School. It appears that this study may have attracted parents from these schools who are more attuned to issues related to their children's educational needs and possible success. The population being sampled in this study might be considered a vulnerable group because of their relative lack of resources and potential feelings of disempowerment, and this must be considered in any attempt to extend this research.

Key Findings

In adapting Clark's (1983) framework to examine the mechanics through which the home effects performance at school, this study focused more on family culture – and factors such as parental expectations, support systems, supervision and guidance – than on family composition and demographic variables. An examination of demographic data from the families included in the interviews and surveys indicated that neither the presence of two parents in the house nor parental employment status impacted the academic success of eighth grade boys in these families. Unlike Salem, Zimmer and Notaro (1998), the traditional two parent family had little impact on academic performance of sons in the families studied. Given the preponderance of low income households among those surveyed, family income and parental employment status were less important than parental education in promoting the academic success of African American eighth grade boys from the families surveyed. These findings support the focus on family culture taken in this study and are encouraging because while family composition is relatively fixed over time, family culture is be more fluid and thus allows recommendations for interventions.

The surveys show that social engagement and the availability of social capital through church activities and community involvement had little impact on the academic performance of African American boys in the eighth grade. Within the families studied participation in social activities outside the home was not associated with higher levels of success in school. While Deering et al. (2006) found parental involvement in both social and academic activities contributed to the academic success, this study suggests that parental involvement in their sons' academic activities is associated with academic success, but involvement in social activities is not. Social capital, forged through family support

networks in the community, that can bridge the home and the larger community played little role in the academic success of African American boys in the families studied. This finding is counter to those found by Brofenbrenner (1979), Garbarino (1992), Jewel (2003), Epstein (1994), and McAdoo (1998); however, given the low incomes of the families surveyed, the lack of impact of engagement outside the home and school on academic performance may reflect the low resource levels of these families. The parents surveyed and interviewed often mentioned lack of time and/or resources (for example lack of transportation for unemployed parents and lack of time and energy for parents employed) as preventing them from being more engaged in their sons' activities. Constraints such as these prevented some parents from having more productive relationships with their sons' schools and may have also prevented them and their families from gaining the full benefits available from social and community engagement. Since the majority of the participating families were considered economically disadvantaged, the opportunity cost of involvement in activities outside the home – both in time and other resources required – may have precluded full involvement. Factors related to material well-being may have limited these families' ability to draw upon social capital within the community that might have been available in their communities. Alternatively, it may be that at extremely low income levels, social engagement is not as salient in producing academic results.

Survey findings suggest the quality of parental involvement in their sons' schools is an area in which parental activities produce results in terms of their sons' educational outcomes. While a number of studies have identified parental involvement in their children's schooling as an important contributor to academic success (Fashola, 2005;

Dearing, Kreider & Weiss, 2006), the variables examined in this study suggest a different quality to parental interactions, both at the school and with their children at home between the two groups studied. Parents of eighth grade boys who scored above 325 on the STAR Math assessment were likely to be more knowledgeable both about their sons' teachers and what their sons were learning. In addition, although these parents may not have been as involved in homework activities, parents whose eighth graders were considered academically successful held their sons more accountable for the completion and submission of homework assignments than parents whose eighth grade sons scored below 325 on the STAR Math assessment. This suggests that in addition to making sure their sons engaged in homework activities, these parents knew what their sons were working on and could hold them accountable for the content of these activities. Thus academic success was associated with social control – where the home and school work in concert in mutually reinforcing the authority and efficacy of each other (Brofenbrenner, 1979, 1994; Clark, 1983) – and with Macoby and Martin's (1983) authoritative parenting style that reinforces social control within the home. As in the work of Kunjufu (2000) and Mandara (2006), authoritative parents in this study were more likely to be actively and effectively involved in their sons' educational experiences than those who are permissive with their sons' activities in the home and passively delegate responsibility for their sons' educations to the schools. Effective social control provided the child with greater personal security and confidence that could translate into motivation, achievement and feelings of accomplishment, since parental activities in the home are informed by strong relationships with the school.

These findings are consistent with results from the interviews that suggest that the quality of interactions was more important than their occurrence or the frequency of contact between the parent and school. Parental responsibility and commitment to their sons' academic success was evident in the reported actions within the home and at school of the parents interviewed. Parents of boys who scored above 325 on the STAR Math assessment were more likely to perceive their responsibilities and the responsibilities of their sons' teachers as a working relationship involving collaboration, with the parents building on the teachers' efforts at home. This created congruence between home and school, and sustained social control and allowed parents to become more effective partners in supporting their sons' academic success. At home parents of high achieving sons discussed their expectations for their sons with them daily, evaluated their progress and worked with their sons to achieve the articulated goals. These discussions bore weight because they tied current activities and accountability for short term results to long term goals. Like Bernard (1995), Cervantes (1965), Clark (1983), Conchas (2006) and Kunjufu (2000), this research finds that the most pedagogically effective experiences occur when the role demands and cognitive functioning of the classroom are compatible with experiences at home.

