

**ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL SETTING ENGAGEMENT EXPERIENCED BY AFRICAN
AMERICAN CAREGIVERS OF EMOTIONALLY IMPAIRED CHILDREN**

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to better understand the experiences of engagement of African American caregivers of children with emotional impairments who attend a non-traditional alternative education setting within an urban New England area. The findings of this study answered the research question, “How do African American caregivers of children with an emotional impairment describe their experiences of engagement with their child’s alternative education staff?” This study is significant to the existing body of literature on school engagement with African American caregivers, due to the attention to various types of caregivers included within the study who care for a child with an EI. The inclusion criteria for the caregivers was African American, biological parent, blood relative(s), relatives through marriage, and court-appointed individuals. A phenomenological descriptive investigation was employed to explore the lived experience of engagement as told by African American caregivers of children with EI in order to get a true picture of the phenomenon. The use of semi-structured interviews was asked of each participant to hear of their personal experiences when communicating with their child’s alternative setting staff. The results indicate that caregivers are invested in attending their child’s individualized educational plan meeting however they described their experiences as feeling confused at the IEP meeting, wanting more diverse staff at the meetings, needing outside assistance to help navigate the IEP process, feeling as if their voices are not being heard, feelings of distrust with verbal communication, the need to stay informed from their child’s staff, and wanting the best for their child.