In examining structural factors within the home and rules and expectations created by parents, the rules appeared less important than the relationships that supported those rules. Both the interview and survey results show little differences in the explicit rules and time management practices in place in the home between the two groups of families studied; however, parents of eighth graders who were less successful reported behavior that was often inconsistent with the explicit rules they laid out for their children and a web

of environmental interactions that did not result in social control as defined by Brofenbrenner (1979). For example, although they established rules setting aside time for homework within the household, parents of less successful eighth grade boys were less likely to follow through and ensure that homework was consistently completed and submitted in a timely manner or to know what their sons were working on in school. Parents of low-performing sons were also more place greater responsibility for their sons' educations on the schools and teachers. These parents were less likely to exhibit the traits of the Macoby and Martin's (1983) authoritative parenting style and were more likely to express frustration or disappointment with the relationship they had with teachers. Social control was more effective when coupled with information from the school that parents could use in designing activities in the home and the structure of the home environment.

When inquiring about goals held by parents for their eighth grade sons, survey results revealed a qualitative difference in the aspirations and expectations of their children's futures expressed by parents of eighth graders who attained high scores on the STAR Math assessment compared to parents of eighth graders with lower scores. While there was little difference in the frequencies of the discussions about academic and social performance between the two groups of survey respondents, the parents of high performing eighth grade sons were more likely to articulate goals for their sons that linked long range success to short term academic attainment. According to Clark (1983), Brofenbrenner (1986), and Conner (1988), how parents and other significant adults communicate with children and the types of topics discussed in the home and the manner in which discipline and encouragement are presented impact children's social and educational adjustment in school. While confirming these findings, this research indicates

that the effectiveness of parental communication in supporting educational success is enhanced by communication with the school. In this way, discussions in the home, both feeds off, and builds on efforts at school. The differences in parental knowledge of their sons teachers and the content of their school work (as discussed in the previous chapter) reported by survey respondents suggested differences in both the context and content of discussions about educational goals that in the homes of African American boys who scored above 325 on the STAR Math assessment. Thus parents with high achieving sons may have provided environment that contributed effective communication and support regarding academic and social progress.

Although the parents interviewed were not directly asked about the aspirations for their sons' careers, the long term perspective that many of them included when answering other questions – such as teachers' roles in their boy's academic success and the discussions of behavioral expectations – suggested that parents of eighth grade sons performing well at school thought about and regularly discussed their plans for their sons' futures with them and monitored and supported these plans. This is further evidence of a qualitative difference in the nature of communication between parents and sons in the home and the type of goals articulated.

The most potent structural factor influencing the academic success of the eighth grade African American boys in the households returning surveys was trust. The unexpected nature of this finding is reflected in lack of trust measures in the interviews. In seeking to extend and verify these results, interviewing parents about trust within and outside the home would provide greater insights into how trust functions in promoting academic success. This may reflect the higher level of educational success, through high

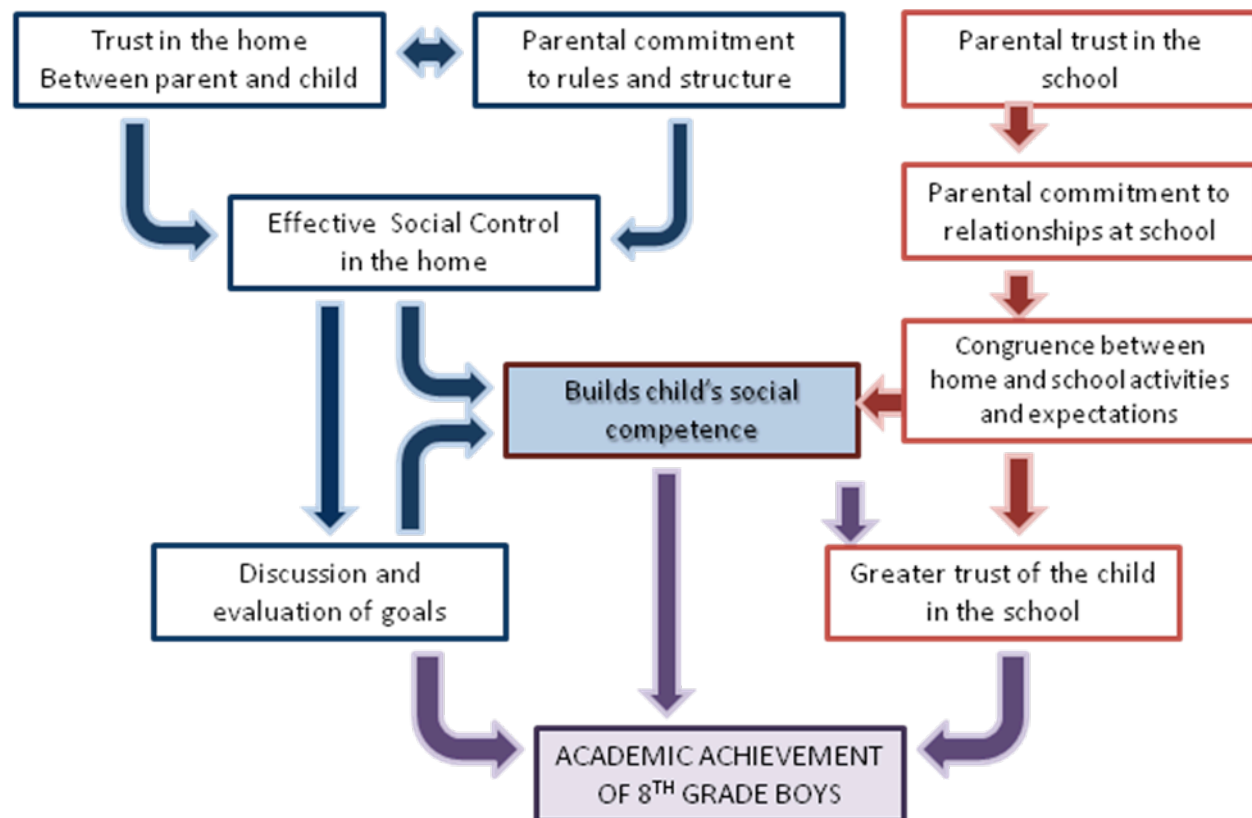
school and degree completion, experienced by this group of parents. It may be that this group had more positive educational experiences as students and therefore did not develop the mental barriers to trusting teachers that parents who for various reasons did not advance so far with their educations. From questions looking at the structure provided by the parent in the home, it appears that children in this sample who did well when tested academically were more likely to come from families where they were trusted by and, in turn, trusted their parents. The home environment of trust was associated with high levels of trust in the eighth grade boys' teachers by both the sons and their parents. Since trust may form the basis of structure and security within the home, it functions to make discipline and order more effective within the household. Issues of trust, particularly between the home and school may also influence the effectiveness of parental expectations on their children's academic performance.

Trust is an important basis for social control as it provides a sense of security that fosters personal autonomy and confidence in personal relationships in the home, school and wider social context. Since self image is initiated in the home (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Clark, 1983; Taylor, 1996), stable relationships within the home built on trust contribute to children's development self-confidence. Trust established and learned in the home feeds directly into children's latent social competence. The ability to trust is developed through early interactions – initially within the family, then the larger community, and then school. Thus, while social competence was not directly addressed in the design of this study, the child's ability to establish trusting relationships outside the home (as reflected in parental perceptions of their son's trust in his teachers) can be used as a proxy for social

competence because without trust it is difficult to develop functional social relationships that characterize social competence.

Figure 38 revises figure 37 to include a possible mechanism by which elements of the home environment and school contribute to the academic success of African American boys in the eighth grade in North Long Beach. This research suggests that congruence between the home and school combines with authoritative parenting to establish social control in the home so that the home and school work together to create a greater sense of security and confidence in the child. Thus, personal characteristics of and parental commitment combine with aspects of the school environment, and relationships between the school and home, to establish and reinforce characteristics in the child that support academic achievement.

Figure 38: Linking Factors in the Home and School to Support Academic Achievement



Parental characteristics such as an authoritative parenting style create trust that provides the child with security through social control. These factors within the home combine with proactive parental relationships with the school to facilitate communication between the school and home so that parents are informed and can structure the home environment and expectations for behavior within the home to support academic goals and the prospect for success. These factors aggregate to create congruence between the home and school and create a general sense of security that fosters strong self-image and enhances self confidence in the child to build social competence. Social competence empowers the child to discuss his goals and progress at home, and reinforces the trusting relationships the child has at school. Social competence makes the child more confident in relationships at home and at school, and empowers the child to succeed academically. These later linkages to social competence are merely suggested in this research. Further work is required to better establish these results.

A distinguishing factor of the parents interviewed with eighth grade sons who scored above 325 on the STAR Math assessment was the prioritizing of actions rather than words. These parents were more active and proactive across a number of domains related to interactions at home and at school associated with social control. In spite of low income levels, the parents of eighth grade boys who scored above 325 on the STAR Math assessment were able to use their time and resources effectively within the home and in interactions with the school. The factors outlined in the figure above operate independent of income and family structure.

This study confirms that as Clark (1983) would state: regardless of family composition and household income, the necessary environment for success can be

provided by caring individuals who have positive and sustained daily contact with their children. The importance of trust as a possible contributor to academic success is as promising as it is troubling. While the interviews reveal a possible cycle of proactive interactions –between the parent, the child and the school – that creates and maintains social control, the surveys reveal the possibility of a more damaging intergenerational parent-school-child dynamic. This may contribute Monroe's (2005) contention that an accumulation of negative experiences in the school and neighborhood heighten the likelihood of African American boys failing in school, falling behind socially and drifting into delinquency. This study suggests that, just as there are protective factors and resources in some homes that encourage academic success, there may also be factors in the home that impede self confidence and academic achievement. As adults, parents who had poor school experiences may be less likely to trust educational institutions. This may influence both their ability to trust their children and may flow on to their children's distrust of their teachers and the school.

Figure 39: Intergenerational Cycles of Distrust and Poor Outcomes in Education

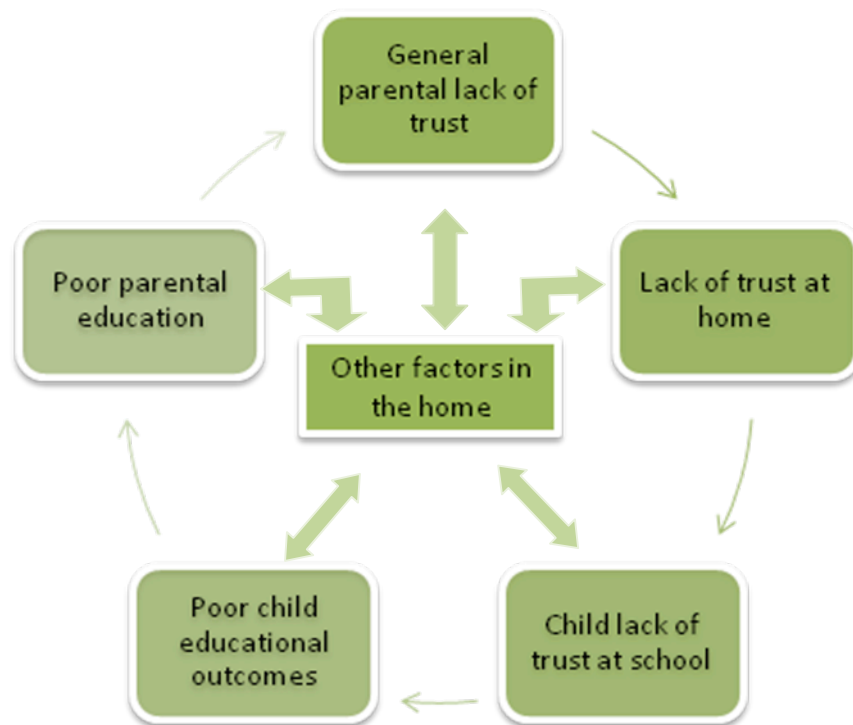


Figure 39 outlines a possible mechanism by which this cycle of distrust and poor educational outcomes can be transferred from one generation to another. In modeling distrust to their children they may destroy any basis of positive social control between the home and school and instead reinforce low expectations of the school experience within their children, which may in turn be self-fulfilling.

Figure 39 stands in stark contrast to figure 38. While figure 38 outlines connections that can contribute to the academic success of African American boys, figure 39 presents a closed cycle of poor outcomes. These figures offer possible explanations for the differing outcomes of the boys from the families studied. While figure 38 offers opportunities for creating programs that build on resources within the home that promote academic success, figure 39 identifies an area in need of rehabilitation. Further study is needed to confirm the causal mechanisms in both the positive and negative parental dynamic, but figure 39

identifies a potential area that would need to be addressed at the level of both the parent and child. Parents are critical factor in their sons' academic achievement. This intergenerational transfer of low trust and the cycle of low expectations it fuels was an unexpected, but important finding.

Although not explicitly included in the design of the study, several respondents in the surveys and interviews stated that they either attended school or were considering returning to school at the Junior College or trade school level. In both groups, the parental pursuit of education was not associated with the educational success of their sons. It may be that like social engagement, the resources of families with parents pursuing education were so limited that parental education detracted from rather than supplemented the educational experiences of their sons.

While limitations of sample size in both the surveys and interviews makes generalizing these results difficult, they offer preliminary insights into family factors that foster academic success for African American boys in North Long Beach. This study presented a snapshot of a single moment in the academic lives of the boys from the families studied. While the findings suggest that at this stage in their development, these boys need not necessarily be doomed to the projections of African American men as endangered species, further work is required – either longitudinal or cross sectional – to determine how success at this stage can be carried forward into High School and beyond. Although the cost of collecting data through interviews is more resource intensive, in looking to extend this research, interviews provide richer and more consistent data than surveys. Additional work is also required to extend the focus of this study from factors within the home environment to factors in the individual schools attended that can help both explain

differences in the patterns of academic achievement and offer insights into how relationships between the home and school are perceived and function within the school.

Both surveys and interviews indicated that almost all of the parents participating in this study wanted their eighth grade sons to succeed academically in school and develop skills that would allow them to lead productive lives and build brighter futures. Differences occurred in the manner in which parenting behaviors were manifested within the household. These results suggest that the educational aspirations parents held for their sons had a powerful influence on the academic achievement of their sons. Most encouraging was the finding that economic challenges faced by the household need not detract from educational performance. From the interviews, parental unemployment, previous incarceration and lack of transportation did not form barriers to the academic success of African American boys. In spite of their limited resources, these mothers maintained relationships with their sons' teachers and held high expectations for their sons. On the flip side, relative affluence did not guarantee academic success as defined in this study. The boy from the only household with an income exceeding \$100,000 did not achieve a STAR score of over 325.

The most significant finding of this research is that at least at this stage of their academic development, the boys in the families studied are not trapped by the adverse effects of unfulfilled potential documented by Edelman (2007), Gabarino et al. (1992), Gibbs et al. (1992) and Lewis (2010), and need not be relegated the status of a vanishing species. This study agrees with researchers such as Clark (1983), Coleman (1994), Cooper and Jordon (2005) that parents are a major force influencing their sons' performance in school. Factors such as Clark's (1983) social control and Macoby and Martin's (1983)

parenting styles operate independent of income or family structure. This study confirms that the quality of the home environment and nature of time parents spend with their sons and interacting with their sons' schools had the greatest impact on their sons' behavior and achievement at school. However, within some families remedial action may be needed to address patterns of poor interactions between parents and schools that may trace back generations and form a potential barrier to both social competence and academic achievement.

Overall Recommendations

This research suggests that African American boys need not be viewed as an endangered species doomed to poor outcomes as they develop. The findings of this study show that resources exist within the family – regardless of structure and income – that can be drawn upon to promote the academic achievement of African American boys. Like Clark (1983), Coleman (1994), Cooper and Jordon (2005) and Kunjufu (1982) this research finds that parents are a major force influencing their children's success in school. These findings are consistent with the manifesto written by Dr. John Hope Franklin in summing up the hopes, cares and concerns held by African American community leaders for the future of African American children in 1990. These community leaders tied their desires and hopes for African American children to dual pledges to strengthen the African American family and improve the Nation's schools. This study endorses not only the school and family as vital to the academic success of African American boys, but also suggests that interactions between the home and school, and the quality of relationships between these two

institutions are also important contributors to the academic achievement of African American boys.

The most significant finding is of this study is that resources exist within the African American home that can contribute to the academic success of African American children. Traditional school-based efforts should be complemented by multilevel intervention strategies that address individual, school, and community factors, but build on the family as the critical unit for academic success. In addition to the psychosocial risk factors of individual students, multilevel intervention strategies should focus on mobilizing resources and cultural strengths to encourage productive student outcomes by reducing distress, promoting resiliency, and fostering personal empowerment from the base of the family. Like Conchas (2006) and Hale (2004) this researcher is confident that there is still time for effective planning, development and implementation of changes that can overcome drawbacks of the current system. Establishing and maintaining productive relationships between the home and school can provide a foundation for higher level interventions, such as family system empowerment, community development, and public policy advocacy. These interventions could then build on success, trust and shared values rather than on disappointment, suspicion and failure.

Remedial actions may be necessary to rehabilitate both short- and long-term patterns of parental expectations that may reflect poor relationships between home and school that span generations. The more intractable issue may be addressing the mental barriers to approaching educational institutions among parents who themselves had negative educational experiences as children and therefore do not trust schools and teachers. Outreach programs may be necessary to address histories of poor experiences

that constitute a barrier to more functional relationships between the school and home.

Outreach and training programs could be developed based on the findings of this study that empower parents to become proactive in their sons' schools and educations and partners for success with their sons' schools and teachers.

There is an ongoing need to consult with both parents and their sons to attempt to discover other elements in the home culture, community and school that can work together to contribute to the academic success of African American boys.

Recommendations for Parents

Urban African American communities are experiencing challenging times. Economics and social challenges combined with political exclusion manifest themselves in psychological and physical stress. Major shifts within the last ten years have altered the economical, social, political and political status of African Americans within America. Many urban African Americans have become more isolated. Large numbers feel disenfranchised and discouraged, and these feelings can affect family security and stability. If the African American community is to succeed in America its future growth and sustainability will depend on well planned and developed collective efforts to insure that its children are well educated in areas of both social and economical relevance. The family is the key to this successful advancement of the African American community.

The family – whether one parent, two parents, grandparent, or other family form – contains resources that can be drawn upon to build relationships between the home and school that will support the academic success of African American boys. Thus the family should provide the basis for a collective vision that consistently presses and supports the

cause of education and development. Parents should be proactive in their relationships with the school and the behavior they model in the home so that they create the security of social control. The focus on responsibility, the acquisition of education and service to the community has to become central themes of every African American household. Each family is encouraged to take advantage of all social occasions and family weekly gatherings to exchange experiences, ideas, and shared dreams. It is recommended that the family lifestyle should include the following elements:

1. Written goals for each family member as to what they want to accomplish
In the future, there should be an awareness that goals change from time to time.
2. Children should be taught to not expect a lot from their family members and society. They should be taught to expect a lot from themselves.
3. Children should be taught the value of careful and complete personal preparation in all phases of life. The world is knowledge-based. They must be taught to learn as much about as many things as possible.
4. Both the parents and their children must stay focused, "KEEPING THEIR MIND AND THEIR EYES ON THE PRIZE!"
5. The family must teach their children it is necessary to accept personal responsibility for their lives and actions.
6. Parents should teach their child to seek becoming someone special. Always be the very best that they can be.
7. The parents should teach their children social responsibility. They should be encouraged to develop a desire to help others. They should be encouraged to become a value to society.

8. Parents must teach their children to never lose faith in their ability to overcome adversity and succeed.

9. Parents must remember and impress upon their children that:

“EDUCATION IS THE KEY TO MIND, BODY, AND THE FUTURE!!!”

National and community leaders, as well as families, must become cognizant that today, education and the preservation of the African American family are the inseparable and essential goals for survival in the United States of America.

The results of this study should empower African American parents to become more proactive in the education of their children, particularly sons. This study has shown that proactive and engaged parental involvement in their sons' academic and social experiences can contribute to their sons' success. Timely and consistent parental involvement – in the home and at school – is essential for positive educational outcomes. Part of the challenge facing African American parents is to instill in their sons the confidence to believe that in spite of external factors such as media portrayals, negative socio-economic conditions, and limited social or political support, there are resources available, within the family that can help them succeed. Strong relationships between the home and the school provide a sense of security that supports positive self-image and self confidence in African American boys that can be built upon in fostering achievement of individuals and is a potential resource that could be used to in efforts to elevate the community.

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Appendix A: Parental Educational Survey and Response Summary

Please fill out the following form. Thank you.

PARENTAL INFORMATION

1. What is your gender?

- Male 6 (18.75%)
- Female 26 (81.25%)

2. What is your relationship to the middle school child?

- Mother 26 (81.25%) Father 6 (18.75%)
- Grandparent Aunt
- Uncle Brother
- Sister Friend or family
- Legal Guardian

3. What language do you speak at home?

- English 32 (100%)
- Spanish
- Other

4. What is your age?

- Under 21 21-25 years
- 26-30 years 1 (3.125%) 31-35 years 10 (31.25%)
- 36-40 years 3 (9.375%) 41-45 years 6 (18.75%)
- 46-50 years 7 (21.875%) 51-55 years 4 (12.5%)
- 56-60 years 1 (3.125%) 61-65 years
- 66 or older

5. What is your ethnicity?

- African American or Black 28 (87.5%)
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- White/Anglo/Caucasian
- Native Hawaiian or Other PI
- Latino/Chicano
- I am multi-racial (Please state the races with which you identify)
 - Half black, half white
 - Black/Caucasian/Latino 4 (22.5%)
 - Black, American Indian, French & German
 - Black/Asian
- I decline to state my race/ethnicity

6. What is your family income?

- Less than \$25,000 19 (61.29%) \$25,000-\$34,999 5 (16.129%)
- \$35,000-\$49,999 4 (12.9%) \$50,000-\$64,999 1 (3.225%)
- \$65,000-\$74,999 1 (3.225%) \$75,000-\$99,999
- \$100,000 or over 1 (3.225%)

7. What is your highest level of education?

- Less than High School 5 (15.625%)
- High School Graduate or GED 8 (25%)
- Some College 7 (21.875%)
- Associate or Trade Degree 3 (9.375%)

- Bachelors Degree
 - Graduate Degree
 - Professional Degree
- } 9 BA or higher (28.125%)

8. What is your occupation?

- Employed, please explain 23 (71.875%)
- Retired
- Unemployed 7 (21.875%)
- Other, please explain 2 (6.25%)

9. Do you attend church services?

- None 7 (21.875%) Weekly 12 (37.5%)
- Occasionally 13 (40.625%) Once a month

10. Do you attend religious services with your middle school child/children?

- Yes 19 (59.375%) No 13 (40.625%)

11. Do you send your middle school child to religious services?

- Yes 17 (53.125%) No 15 (46.875%)

12. Do you participate in local community activities with your middle school child?

- Yes 17 (53.125%) No 15 (46.875%)

13. Please list all community activities you are involved in?

- Activities for children: Bible Study, community youth speaking groups.
- Beach clean up
- Church activities
- Church family assistance; school activities and Christmas activities
- Community garden

- Feeding the homeless and visiting
- Festivals, concerts, farmers market
- Football
- He goes to the community center, teen board
- Operation fresh start, political events, etc
- Park activities
- Youth spot light productions, feed the homeless and pass out clothes

14. What are the names of your middle school child's teachers?

- Know no teachers' names 6 (19.355%)
- Know one teacher's name 7 (22.581%)
- Know three teachers' names 4 (12.903%)
- Know five teachers' names 14 (45.161%)

15. During the past week, what did your middle school child study in Mathematics or Science?

- No knowledge 6 (22.222%)
- Limited knowledge of Math only 14 (51.852%)
- Limited knowledge of Science only 1 (3.704%)
- Limited knowledge of both Math and Science 4 (14.815%)
- Thorough knowledge of both Math and Science 2 (7.407%)

16. During the past week, what did your middle school child study in English or Social Studies?

- No knowledge 9 (37.5%)
- Limited knowledge of English only 8 (33.333%)

- Limited knowledge of Social Studies only 2 (8.333%)
 - Limited knowledge of both English and Social Studies 3 (12.5%)
 - Thorough knowledge of both English and Social Studies 2 (8.333%)
17. Do you help your children with their homework?
- Yes 20 (64.5%) No 11 (35.5%)
18. To the best of your knowledge, during the past week, did your child turn in all of his/her homework?
- Yes 22 (70.968%) No 9 (29.032%)
19. Do you attend school events? (e.g. Open House, Back to School Night, parent-teacher conferences, sports, drama)
- Yes 28 (87.5%) No 4 (12.5%)
20. During the past week, what was the title of the book that your middle school child saw you reading for pleasure?
- Named at least one book 17 (62.963%)
 - Had not read a book 10 (37.037%)
21. How much free time does your middle school child have during the week?
- None 1 (3.125%) 1-4 hours 15 (46.875%)
 - 5-9 hours 12 (37.5%) More than 10 hours 4 (12.5%)
22. How many hours of television does your middle school child watch daily?
- None 2 (6.25%) 1-3 hours 24 (75%)
 - 4-6 hours 5 (15.625%) More than 6 hours 1 (3.125%)
23. How many hours of television do you watch per week?
- None 1-3 hours 12 (37.5%)

- 4-6 hours 10 (31.25%) More than 6 hours 10 (31.25%)
24. How much time outdoors does your middle school child spend unsupervised?
- None 5 (15.625%) Weekly 14 (43.75%)
 - Occasionally 12 (37.5%) Once a month 1 (3.125%)
25. Do you trust your child's teachers?
- Yes 28 (87.5%) No 4 (12.5%)
26. Do you trust your middle school child?
- Yes 27 (87.097%) No 4 (12.903%)
27. Do you think your middle school child trusts you?
- Yes 30 (96.774%) No 1 (3.226%)
28. Do you think your middle school child trusts his/her teachers?
- Yes 21 (70%) No 9 (30%)
29. What educational goals do you have for your children? Please explain:
- Bachelor's Degree at least
 - Bachelors of Arts or Science Degree
 - College
 - College bound
 - College Degree
 - Complete High School and attend college
 - Doctors Degree in Social Justice
 - Excel in their studies, go to college and obtain a graduate degree
 - Finish High School and go to college
 - Finish middle-school with a "B" or better

- Finish School, go to college, get a job and move out
- Graduate from College, get a trade
- Graduate from High School go to Navy
- I really want him to graduate from middle school and pass the exit exam and graduate from high school
- Keep up assignments, Learn good note taking
- Maintain a "B" average and complete all assignments
- Ph.D Robotics or Engineering
- Success at the highest level
- Through graduate school
- To attend a four year college or community college or Trade Tech
- To attend college
- To be a doctor
- To complete and understand, complete and graduate
- To finish high school and attend UCLA
- To go to college
- To go to college. Don't become an unwed father.
- To pass 8th grade with 3.0 GPA.
- To graduate with high honor from college
- Whatever he chooses
- Whatever he chooses to do.

30. What career goals do you have for your son? Please explain:

- A career area he's comfortable with-a lucrative job that he can support a family with
- Be successful
- Become a medical doctor
- Do what makes him happy
- Finish high school, go to college
- Firefighter or General in the Marines
- He wants to play baseball. I want him to be a doctor or dentist.
- I just want him to be productive and happy
- I just want him to become successful
- I never thought about it
- I want him to be a productive citizen
- I want him to go to college or trade school
- I would love for my son to become a lawyer, Judge or doctor
- Pick an interest and make a career
- Study Hard Do his best
- Successful at whatever he chooses
- To be a community activist
- To become a basketball or football player
- To become a basketball player
- To become a dentist
- To continue on to high school passing each grade and improve, to complete and graduate. Learn from challenges.

- To do whatever he wants in life
- To get a good job
- To pursue a high demand career
- Whatever he chooses to do
- Whatever he wants to be I will support
- Whatever makes him happy

31. Do you have high expectations for your child?

- Yes 32 (100%) No

32. Do you have established house rules for completing school homework assignments?

- Yes 27 (84.375%) No 5 (15.625%)

33-a. Do you discuss your middle school child's educational and social progress on a regular basis?

- Yes 27 (84.375%) No 5 (15.625%)

33-b. How often do you discuss your child's academic performance with him?

- Never Weekly 25 (78.125%)
- Occasionally 4 (12.5%) Monthly 3 (9.375%)

34. To what do you attribute your child's academic success?

- Being present and showing concern. I also attend all activities. I express honesty and dedication
- Constant monitoring, providing a tutor, open communication
- Discipline; following up with him on his work; and his interest level
- Early encouragement from kindergarten. Establish good homework and study habits at that time also.

- Follow up with his studies
- Good Teachers, help with homework and home tutoring
- Hard work by him & lots of parent involvement!
- He has no limitations except those that he creates for himself
- His hard work
- I am there for him. I attend parent meetings. I help him get tutoring
- I fight with him constantly about his work
- I speak to him about doing his best
- I stress the importance of education for Black Men
- I tell him to work hard
- I try to show him the value of an education
- I try to stay on him about his school work, but he does not listen
- I will always be there for my son
- Making sure that he stays busy with sports, getting him to volunteer, and keeping him focused
- My son is highly motivated. My son loves to be challenged
- My time
- Open communication and having mentors available
- Provide the tools & help that he needs
- School's specialize training programs
- Stay on Kevin about his education. Get him into college
- To stay focused and do all his homework and school work
- Try to provide a safe environment. Share Dreams

Appendix B: Comparison of the Quality of Success-Producing Patterns in Homes of High and Low Achievers

High Achievers	Low Achievers
Frequent school contact initiated by parent	Infrequent school contact initiated by parent
Child has some stimulating, supportive school teachers	Child has s no stimulating, supportive school teachers
Parents psychologically and emotionally calm with child	Parents in psychological and emotional upheaval with child
Students psychologically and emotionally calm with parents	Students less psychologically and emotionally calm with parents
Parents expect to play a major role in child's schooling	Parents have low expectation of playing a major role in child's schooling
Parents expect child to play a major role in child's schooling	Parents have low expectation of child playing a major role in child's schooling
Parents expect child to get post-secondary training	Parents have low expectation of child getting post-secondary training
Parents have explicit achievement-centered rules and norms	Parents have less explicit achievement-centered rules and norms
Students have long-term acceptance of norms as legitimate	Students have little long-term acceptance of norms as legitimate
Parents establish clear, specific role boundaries and status structures with parents as the dominant authority	Parents establish blurred role boundaries and status structures with parents as the dominant authority
Siblings interact as organized subgroup	Siblings are a less structured, interactive subgroup
Conflict between family members is infrequent	Conflict between family members is frequent
Parents frequently engage in deliberate achievement-training activities	Parents seldom engage in deliberate achievement-training activities
Parents frequently engage in implicit achievement-training activities	Parents seldom engage in implicit achievement-training activities
Parents exercise firm, consistent monitoring and rules enforcement	Parents have inconsistent monitoring and rules enforcement
Parents provide liberal nurturance and support	Parents are less liberal nurturance and support
Parents defer to child's knowledge in intellectual matters	Parents do not defer to child's knowledge in intellectual matters

Source: Clark (1993, p. 200)